

SEMINAR ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

PARTICIPATING IN AUTHENTIC HUMAN PROJECTS

Something called "theological anthropology" has been granted respectable amounts of time at recent CTSA conventions. In 1974 Michael Scanlon and Charles Meyer, in 1978 Charles Meyer, in 1979 Jane Kopas, in 1980 Cathleen Going were asked to organize seminars under that rubric; Frederick Jelly conducted pre-convention seminars on "Mariology and Christian Anthropology" in 1979 and 1980; the entire 1979 program was concerned with "The Meaning of the Human" and included a presidential address entitled "A Theo-Anthropology" (Ken-an Osborne). This report sketches preoccupations of the 1980 seminar and the questions its participants offer to the continuing seminar.

Presumably "theological anthropology" in CTSA sessions has meant several things: fundamentally, the "anthropological turn"¹ appropriate to all theology of the present day; partially, that one's theology will be modified by interdisciplinary listening; partially, that there can be areas of questioning specifically about what-it-is-to-be-human.

"Listening to the human sciences" seems a safe procedure for theological anthropology, though at the 1980 seminar we wondered about the helpful disturbance a discipline anthropologist might bring into every such discussion. (It is obvious that among North Americans, unthinking theological appropriation of the term anthropology is offensive.) We wondered also how profound is the modification offered to theology whenever a radically different culture (e.g., native Indian) is given real attention. The claim of a specific difference for theological anthropology—the other partial meaning presumed of the CTSA sessions mentioned above—is the element of risk and it is dealt with below in connection with "method."

Contemporary sensitivity asks theological anthropology to attend to at least these human affairs: social justice, the significance of Christ (including Jesus' ways of relating to culture²), sexuality, prayer, dying. Since contemporary sensitivity has respect also for dreaming, we can—in regard to all of the above—look to dreams to "see detailed imaginally how we are faring"³ in the dramatic project of becoming human. There is currently sufficient talent to make realistic a demand

¹ K. Rahner's much-quoted article, "Theology and Anthropology," can be found in *Theological Investigations IX* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972), pp. 28-45.

² F. Crowe suggests that the structure of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*—its several ways of thinking about Christ's relation to culture—can become several questions about all graced humans.

³ Cf. the work of Robert Doran, especially "Dramatic Artistry in the Third Stage of Meaning," Lonergan Workshop Paper (to be published).

that all such matters as these should be approached as interpenetrating concerns rather than as successive "topics."⁴

"Man is a rational animal" surfaces irresistibly when certain middle-aged memories are consulted for what they once securely learned about humanness. An article by Eric Voegelin (required reading for this seminar) helps to open that learning to a profound understanding of "reason."

[R]eason has the definite existential content of openness toward reality in the sense in which Bergson speaks of *l'âme ouverte*. If this context of the classic analysis is ignored and the symbols *nous* or reason are treated as if they referred to some human faculty independent from the tension toward the ground, the empirical basis from which the symbols derive their validity is lost; they become abstracts from nothing. . . .⁵

Corresponding to this deeper sense of reason, according to Voegelin, is resistance to social disorder. In the seminar, the younger the participant, the more the description of perceived disorder approximated Voegelin's account of the classic analysis.⁶

In the Lonergan "required reading"⁷ the structure of human consciousness, and alienation, are among the prolegomena for the study of the emerging religious consciousness of our time. The similar considerations of the two authors raise questions which insist that "theological anthropology" reach a level deeper than our learned descriptions of humanness and more demanding than our immediate experience of being human. The invitation of the readings was at least this clear.

One would expect Voegelin and Lonergan to have something to say where the context for theology is our own culture, and theirs. Where the context is a notably different culture there remain pertinent Voegelin's description of human existence as "living in the in-between"⁸ and Lonergan's presentation (in Whitson's terms of "the coming convergence of world religions"⁹) of a commonality of the experience of unrestricted being-in-love, a presentation habitual to him in recent years. These clearly religious matters, together with Voegelin's understanding of reason and Lonergan's account of consciousness, have startling implications for some missionary work and some theology of mission. The work of Vincent Donovan has already made the congruent points; for example:

⁴E. Voegelin warns about experience-become-*topos*. Cf. *The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 45.

⁵"Reason: The Classic Experience," *Anamnesis* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), pp. 97-98. The entire article, pp. 89-115 in *Anamnesis*, can also be found in *The Southern Review* 10, 2 (Spring 1974), 237-64. Cf. also "In Search of the Ground" in *Conversations with Eric Voegelin* (Montreal, Canada: Thomas More Institute Papers/76, 1980), pp. 1-35.

