

SEMINAR ON HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

In the first session of the Historical Theology Seminar, which met on June 12, 1992, Prof. Paul Misner (Marquette University) summarized the main points of his recent *The Origins of Social Catholicism* as a basis for our discussion. His presentation was divided into three areas, namely the historical phases of social Catholicism in Europe, its reception, and the experiences out of which it emerged. In his response, Prof. Gregory Baum (McGill University) indicated his very great appreciation for Prof. Misner's work and raised five areas for further reflection: the distinctions of the Catholic mindset in modernity; the importance of bringing social and political science perspectives to the topic of Catholic social thought; the difficulty of applying North American liberal/conservative dichotomies to the nineteenth-century European context; the significance of Catholicism as an alternative to both capitalism and socialism; and finally, the inability of ecclesiology to cope with the sins of the Church.

Subsequent discussion explored these issues in more detail.

The second session on June 13 was entitled "Reconsidering Patristic Exegesis." Three papers were given. Prof. Charles Kannengiesser (University of Notre Dame) spoke on "Patristic Exegesis Today." His concern was for the creative spirit of the early Christian writers and the bond between exegesis, theology and faith community.

The second paper by Prof. Mary Rose D'Angelo (Villanova University) was entitled "Early Christian Uses of the Scriptures and Resources for Contemporary Biblical Interpretation." The presentation singled out four areas of significance. First, a more comprehensive study of early Christian literature provides knowledge above the textual history and variants of the biblical texts. Second, the fact that the writers of the early Christian centuries shared the language used by the writers of the Christian Scriptures sheds light on linguistic problems. Third, early Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is in continuity with the method and spirit of the interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures to be found in the New Testament itself. Fourth, the writers of the early centuries shared much of the same religious world as the authors of the New Testament.

The final presentation by Prof. Bradford E. Hinze treated "Early Christian Exegesis and Contemporary Hermeneutics." Hinze placed his appeal for a more thorough examination of critical methods in the context of the strongly polarized views of the "new theology" movement of the 1940s and 1950s with its attempt to retrieve something of the tradition of spiritual interpretation and the rather cool attitude toward precritical exegesis found in representatives of critical exegesis. A more critical approach to early Christian exegesis would be concerned at one level with issues of authorship sources, genre, etc. At another level, it would

Browning, and Mike McGinniss, a Browning expert who is reviewing the book for *Theological Studies*. Participants raised questions about parallels with Bernard Lonergan's method, the scope of resources used in developing strategic proposals for action (to offset the temptation of a Christian elitist solution to societal problems), the difficulty of doing a thoroughly descriptive theology, the lack of knowledge which hinders development of historical theology, the use of the method outside of Church concerns, the value of the method for forming habits of reflection, and decision making in a community of faith.

The discussion moved toward agenda setting for the seminar. There was general interest in constructing a practical theology reflection on an issue (perhaps in the form of a case study) using the steps of practical theology outlined by Browning or another author, or the participants' own methods. A case relative to the theme of ecumenicity and evangelization, perhaps as it affects the Hispanic church, seemed relevant to the topic and setting of next year's convention. An alternative topic is a practical theology of modern communications media.

Dr. Kinast agreed to circulate these proposals to the members of the seminar for further input. The goal is to set up a two or three year project which would be both a working example of practical theology and a source for publishing the findings derived from the exercise.

Although several regular members of the seminar were unable to attend the convention this year, an equal number of new members joined both sessions because they saw practical theology as the proper focus for the CTSA and a way of combining the many sources and interests of theology.

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