

to emphasize the deficiencies of individualism more so than those of communitarianism, bolster an unreflective compliance to the exercise of ecclesial power?

A lively conversation ensued. The public stature of Guardini was recalled with admiration as some drew attention to facets of his social and cultural setting. Questions about the affinity between his largely uncritical approach to the scriptures and tradition and to the exercise of Church authority in the interest of promoting communal identity were discussed. The appeal of a decontextualized Guardini devoid of discerning evaluation of his work for a personalist, sacramental, and ecclesial vision of Catholicism remains viable for many. But the question and challenge persists: how can the abiding achievement of Guardini be acknowledged, while conceding the limitations of his vision, and the need for critical reappropriation and new efforts in order to address our own situation?

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#### SPIRITUALITY

Topic: Anthropologies for a Socially Conscious Spirituality: Emmanuel Levinas, Josiah Royce, Gustavo Gutierrez

Convener: Joan M. Nuth, John Carroll University, Cleveland

Moderator: Mary Frohlich, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

Presenters: Michael Downey, St. John's Seminary, Camarillo

Simon J. Hendry, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley

Downey opened the session by considering postmodernism with its lack of unifying perceptions of truth, being, or progress. All seems fragmentary and subjective. How speak of a socially conscious spirituality in this context? Downey finds the thought of Levinas, particularly his idea of "the other," helpful in this regard. For Levinas, we ought not give up in the midst of the fragmentation in which we find ourselves, but need to make ethical decisions, claiming "Here I stand" and act upon them. However, this "I stand" is not to be understood in any individualist sense, nor is it based upon any fundamental first principles. In contrast to the Enlightenment *cogito*, Levinas's "I stand" is uttered in response to the other, whose needs place a demand upon us. Indeed one's identity as an "I" derives from the call of the other, disposing one to be always a "subject-in-process." The other has a "face" that is real, concrete, demanding, and often not pretty. This "face" of "the other" calls us away from any self-absorption that results from the collapse of our outer worlds of meaning. Such an ethical priority emphasizes praxis over theory, doing good over questions of truth or being. Obviously, every claim of an "other" upon us is not equally

legitimate. The ethical call is unconditional only in the case of the other who is powerless and in dire need.

Downey maintains that Levinas's idea of "the other" has much to offer approaches to spirituality that espouse inclusion of the marginalized, to spiritualities that listen to women's texts and popular devotions, to spiritualities that seek alternatives to human "stewardship over" the earth. In short, Levinas's idea of "the other" can lead to a quest for the holy in unexpected places, and an experience of the advent of God, the Other behind all others, through those "others" previously unheard and unappreciated by the Christian community.

Hendry examined Royce in contrast to James's emphasis upon individual experience and interior spirituality. Instead, Royce, strongly influenced by Pauline ecclesiology, focuses upon communal religious experience. Royce believes that the human search for truth needs a social context to guard against subjective self-deception. A key value for him is loyalty which inspires devotion to a cause, moving one from preoccupation with self to the welfare of the community. Well aware that communities, too, can be self-preoccupied, Royce sees as the ultimate goal of communal spirituality the movement toward universal community, inclusive of all, which is the call and the gift of the Spirit. However, it will have no embodiment unless humans accept it and make it real, under the influence of grace, in the particular circumstances of their lives. Another key concept in Royce's anthropology is interpretation, which enables for the individual a constantly renewed sense of self in relation to the community. In fact, all human knowledge is the product of the community's work of interpretation. To the extent that this work, this product, this knowledge tend towards the goal of universal community, these give evidence of contact with and guidance by the Spirit.

Gutierrez's experience of the *comunidades eclesiales de base* led him to a new perception of humanity. His focus is the political dimension of faith. Through our activity towards the poor, guided by grace, we "become" God acting in history, enabling salvation, which is at root liberation—on three levels: political liberation from oppression, personal liberation from the lack of responsibility for one's life, spiritual liberation from sin. All three find their root in the encounter with the poor as a social class, leading to an awareness of the need for conversion, and to an understanding of faith as action on behalf of the poor. If God is Father who loves all gratuitously, and we are brothers and sisters to one another, this truth becomes real only through action on behalf of justice for the oppressed.

The conversation which followed raised some provocative questions, many dealing with discernment in the application of these ideas to ethical choice. It was generally agreed that each thinker, though certainly in differing degrees, offers helpful directions toward a socially conscious Christian spirituality.

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