

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: The Trinity and Ecclesiologies of Communion
Convener: Anthony Keaty, St. John's Seminary, Brighton
Moderator: M. John Farrelly, St. Anselm's Abbey, Washington, D.C.
Presenters: Bradford E. Hinze, Marquette University
 Jamie T. Phelps, Loyola University of Chicago

Dr. Hinze reviewed briefly the shift in the ecclesiologies of Congar, Rahner, and Mühlen before Vatican Council II from a predominately Christocentric ecclesiology to a trinitarian ecclesiology. This shift gave added prominence to communion ecclesiology in Vatican Council II and in ecclesiologies afterward.

While trinitarian ecclesiology has become an acceptable approach to ecclesiology, differences arise over how to draw the analogy between the doctrine of the trinity and the life of the church. Some theologians such as Balthasar, for example, emphasize the Son and Spirit's obedience to the Father in trinitarian theology. Analogously, communion in church life occurs through obedience to church authority. Dr. Hinze proposed that in addition to thinking of the trinity in terms of the Father speaking, the Son obediently speaking what is heard, and the Spirit enabling the obedient reception of the Word, we also understand the Father as listening. Obedient listening would then be an attribute belonging to God as such. There is warrant in Scripture for ascribing to God the activity of listening. In the book of Exodus, God tells Moses that He hears the people's cry of suffering. In the Gospels, Jesus listens with power to those who suffer. The resurrection of Jesus testifies to the Father's hearing the cry of the poor. Obedience and hearing, then, do not only describe Jesus' relation to the Father but also refer to an attribute common to the three divine persons. Analogously, the Church in all its members must listen for, as well as speak, the word of God. In all its members, the Church must be a learning Church as well as a teaching Church.

Dr. Phelps began by reflecting on the postmodern situation. We have accepted unreflectively the modern classification of reality, especially social reality. In our social relations this has resulted in a social hierarchy. Postmodernity questions this classification. As such, postmodernity represents a threat to some and an opportunity to others.

Dr. Phelps asked if trinitarian theology might help us to make the transition from the modern world of social hierarchy to a postmodern world of community. Dr. Phelps has found the work of Catherine LaCugna helpful, although Dr. Phelps wonders, *contra* LaCugna, if intratrinitarian life might be worth reflecting on. What might it be like to be so attuned to the other person, as the divine persons are, as to be constituted by the other yet to maintain a distinct identity? Dr. Phelps proposed the image of dance and song as a way of approaching this communion of distinct persons.

The Church is to be a sacrament of God's presence to the world. As such, the Church finds her identity not so much in terms of her internal relations but rather

in terms of her relation to the other, to the world. The Church's universal love is to be an image of God's universal love. This universal love is not possible without the presence of God's Spirit. In her vocation, the Church can lead the way in exposing the pattern of domination and the modern form of social hierarchy.

The first questioner noted that communion ecclesiology can often downplay diversity in the Church. Dr. Phelps agreed with the observation, noting as an example that liberation theology has not generally included black liberation theology. Dr. Hinze observed that mystical body theology emphasized the commonality of church members. A more trinitarian approach to ecclesiology will hopefully highlight the important role that diversity plays in church life.

The second questioner noted that analogy between trinity and ecclesiology can easily become ideology for a particular form of communal life. Dr. Phelps pointed out that Augustine in book IX of *De Trinitate* uses an inductive approach for understanding the trinity. Understanding the trinity from church life would avoid the ideological tendencies that a deductive approach has. Dr. Hinze agreed that God always exceeds the human capacity for understanding. Nevertheless, there is intelligibility in the doctrine of the Trinity such that the doctrine of the Trinity can provide an important starting point for understanding Church structure.

The final questioner asked Dr. Hinze if he was arguing that a "listening God" leads to a "listening Church"? Dr. Hinze agreed that our understanding of God influences our understanding of ecclesiology. At the same time, though, our understanding of the Church can provide a source for our understanding of God.

ANTHONY W. KEATY
St. John's Seminary
Brighton, Massachusetts