

SEMINAR ON THE TRINITY

The Trinity Seminar initiated its planned two-year consideration of pneumatology with Kilian McDonnell's paper, "Holy Spirit: Christological Reciprocity, and a Way of Knowing."¹ In a set of "discussion paragraphs" McDonnell proposed that in order for Christian theology to be properly pneumatological, the mission of the Spirit must be regarded as being as important as that of the Son. Without a true reciprocity between Christ and the Spirit, trinitarian doctrine collapses. "Being in the Spirit" is the interpretative framework for "being in Christ," and *vice versa*. Pneumatology cannot be "a tract apart," nor can it function without a trinitarian grammar.

The Holy Spirit does not displace Christ but takes its place as the second of two foci in an elongated circle. The Spirit exercises a "contact function," as God's bridge to the world and also the means of ascent to God. The Spirit must permeate the whole of theological reflection. If Christ is the "what" of proclamation, the Spirit is the "how." Pneumatology is to theology what epistemology is to theology.

There is an intrinsic difficulty in formulating a pneumatology because of the ever-elusive character of the Spirit. Differences between Eastern and Western theology are prominent; the problem of *filioque* was raised as a way to focus the issues McDonnell raised. The caveat was made that because "mission" and "procession" are different orders of knowing, and because biblical testimony concerns the former, theologians must be cautious about making overly precise statements about intra-divine life.

The seminar then discussed Robert Imbelli's paper, "The Experience of Spirit in Christ and Church," which locates trinitarian theology in experience. Imbelli emphasized the experience of transformation by the Holy Spirit as the point of entry into a pneumatology from below. The classical language of "indwelling" can privatize the Spirit, whereas the Spirit is better described as the ambience in which we dwell. Life in the Spirit is a corporate life. "The Spirit works communion not fusion, inspiring community not collectivity. The effect of the Spirit's coming is to foster persons in community—indeed, one can only be 'person' in community; but, reciprocally, authentic community is a community of persons and not of 'egos' (whether the inflated or the deflated sort)." The "I" is transformed into "we." *Koinonia* is the summary reality of life in the Spirit.

The sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist, are the vehicles of transformation. Still, the sacraments must function not only for the individual's trans-

¹Based on Kilian McDonnell, "A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?" *Theological Studies* 46 (1985) 191-227.

formation but must serve the final goal of Christian life which is the transfiguration of the cosmos. All of creation is embraced by God, being transformed in the Spirit according to the pattern of Christ.

Discussants acknowledged the importance of the experiential and communal dimension of pneumatology. We dwell in the Spirit and the Spirit dwells in us to the extent that we all dwell in each other. The Christian community is gathered because its members live in Christ, and not because members necessarily agree with each other or share all conditions of life in common. The experience of the Spirit in the community of Christ therefore inevitably entails the experience of conflict. The point was made that there is a need to consider "pseudo-pneumatologies" which promote false or evil spirits in place of the Holy Spirit. Christian theology would also profit from incorporating the Jewish concrete sense of Spirit, in contrast to the abstract tendency of some ways of speaking of the Spirit. Attention was drawn to the saints (holy men and women) who are agents of transformation in and out of the Christian community, and to the praise of God as a fruit of life in the Spirit.

The topic for panel discussion on the second day was, "Shall we address the Holy Spirit as She?" (panelists: Donald L. Gelpi, John M. Farrelly, Catherine M. LaCugna). The current interest in exploring feminine metaphors for God is a sign of the thirst for a more integrated concept of God. The question of images and language for God arises at the pastoral, liturgical and catechetical levels; trinitarian theology is especially affected since the metaphors of 'Father' and 'Son' are nearly automatically associated with masculinity.

John Farrelly² proposed that while the Holy Spirit is, properly speaking, neither male nor female, the dominant symbols of the Spirit in scripture should be construed as feminine. While not denying that feminine symbols are also used of Father and Son in the New Testament, the names and symbols for Father and Son are dominantly masculine. Criteria for determining what constitutes a masculine or feminine symbol are controversial and difficult to establish without prejudice or sex-stereotyping. Farrelly locates the difference in the distinctiveness of male and female relational styles and modes of presence. Thus Word and Spirit each uniquely mediate God's presence in the world; the Spirit effects interior transformation which is manifested outwardly in attitudes and activity, whereas Christ's influence initially is exterior but eventually brings about inner transformation and union with him. These different ways of mediation correspond roughly to female-male differences, respectively. Farrelly's project includes a review of relevant biblical texts.

The context of Donald Gelpi's writings³ on this topic is the theology of conversion and a foundational pneumatology. In the seminar Gelpi stressed the distinction between logic and imagination when the question is the appropriateness of feminine symbols for the Spirit. There is a need to "re-imagine" the function

²See John M. Farrelly, "Feminine Symbols and the Holy Spirit," in *God's Work in a Changing World* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1985) 49-76.

³See Donald L. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother. A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1984).

and reality of the Holy Spirit, especially since in early Christianity the distinctive role of the Spirit as source of enlightenment was preempted by the Son/Word. Since the relationship between Christ and God is eminently personal, images for the Spirit who enables our participation in that relationship must also be personal. There is evidence in the tradition (especially biblical) for the legitimacy of imagining the Spirit as feminine. Jungian archetypal theory may be especially useful here, as long as the sexist connotations of archetype-become-stereotype are rejected.

Catherine LaCugna approached the question from the standpoint of trinitarian theology, arguing that to call the Spirit "she" as a way to redress the one-sidedness of God-imagery concedes that both God the Father and God the Son are "he." It is not clear why femininity should be attributed solely to the Spirit, especially if this argument is used to bolster the idea of a male deity who has "his feminine side." Male and female are intrinsically relational terms. Used *in divinis*, they indicate the essential relatedness of God, not the sex of God. Second, the presence of feminine imagery for God in the Bible is insufficient grounds for establishing that there are feminine "aspects" to God; masculine and feminine characteristics (biological and behavioral) are generally sex-stereotyped. The gender of words is also a weak basis for theological argumentation. Third, taking the fatherhood of God literally led to serious misunderstandings and heresies in the early centuries. Arius was unable to recognize the metaphorical character of divine paternity. The motherhood of God may be equally susceptible to distortion, either by being taken literally or by being made to conform to social and sexual stereotyping. Fourth, many discussions of this question exhibit an individualistic approach to the divine persons, betraying an Augustinian, not a biblical or Greek or creedal understanding of the one perichoretic unity of God. Fifth, there are several distinct though not equivalent meanings of "Spirit": as synonym for God; as the name of God's presence in the world; as the one sent by Christ; as the one sent by the Father (Jn 15:26); as one of three intra-divine persons (according to the East the Spirit is recipient of deity from the Father and bridge between God and world; in the West the Spirit is the bond between Father and Son). LaCugna suggested that if pronouns are to be used, they be used iconoclastically (e.g., "God the Father in her wisdom . . .") to insure that relational metaphors are not taken literally.

In discussion a careful distinction was made between using feminine images for the Holy Spirit, and thinking that the Spirit is "she." Questions were raised about the assumption that "the Spirit" spoken of in the Hebrew Bible is identical to "the Holy Spirit" of early Christianity. A catechetical difficulty is raised by the exclusive use of masculine imagery for God, especially in light of the fact that so many children in this country either do not have fathers or experience fathers negatively. Prayer was mentioned as a source for a new religious imagination on this question, given that the burden of the theological endeavor includes questions of conversion and transformation. Finally, in dialogue with other religions, it was suggested that the question of the Spirit is not intra-trinitarian but pertains to whether ultimate reality is personal or impersonal.

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