

GOD AND TRINITY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: “All You Who Labor...”: Theology, Work, and Economy
 Convener: Brian D. Robinette, Boston College
 Moderator: Tiffany Lee, Boston College
 Presenters: Jane Lee-Barker, St. Barnabas College, Charles Sturt University
 Ruben L.F. Habito, Southern Methodist University

Jane Lee-Barker’s paper, “Come Unto Me: Work, Mysticism, Contemplation, and Theosis in the Trinitarian Theology of Romano Guardini,” provided an informative overview of Romano Guardini’s (1885-1968) theological work with an emphasis upon the devaluation of labor in the modern world and the promise of its renewal through contemplative and liturgical practice. Beginning with some historical contextualization of Guardini’s life and theological development, the paper proceeded by laying out the methodological foundations of Guardini’s theology as well as the manner by which it foregrounds historical consciousness in the ongoing tasks of creative intellectual and pastoral work. Of special import is the way Guardini articulated theological insight as springing from an intuitive perception that embraces the dynamic tension between opposites. This dynamic tension of contraries ultimately flows from God the Creator, even if contradictions do not. The human relationship with God was further elaborated as one of theonomy, which Guardini opposed to the false heteronomy of collectivism (exemplified by fascism) and false autonomy (exemplified by modern individualism). As the ultimate Thou, the Triune God ontologically grounds the inviolable dignity of the creature while drawing the creature into a historical and personal relationship of ongoing transformation, or *theosis*. Out of this dynamic relationship, all human activity, including human labor, is a vital means for realizing our deepest vocation. The rediscovery of this human-divine vocation is crucially needed in the wake of modernity’s devaluation of labor, which strongly tends towards homogeneity and instrumentalization. The paper concluded by highlighting the importance of contemplative wonderment and liturgical praxis as resources for this rediscovery.

Ruben L.F. Habito’s paper, “Triune Mystery as Zen Koan,” presented the use of koans in Zen Buddhist practice as an interfaith means by which to freshly approach the Triune Mystery of God. Beginning with a note of gratitude for theologians like John S. Dunne (1929-2013), whose appeal to “passing over” and “returning home” across religious boundaries still inspires creative work in comparative theology, the paper proceeded by offering an introduction to styles of Zen meditation that use striking verbal exchanges and/or gestures between a master and student in order to facilitate breakthroughs into non-discursive wisdom. Practitioners of koans are not meant to “think about” or analyze the content such exchanges or gestures, which would only further entrench the mind in discursivity, but to concentrate the mind upon a single word, or often just a syllable or sound, oftentimes nonsensical, so as to facilitate deep stillness beyond the dualistic framing of experience. While not a mechanical process, such practice poises the dedicated meditator for the spontaneous and immediate perception of our intimate interconnectedness with all things. Such is nondual wisdom. After providing basic instructions in the practice, Habito elaborated how Christian theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* may be practiced analogously through recourse

to its contemplative heart. Given that the Triune God is the inmost mystery of all things—a mystery which is ungraspable in its infinite intelligibility—the conceptual elements of Christian theology can and should be integrated with the non-conceptual wisdom of contemplative practice, insofar as both are ultimately propelled by the human desire for union with God.

Both papers inspired lively discussion from the approximately eighteen participants in attendance. The presenters also took the opportunity to engage each other's papers, including the intriguing connections between Guardini's account of creative opposition and the Zen Buddhist penchant for paradox.

BRIAN D. ROBINETTE
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

