

SEMINAR ON THE TRINITY

This year's seminar focused on pneumatology (Rahner, von Balthasar) and on the problem of masculine language in trinitarian theology. Because there is a high degree of interest in pneumatology, the members of the seminar have decided to pursue topics in pneumatology over the next two, possibly three years.

Session 1: Members of the seminar discussed Karl Rahner's pneumatology, having read Leo O'Donovan's paper, "Rahner's Late Pneumatology at the Center of His Thought." O'Donovan traced the development in Rahner's own thinking by showing how the shift in emphasis in his Christology brought about a change in his pneumatology. As Rahner's Christology became less incarnational and more historical, his theology of the Holy Spirit became more evident. Certainly in Rahner's earlier writings one finds an implicit theology of the Spirit in the doctrines of grace and ecclesiology. But in the last volumes of the *Schriften*, the identification of grace with the gift of the Spirit becomes more pronounced. This coincides with the new perspective in Rahner's Christology on the way Christ makes himself solidary with all humanity and with God, opening up the possibility of a unitary history of the world. God given as Spirit makes possible and transforms this history, at the center of which stands Christ. The history of the world is God's own history. Rahner came to speak of a "universal pneumatology" which might precede Christology in the full development of a historical theology. Looked at from the perspective of a world-historical consciousness, God's communication with all people everywhere might only gradually be understood to be grounded historically in the figure of Jesus. O'Donovan pointed out that the analogy used to understand the triune God is neither psychological nor social but can be called the "analogy of historical communication."

O'Donovan raised the following critical questions: (1) How might we best see the correlation of the doctrine of grace with a theology of the Holy Spirit? (2) What are we to make of the fact that Rahner's fourfold scheme for understanding God's self-communication in history (origin-future, history-transcendence, invitation-acceptance, knowledge-love) appears nowhere else in his works but only in *The Trinity*? (3) Can Rahner answer the charge (made by Moltmann and others) that his trinitarian theology is modalistic?

In his prepared response to O'Donovan's paper, John Wright noted two difficulties with Rahner's pneumatology. First, Rahner fails to speak of the Holy Spirit in the context of Christ's universal influence in connection with the causality of his grace. Second, Rahner has difficulty correlating the transcendental and the categorical on the question of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity. Nonetheless, Wright pointed out that Rahner's late pneumatology serves to integrate and unify several basic themes in his theology, namely, his transcendental pneumatology, Rahner's teaching on the supernatural existential, and his eschatology.

General discussion raised questions about whether there is any connection between Rahner's pneumatology and his theology of hope; whether the *gratia Christi* can be identified with the *gratia spiritus sancti* (whether, that is, the *hypostasis* of the Spirit is adequately distinguished from that of the Son); how worship and doxology are related to Rahner's pneumatology; about the role of the Holy Spirit as *amor personalis*; about the agency of the Spirit in the act of creating.

Session II: In her paper, "The Unmale God: Reconsidering the Trinity,"¹ Marjorie Suchocki suggested that the "problem of the masculinization of God is twofold, involving (1) the adequacy of theology to express the nature of God, and (2) the sociological effect of theological symbols" (p. 35). The point is not to assert the femaleness of God (since this can be just as one-sided) but to seek the "Godness" of God. Suchocki argued that the names "Father, Son, Spirit" function in the Bible to show God's passion for justice, to evidence God's purposes to bring about a society of relationships characterized by caring, dignity and mutual respect. It is particularly God as indwelling Spirit who builds communities of justice; the "gifts of the Spirit" are communal rather than private, meant to be used to bring about the purpose of God toward justice.

Suchocki links the masculinization of the Father-Son-Spirit metaphors with the ontological turn in trinitarian theology by which the categories of being, knowledge and love (with variations) were equated with Father, Son, Spirit. The substitution of Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer language is not a real solution since these terms tend to retain philosophical rather than historical meanings. Suchocki suggests that by recapturing the biblical connotations of Father, Son, Spirit by focusing on the divine will towards justice, the masculinity of trinitarian language is attenuated. This entails heightening our sense of the metaphorical nature of the terms by which we depict God; removing all pronouns for God; re-tooling our philosophical and theological language of God (on this last point Suchocki proposes a process theology framework as most adequate to the task).

Spirited discussion followed. Some wondered whether not using pronouns for God has the effect of de-personalizing God. Certainly we in our personhood are mere fragments of what it means to be "person." God is not less than but more than "person" (or, God is the only complete person). It was suggested that we address God as "You" rather than talk about God as "he"—as if God were not present in our speech. There are other ways to identify God, for example, "God is the One who leads us out of captivity." *Spirit* was regarded by some as the most accurate name for God, conveying God's nearness and presence among us, whereas "Father" tends to depict the remoteness of God. Spirit-language is less gender-specific and has the advantage of being more obviously related to the upbuilding of communities of justice.

In "The Pneumatology and Spirituality of Hans Urs von Balthasar," Randy Sachs began by giving an overview of Balthasar's theology. For him theology is essentially contemplative. Its heart is the living gestalt of God's self-revelation in Jesus, and its foundation is obedient contemplation in faith of this gestalt. This

¹*Quarterly Review* 3/1 (Spring, 1983), 34-49.

view of theology accounts for the "anti-systematic" character of Balthasar's work (since the inconceivable fullness of God cannot be captured by any system) and explains why its contemplative-symbolic approach makes Balthasar's work appear to many as pre-critical and naive. Nonetheless, Balthasar's theology seeks to overcome the antinomy between theology and spirituality by stressing the importance of the saints as *loci theologici*, and by viewing spirituality as the "subjective side" of dogma.

Balthasar's pneumatology illustrates his conception of God as the "ever-greater" (*Deus semper maior*). The Spirit is the divine freedom in its ever-greater fullness, God's ability to ever "exceed" God's self in the infinite fullness of love. The only starting point for speaking about the triune God is the gestalt of Jesus Christ, specifically his life-in-mission. The cross and resurrection of Jesus reveal God as love "greater than which cannot be conceived." In this context Balthasar develops his understanding of the Trinity: the Father is begetting love, the Son is God's begotten love; the Spirit as person reveals God's nature to be "ever-greater" love. The Spirit, which is both the boundlessness and final determinateness of the divine love, is thus the personal expression of God's *innermost* being as love, and of God's *outermost* being as ecstatic love. Balthasar rejects the 'process' view of God according to which God "becomes" God, yet tries to incorporate the dynamic character of God's self-emptying and self-exceeding activity, by bringing together both being (*Sein*) and event (*Geschehen*).

Sachs went on to discuss the consequences of Balthasar's pneumatology for Christian life and spirituality. Life in the Spirit is understood by Balthasar in terms of the life of Christ and his obedience to the Spirit. The Spirit shapes the mission-existence of Jesus as the one *sent* by God. Similarly, personal Christian existence is life-in-mission: we share in the mission of Christ as we live in the Spirit. Contemplation and action converge insofar as one "listens" in order to carry out the will of God. The goal of the spiritual life is thus the desire to serve and the readiness to be sent.

Discussion centered on Balthasar's notion of God as *semper maior*—as love. Questions were raised about what it means to say that God can exceed even God's self; the elusiveness of Balthasar's often-paradoxical expressions; whether Balthasar is "tritheistic" if all three persons participate in the kenosis of the incarnation; whether a final triumph of love is assured, given human freedom.

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