

CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

- Topic: Theological Language: Constructive Proposals
Conveners: Vincent J. Miller, Georgetown University
Michele Saracino, Manhattan College
Presenters: Robert Masson, Marquette University
Terrance W. Klein, St. John's University

Robert Masson spoke on "The Force of Analogy." The notion of analogy was a pivotal theme of 20th century renewals in Catholic theology and this centrality persists in frequent appeals among Catholic thinkers to the singular role of analogical imagination in religious and theological reflection. But it would appear that the notion of analogy is so wedded to the metaphysical conception of the "analogy of being" and to related theories of language, that it could have little utility in a theology that takes seriously postmodern linguistic theories and critiques of ontotheology.

Masson outlined nineteen theses for rethinking the notion in a postmodern context. His theses encapsulate an argument that draws heavily on Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell's theory of metaphoric process, and that appeals to the actual use of analogy in religion and theological argumentation rather than to a priori theories about analogy. Key to the argumentation is the thesis that the paradigmatic and decisive force of analogy is to extend and create new meanings by "forcing" an affirmation of identity that fundamentally alters a tradition's "received" field of meanings. Since the force of metaphoric analogy is in the broader field of meanings, it is much more than a matter of recognizing similarity in difference, proportions or attributions. Helpful illustrations are found in David Burrell's and Gregory Rocca's interpretations of Aquinas and in Robert Sokolowski's phenomenology of the "Christian distinction." Masson proposes that the metaphoric force of analogy warrants and explains a type of theological speech act left unexplained in accounts of religious discourse influenced by Heidegger, and moreover, is not inconsistent with Heidegger's critique of ontotheology or even fairly strict Heideggerian usage. On this reading, the "analogy of being" is an instance of metaphoric analogy and so should be interpreted in light of this: the key to understanding the "analogy of being" is the metaphoric force analogous speech acts, not vice versa.

The discussion following the presentation explored the relationship between Masson's notion of metaphor and culture, and considered whether his notion of metaphoric analogy was an ordinary part of the life of traditions or something that emerged primarily at moments of crisis and transition.

Terrance Klein's paper was entitled "Adventures In Alterity: Wittgenstein, Aliens, and Aquinas." Klein suggested that the oldest avenue of alterity might be called the existential: the Other whom Augustine addressed as "more intimately present to me than my innermost being." Examples of existential alterity are

abundant because Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, proclaims a God who is other than we, whom we are to love in order to know completion of the self.

Klein argued that such existential alterity is inescapable even when the Other comes stripped of any patina of piety. How else does one explain our contemporary fascination with aliens? If alterity is the absolute fecundity that is humanity, and philosophy skewers itself with a rejection of that which is beyond the self, then the alterity of discourse become the only possible project for contemporary philosophy. The deconstruction of Derrida is premised upon allowing *différance* its voice, because only the paradoxically silent interlocutor can forestall the hegemony of logocentricism. "Banish the *Ontos*, and only *différance* can quicken the womb of discourse. Yet what dynamism of the human spirit accounts for our disquietude at what has come before?" Klein suggested that a careful shepherding of language will allow our fellows to see themselves as constituted by what Aquinas called an admixture of potency and act. Aquinas reminds us that we are the only earthly creatures who know themselves to be limited and who define themselves as awaiting completion. The existential meaning of his *reditio in seipsum completa* is the assertion that we cannot be ourselves without ceaselessly completing ourselves in something other than the self.

Klein concluded: "That we yearn for angels and aliens does not prove their existence anymore than desire for God proves God's, but the question that the believer and the nonbeliever can contemplate is the meaning of human existence, that open-ended question that cannot know closure without coming to rest in something outside itself."

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CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

- Topic: Ecclesiology and Reconciliation in U.S. Catholicism
 Convener: William A. Clark, College of the Holy Cross
 Moderator: Eileen Burke-Sullivan, Creighton University
 Presenters: J. Michael Byron, University of St. Thomas
 Joseph Hartzler, Franciscan School of Theology
 William A. Clark, College of the Holy Cross

This new developing group seeks to use the tools of contextual and practical theology to focus on the situation of the church in the contemporary U.S. The presentations and discussion were aimed at examining the convention theme, "Reconciliation," from this point of view.

J. Michael Byron opened with a paper entitled "The Church in the U.S.: Sign of Reconciliation?" Borrowing a metaphor from novelist Barbara Kingsolver, Byron evoked the image of the Christian community as a "dwelling of