⁶"Classic" means, for Voegelin, Plato's and Aristotle's analyses as formative of the Western vocabulary for experiences of order and disorder.

⁷B. Lonergan, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of our Time," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 9, 1 (Winter 1980), 3-15.

⁸See note 5.

⁹See note 7.

Preevangelization is a noble theory constructed by theologians, according to which it is stated that not all peoples are ready for the gospel, and somehow must be made ready for it. In its arrogant cultural assumption, pre-evangelization may be the most vicious system of thought and action ever invented by missiological theologians.¹⁰

"Look to Jesus Christ" has been a commonplace of theological piety; on the other hand we are warned by E. Schillebeeckx, in his writings and in his address at this convention, not to make of Jesus a cipher we manipulate in our attempts to envisage true humanness.¹¹ If the seminar discussion is evidence, we are not prepared to make either move. Though attention went eagerly to the Christology questions, the sense of lived distance was too vivid: distance from the Jesus of history and from the Christ of a certain kind of externalized hermeneutics.

The significance of Christ is clearly a painful human question for people who are both committed and honest in their relationship to him. (As one participant noted, in speaking of Christ the confessional mode of expression—in the Augustinian sense—was adopted spontaneously at the seminar.) Yet, though we suffer from confusion of information and especially of images we are not willing to return either to uncommittedness or to the "age of innocence" (pre-Enlightenment and pre-critical), since praxis acknowledges an end to that age.¹² "Jesus as model" has to give way to Jesus as "freeing us for freedom,"¹³ or Jesus as Door, or Jesus as Question (i.e., as having for us the structure of Question¹⁴). In fact, the concerns of theological anthropology, such as those suggested above as a suitable range of contemporary questioning (social justice, sexuality, prayer, dying), were raised in the seminar chiefly in a Christological mode, including the question about dreaming. (What would be the dreams of the successful dramatist-of-his-living? Can we know? What difference would it make to us to know? About Jesus the Christ what *does* it make a difference to know?)

Although the seminar was subtitled "some achievements and failures of contemporary theological anthropology," we are not ready to try out for each other our comparisons of authors, or our assessments of the theological-anthropology contribution of the whole work of any single author. Still, there were among us authors who had tried works of theological anthropology themselves; and at many points insights from Rahner, Pannenberg, Lonergan, von Balthasar and de Chardin were thought important.

¹⁰ V. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides/Claretian, 1978), p. 55. The Belgian missionary to Africa who was present the first day of the seminar corroborated from his own work the perspective of Donovan in the passage quoted.

¹¹ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 65: "[I]n that case, surely, Jesus might very well be left out of it."

¹² B. Lonergan, "Ongoing Genesis of Methods," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 6, 1 (Summer 1977), 352.

¹³ Enda McDonagh in his convention talk (cf. these *Proceedings*) had made use of the Pauline idea of "freed for freedom."

¹⁴ I adapt here Eric Voegelin's presentation of Question and Mystery in section 5 of the chapter "Universal Humanity," *The Ecumenic Age*, pp. 316-30.

On the second day of the seminar, when attention was on the significance of Jesus for what-it-is-to-be-human, no explicit link was made with the first day's discussion of "search for the ground," "tension toward the ground." That symbolization did return in the discussion of prayer.¹⁵

We wondered, at the beginning and end of our sessions, what transformation of insights about humanness had been brought about by the intensified concern for social justice in the past ten years or more. Perhaps for the seminar the words about social concern functioned as moralizing exhortation rather than as operative question; we were not able to sustain the perspective Bonhoeffer declared us to have acquired (in a passage we had at hand):

There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.¹⁶

We were ready in the seminar for questions about authenticity and about order. We were ready for discomfort in bringing to consciousness our fundamental positions, and for something more like courage, given the obvious commonness among us of a faithful disturbance.

We devised for future organizers of a continuing seminar in theological anthropology these suggestions:

- the local church (i.e., the anthropology at stake in considerations of the 1981 convention theme; and the further suggestion that the theological-anthropology seminar usually be linked to the general theme);
- social justice (some thought that this matter has not been adequately approached by CTSA);
- the published Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on justification (suggested for theological anthropology in the 1979 *Proceedings*: Appendix: LuCath);
- method.

