

SEMINAR ON CHRISTOLOGY

In the single session of the continuing Seminar on Christology this year the discussion centered around a section of William Loewe's project on soteriology. Prof. Loewe (Catholic University of America) has been wondering whether the 2,000 years of Christian theology have been simply a succession of inculturations, or whether there has been some irreversible progress. The doctrine of salvation is so central to Christianity that it offers a good place to test this question, and Lonergan's theory of the stages of meaning offers a framework in which progress can be admitted without prejudice to earlier stages.

In his paper distributed before the convention, "Method in the *Cur Deus Homo?*: Concept, Performance, and the Question of Rationalism," Loewe reexamined the alleged rationalism of Anselm's search for "necessary reasons" (as contrasted with criteria of fittingness) for the Christian doctrine of salvation. Where did this pursuit of necessary reasons come from, and what happened when Anselm actually worked them out? Was his insistence that our situation demanded *aut poena aut satisfactio* a reduction of the thrilling adventure of free grace to a mechanical destiny which bound both God and us?

In Loewe's analysis and response two points stood out. First, Anselm was not calling into question the story of God's free grace to the world, but rather he presupposed it; not content with repeating the story, however, he sought its intelligibility, not only in a systematic metaphysics taken over from Augustine, but in contemporary political theory and the practice of sacramental penance. This drive for intelligibility corresponds to the transition which Bernard Lonergan makes between the realm of common sense and that of theory. It is therefore not a lapse into rationalism, but a genuine advance of the Christian mind from one stage of meaning to the other. Second, Anselm's *rationes necessariae* were never envisaged either as ultimate or as placing God under external constraint. Anselm always reminded his readers that because of the inexhaustibility of the mystery others might improve on his reasons; and his Platonism, which saw in the mind of God the place where all things had their most intense reality, led to a practical equivalence of necessary reasons and those founded on God's sense of fittingness.

Discussion ranged from the relation between Anselm's idealism and Barth's thought, to how far the notion of "necessary reasons" extended beyond Anselm's soteriology into other areas of doctrine, to the subject of Anselm's implied dialogue partners outside the monastery. It was pointed out that for Anselm the Good was as important as intelligibility, but no resolution was achieved on the question as to whether Lonergan's theory of stages could be applied to that area as well as to meaning. Final points of the discussion dealt with present-day

appropriation of the content as well as Anselm's performance of his theory of satisfaction.

The Seminar on Christology looks forward to William Loewe's completed study of the relation between soteriology and the development of stages of meaning, and is grateful to him for providing us now with such a thought-provoking sample.

MICHAEL SLUSSER
Duquesne University
Pittsburgh