

SEMINAR ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A. WOMEN'S VOICE: OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The first session of the seminar consisted of brief presentations of three papers (by Mary Ann Hinsdale of St. John's Provincial Seminary in Plymouth, Mich.; Mary Aquin O'Neill of Salve Regina College in Newport, Rhode Island; and Ann O'Hara Graff of DePaul University in Chicago) and was chaired by Susan Ross. Since the papers had been made available in advance, the presenters either commented on or read their papers.

Mary Ann Hinsdale began with "Woman's Voice in Theological Anthropology: An Assessment." She asked what "women's voice" is, and raised questions about the adequacy of models for theological anthropology (such as those developed by Mary Aquin O'Neill, Mary Buckley, and Anne Carr): do models *reconstruct* or *construct* women's voice? In proposing ways of hearing women's voices, Hinsdale suggested 1) a return to narrative, which retains specificity and concreteness; and 2) the use of the models of knowing developed in *Women's Ways of Knowing*.¹

Mary Aquin O'Neill read her paper which reviewed the status of models in theological anthropology and commented on myths of the origin of men and women: the Pandora myth (in which women are not originally intended); the myth of the androgyne (the original creation that is both male and female); and the Genesis myth (in which two separate beings are created). She then suggested that the critical issue is not so much whether one adopts a "one nature" or a "two nature" anthropology but rather how we imagine the oneness of human nature. The problem is that the voices of women, in developing a theological anthropology, have not given sufficient attention to things that women know well (nature, emotions, intersubjectivity, and so forth).

In her paper "Discovery and Metapatterning: Mary Daly on Naming Female Being," Ann O'Hara Graff used the work of Mary Daly to suggest new ways of understanding women's experience. In *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*, Daly attempts both to name women's experience and to "weave a new world of women" through her criticism of patriarchy and her development of a new language. Especially crucial is Daly's work on myth and metaphor which shows how women are shaped by culture and how women's being is "erased," "repressed," and "stolen." Graff emphasized the point that women's experience must find new ways

¹Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

of expression (and so she stressed the value of Daly's contribution) but raised questions about Daly's characterization of any social situation related to patriarchy as "unambiguously evil": all human situations are ambiguous.

The discussion that followed touched on points related to all three papers. One participant raised the question whether women's ways of knowing are also ways of learning (they are) and how Daly's use of language is problematic because it is not how language is ordinarily used. Another participant focused on the way *hearing* is the dominant learning metaphor for women, where *seeing* is dominant for men. The discussion also touched on the issue of conversion and the need to develop the implications of fidelity to women's experience in Christian self-expression. There was also lively discussion on women's alienation from language and knowledge: how some questions are deemed "women's questions," how women's language gets "neutered," and how women's language is dismissed as "poetic" or as "gossip." One participant noted that in our search for "a voice," we need to focus on the concreteness and plurality of "women's voices"; another participant suggested that silence is both a positive and negative characteristic of women's voice. In addition, the need for intersubjective language was raised, as opposed to a language of "rugged individualism" or of gender "complementarity."

SUSAN A. ROSS

Loyola University of Chicago

B. AN EVALUATION OF PAUL RICOEUR'S INTERPRETATION OF GOD-TALK IN SCRIPTURE

In the second session of this seminar there were papers on the chosen theme offered by two presenters and a respondent. The papers were very illuminating—more so than can be indicated here, though the presentations took up all the time, precluding an opportunity for discussion. We note here the main points which our speakers developed.

Patricia Wismer, of the University of Notre Dame, wrote her doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago on *The Myth of Original Sin: A Hermeneutical Theology Based on Genesis 2-3*, in which she made extensive use of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. She showed some major ways in which Ricoeur's work could help a systematic theologian. In the first place, Ricoeur analyzes poetic language, meaning by this all types of figurative language (e.g., fictional narrative), and shows that in this the content depends on form, multiple meanings can be conveyed, and productive imagination is central. Ricoeur's study of metaphor, of religious language, and of the parables and genres found in Scripture are all carried on within this context, and must be taken into account for a critical interpretation of the text. This can help us see, for example, that in Genesis 2-3, the words ascribed to God are ascribed to God as a character in the story, and thus should be interpreted in this larger context, rather than being taken simply objectively. Secondly, Ricoeur's analysis of "redescriptive reference" is helpful. Poetic and religious texts convey a "world in front of the text", a mode of the possible or of

