

SEMINAR ON CHRISTOLOGY

In the first seminar, Hunter Brown (King's College, Toronto) made a presentation on "Christ and Salvation in Walter Kasper's Theology." In preparation for this presentation the members of the seminar had read Kasper's *Introduction to the Christian Faith* (1972) and *Jesus the Christ* (1974). Along with these texts, Brown drew on Kasper's *The God of Jesus Christ* (1982). Brown observed that Kasper has sought to retrieve the insight of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, though he has shifted the focus to stress the theme of freedom. Moreover, Kasper has developed his soteriology in such a way as to move beyond both a supernaturalism which devalues history and also the Enlightenment's understanding of freedom.

Brown pointed out that Kasper (with Anselm) is not speaking about appeasing an angry God, but about the necessity of restoring harmony and justice to a situation of breakdown and alienation. Further, according to Kasper, the "structure of freedom" must be understood if we are to appreciate what has occurred in Jesus Christ. That is, we find ourselves lacking in freedom and living in a state of estrangement. We cannot ultimately overcome this condition through our own efforts. The standards of justice exceed our ability to respond. Hence, we must be set free. Jesus Christ is the liberator of all of creation, for through his total obedience to God he has reconciled us to God, to one another, and to our very selves. True emancipation takes place therefore not when we are in control but when we are receptive to the freedom which comes from outside of ourselves, namely, from God in Jesus Christ.

Discussion highlighted a number of points. Anselm has presupposed the social order of his day, and our kind of social order does not lend itself to talk about harmony and justice. Also, the emphasis on Jesus' freedom is more our theme than Anselm's, and thus it may be that a contemporary idea is being read into *Cur Deus Homo*. Further, Kasper is attempting to overcome our modern sense of autonomy with a Christian understanding of theonomy. Moreover, Kasper's soteriology must be understood in relation to his pneumatology and trinitarian view of God. For example, we can share in the freedom of Jesus Christ, says Kasper, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, there appears to be an ambiguity in Kasper's writings when he speaks on the one hand about the transcendence of the triune God and on the other hand conveys the idea that God shares in human suffering through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the second seminar, Elizabeth Johnson (Catholic University, Washington, DC) spoke on the topic "Toward a Non-Androcentric Christology." In preparation for this presentation the members of the seminar read Johnson's "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," *Ephemerides Theologicae Louvanienses* 60 (1985) and Anne Carr's *Transforming Grace* (1988). At the outset, Johnson expressed her indebtedness to the work of Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza and Rosemary Reuther. Also,

she pointed out that from a feminist perspective the dilemma concerns not necessarily Jesus Christ himself but our talk about Jesus Christ. For example, the metaphor of Christ as head has been frequently distorted to convey the idea of the superiority of men over women. Further, she clarified that the issue of Jesus as a male has arisen because some church officials have appealed to Jesus' maleness in order to support their theological claims (e.g., regarding ordination). In this regard, it is important to observe that Jesus himself called his followers to "a discipleship of equals." Moreover, doctrinal formulations about Jesus Christ (e.g., Chalcedon's) concern his humanity, not his maleness.

One source for the development of a new, nonandrocentric language about Jesus Christ is the Bible's wisdom literature. The Book of Wisdom speaks, for instance, about wisdom, *sophia*, in personified terms. *Sophia* guides those who seek her counsel, and she judges fairly when disputing parties turn to her. Further, the wisdom trajectory in the Hebrew scriptures has been taken up into the New Testament, as is evident in the Q-sayings, Matthew and John. John's Gospel is intriguing because while the prologue uses the term *logos* the gospel itself presents Jesus as the embodiment of *sophia*. Further, the wisdom heritage is also applied to Jesus in patristic writings. For example, Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo extend the language of *sophia* to their reflections on the mystery of Jesus Christ.

In light of this rich tradition, it would be possible today to employ the metaphor of *sophia* in our discourse about Christ. Towards this, Johnson proposed that we pursue four avenues of christological research. First, we can experiment with retelling the story of Jesus using the image of *sophia*. Second, we can rethink our christological doctrines in terms of *sophia*. Third, we can reflect on the mystery of Jesus Christ within the language of *sophia*. Fourth, we can undertake a hermeneutical studies of "logos" and "sophia" in the Bible and ancient literature.

Theological exploration of the sort proposed would result, observed Johnson, in at least six benefits. It would permit us (1) to craft a more inclusive christology and also (2) to correct the error of claiming that salvation depends upon Jesus being a male. Further, it would lead (3) to our seeing a link between creation and christology and (4) to our finding new avenues for ecumenical and global awareness. Moreover, by drawing on the wisdom tradition in christology we would introduce (5) a fresh emphasis upon the theme of justice in christology, for according to the Bible *sophia* teaches justice. Finally, this exploration would help us (6) to discover the relational character of God and Jesus Christ.

Discussion developed ideas from the presentation. It was noted that John's Gospel highlights the discipleship of women (e.g., the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary Magdalene). Also, since John's prologue was added to the gospel, its understanding of *logos* should be interpreted in light of the gospel's sense of *sophia*. Moreover, "sophia" is linked in the Hebrew scriptures with talk about "the glory of God" and the Temple, and this association broadens our source for the renewal of christological language. Finally, it was observed that for such a renewal to occur we need to use not only past metaphors but also wholly new images in our reflections on Jesus Christ.

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