SEMINAR ON TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The 1993 sessions of the Trinity Seminar were devoted to two different areas of Trinitarian theology: at the Friday meeting Michael Barnes offered a presentation on *The Use of Augustine in Contemporary Theology.* The second session was given by Sixto J. García, who focused on the Trinitarian structure of the German idealist Friedrich W. J. Schelling.

Michael Barnes argued that systematicians have consistently and uncritically adopted Theodore de Regnon's paradigm on the standard division of trinitarian theologies into the Greek tradition, paradigmatically exemplified by the Cappadocians, and the Latin tradition, paradigmatically expressed by Augustine. De Regnon's account offers that Greek theology begins with the reality of the distinct persons while Latin theology begins with the reality of the unity of the nature. Barnes finds this schema too neat and too tidy, concealing as much as it reveals. Above all, de Regnon and the contemporary followers of his paradigm ignore the close affiliation and consensus (a "Nicene" consensus) between Athanasian and Roman theologies which existed a generation earlier. French scholastic Augustinians perceived in Augustine's trinitarian system a departure and separation from Nicene theology, thus dramatizing the Cappadocian/Augustinian opposition.

Barnes suggests that we now have a glimpse of just how little we know about key moments in the patristic developments of the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, we do not know the specific influence Athanasius might have had on the Cappadocians; nor do we know the character, and origins and specific features of Latin pro-Nicene theology, nor how much exactly Augustine knew of Greek theology, including that of the Cappadocians. Barnes argues that, from an historical perspective, one of the most striking elements is the unwillingness of systematicians attempting to interpret trinitarian doctrine to seriously "countenance uncertainty, or alternately, an unwillingness to find God in the details." The preferred narrative form which systematicians have adopted, is an architectonic one, meaning (a) an account that is open-endedly comprehensive, and (b) a description of evolution of doctrine in terms of the internal logic of an idea. Barnes cites Yannaras's recent study on Augustine as an example of the systematicians' fascination with the idealizing account of doctrine. Yannaras's collaborative work with Martin Heidegger confirms his debt to German idealism. Barnes offers the thesis that the fascination with conceptual categories of polar opposition, the use of the logic of ideas to describe cultural forms, and the claim to comprehensiveness on the basis of the polar categories and the ideal logic

suggest that the influence of German idealism extends beyond Yannaras's work to that of most systematicians in their explorations of trinitarian—and in this case, Augustinian trinitarian—theology.

Having offered this general phenomenology of contemporary systematic appropriations of Augustine's trinitarian system, Barnes offered "two specific properties of such appropriations," to wit, the proclivity to avoid polemical texts, exemplified by the widespread nonpolemical reading of Gregory of Nyssa's *On "Not Three Gods."* An even more glaring example would be the automatic judgment of Augustine's own *De Trinitate* as nonpolemical. The second phenomenological property offered by Barnes is the ubiquitous presence of Olivier du Roy in Brown, Muller, LaCugna and most contemporary trinitarian authors. Du Roy suggests how deeply Augustine's trinitarian theology finds itself interwoven with philosophical considerations. Barnes argues that few trinitarian specialists could name even one sustained discussion of a similar debt to his Latin predecessors. We are led to the contradictory position that whereas the influence of philosophy in religious doctrine is a fundamental necessity, according to most systematicians, that of prior expositions of religious doctrines is not. The second feature of du Roy's methodology is that Augustine's trinitarian system is static. A reading of Augustine's *De Fide et Symbolo* would argue against this, since his argument here is indistinguishable from that of his Greek contemporary, Evagrius. They both offer anti-Arian positions drawn from Jn 5:19 (the Son cannot do anything without the Father) as an affirmation of the Son's natural relationship with the Father, since common activities require common natures.

Barnes concludes that systematicians' methods show (a) an unconscious dependence on de Regnon's paradigm, (b) a proclivity towards a logic of ideas, (c) a lust for encyclopedic comprehensiveness, (d) the use of *De Trinitate* as an exclusive source, (e) a hermeneutically based retreat from the use of polemical texts, and (f) an equally hermeneutically inspired emphasis on the philosophical content of doctrine. Barnes singles out Yves Congar as someone who steers clear of these theological missteps; Congar shows a clear sense of the sources and contexts of Augustine's doctrines. Barnes's final point is: "We know less, far less, than most systematic accounts of Augustine's theology presuppose, and yet we know more than they are telling us."

