

SEMINAR ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

In accord with the theme of this convention our seminar topic, Christian Eschatology, was discussed from the perspective of "continuities and discontinuities since Vatican II."

The first half of the seminar period focused on "continuities" in the traditional "Augustinian" type of eschatology, exemplified in the scholastic tract, *De Novissimis*. It was noted that after a significant period of theological silence about the issue of personal hope for eternal life, new theologies of death and personal destiny have begun to emerge. Chastened by critiques of other-worldly, escapist supernaturalism, many of these recent theological efforts have become more responsible and more sober in addressing the question of life after death. Theologians in general have become more sensitive to the fact that the Christian symbolism of hope cannot be translated into naive phenomenologies of eternity.

To initiate the discussion, Charles R. Meyer presented his reflections on personal survival of death. Meyer's suggestions for a contemporary retrieval of personalist eschatology come from his own "turn to science" for constructing a correlation between the tradition of Christian hope and contemporary culture. Embracing the "final option" theory in his theology of death, Meyer finds empirical confirmation of this position in studies like those of Raymond Moody and E. Kubler-Ross. In addition, Meyer feels that "quantum mechanics" and other post-Newtonian scientific advances will force a total revision of traditional eschatological data if they are to be accepted by American society in the future. In response to questions Meyer spoke of heaven and hell as "other systems" in line with scientific recognition not only of a four-dimensional universe but one of *n*-dimensions. His general position, defended with passion, avers that scientific acculturation of belief is the condition for the possibility of the restoration of meaning for eschatology.

From a biblical perspective John G. Lodge recalled the twentieth century rediscovery of apocalyptic and its relationship to eschatology. Lodge reviewed the various positions on the issue of time and eschatology: consequent, realized, existential, and proleptic eschatologies. The "temporal dualism" of apocalyptic eschatology was contrasted with the "historical realism" of prophetic eschatology. Lodge agreed with the position that sees a continuity between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatologies; both proclaim Yahweh's sovereignty over history. Both illustrate the religious language of hope in different historical situations. The perduring contribution of apocalyptic to Christian eschatology is the symbol of resurrection. The symbol of the kingdom of God expresses the Christian vision of hope for the issue of history.

The second half of the seminar reflected an approach to eschatology

more akin to Joachim of Fiore than to Augustine. John Farrelly gave a brief presentation in which he situated and summarized his article, suggested as reading for the seminar, "The Peace of Christ in the Earthly City," in Thomas E. Clarke, ed., *Above Every Name: The Lordship of Christ and Social Systems* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 269-99. The content of this article is aligned with the futurist eschatologies prominent since the 1960's — eschatologies that are reactions against earlier views that in different ways excessively dissociated eschatology from history. These new "Joachimite" eschatologies exemplify "discontinuities" in traditional Christian eschatology since Vatican II. When compared, however, with Moltmann's political theology or Pannenberg's eschatology as the meaning of history or Gutierrez's and Segundo's liberation theology or the process theologies dependent on Whitehead or on Teilhard de Chardin, Farrelly's position as presented at the seminar is somewhat different (as can be seen from, among other things, the philosophy of the human person it uses).

In the New Testament, and particularly in Luke, we see that Jesus adopted as an integral dimension of his ministry in proclaiming the kingdom a concern for his people in the political order. While the earliest Christians expected the kingdom or God's definitive salvific intervention to come when Jesus came again, Luke, for example in Acts, shows that God's kingdom is already operative through Jesus' ascension and his transforming influence in the world through the church and the Spirit. This kingdom, like the ministry of Jesus, was to have a transforming influence upon the social relationships among individuals and among communities. The kingdom was meant to effect peace among peoples in history. Resistance to the kingdom, as in the case of the Jews, resulted, on the other hand, in judgment within history.

How is this biblical symbol related to the quest for peace in our own age? The relation between the kingdom of God and peace, it was suggested, is correlated with the relation between redemption and creation. The Judaeo-Christian view is that God created humanity and history for definite purposes both divine and human, that humanity turned away from these purposes even in the beginning of history and thus fell under the control of powers alien to God. The purpose of the kingdom, given to the risen and ascended Christ to effect, is to fulfill God's purposes in history, to reconcile men and women with God and with one another, and to liberate humanity from what stands in the way of such reconciliation. More specifically, we can see in the social teaching of the church criteria for the kind of peace that God sanctions and seeks to bring about in history. Pope John XXIII based his view of this peace in *Pacem in terris* (1963) on the dignity of the human person and the rights and duties that flowed from this dignity, with its implications for relationships within an individual political community and among all the political communities of the world in our historical period, as can be discerned through reading the "signs of the times." Vatican II and later church teaching grounded their social doctrine both on the "natural law" basis of the dignity of the human person and on Christian symbols such as the kingdom of God.

The discussion that followed centered primarily on the question of how recent interpretations of eschatological symbols such as the kingdom of God as having practical impact on the political, social, and economic order developed in theology and in official church teaching. Different suggestions were proffered. The need to oppose Marxism was mentioned. It was recalled that Pope Leo XIII tried to relate the church more positively to the modern world than Pius IX had done; and that he did this in part through the application of natural law ethics to the changed conditions of the modern world. In the more ecumenical context of Vatican II the church turned to Christian symbols to ground its social engagement without abandoning an updated "natural law" approach (now rooted in the dignity of the human person). Modern historical consciousness was mentioned as an important factor. Our realization that social, political, and economic institutions are not simply there but are human constructs makes us understand that we are responsible for them. This historical consciousness has stimulated a new reading of the Christian tradition of hope. The ultimate kingdom we hope for must be penultimately anticipated. The divine promise entails human praxis.

Eighteen people participated in this seminar. In line with the announced theme for the 1984 convention, "The World Church," the topic for the seminar in theological anthropology will be ecumenical; we will discuss the doctrine of justification from the reports of the Lutheran/Catholic Bilateral. John Farrelly, Frederick Jelly, and Michael Scanlon will constitute the planning committee; John Farrelly will serve as Chair.

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