

## SEMINAR ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### POWER AND THE HUMAN SITUATION

Given the anthropological context of John Coleman's presentation in the opening general session of this convention, the seminar was prepared in consultation with Coleman. Readings to advance the discussion from Coleman's keynote address were suggested to the participants: Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981 Reprint), Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1974), and Rollo May, *Power and Innocence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972).

In addition, specifically theological explorations of the theme of power were employed to focus our discussion. Karl Rahner's observations on "The Theology of Power" (*Theological Investigations*, Vol IV) evoked considerable discussion. Rahner emphasizes the ambiguity of power within the context of his nature-grace theology. Power, which "should never have been," is de facto an inescapable reality in the life of freedom. Heightened awareness of the fact that one's decisions in freedom always situate for better or for worse the freedom of others should intensify one's sense of responsibility. Connections were made here between Rahner's thought and Rollo May's distinctions of the various kinds of power (*Power and Innocence*, Chapter 5). "Nutrient" and "integrative" kinds of power should describe the intentionality of the responsible self, while the tendency of power to become "exploitative," "manipulative," and "competitive" should signal a healthy hermeneutics of self-suspicion.

Participants in the seminar recalled the fact that the traditional locus for the discussion of power in the context of Christian anthropology is the theology of grace. Since the time of the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, received doctrine in the Western Church has always stressed the impotency of human effort to attain the truly good. Accordingly, grace has been presented as a "new power" or empowerment by the Spirit unto freedom from self for love. Indeed, the emphasis on grace as power (and not just pardon) is seen by Reinhold Niebuhr to be the distinctive feature of the Catholic conception of grace—wherein *gratia cooperans* (the power of God in us and with us) leads to rather optimistic assessments of the potential of Christian existence. Some in our group thought it would be fruitful to reflect on this typically Catholic understanding of grace as power in light of contemporary historical consciousness. Reference was made to the work of Schillebeeckx in *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* as an attempt to ground "social activism" in an historically conscious retrieval of the tradition of grace as power.

The discussion on grace as power led to the problem of the ecclesial mediation of grace. Bemoaned was the fact that the authoritarian structures of the Church impede the concrete mediation of grace as the power of the Spirit to be realized in freedom. The present state of the institutional Church, wherein we note "a permanent suspension of the (Church's) constitution,"<sup>1</sup> was criticized from the ideal perspective of the Church as "institutional freedom." Some of

<sup>1</sup>Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 149.

the participants were interested in a further, more detailed critical discussion of the issue of mediation in relation to parish structures, catechetical programs, etc. The problem of effective styles of leadership in the Church was also addressed.

At the request of the President of the Society several organizational questions regarding plans for next year's convention were discussed. Most of the participants were interested in attending this seminar again next year. It was agreed that we plan the seminar in light of the theme announced for the 1983 convention. Accordingly, the continuing seminar on theological anthropology will discuss "Continuities and Discontinuities in Theological Anthropology since Vatican II" next June. In terms of procedures there was a strong suggestion that the continuing seminars be scheduled for a *one, three-hour period* with a break in the middle. Two sessions on different days do not favor continuity of discussion.

Three participants have volunteered to work with Michael Scanlon as Chair in planning next year's seminar: John Lodge and Charles Meyer of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein and John Farrelly, O.S.B. of De Sales Hall, Washington, D.C. Readings for the seminar will be announced through the services of the Secretary of the Society. No formal talks will be given, but the participants, and especially the discussion leaders, will be asked to do some "preparatory thinking" on the theme.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Participants in the 1982 seminar were: John Connelly, Donald Cozzins, Robert Gregorio, Cathleen Going, Thomas Ivory, Georgia Keighdley, Norman King, John Lodge, Lomis Madgi, Charles Meyer, Kevin McMorrow, Julia Ann O'Sullivan, Nancy Ring, Michael Scanlon (chair), Maureen Sullivan, Frank Tiso, and Leland White.