

## METHOD IN THEOLOGY/FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Topic: Appealing to the Tradition: Recent Shifts  
 Convener: Gregory LaNave, Dominican House of Studies  
 Moderator: Matthew Levering, Ave Maria University  
 Presenters: Dominic Doyle, Weston Jesuit School of Theology  
 John Corbett, Dominican House of Studies

Following the convention theme of Generations, the Method in Theology and Fundamental Theology Group session contained two papers that dealt with changes in the way elements of the Tradition have been received in the past century.

Dominic Doyle (“Christian Humanism from Jacques Maritain to Nicholas Boyle: Adapting a Classic Motif to a Globalised Age”) showed that the unchanging core of Christian humanism receives social expression that is conditioned by the social context. He argued that Maritain’s *Integral Humanism* (1936) appeared at a time when French Catholics were looking for a reconciliation of Catholicism and modernity; Maritain offered this first on the cultural level (*Art and Scholasticism* [1920]), then on the socio-political level, where he envisaged an influence of Catholic ideas—such as the transcendent dignity of the human person—within a democratic, pluralist form of society. Doyle noted that Maritain’s attempt at cultural synthesis attempted to ratify the existing rapprochement between the traditionalist Catholicism in France and the modernist Third Republic, while his socio-political synthesis looked to the future, aimed at forestalling the fragmentation of Europe in the face of first Fascist and then Communist regimes.

Doyle then briefly spoke about the Christian humanism of Christopher Dawson and John Courtney Murray. Dawson looked particularly to the Christian culture of the past, most evident in the Middle Ages, while Murray looked to the present, and the “Catholic moment” of cohesive social witness particularly in mid-century America.

According to Doyle, Nicholas Boyle (in his 1998 book *Who Are We Now?*), like Maritain, centers his Christian humanism on the future. Boyle presents the modern world as being shaped by a consumerist ideology. This presents the individual with the myth of infinite freedom, obscuring the fact that the consumer is also a producer and his ever-greater desire as consumer places ever-greater burdens on himself as producer. For Boyle, the task of Christian humanism is to critique this ideology, to remind human beings of their finitude, and to cultivate a sense of vocation—a permanent commitment to the future that reveals our status as creatures and enables us to transcend our finitude in a religiously significant way.

This discussion highlighted the theological difference between Maritain and Murray on the one hand (emphasizing the incarnation) and Boyle and Charles Taylor on the other (emphasizing the virtue of hope). Several participants raised the question of whether Boyle’s account of the possibility of Christian humanism

adequately takes note of such cultural factors as the rate of change in society and the rise of radical Islam.

John Corbett (“Paraclesis and Prophecy in Thomistic Moral Theology”) took up a theme raised but little explored by Servais Pinckaers: paranesis and paraclesis as forms of moral discourse. Corbett noted that the genius of Pinckaers’s general project was the study of Aquinas’s moral theology by looking at his sources, rather than his commentators. In articulating the biblical foundations of that theology, Pinckaers came upon the ancient genre of paranesis (exhortation) and its intensification in New Testament paraclesis (earnest exhortation). These genres have been downplayed in recent centuries, as moralists have become preoccupied with the specification, justification, and defense of moral norms or obligations. Paranesis and paraclesis have been reduced to insignificance, forms of moral discourse interesting only to those people who are aiming at perfection. Corbett, elaborating on Pinckaers, argued that the richness of this discourse can be seen if one is attentive to the metaphysical and revelatory content of Scripture. Scriptural exhortation is meant not simply to urge people to follow the moral law they already know and that, at least in principle, forms the basis of their culture. It is an act of God, communicated (especially in the earnest exhortation of paraclesis) through an apostle, which strengthens and deepens what has already been done for us in Christ. It strengthens our bond with Christ; it has the effect of healing the mind (so as to see and understand the moral life properly); and it bestows the freedom both to confirm and to subvert the surrounding culture.

Questions raised in the discussion included the Trinitarian basis for moral theology (the relationship between “paraclesis” and the Paraclete), the significance of paracletic exhortation on the part of the magisterium, and whether such a theory accounts for the natural intelligibility of moral norms.

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