

SEMINAR ON THE TRINITY

Language, art, the meaning of "person", and post-conciliar pneumatology engaged members of the continuing seminar on the Trinity. Catherine M. LaCugna's paper "Trinity: Metaphor and Model" was the focus of discussion of a language problem basic to Christian theology. LaCugna reminded us that theology is necessarily involved in hermeneutics; a sound hermeneutics prevents the facile equation of what we say and what is. Further, Christian theology is chiefly a way of speaking about God rather than a way of describing God in himself. This presents the theologian with the need to balance the requisite indirection (we cannot describe God *in se*) with the desire for clarity. In reflecting on analogous language, in particular on metaphor, we can come to see that "there is a fascinating intersection between the form of what we say ('we can know God only in relation') and what we say ('God is God by being self- and other-related'), with the latter serving to verify the former." Metaphor allows us to see one thing *as* another without forgetting the persisting dissimilarity. Parable and model are forms of metaphor, the parable being an extended metaphor and the model a sustained metaphor. In theological discourse metaphor in its various forms enables us to speak of God in terms of what we know, and allows the speaker to reshape his/her thinking. (As an example of the latter, consider the shock effect of parable in opening a way to unexplained meanings, even for the one who utters the parable.)

LaCugna drew on Ricoeur (including, but not only, *Interpretation Theory*) and on Scharlemann (*The Being of God*) in developing her thought, which she then applied to several assertions from Trinitarian theology. For example, the statement "God is (a/the) Father," through application of her hermeneutical principles, may be seen "as metaphorical, or analogous, when the relationality of Fatherhood is in view."

Returning to metaphor as model and applying it to Trinitarian thought, LaCugna pointed out that models enable us to describe a structure or set of relations. She remarked that "the primal experience which Christian theology attempts to enunciate ... is God-in-relationship." This is the root metaphor, the fundamental model which functions in Trinitarian theology to preserve the distinction between God's reality and our thoughts about God, giving validity to the concepts that reattach our images to the referent, God-in-relation.

Discussion considered the usefulness of this approach for reflection on the relation between the economic and the immanent Trinity. Enunciation of the distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity is an affirmation that the God who manifests his reality in creation invites us through redemption into his self. Does reflection of the kind LaCugna proposes take sufficient account of this as reality?

A second point raised was that language analysis is a tool for philosophical reflection on language itself. This reflection does not bring one into contact with the Trinity. LaCugna pointed out that if Christian theological

language is indirect, ostensive, manifesting it will never tell who God is, but it shows who God is. It is possible, after all, to make statements about an encounter without ever getting at the nature or being of the partner to the encounter.

There was discussion of ontological Fatherhood-Sonship as characterizing relationship in God. While some members affirmed Fatherhood as essential to God, it was pointed out that in the fourth century debates what was deemed essential was the generative role, so that the basic distinction between the first Two in the Trinity is between the Ungenerated-Generator and the Only-Generated.

Attention then turned to discussion of Lorine Getz's presentation of the "Trinity in Early Christian Art," the reading for which was chapter 2 in Tavad's *The Vision of the Trinity*. Art mirroring faith is an essential element in Christian theology. Getz presented copies of a number of the artifacts discussed by Tavad as well as of other related ones. Having reviewed the movement of Tavad's argument, Getz leveled a critique including these points: 1) assent concerning the value of art to faith life and its essential symbolic structure; 2) problems inherent in drawing specific conclusions from works which cannot be accurately dated and which include themes common to contemporary Jewish and/or pagan works; 3) problem of accepting Benedict XIV's position as correct in determining how the Trinity may be depicted in Christian art; 4) contemporary challenge to the adequate expression of the experience of God.

Discussion drew attention to the importance of the role of Maximus the Confessor on mystagogy and of Theodore the Studite in the iconoclastic controversy, areas which need consideration in the study of the Trinity in early Christian art. In the contemporary realm, discussion affirmed the importance of self-negating images. These are critically important if naive and distorted images are to be replaced. The development of such images will require a return to a contemplative approach to the Trinity.

William Hill's section on the "Meaning of 'Person' in Trinitarian Theology" provided an opportunity for study and discussion of his book *The Three-Personed God*. In response to the earlier consideration of LaCugna's work, Hill agreed that all talk of God is by way of indirection, but ultimately it is of God *in se* and not just of his free relationality towards us. So analogy falls between univocation (which leads to anthropomorphism) and equivocation (which leads to agnosticism). Causal analogy takes us from the known to the unknown in the preambles of faith, while analogy of proportionality serves for the manifestation (not the proving) of the object of faith. "Models" then can function as an umbrella category provided they give knowledge of God *in se*, and not only of our felt relationship to God; thus they need to be based on revelation as the self-communication of the "Holy Mystery" (Rahner) toward which we tend asymptotically, and who is mediated in the experience of the finite.

After centuries of neglect we are recovering Trinitarian theology through its salvational import, thus by way of the economic Trinity as in ecclesiology and the pneumatology of Vatican II. Major figures include

Barth and Rahner. Rahner's axiomatic affirmation that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity" is not mere metaphor in Hill's opinion. It affirms that God is there for us in the economy of salvation in a three-fold way, and this is how God is in himself. Both Barth and Rahner eschew the term "person," Barth preferring to speak of three modes of existing and Rahner of three distinct modes of subsisting. While this can be understood in an orthodox way, Hill believes it also can easily be misunderstood either as three modalities of one uni-existent uni-personal God or as the fullness of the Godhead being in the Father alone. Another route entirely is followed by Pannenberg, Moltmann, Jüngel and others who may be characterized as "neo-economic Trinitarians." Hill summarizes the work of these theologians on "person" in his book, where he also expresses his reservations with respect to their positions.

