

## SEMINAR ON SPIRITUALITY

### SPIRITUALITY AS A SOURCE FOR THEOLOGY

The theme of the seminar was explored through the contribution of four panelists and through discussion. To simplify this report on the seminar, the reflections of all of the panelists will be presented first and then highlights of the discussion will follow.

This first panelist, Elizabeth Dreyer, provided an historical example of the interconnection of spirituality and theology through the work of Bonaventure. For Bonaventure, the goal of theology was *ut boni faciamus*. He fought against school theology's tendency to separate speculative and practical theology. He focused on the ultimate context of both: sainthood and the life of the beatitudes. The specifics of the faculty psychology through which he waged his battle is less important for our contemporary situation than the fact that he waged it.

For Bonaventure, theology is graced. It presupposes not just faith itself but an active faith. It encompasses prayer, the exercise of the virtues, and the movement of the soul to God. The cultivation of the intellect then begins in faith and ends in mystical love. He cannot separate theology from the experience of God's love and vice versa. Theology is a wisdom; it deals with the relation of knowledge and love. It is "extended intellect," understanding with affectivity. Wisdom is the goal of knowledge because it sets knowledge in its authentic finality, i.e., directed to love itself. Theology must not only describe the itinerary, it must also achieve it. Wisdom unites speculative and practical aspects of theology and directs it to the end which is the good of the risen life to be obtained through charity. The perfection of wisdom equals the contemplation of God. Bonaventure incorporates the medieval idea of knowledge as the process of actualization of the soul's potentiality to become what it contemplated. For Bonaventure, theology is a *transitus* toward the spiritual delight of the vision of God of which it is both a preparation and an anticipation. The center of mystical experience must also be the heart of theology.

Intimately connected to Bonaventure's understanding of theology is his understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites all forms of theological knowledge in the bond of charity and orders them to the delight of union with God in mystical contemplation. The Holy Spirit operates in the completion or perfection of knowledge and elevates the mind beyond every form of knowledge to experience the hidden mysteries of God in a rapture of ecstatic love. This is an experience obtained solely by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The mystical union of the Christian with God is consummated in the fruits of the Holy Spirit, with peace as its final goal.

Dreyer concluded her reflection on Bonaventure by a consideration of his understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they relate to spirituality and theology.

The second panelist, Keith Egan, suggested pushing the stated theme of the seminar beyond spirituality as a source for theology to spirituality as theology. The first presentation had prepared the way for this move.

Egan reminded the seminar that we are not so far removed from the time when in Roman Catholic seminaries the tract on spirituality (or an ascetical and mystical theology) appeared as an appendage to the dogmatic and moral tracts. It is now time for spirituality to enter fully into the search for an integration with theology. What Egan proposed to the seminar and to others is a program for integration. He finds the items to be mentioned helpful to keep spirituality and theology in some kind of creative tension. He adverts to the distinction between the practice of spirituality and the theoretical understanding of spirituality. Obviously understanding is for the sake of practice, yet the main concern will be with the place of spirituality as understanding, while at the same time being concerned that practice both inform and be informed by theological spirituality.

The specific steps suggested by Egan for the recovery of the unity of theology and spirituality include the following: the application of hermeneutical principles to the recovery of the spiritual tradition; a collaborative effort along the lines of Lonergan's functional specialties; a collaboration that would be transcultural, interfaith, global and feminist; a study of the origins of the separation between spirituality and theology in order to find new ways to reintegrate them; an articulation of the notion of praxis as it applies to lived and theological spirituality; a recovery of the theology of the Holy Spirit; a fresh look at the meaning of *sacra doctrina* in St. Thomas and its implications for spirituality and theology; the need for the religious, moral, and intellectual conversion to which Lonergan has called our attention.

After Egan's careful articulation of the massive project that those who are serious about the retrieval of the spiritual traditions must be about, Sebastian Moore provided a specific example of the fruitfulness spirituality has as a source for theology. Focusing on the mystery of our own selfhood, he shows how our experience both illuminates the meaning of the Trinity and is illuminated by it. He asks: What do we mean when we say that we do not know who we are? First of all, the "who" denotes relationship. The question "Who am I?" means "Where is my place in relation to others?" But none of my relationships tell me, ultimately, who I am. The question persists, absolutely. And it is still a question as to how I am related.

The resolution of my bewilderment as to who I am is the mystery of which the who of relationship is the whole reality: the who of the unknowable. The who of its self-denying self-affirmation in the who of love. The bewilderment as to who I am is the faint resonance of the interrelation of "who"s in which I exist. That which makes me unable to say who I am is itself the origin of who-ness. For the origin of all who-ness, of all contrasting relationship, is the contrasting relationship between the ultimately unknowable and the wholly manifest in the love that makes

this contrast not a contradiction.

