

GOD/TRINITY

- Topic: Immanence, Transcendence, and Divine Freedom: Trinitarian Theologies East and West
- Convener: Cara Anthony, University of St. Thomas
- Moderator: Gill Goulding, Regis College
- Presenters: Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fordham University
Michael Dempsey, St. John's University

Two papers were presented. The first, delivered by Aristotle Papanikolaou, was entitled “*Sophia! Orthoi!* The Trinitarian Theology of Sergei Bulgakov.” The second, delivered by Michael Dempsey, was entitled “Love is Free or It is Not Love: Why the Immanent Trinity Still Matters in the thought of Karl Barth and in Contemporary Theology.” Summaries of both papers are given below. The relatively brief discussion period after presentation of the papers was largely devoted to questions for clarification.

According to Papanikolaou, the most developed form of Bulgakov's Sophiology appears in his dogmatic trilogy *On Divine Humanity* (*O bogoche-lovechestve*, 1933-45), which is only now being completed in English translation. Bulgakov identifies the humanity of God with Sophia and affirms the core meaning of Vladimir Solovyov's Sophiology—God is always God for “me” (i.e., for creation). God's being is not dependent on creation nor is God exhausted in God's relation to creation; but God's being is such that God *is* the God who creates and redeems creation. Bulgakov affirms the distinction between the world that God relates to from all eternity and the created world, but it is impossible for humans to think of God as not eternally relating to the world. Bulgakov's Sophiology is more explicitly Trinitarian and appropriates traditional Trinitarian language. Sophia is identified with being, the *ousia*, but as such, *ousia* comes to mean much more than that which the persons of the Trinity possess in common. Sophia is God's being as the self-revelation of God to Godself, and as such, as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. Always participating in the divine Sophia, the world as created Sophia is moving toward the unity of all in God's life, which is given in and made possible by the kenosis of the Son and completed by the Holy Spirit.

Dempsey began by pointing out that one of the most intractable impasses in Trinitarian theology today is found in a recent debate in the interpretation of Barth's doctrines of Trinity and Election. On the one side stands Bruce L. McCormack who has argued that Barth's doctrine of election requires the entire restructuring of the *Church Dogmatics*, so that election precedes and defines the doctrine of the Trinity and divine perfections. Since God *is* as God does, McCormack argues, it follows that the being of God is a function of God's action *ad extra*. In response, Paul Molnar and George Hunsinger argue that if God's being is constituted by God's primal decision of election, then God's being is dependent on the being of the world, which then undermines the gratuity of grace and reduces theology to anthropology. This paper argues that the immanent

Trinity must continue to play a profound role if theology and faith are to remain rooted in the truth of God's being and action. Accordingly, the immanent Trinity is necessary to preserve the ontological independence of God as a living and acting subject and to establish the truth of theological statements in God and not in human thought and experience. It is also necessary to preserve the transcendence of God to act *above* and immanently *within* the creative agency of human beings who mediate, in their own way, the corresponding love and freedom of God for others. As a result, the immanent Trinity does not sanction hierarchical domination and independence but rather establishes the truth of theology and faith in God, so that we can think and act from a center in God, as God draws us up to share in God's own inner life and participate in the free overflow of God's essential goodness for the salvation of the world.

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