

## SEMINAR ON NORTH AMERICAN THEOLOGY

The North American Theology seminar began its first year concentrating on the convention's theme of "the linguistic turn" as found in Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*. The seminar brought to bear the American philosophical and theological tradition on the question of the relation of individual and community. The first presenter, Don Gelpi (JSTB), opened the seminar with "Individualism and Conversion in R. Bellah and Jonathan Edwards." Most importantly, Edwards concerns himself with beauty, especially moral beauty, which transcends individualism. Attention to the affections in pursuit of beauty becomes a process of conversion that offers an option beyond Bellah's categories of expressive and utilitarian individualisms. The conversion to beauty, however, must go beyond Edwards to a total conversion on all levels of the human condition as indicated in such people as Lonergan. Beyond Lonergan, a political conversion is called for which carries the individual beyond privatization. Once informed by conversion, the Christian opts for values influenced by the biblical tradition and thereby moves beyond a relativism in values.

The second presenter, Joe Hallman (St. Thomas College), continued by comparing *Habits* with Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* to indicate that the free, autonomous individual has never been philosophically demonstrated as viable. This more pessimistic account of the direction of rampant individualism indicates that other options are necessary. The pull of community to correct individualism can be found in narrative, which presents the larger whole of individual in the world. Central to any narrative in the Catholic tradition will be the retrieving of the basic reality of church. Such an ecclesiology is not forthcoming at the moment. Instead, the concern of freedom versus authority dominates the ecclesial conversation. This tension is combative and, finally, not helpful in reconstituting a community of memory and hope.

The stress upon hope over memory, or an active retrieval of the past and its tradition, dominated the discussion. The conversion of the individual, especially affectively, bears further investigation. Some suggested that the Catholic immigrant tradition had never fully stepped into the mainstream of civic responsibility. The two recent bishops' pastorals, however, did provide a new model for entering into the discussion of value on a political level.

The second session began with Frank Oppenheim (Xavier U.) considering "Individualism in Bellah and Josiah Royce." Royce retrieved Christian language to express the relationship of the individual to the beloved community. The individual receives his or her identity through commitment to a cause which brings differences together in a common pursuit. Individuality, not individualism, results. The comment was made that because of the experiential nature of Bellah's investigations sufficient attention to a metaphysics is missing, by which suffering

or alienation can take on meaning. Finally, as Royce observed in his trip to Australia, while both Australia and the U. S. won their freedom from England, Australia did it slowly and without violence. The U. S. broke violently and radically. This characteristic still permeates the American concept of freedom. The notion of "creating something together" is not stressed in the American understanding of freedom.

The second presenter, John Stacer (Loyola, New Orleans), drew upon "Hope-filled heart of the World Citizen" as found in Wm. E. Hocking, a student of Royce and world traveler. In his last two works, Hocking saw a great threat to the world citizen. The problem resided not in the individual nor in the world community but in the partial and narrow world claim of a nation. The nation stands as a middle community which can become destructive of both world and individual by its fear of others. A misguided nationalism becomes self-serving and "conquest" language dominates. Hocking suggests dropping such language in favor of "world citizen" language. Solidarity with the world community is paramount. It comes through "reverence for reverence," i.e., a reverence which replaces fear and selfishness. Also, the desire to rehabilitate not only individuals but nations must be a universal commitment. No one can be left out of such a world community. Finally, Hocking saw the ecumenical movement as an important source for the world because all persons and religions were allowed to remain who they were and yet move together in a common hope. Shared hopes are an important source for unity.

The discussion continued the various themes of the two days. Subsidiarity of various levels of community needs attention so that selfishness does not occur. A community of discourse proceeds from such belongingness. The possibility of conversion of the affections toward political responsibility took a new twist to the emphasis upon hope and mutual commitment to a cause. The Catholic tradition seems to be undergoing many rapid changes at the moment, perhaps too many at once. However, it may be that what seems to be a collapse of meaningfulness on the linguistic level has already been preceded by affective changes which provide resources for a new language, a new narrative, a new hope. The idea that the individual is a solitary self is bankrupt. As these sources have shown, the individual is really communal. The impoverishment of our language is showing up and a new day of expressing this deepest reality is emerging

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