Earl Muller asked what might be done to remedy the evils of contemporary systematic appropriations of Augustine. Barnes suggested a deeper awareness of the nature of the texts and the sources of their language, breaking with the accepted—and uncritical—present systematic readings of Augustine, and a recourse to specialized and supplementary literature. Architectonic, comprehensive systems may not be adequate to undertake the task of such appropriation.

Robert Jenson suggested that Barnes's critique of the architectonic, idealist centered, and philosophically inclined reading of Augustine (or any text of the tradition) by systematicians might make any systematic reading of Augustine superfluous. A systematic reading of historical/theological texts must presuppose

an architectonic context. Barnes responded that such a context has not done theologians any good; the architectonic forms are not the only way to bring a theological story forward. Jenson opined that German idealist influences present in a systematic appropriation of the tradition need not be considered automatically flawed. On the issue of historical development and memory, Mary Ann Donovan asked how we can see classical texts as theological loci and resources, in light of Barnes's critique. Barnes offered that the notion of development of doctrine may have been interpreted too narrowly; within Catholic Christianity in particular, this notion depends on memory. Donovan opined there is a need to critique memory and to bring this forth for theologians to hear. For Barnes, this implies the need to relocate the function of systematics within the theological enterprise. On the issue of theological system building, Muller asked whether systematics might have organic unity as a project. Barnes agued that this would need to be challenged by a sharper critique on the part of historians, who have often allowed systematicians to run away with unsubstantiated fancies.

Joseph Lienhard asked what conclusions must we draw concerning the choice of nonpolemical texts. Barnes suggested that (a) any text is just one half of a dialogue, (b) polemics are one side telling the other side it is wrong—always a source of discomfort, and (c) polemics are always present when historians and theologians address present-day issues. Barnes proceeded to ask what methodological options should be open to graduate students, who can only master a couple of disciplines within theology. We need to take limitations imposed by choice more seriously. The projects of systematic unity must be postponed as long as the lacunae in fundamental issues remain unsolved. Theologians today tend to doubt attempts at structuring unifying systems. Kenneth Steinhauser suggested the theologian or historian of doctrine should try to understand history as it unfolded and not to be a (subjective) player as such. Barnes asked what the wider public's understanding (outside the realm of academics) of theological issues might be, and how theologians might express their systems before a more general public. Sixto García suggested the theologian must develop the skills to articulate his/her theological thought in catechetical formulae, if and when the occasion demands. The discussion drifted again to the concept of *oikonomia* in Augustine, and the dangers of cryptomodalism inherent in it. Barnes referred to the need to use language as the author (Augustine) uses it.

The second session convened on Saturday. Sixto García discussed Schelling's trinitarian system in four parts. First, Schelling's earlier writings, *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, written in 1809 during his first Munich period (1806–1821), and the posthumously published fragment *The Ages of the World*, on which he worked from 1811 to 1820. In his writing on freedom, Schelling proposes that God is not fullness of essence, being-in-itself, a definition which would reduce God to an essentialistic reality. God is radical freedom, freedom-in-itself, unrestricted possibility. Schelling's metaphysics of God, as Thomas

O'Meara has observed in his *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame, 1982) conceives God's essence as pure freedom. As such, God can only be truly total freedom if his ontological identity as such can be put to the test: the threat of nonbeing, of its opposite and contradictory reality. God is total freedom only if, as God, he can stand vis-à-vis his potency of nonbeing.

The second part of the presentation introduces the phase where Schelling develops his concept of the potencies in his *Ages of the World*; these are the ultimate, most intimate realities of the trinitarian persons (not the trinitarian persons themselves!). The potency of the Father is the *Sein-können* (can-be) potency, the Son's is the *Sein-müssen* (must-be) potency, and the Spirit is the *Sein-söllen* (ought-be) potency.

The third part of the paper discusses the full realization of the trinitarian pilgrimage/process; this will be actualized in Schelling's final system, his positive philosophy, whose main work is the *Philosophy of Revelation*. García explained that, for Schelling, positive philosophy is historical philosophy, the philosophy of the ultimate grounds and reality. A recent commentator of Schelling (Xavier Tilliette) has called it a narrative philosophy.

