

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Today's Moral Theology

Moderator: Mary Ann Dillon, St. Francis College of Pennsylvania

Panelists: James Keating, Pontifical College Josephium
John Popiden, Loyola Marymount University
Maura A. Ryan, University of Notre Dame

Referencing the comments Philip Keane made in his plenary address, James Keating focused his remarks on the relationship between spirit-inspired prayer and conscience. He suggested that the act of conscience-seeking-the-truth is the Spirit operating. In the process of deciding, the person experiences God communicating through the very goodness of human powers. "Conscience is the field upon which God stands in order to dialogue with the self and therefore with society." Thus one might understand obedience to conscience as an act of faith, a prayer.

Maura Ryan recommended that, because of the unresolved tension between the charismatic and hierarchical/institutional forms of authority within the Church's teaching, any effort to make connections between pneumatology and ethics requires ecclesiological considerations. She isolated two particular places where the connections among pneumatology, ethics and ecclesiology would be especially helpful: discernment and the centrality of liturgy and prayer to moral formation. With regard to the first, Ryan raised questions about the Church's practice of discernment, "not just in the head but at the center of the community" as a necessary model for teaching individuals to practice discernment. In the second area, she raised questions about the kinds of liturgical experiences needed to reflect "our evolving understanding of God, of ourselves as a community of witness, and the meaning of right relation to others and to all of creation?"

John Popiden concentrated his remarks on Keane's recommendation that, in any effort to connect moral theology with pneumatology, the natural aspect of Catholic moral theology be retained. Since moral theology is theology it "must acknowledge the Spirit as the key to everything." Therefore there is no aspect of morality which is not touched by the Spirit. So, Popiden points out, "the Spirit is to be found in the approaches of both the right and the left hemispheres of the brain, in the approaches of both men and women in moral matters, and in the law as well as beyond it." At the same time, human nature is a fallen nature and so it is important to deal with the reality of sin and the effect of sin in natural morality.

A wide-ranging discussion involving the thirty plus participants followed the three brief presentations. Topics ranged from the need for a renewed attention to the gifts and fruits of the Spirit as a basis for a pneumatological morality to the

importance of further consideration of the imagination, both personal and corporate, as a powerful source for the formation of Christian morality. The group acknowledged its appreciation for Phil Keane's presentation which raised many questions for future consideration in the arena of moral theology.

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