

METHOD IN THEOLOGY

- Topic:** The Spirit, Bond of Communion in a Community of Grace:
Nature and Grace Revisited from a Communal Perspective
- Convener:** Terrence W. Tilley, University of Dayton
- Presenter:** Susan K. Wood, Saint John's University, Collegeville
- Respondent:** J. Michael Stebbins, Woodstock Center, Washington, D.C.

Dr. Wood's project began with a questions: "What is the communal perspective of the nature/grace problematic?" The work done on the relationship between nature and grace in this century was largely motivated by a desire to solve the problem of extrinsicism between nature and grace. Since one effect of grace is to put us in communion with the Triune God and one another, Wood argued that we need to revisit the question of nature and grace and correct what may have been an overly individualistic approach to the effect of grace on nature.

The paper compared work of John Zizioulas and Karl Rahner, Zizioulas because he develops an ontology of communion and correlates what he calls an "ecclesial hypostasis" with "biological hypostasis," and Rahner because he speaks of the relationship between person and nature. Both writers see person and community as correlative realities. Wood found that when the effect of grace was seen to be creative of personal community, the terms of the discussion tended to shift from a focus on "nature and grace" to a focus on "nature and person" since for both writers persons are graced.

Dr. Wood found that the methodological issues raised by a comparison of these writers are (1) the problem of correlating Eastern theories with the Western categories of nature and grace, (2) the distinction between nature and person, (3) the status of the nonbaptized within Zizioulas's thought, (4) the persisting tendency towards a dualism between matter and spirit, (5) the effect of sin on the personal, and (6) the role of the Spirit in transforming us into relational beings.

Wood argued that what became evident is that grace is constitutive of the persona and that personhood cannot be identified with nature, but represents an openness and spiritual dimension of being, and a communion with God and others. The initial question of the project, how envisioning the effect of grace as constitutive of communion affects how we view the relationship between nature and grace, shows the more correct correlatives are "nature and person." Grace reveals then the theology of the person as communion. Starting with "person" rather than "nature" also indicates a way to bypass the discussion of whether

grace answering an exigency with nature for true personhood is revealed rather than deduced from nature. This is evident from Zizioulas's starting point with personhood in god, but something similar occurs in the theology of Thomas Aquinas where he defines persons as relations in the *Summa*, but where the persons in question are the persons of the Trinity. To compare human persons with persons in God is to speak analogously, but, nevertheless, relationality is constitutive of the personal.

Michael Stebbins responded by questioning how advisable it is to frame the discussion about the communal effects of grace in terms of "nature and person" rather than "nature and grace." He suggested that the basic elements of Aquinas's understanding of grace, including the natural-supernatural distinction, ought to remain an integral part of any future theology of grace. Stebbins claimed the communal dimension within Aquinas's theology of grace is in his understanding of the beatific vision since cognition is a kind of communion and in knowing God one knows and therefore communes with all that God knows. To bring the scholastic insights into our own context, Stebbins suggested that the work of Bernard Lonergan would be helpful.

The presenter and respondent engaged in discussion with the other members of the seminar on the issues raised.

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MORAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Love and the Discernment of the Spirit
Conveners: Dolores Christie, Ursuline College
Philip J. Rossi, Marquette University
Moderator: Brian F. Linnane, College of Holy Cross
Presenter: Edward, C. Vacek, St. John's University, New York
Respondent: Anne E. Patrick, Carleton College

In a presentation drawn from a much larger work in progress, Vacek argued that friendship with God is a more effective ground for discernment than a well-ordered harmony or congruence to self, since friendship is the best vehicle to understand and to become like another. The key test for discernment should be resonance with God's self and with our mutual relationship with God. The dis-