

SEMINAR ON SPIRITUALITY

The theme of the 1991 convention, "Theology as Intellectually Vital Inquiry," provided helpful focus for presentations, responses, and general participation in both sessions of the seminar. Approximately thirty members attended each session.

In the first session, Louis J. Cameli (University of Saint Mary of the Lake) addressed the topic "Reviewing the Contribution of Sandra M. Schneiders to the Study and Teaching of Spirituality." Sandra Schneiders (Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley/Graduate Theological Union) responded. Cameli began by drawing attention to Schneiders' two essays: "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons* 13 (1986) 253-74; and "Spirituality in the Academy," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 676-97. Focusing on Schneiders' understanding of spirituality as both lived experience and the academic discipline which studies this subject, he offered an expanded description of spirituality as lived experience, and proposed an alternative definition of the discipline of spirituality.

Appreciative of Schneiders' definition of spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives," Cameli noted the absence of a specific reference to "being profoundly affected by reality beyond oneself" alongside the experience of "consciously striving to integrate one's life." Cameli argued that the inclusion of this reference would lend to a more accurate definition of spirituality as response to an initiative originating beyond oneself.

Turning his attention to Schneiders' definition of the academic discipline of spirituality, Cameli offered a brief survey of the chief characteristics and methodological slants of her approach, specifically her three-dimensional approach to the subject of spirituality: description; critical analysis; and constructive appropriation. He also underscored what Schneiders refers to as the "irreducibly triple finality" of the discipline: the production of cumulative knowledge, development in the spiritual lives of those engaged in the study of spirituality, and, in turn, fostering the spiritual lives of others.

Offering an alternative to Schneiders' definition of spirituality as "the field of study which attempts to investigate in an interdisciplinary way spiritual experience as such," Cameli defined spirituality as *experientia Dei quaerens expositionem et augmentum*. He maintained that this definition expresses both the "givenness" of the experience of God (*experientia Dei*) and the striving to express and to grow (*quaerens expositionem et augmentum*) in this experience. Additionally he suggested that this alternative definition brings greater clarity to the nature of the relationship of spirituality to theology and to praxis.

To clarify his position, Cameli then described his use of Teresa of Avila's *Life* in both studying and teaching spirituality. He observed that the *Life* is not simply a record of Teresa's lived experience, but an exercise in the discipline of spirituality. In it he sees the movement from the experience of God to its expression and to the conscious striving to grow in that original experience. He also sees in the *Life* an example of Schneiders' general ideal procedure: description; critical analysis; and constructive appropriation. Cameli suggested that students should not only be introduced to this procedure, but also invited to recognize its operation within the text itself.

Cameli concluded with two observations. The strong anthropological approach to spirituality characteristic of Schneiders' work causes skittishness in some. An antidote to this might be provided by historical studies that recover the anthropological foundations of spirituality as a genuine part of the Christian tradition.

Cameli then observed that while he had raised the issue of spirituality's relationship to theology and to praxis, he had left unattended the question of its relationship to the academy. But he suggested that the more important question is that of spirituality's relation to religion, "for it is the 'religious' commitment far more than the 'spiritual' commitment which makes the academy wary of spirituality as a legitimate discipline."

In her response, Schneiders noted her appreciation of Cameli's expanded definition of spirituality as lived experience, crediting him with giving needed attention to the more "objective pole" in spiritual experience. She also acknowledged the significance of his observation about the relationship of spirituality to religion, suggesting that there is room for greater exploration here.

Schneiders expressed disagreement with Cameli's view of the discipline of spirituality, suggesting that his emphasis on *expression* and *growth* only leads to the common perception of the discipline of spirituality as "confessional" and "formative." She drew attention to the importance of the first element of the irreducibly triple finality of the discipline. The bulk of her response and the discussion that followed focused on the importance of recognizing that work in the discipline of spirituality is aimed primarily at the production of cumulative knowledge in the field. Schneiders cautioned against the reduction of the study of spirituality to spiritual formation of the self and others. She advised that the emergent discipline of spirituality is not to remain under the tutelage of theology or history, and invited participants to recognize that questions which have not been asked in either theology or history are being posed in the field of spirituality, giving rise to the emergence of new horizons and opening up new meanings.

In the second session, "Spirituality as an Intellectually Vital Inquiry: The Contribution of William M. Thompson" was presented by Julia Upton (St. John's University, New York). William Thompson responded.

Upton's presentation focused on two of Thompson's works: *Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1987), and *Christology and Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, at press). She described Thompson's work as an attempt to turn, or return, to spirituality as a source for theology, specifically christology. Thompson's project represents an intensive search for the font from which genuine Christian renewal can spring. His aim is to recover the fullness of Christian experience as locus for theological reflection. Upton articulated Thomp-

son's position concisely: if turning to spirituality is turning to the reality of Christian substance, then ignoring spirituality is like entering into theological illusion. She described his work as an experiment, testing the contribution of the experience and language of Christian spirituality to the realms of theology and christology.

Upton noted that Thompson's major focus in looking to spirituality as source for theological reflection is the saints, more specifically the mystics. Thompson consults the saints so that the "fire" of the mystic may be brought to bear on the "light" of the theologian. He judges the consultation of the saints to be crucial in theological reflection because of their experiential approach to religious and Christian values. Saints do not just "parrot" a theology; they live it and explore it experientially. Looking to spirituality as source for theology gives rise to fresh questions and new concerns, influencing thereby its methodological form and its conclusions.

Thompson responded by pointing to the singular importance of using primary sources in consulting the mystics and saints as a source for theological reflection. Thompson then situated his own work in relation to that of Sandra Schneiders and others whose energies are devoted to bringing methodological form to the discipline of spirituality. He observed that his own project is different from theirs. His efforts in the field of spirituality were originally motivated by christological concerns. In order to come to a fuller theological understanding of Christ's *kenosis*, he turned to the mystics' description of the dark night, abandonment, and emptiness. Though his own project involves consulting spirituality as a source for theological reflection, he agrees with Schneiders and others that the discipline of spirituality is not to remain under the tutelage of systematic theology. This is expressed in his new work *Christology and Spirituality*.

Discussion focused on several issues. Question was raised regarding the persuasiveness of the conclusions Thompson reaches in consulting the writings of Teresa of Avila on christological concerns. Attention was drawn to the difficulty in trying to find answers to contemporary problems, such as the tension between the uniqueness of Christ and the validity of truth claims of different religious traditions, by consulting historical texts. Here, Thompson suggested, it is more a matter of looking to the text of someone like Teresa of Avila for analogous problems and issues, and attending to the way in which resolutions are sought. Here the *pensée pensante* may be more instructive than the *pensée pensée*. In such consultation, attention must be given to a whole host of contextual factors that also must be considered if one is adequately to interpret and to appropriate historical text or tradition.

A question was posed about the very criteria for determining who is a saint, and therefore, about precisely which texts can be consulted profitably in making connections between theology and spirituality. This resulted in discussion of appropriate criteria for judging what constitutes the various types or forms of "classic" to be consulted in spirituality.

Finally, attention was given to the matter of adjudicating between contradictory theological claims based on consultation of the same saint/mystic.

The session was brought to a close with suggestions and recommendations for topics and papers in view of next year's theme, "Experience and Theology: A Critical Appropriation."

MICHAEL DOWNEY
Gwynedd-Mercy College