Schelling argues that God has had within the Godhead all the potencies from all eternity. The begetting of the second potency as a distinct potency takes place as it disengages itself from the Godhead (the Father) and sets itself up as the potentiality of nonbeing, as opposition; and yet the second potency must actualize itself, must bring the process of reconciliation within the trinitarian structure of God to fullness, and in the process bring fullness to creation. The second potency will not become the Son (the second person) until it has accomplished this. In Schelling's scheme, his *Philosophy of Revelation*, which he began to develop during his second Munich period (1827–1841), was preceded by his *Philosophy of Mythology*. The latter is the philosophical narrative of the second potency's travel through the age of the mythological gods. For Schelling, these gods are real insofar as they reflect the particular aspect or reception of the second potency by the different nations. In fact, a nation acquires its ultimate identity through its own mythological self-narrative. Mythology gives way to Judaism, which anticipates Christianity, the realm of fullness for the second potency. Schelling, however, like Hegel (at least in his writings of youth) and other German idealists, had a minimalistic and inferiorizing approach to the history of Israel (notwhistanding the fact that Schelling was the son of a well-published Hebrew Bible scholar). He holds that while paganism achieves its purpose, which is to self-efface itself into Judaism and Christianity, Judaism ends in failure, since it failed to recognize its own moment in history.

The fourth part discusses the Incarnation, that is, the enfleshment of the second potency. Schelling develops his own *sui generis* philosophical exegesis of Phil 2:6-11 to unfold the process of incarnation and paschal event. Jesus of Nazareth becomes the *morphe theou*, the form of God, precisely because he

becomes the external form in history of the second potency, who relinquishes his divine prerogatives. The Cross is the moment of total glorification through the self-sacrifice of the second potency, who now stands ready to accomplish his mission of reconciliation. This final step is the Resurrection of Jesus, where Jesus becomes the man-spirit, as well as the full-fledged Son. In the process, the third potency becomes the Holy Spirit, the third trinitarian person, as it accomplishes its function of reconciling the second and first potencies (now persons) and restoring unity and integrity to the Godhead, and hence to creation.

Schelling's trinitarian theology, quite obviously, is heavily christocentric (Jesus the Christ becomes the second person as the full reconciliation with the Father and creation attains completion). For Schelling, however, the pilgrimage of the trinitarian potencies-now-become-persons does not stop here. The age of the Church is the age of the Holy Spirit, and the Church takes on the sign of full reconciliation in her historical mission and worship. Schelling sees his positive-philosophical analysis completed by ecclesiology. History has three stages: the age of Peter, or the Catholic age; the age of Paul, the Protestant age; and the final synthesis, the age of John, the age of the Church of love, where Peter and Paul find their synthesis and reconciliation. Thus, in Schelling's scheme, trinitarian theology flows into ecclesiology. García concluded by alluding to the influence of Schelling's trinitarian and christological systems on later traditions; among those mentioned were a number of nineteenth-century Protestant theologians from Tübingen and Frankfurt; Paul Tillich, who wrote both his licentiate theological dissertation and his philosophy doctoral one on Schelling; and Walter Kasper in his early years, under the influence of Wolfhart Pannenberg's theology of history and revelation, as he sought a theological framework for salvation history. These testitfy to Schelling's influence in later theological traditions, and reflect the renewed interest in Schellingian studies in recent years,

During the discussion that followed, Joseph Lienhard asked whether Schelling ever clarified further the time of the begetting—or recognition—of the second potency, which Schelling equates with creation, and as taking place before time (but not from all eternity). García offered that Schelling never specified any further how this creation before time, but not before eternity, might be conceived; the best answer, for the time being, would be to say that Schelling sees this process/event taking place outside of time.

Earl Muller suggested that another value of Schelling's perspectives on the Trinity relate to the way his views on God as radical freedom, on the disengagement of the second potency from the unity of God, and on the dynamics of the trinitarian persons, suggest themselves to the historian of dogma or the patristic theologian as he or she analyzes the Cappadocians or the Augustinian systems on the unity and diversity of God, on trinitarian processions and on trinitarian becoming. Origen of Alexandria stands in correlation with Schelling, particularly concerning their respective theories of the Incarnation.

García commented on Schelling's paramount influence on Catholic thought at the University of Munich during his time, and of the influence the Catholic philosopher/theologian Franz von Baader had on Schelling. Thomas O'Meara pursued this idea, adding that Schelling's influence in this early years was much more direct and essential than Hegel's. O'Meara opined that Muller's suggestion concerning the correlation of Schelling's trinitarian structures with early patristic systems deserved further research.

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