

SEMINAR ON CHRISTOLOGY

The Christology Seminar opened on Friday with about fifty in attendance. Barry Strong (De Sales School of Theology, Washington, D.C.) led a general discussion of Spirit Christology and its ecumenical importance. He pointed out that the current Catholic interest in Spirit Christology has arisen from the need for a Christology which integrates more fully all the data from Scripture, tradition, and the contemporary experience of worship and mission, and fits more naturally with other important doctrines.

Spirit Christology, said Strong, begins "from the role and function of the Spirit in the life, ministry, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus, as well as the contemporary access believers have to Christ in the power of the Spirit in their own experience of worship, prayer, and life." To the extent that, for Christians, "Salvation consists in the participation in the Holy Spirit mediated by Jesus in the life of God" (Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 254), understanding Jesus in terms of the Spirit in his life connects him vividly with our experience of salvation. An additional value of Spirit Christology is the way it provides a context for Christology, situating Jesus within God's entire economy for the world.

Various Spirit Christologies may be categorized from the different events in the existence of Jesus on which they lay principal focus, or from the different ways they develop from their starting point. Strong proposed as a framework a spectrum from "West" to "East": from an emphasis on the being, substance, and nature of God, with "priority . . . in the economy of salvation assigned to the Son," to an emphasis on persons in relation, with "priority . . . assigned to the Spirit, without detriment to the contents of Christology." From the Eastern end of the spectrum the Western approach might seem modalistic, and unable to accommodate the demands of new theological questions about God's transcendence and immanence without loss of the language of hypostases and persons. From the Western perspective, the Eastern approach may risk a loss of the divine unity in being and action.

Is there a place between these extremes for an "integral Spirit Christology"? Strong thinks so, and prefers "a pneumatology which is capable of dialoguing with and incorporating the classical christological themes into a trinitarian expression of faith . . . to either a thoroughgoing Logos Christology or a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology." He gives theological priority to the economy of the Spirit, a consideration of salvation in its universal sweep, but thinks that this can enable a fresh affirmation and explanation of the hypostatic union. Instances where this has been worked out include the work of Congar, Mühlen,

Moltmann, Rosato, Kasper, and John Paul II. Although these writers differ in many respects, they agree on the key point of complementarity between the economy of the Logos and that of the Spirit.

This enterprise is ecumenically important, said Strong, because it offers fresh avenues of approach not only to the East-West divide but "to the thorny issues of ecclesiology and sacramental life stemming from the Reformation." It also offers a helpful framework for interreligious dialogue. But most important for dialogue among Christians is the way pursuit of such an integral Spirit Christology shifts our focus to the future, to the fulfillment of the work of the Spirit. This future orientation can correct our tendency to see Christ as a past figure, and the work of the Spirit as disconnected from Jesus, rather than the saving work of the Trinity which embraces both.

Discussion began with comments by Ralph Del Colle, who pointed out some of the sources of current confusion about what is meant by Spirit Christology. Some integrative approaches have trouble negotiating the articulation of intratrinitarian relations; other approaches, which might pejoratively be termed "post-trinitarian," reconceive those relations as modalities. A helpful tool for discriminating these approaches might be to see whether or not they can distinguish between the agency of the risen Jesus and that of the Spirit.

From that point the discussion went in a number of different directions. Some interventions added data, for example, the need to add Piet Schoonenberg's recent work to the list of Catholic theologians active on this theme, and the difference that a pneumatological focus could make for the shape of arguments about sacramental theology, especially ordination. Other comments made it clear that the notion of Spirit Christology itself was still too vague or too ambiguous in the minds of many participants.

The first day's group had about fifty participants. On the second day, it swelled to sixty, the capacity of the room, as Jesuits Roger Haight and John Hickey Wright continued their exchange on Spirit Christology which began in *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) 257-87 and 729-35. Haight began with a clarification of the issue as he sees it. He said that the issue is whether a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology is viable, not whether a Logos Christology is possible today or which of the two is more theologically adequate. He himself learned a Logos Christology first, and continues to teach a Logos Christology along with a Spirit Christology, but has come increasingly to see the latter as offering better responses to new problems we have in understanding Jesus Christ. These include especially the peripheral place of humanity in the scientific view of the universe, our greatly expanded appreciation of the historical and religious diversity of the human race itself, and the need on several counts to be able to assert in an unambiguous way that Jesus was a human being just like us in all things except sin. While Logos Christology can address these issues, the effort is more strained than it is with a Spirit Christology.

Wright opened by acknowledging wide areas of agreement between himself and Haight, but focused attention on three matters. First, if he has represented Haight's proposal accurately, there really is a problem with the attempt to move the ontological connection between Jesus and God from the Logos as ultimate subject or person in Jesus to the special pervasive presence of the Spirit. And if this presence is ontological as well as functional, doesn't it run into trouble with a demanding standard of consubstantiality between Jesus and us? Second, Wright asked if Haight has not misrepresented the methodology he and others use, suggesting that they are working a priori, rather than a posteriori from the total message of the Scriptures, in which there is a trajectory leading to the assertion of Jesus' divine sonship, and from the life of the Church. Third, to determine the data of Christian faith, for which we seek a viable theological explanation, we need to note that this faith is a social act, represented preeminently in the liturgy, to which our theology is responsible. Here we find faith that Jesus is active both in salvation and creation.

After these brief opening remarks, the seminar members were invited to enter the discussion, which they did for a full seventy minutes. The remarks and questions were without exception thoughtful and respectful, and far too interesting for detailed note taking. A few points caught my attention as particularly helpful to seminar members who wish to pursue the theme of this year's seminar further: Haight has a full discussion of an important term, "symbolic," in his *Dynamics of Theology*. While Geoffrey Lampe's *God as Spirit* is important background for understanding Haight's approach to Spirit Christology, one should consult also the recent writings of Piet Schoonenberg on the subject. Many of the key terms in classic Christology are analogical, and more open to reevaluation than one might infer from Wright's written comments, though he acknowledged that analogical character in the oral discussion (on this point, Wright referred us to an earlier paper of his, "If We Say 'Jesus Is God,' What Do We Mean?" *Woodstock Report*, n. 12, May 1987). It became apparent also that a critical point was the notion of Jesus' "consubstantiality with us," and what it demands or permits in the way of assertions about the divinity of Jesus.

Whether or not this session was helpful to Roger Haight and John Hickey Wright in clarifying the central christological issues they have been discussing, it was both fascinating and illuminating to us who were in attendance.

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