Hill himself offers a third option for the handling of "person." He affirms that God's unity means one essence, one existence, one consciousness, one liberty, one self, and one absolute subject. Yet there are three Persons in the sense of three foci of that one consciousness, three subjectivities, three centers of one consciousness. These three are really distinct but only relatively so. In short, there is a divine *koinonia*, rooted in genuine intersubjectivity. The grounds for such a position are that generation in God is an inner divine activity proper to the Father alone; spiration is an activity proper to Father and Son. A relation as subsistent is precisely the exercise of notional (as opposed to essential) act. The intrasubjective psychological model takes upon itself an intersubjective dimension with the theological analysis of love as demanding a third (Richard of St. Victor) or as itself issuing in the personal "other" (Thomas Aquinas).

Questioning made clear that Hill's position goes beyond Aquinas in that it incorporates the psychological which Aquinas rejects. With respect to three centers of the one consciousness, Hill pointed out that the unity in question is not a generic unity but a numerical one. Furthermore, in his position the freedom of God is possessed integrally by the Three but is exercised by each of them. The usual explanation has been "appropriation" but in Hill's understanding there is more to it than that.

In the discussion of Pannenberg, whom Hill faults as panentheistic, Hill made clear that his objection is that Pannenberg's approach historicizes the divine being so that "God" is a code-word for the totality of historical process. By contrast, an orthodox panentheism would see God as the ground of all that is; existence as finite, then, is grounded in uncreated existence.

Beginning with a review of the contributions of Vatican II to Trinitarian theology, Mary Ann Donovan's paper focused on "Pneumatology" because of its prominent role in subsequent developments. The purpose was to illuminate those aspects of post-conciliar theology of the Spirit that are clear developments from the Council documents. In *Lumen gentium* 8 we read: "Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who

vivifies it by way of building up the body." There has been a history of interpretation of the Body of Christ which views the church as the extension of the incarnation; the shift introduced here is a change in direction chosen by the Council. In a number of other passages, the work of the Spirit is spelled out as sanctification through giving participation in the anointing of Christ (*SC* 5; *LG* 7,9; *PO* 2). The problem posed is the interpretation of the text quoted. Mühlen has offered an interpretation (*Una Mystica Persona. Eine Person in vielen Personen*). While the question is an ecclesiological one, Mühlen considers that to pose it correctly it must be placed in relation to the Trinity, which is manifested in the economy of salvation. Mühlen asks whether the Spirit is manifested in the economy in a way proper to himself and not simply appropriated. If so, he says "in the measure that one is able to show that the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit as uncreated principle of unity, is fundamentally distinct from the mystery of the Incarnation, in that measure also the Holy Spirit would appear more clearly *as* person, in his distinction from the Father and the Son" (p. 36, French).

Donovan's presentation of the heart of Mühlen's argument is as follows. Within the Trinity the Son and the Spirit are constituted as really distinct persons in their processions. Within the economy each has a distinct mode of manifestation proper to his mission. The Son is constituted as person within the Trinity by being generated from the Father. He is sent in the Incarnation, where he elevates one single human nature to hypostatic union, constituting the person Jesus Christ who is Son by nature to the Father. The Incarnation manifests in the economic order the intra-Trinitarian procession of the Son. It is Mühlen's contention that the mission of the Spirit to Jesus Christ, that is, Jesus' anointing in the Holy Spirit, is a manifestation in the economic order of the intra-Trinitarian spiration. In the Trinity the Spirit is breathed forth (and constituted as person) as the bond of love between Father and Son. Active spiration is a personal property of Father and Son although it does not constitute either Father or Son as person, but only Spirit. Having been spirated (and we must remember with Mühlen that this is a use of temporal terms to describe an atemporal process), the Spirit's proper activity is to bind together the two from whom he proceeds. Thus the Spirit is one person in two persons, that is, in Father and Son. In the economy the mission of the Spirit to Jesus Christ does not constitute the Son as person. The Spirit's proper activity in the economy is to anoint Jesus and to unite Jesus the Christ (The Anointed) and the many Christians (the anointed) who are members of the church. So in the economy the Spirit is one person in many persons, that is, in Christ and in us.

Another important conciliar contribution to pneumatology lies in the renewed significance attached to charism in the church. Donovan pointed to a number of developments in the past twenty years whose relationship to one another is rooted in the nature and use of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. These include the emergence of ministry as a theme for reflection, the phenomenon of the charismatic movement, attention to discernment of spirits, and renewed interest in spiritual direction. The

paper indicated the lines of connection, summarized major contributions, and suggested areas that seem likely to be fruitful for further study.

In discussion members noted that the shift in ecclesiology from a Christological base to a Pneumatological one requires that ecclesial ministry be reconceived. While the hierarchical approach better corresponds to a Christological base, a pneumatological base emphasizes the interpersonal, communal and empowering dimensions of ministry. A further implication of the shift would be the rethinking of ecclesial authority. Rights and duties in the church are charismatically grounded, but note the lack of recognition of this fact in the new Code of Canon Law.

Problems of language recurred in the discussion. Spiration is a metaphorical and not a metaphysical term, since one person can never actually bind together two persons (as in Mühlen's theology). But here differences in metaphysical systems become more apparent. Mühlen's definition of "person" hinges on a distinction between conjoint and mutual love. Note in this connection the liability of the French translation of *Wir (Uns)*. Metaphorical language comprises far more of Trinitarian theology than has always been acknowledged. It is cognitive and indispensable in any doctrine of God.

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