To the extent that we are personed by *the* persons, we are one. For *the* persons are unity unfolded in generosity, unity all-embracing. They come out of unity, out of its requirement to be all in love. Hence Jesus prays "that *they* may be one, as *we* are one."

In short. A person is a reality one end of which is unknowable, the other end related to this world. This relationship, this spanning, between the unknowable and the world, is what constitutes personhood. It is why we as persons are not yet completed, are an enigma, do not know who we are. Our completion as persons is in a larger reality in which the unknowable relates positively to the world, for it invents existence, is manifest in the Logos of all. This clear relationship of the unknowable to the manifest is thus the fulness of personhood seen in the perfect relationships between the unknowable and the manifest, in the Spirit of the manifestation. The God-persons are what persons really are.

Finally, Moore pointed out, the structure of self-manifestation on the part of the non-manifest is essentially triadic. The Holy Spirit is the reason, and the only reason, why the self-manifestation of the non-manifest is not a self-contradiction.

The final presentation prepared by K. Priscilla Petersen but read in her absence made concrete the necessity and fruitfulness of the retrieval of Western spirituality in the context of the spirituality of the Asian traditions. She addressed the relationship of spirituality and theology in those traditions. She indicated that in investigating uses of the word "spirituality" she has found a cluster of related themes: the personal, the experiential, the interior and the concrete. There is also a pervasive, even inevitable assumption that spirituality will be about, among other things, prayer and contemplation. At the same time "spirituality" includes not only the person in deep inwardness and individual meditation, but embraces also the life of the person in liturgical, moral and intellectual community, while retaining a focus on the essential themes.

As for "theology," since Buddhists do not use the word "God" or any obvious equivalent, she would characterize it as "explication of what is held in faith" or "reflections made in the light of acceptance of a central religious reality".

Theology does not exist without tradition and so she will be concerned with the relation of theology, as theological tradition, and spirituality, as personal, concrete, inner religious experience, and that in two Asian traditions: Buddhism and Hinduism. She discussed a major figure from each tradition: the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dōgen Kigen, and the modern Bengali yogi and theologian Sri Aurobindo. For each, spiritual experience played a crucial role.

In the discussion of the papers it was recalled that the theme of the entire convention was old and new treasures after Vatican II. Spirituality is in a special way such a treasure both because of the advances of historical studies and because in a time of reevaluation of traditions one is personally challenged to experientially verify the traditions. It was informative in

Petersen's paper to see concretely the structure of reevaluation as a cross-cultural phenomenon. It was also pointed out that the personal appropriation of the tradition never leaves the tradition unchanged but is simply a new stage of the tradition. In our own time one of the key challenges is the integration of spiritual praxis and the praxis of justice. The observation was made that the whole range of spirituality must be studied, not only the literary mystics, but those who have expressed themselves artistically and through their labors in history.

The Eastern Christian traditions and the Indian traditions seem to have preserved the central importance of spirituality in the way the Western traditions have not. A new ecumenical encounter now seems possible on this renewed base. The question was raised in the light of Dogen, Aurobindo, and Bonaventure of the significance of the fact that each one's spiritual experience received relatively adequate expression in three quite different traditions. What does that say about the unity and diversity of traditions?

Julian of Norwich was discussed as a particularly fruitful example of someone confirming the central insights of a tradition and yet notably expanding it as well. Her parable of the lord and the servant raises crucial questions about the ultimate triumph of the goodness of God in the light of the church's teaching about hell. Her persistent confidence in the goodness of God made her pursue her interpretation of this "showing" for twenty years before she would share it in her writing. It is striking that this parable is immediately followed by her making explicit the motherhood of God.

The theologian Bernard Lonergan was pointed to as providing a very explicit appreciation of the necessity of the personal appropriation of tradition through his development of the functional specialities of dialectics and foundations. The self cannot be by-passed in moving from the past to the future in theology and religion.

The discussion turned to an appreciation of Moore's analysis of the unmanifest and the manifest in our Christian understanding of God. Moore pointed out that much of the disillusionment with religion might stem from the disproportion between the frequent triviality of the manifestations of religion and the recognition of the beauty of the unmanifest to which it bears inadequate witness.

The importance and the challenge of the tasks outlined by Egan were enthusiastically supported by the seminar. This led to a discussion of the next meeting of the seminar itself. The suggestion was made to choose a classic text and to examine its contemporary significance. John of the Cross's *Dark Night* was chosen for a number of reasons. It is a poetic text enhanced by the author's own interpretation. The focus for the seminar will be the two texts themselves and their contemporary personal, social, and doctrinal importance.

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