the 'power to be'; the primary point of the texts of Scripture is to testify to faith, not to produce historical documents, though some do convey traces of what happened. The theologian should study the link between the world portrayed by certain critical biblical texts and the dogmas that have grown out of reflection on these texts, and face the problems discrepancies between these at times pose (e.g., in reference to dogma of original sin). Thirdly, the interpretative process comes to completion in appropriation, that is, in the reader imaginatively entering the world of the text and receiving a new and larger self in the process. This is counter to the illusion that subjects constitute themselves, rather than receive their selves from God. Wismer concluded by pointing out a couple of problematic aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutics—in particular, that his work is too exclusively theoretical and that he does not sufficiently critique those texts in which the 'world' opened up to us is diminishing rather than enhancing (e.g., the story of Jephthah's daughter for women of our time).

Francis Martin, professor of New Testament at Dominican Home of Studies in Washington, D.C., suggested that Ricoeur's work can contribute to developing a theology of human communication, central to the problem of biblical interpretation in our time. To illustrate this help and certain limits to Ricoeur's hermeneutic, Martin gave an exegesis and interpretation of Mark's account of Jesus' moment of decision before his passion (Mk 14:32-42), and then reflected on "how this narrated event is revelation, and how and in what sense this text is God talk." In his exegesis, he gave reasons for saying that the story did refer to an historical event, and showed how the account was configured in the context of Jesus as suffering just man and addressing the Father as he had called his disciples to do in the Our Father. Thus, "the event is shaped in the light of its perceived inner relation to the life of Jesus and that of the community." He presented a literary critique, showing the way in which the verbal texture configures the movements of the action by relating them to other themes in the gospel and the traditions contiguous to it. Early Christian prophetic exhortation to perseverance in the midst of eschatological distress is incorporated into this passage. In his interpretation of the text, Martin pointed out that two dimensions of time are being conveyed. The event is presented as proclamation, and this depends on the fact "that this historically contingent event is still present because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead," and thus is alive and addresses the community through the text. Martin finds Ricoeur has developed a theory that accounts for the way the exegete can listen to an interior meaning to which the text bears testimony. However, he seems not to have made sufficient room for a kind of historical criticism that serves the text, and he leaves us with the question whether "this refigured world (is) merely a metaphor of a metaphor . . . or a genuine appropriation of truth through a judgment." In reference to this, Martin cited objections posed to Ricoeur by David Carr and Hans Frei. Martin concluded by showing how a reading of his chosen text could show us something about the nature of revelation and what it permits us to say about God-talk in Scripture.

Jean Ladrière, who gave the keynote address at the convention, responded to the two presentations. He affirmed, first, that Ricoeur's work in general is useful. It took its departure from his initial question about the will, an existential question for him since it addressed the reality of evil within the will, and thus too a theological question of sin and grace. He approached this question from a philosoph-

ical point of view, and, more specifically with the view that evil resists conceptualization. When then is the approach to an understanding of evil? It is through symbol. The task of philosophy is therefore to decipher these symbols, which indeed "give rise to thought," i.e., philosophical conceptualization. The problem of interpretation of symbols then is central, and Ricoeur uses different methods for this purpose. Thus we have to remember that behind Ricoeur's work there lies a specific question which is his presupposition, because to understand a text we must have a good question. Secondly, Ladrière discussed the relation between exegesis and systematic theology, concluding that the task of dogmatic construction is necessary as such. Thirdly, he presented a suggestion that he found implicit in the two presentations. Ricoeur's concept (which he took from Heidegger) of a disclosure of a world before us and for us, in which we receive our possibilities is taken as a 'new' world that offers us transformation. We can take this term 'world' as a cultural totality, e.g., as the Greek world that, in the measure we can reach it becomes a part of our world today, and in a phenomenological sense as the horizon of all our experience. In what sense does Ricoeur take it when he uses it of the New Testament? Does he take it as a replacement of our world by another, or an enrichment of our cultural world by another (e.g., the Greek world)? It is neither of these, but rather revelation. We need an interpretation that gives an account of the traditional notion of revelation. Also, can one take the text of the New Testament as simply a particular case of something general (e.g., religious language)? What is unique about it is that God reveals himself through it. So the development of the notion of the 'world' should be a development of the notion of revelation. That is, perhaps we can reinterpret 'revelation' by the notion of the 'world,' without, however, submitting it to a larger genus.

M. JOHN FARRELLY, O.S.B.
DeSales School of Theology, Washington, D.C.