Method was the co-leaders' proposal for the next meeting of the continuing seminar. Frederick Crowe suggested that since eight-fold specialization (as in the work of Bernard Lonergan) is based on the structure of human consciousness, discussion and implementation of such an understanding of method is clearly pertinent to theological anthropology.

A suggestion in the seminar outline that theological anthropology be taken to mean "theological work *focused* on questions about what it is to be human" (implying that "focus" differentiates) had not been challenged. "Focus" can function as a memorial to *objectum formale quo*, or it can function as a working image (foreground/background) vague enough to keep open the struggle among possible meanings of

¹⁵Prayer was included in the list of theo-anthropological concerns as a sublating consideration for many of the old dichotomies in regard to human beings: faith/reason; grace/nature; body/spirit.

¹⁶D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (enlarged edition), p. 17.

theological anthropology. But attempts to justify differentiation of a work called "theological anthropology" might gradually shear theological praxis away from the insights of the anthropological turn¹⁷ and from the methodologically more radical "turn to the subject" accomplished for us incompletely in Kant's time, suspiciously by critical social theorists, and heuristically by Lonergan. Subsequent to the sessions, the other leader, rethinking the matter of "focus on the human," wondered what forms of theology belong among authentic human projects. Is theological anthropology a grab-bag of interests—a large pool in which it is pleasant to wade and talk?

Against our better judgment we may continue to explain that some theological questions are about human beings and some are not. But to unravel such an explanation of "theological anthropology": some will think that it is as though a reader of Northrop Frye were to say, in defiance of the core of *The Secular Scripture*,¹⁸ that some good stories are about the reader and some good stories are not. Clearly, "theological anthropology" is really "subject [topic] specialization," if the vague notion of "focus" (see above) be asked for its secret. Entrapment in that type of specialization would merely continue the academic smorgasbord, add to the *topoi*.¹⁹

Casting about for some control, or path, in areas designated "theological anthropology," one can recall Lonergan's invitations to interiority and Doran's insistence that "the only viable control of meaning in our time is the self-appropriating subject."²⁰ Since in the seminar some were concerned over the plurality of anthropologies and divergence of views about what it is to be human, one participant suggested that this is where "turn to the subject" can be literally of immense help. Following Lonergan's guidance, one could move into the realm of interiority; there consensus is fostered by grounding one's thinking on invariant structures thus reducing the likelihood of radical revision. The findings of interiority are, of course, then formulated as theory but this approach avoids objectivist theorizing. The prime task of contemporary Christian anthropology may be to ground notions of what it is to be human on this emerging consensus of interiority. Moreover, the anthropological quest can be said to be centered in experience of living "in-between," in tension toward the divine ground. Voegelin's insistence on the need for *anamnesis* or fresh recollection of this fundamental experience gives support for a renewed anthropology with ecumenical appeal.

The 1980 seminar was conducted as formal discussion: i.e., the two co-leaders, relying on the required readings (with excerpts on hand as

¹⁷ For example: convictions about the unity of God's plan in creation and history; or about the unsatisfactory abstractness of considering human beings as though, without reference to God, they could ever be; or as though they could think about God without that activity being human thought.

¹⁸ Cf. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). See especially p. 157.

¹⁹ See note 4.

²⁰ R. Doran, *Subject and Psyche* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), p. 48.

"instant reading") and on the talents of those assembled,²¹ proceeded strictly by posing questions to evoke discussion. The sessions were an attempt to provide times of full participation for some of the gifted and thoughtful people who attend the conventions.

If the discussion leaders had a "hidden agenda" it was a hope, for their own and others' questions, for the kind of surprising shift that befell a well-known inquiry about humanness: "Can anyone enter again into the maternal womb and be born again?" (cf. Jn 3:4-10). In theological praxis and in living, such a shift might facilitate the emergence of new meaning.

CATHLEEN M. GOING
Thomas More Institute
Montreal

²¹ Participants on both days of the seminar were: Michael Barnes, John Breznica, Claudette Dwyer, Frederick Crowe and Cathleen Going as discussion leaders, David Granfield, Joseph Grau, Allan Laubenthal, Daniel Liderbach, Julian Miller and James Pambrun. (They were joined the first day by B. Marthaler, P. Reilley, O. Sharkey, Father Terrien, the Belgian missionary referred to in note 10, and two others.) The report above is based upon the seminar plan and on the discussions as these occurred.