

GOD/TRINITY TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Encountering the Triune God in the Sacrament/s
Convener: Gloria L. Schaab, Barry University
Moderator: Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fordham University
Presenters: Andrew Staron, Catholic University of America
Theodore J. Whapham, Saint Thomas University

This session explored the broad understanding of S/sacrament as the sacred mystery that perpetuates the union of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ and as the affirmation of the goodness of created matter. In so doing, this session affirmed and extended the Catholic theological understanding that sacraments symbolize the God-world relationship in Jesus Christ and point to the revelation of the Triune God.

To advance this objective, Andrew Staron, in his paper, “‘He did not regard equality:’ Christ as the Icon of Sonship in the Thought of Jean-Luc Marion,” explored Marion’s analysis of the icon of the cross and its signification of the Son’s faithful relationship with the Father, and to that degree as a way of proceeding into the heart of trinitarian mystery. Staron began by investigating Marion’s understanding of the nature of theological language and its task of signifying the invisible. Taking neither a cataphatic nor apophatic approach, Marion speaks of a third way by means of *praise*, by which God’s unpronounceable name is said not *of* God, but *to* God and in *response* to God. Staron continued by summarized Marion’s work on icons as “the types of that which has no type,” following the implications of Christ as the icon of the invisible God, and describing how the Christological icon is the prototype for all discussion of the invisible. Finally, Staron examined Marion’s presentation of the icon of the cross, in which the distance of the crucified Christ from God reveals the relationship of the Father and the Son. Precisely in laying aside the claims of similitude to God, Christ most clearly reveals his divine Sonship and thereby the Trinity itself. Such revelation is governed by charity, the only means through which the cross can be seen as revelatory of the Trinity.

Observing that in recent decades there has been significant interest in developing an adequate theological expression of God’s activity in the world, Theodore J. Whapham investigated the importance of the concept of symbol for addressing the notions of sacramental efficacy and the relation between God and the world. In his paper, “How do These Symbols Work? Sacramental Implications of the God-world Relation in the Trinitarian Theologies of Louis-Marie Chauvet and Kevin Vanhoozer,” Whapham pointed out that discussions of divine agency have taken place in a variety of contexts, including religion and science, sacramental theology, and trinitarian theology. At the core of each of these discussions, however, is an attempt to navigate the turbulence of the debates surrounding divine immanence and transcendence, human freedom and determination, and the creator-creature distinction. To create a bridge over such turbulent crosscurrents, many scholars have turned to the symbolic.

Whapham began by addressing the notion of symbolic efficacy, as developed in Chauvet’s *Symbol and Sacrament*, to draw out the latent impact of this important work of sacramental theology for broader theological discussions. According to Whapham, Chauvet suggests that the entirety of God’s relationship to the world can be understood in terms of a deeply embodied symbolic exchange. This exchange is characterized by both God’s gratuitous relation to the world and free human cooperation with grace. Whapham then turned to the concepts of authorial action and communicative theism developed in Vanhoozer’s

Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship. Drawing upon the work of Paul Ricoeur and Mikhail Bakhtin, Vanhoozer develops an evangelical theology of divine action that preserves both divine transcendence and human freedom by focusing on the power of God's Word. Indicating that Vanhoozer does not treat sacramental theology explicitly, Whapham indicated that his work nonetheless focuses on Trinitarian theology and in particular a theology of divine action. In the final section of his paper, Whapham delineated the relative strengths, limitations, and correspondences between Vanhoozer's and Chauvet's work to advance an understanding of sacramental efficacy that focuses on the significance of symbolic communication. Essential to such sacramental efficacy is a presentation of the God-world relation that both appreciates the importance of sacramentality and preserves the creature-creator distinction.

Each paper provoked lively discussion and debate on the deeper meaning and implications of Marion's concept of icon, Chauvet's notion of symbol, and each theologian's perception of the dynamic of transcendence inherent in their insights. Several questioners raised consonances and dissonances between Marion's and Chauvet's reasoning and conclusions and the theology of symbol and of transcendence set forth by Karl Rahner.

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