

MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Experience and Science in Medieval Theology
Convener: Michael Gorman, The Catholic University of America
Presenter: William B. Stevenson, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul
Presenter: Gregory LaNave, The Catholic University of America

For the second year in a row, the medieval group's program was set on the basis of an open paper call with blind refereeing. There were two papers, each followed by lively discussion in which later comments often piggybacked on earlier ones.

William Stevenson discussed the order of questions in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. According to Stevenson, the order of questions in the *Summa theologiae*'s treatise on the Trinity (QQ. 27-43) has been the subject of much scholarly opprobrium among a number of contemporary writers who see Thomas's Trinitarian thought as conceptually remote from biblical revelation or even effectively irrelevant to the life of the Church. Thomas's almost exclusive concern with the intradivine relations—he relegates the divine missions to a single question at the very end of the treatise—seems a far cry from the emphasis on the saving work of the divine persons found in the Bible and in early patristic writers like Irenaeus.

Thomas uses what he calls the *ordo doctrinae* or *ordo disciplinae*, which cannot be understood apart from a distinction he makes in his fourth Quodlibetal Question. The distinction is between two types of disputation, one which aims at removing doubt as to whether some matter is so, and another, "magisterial," type "whose goal is not the removal of error but the instruction of the listeners in such a way that they may be led to an understanding of the truth the teacher intends to bring out." The *Summa theologiae* is the supreme example of the second type of disputation; it does not attempt to generate certainties but rather seeks to increase the understanding of certainties that are already grasped as such by the assent of faith. Crucial to this procedure is the following: ordered understanding must move from what is prior with respect to itself (*prius quoad se*) to what is prior with respect to us (*prius quoad nos*), which also means moving from what ontologically grounds to what is ontologically grounded. By beginning with what is prior with respect to itself, Thomas makes it possible for the student to arrive at understanding more easily and pleasurably.

In his discussion of the Trinity, then, Thomas begins with the processions and not with the missions precisely because he is profoundly concerned with what modern writers have termed "biblical theology." The great irony is that this concern is demonstrated by the fact that Thomas does not take the Bible, or, more accurately, the Bible's formal concepts, as his starting point. Finally, because the realities known and understood are the same in the *quoad nos* and the *quoad se*, there is no split between the immanent and economic Trinity in the *Summa theologiae*. Instead, there is a distinction (not a split) between the Trinity as

experienced and the Trinity as explained. Indeed, the *ordo doctrinae* begins with the *priora quoad se* and moves to the *priora quoad nos* in such a way that the latter are enriched, not obliterated.

Gregory LaNave discussed St. Bonaventure's views on the subalternation of theology. According to LaNave, the dependence of theology on faith is frequently reduced to the fact that faith makes known the things that theology tries to understand. Many theologians also speak of faith as necessary for purifying and perfecting the reasoning of theology or for guiding the theologian's reflections. But such explanations do not give a place to faith—or, more generally, to Christian experience—within the very intelligibility of theology. For all its relationship to faith extrinsically, theology's intrinsic rule is supposed to be reason, the rational intelligibility of the things of faith. To appeal to faith as an intrinsic constitutive part of theology appears to be fideistic.

Bonaventure's description of theology as a subalternated science is a way to retain both its rational intelligibility and its thoroughgoing dependence on faith. As a subalternated science, theology depends upon the articles of faith and the principles of reason. The reason in question here is not natural reason, but reason transformed by faith. Bonaventure escapes the charge of fideism by giving this reason a very precise meaning: it is a reason suitable to an affective science, which is determined by its relationship to its object. The object of theology is God as manifested in Christ. The science of theology, therefore, uses as principles of demonstration what is known to the theologian by his attention to Christ, and therefore to God. The apparently negative judgments of the value of a rational theology that one finds in Bonaventure's late works are not a repudiation of his earlier systematic constructs but a deeper penetration into how the theologian can attend to Christ. The model of the theologian in the early works is Peter Lombard; the model in the late works is St. Francis. Ultimately, Bonaventure's theological science allows for the introduction of principles that are self-evident to the saint by his conformity to Christ.

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