

GOD/TRINITY—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: God/Trinity
Convener: Anthony J. Godzieba, Villanova University
Moderator: Anthony W. Keaty, Blessed John XXIII Seminary
Presenters: Neil Ormerod, Australian Catholic University
Manuel A. Cruz, Belmont University

This year's session was fortunate to have two papers that responded most substantially to two of the *desiderata* mentioned in the Call for Papers: a discussion of trinitarian topics such as monarchy, relation, subordination, order, etc., and a presentation of one aspect of the most recent discussions of God in continental philosophy/philosophical theology from a theological perspective.

Neil Ormerod ("Processions, Relations, and Created Participations in the Divine Nature") noted that, while in contemporary trinitarian theology the term "relation" has taken on personalist overtones, the more classical Western approach correlates relation with the trinitarian processions. The two processions of the Son and the Spirit then give rise to four relations, paternity, filiation, active spiration, and passive spiration. Just as the two processions ground the two divine missions, the four relations ground four distinct created participations in the divine nature. This "four-point proposal" (found initially in the work of Bernard Lonergan and taken up more recently in Robert Doran's *The Trinity in History*) provides a more nuanced trinitarian phenomenology of religious experience that can locate all religious traditions within a framework of the divinely originated solution to the problem of evil. The proposal thus extends Aquinas' approach to the missions and can provide a new starting point for theology, especially in its potential application to interfaith dialogue.

Manuel A. Cruz ("The Trace of God: Difference, Non-Identity, and Revelation") took up a theme from contemporary continental philosophical theology by examining how far one might be able to press divine difference before eroding the bond between finite creatures and God. He focused on the "trace of God" and the implications of divine absence in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. In describing the absolute difference of God, Levinas speaks of God beyond identity and presence. God *qua* difference has no identity—"transcendent to the point of absence." Cruz argued that the trace of God in the face of the other harbors the unbearable paradox that the way *to* God leads every *away from* God (*adieu, adiós*) whom we can never encounter in the flesh. Thus the human subject is projected away from God toward its unique identity as bearer of infinite responsibility for the neighbor. In turn, the neighbor *qua* other confronts the human subject across an irreducible difference that opens one up to a similarly unattainable horizon of future life. It is clear that there are both possibilities and limits inherent in the theological appropriation of the phenomenological trace of God within Catholic discourse on the doctrine of God.

Richly suggestive discussions occurred after each paper. Ormerod was asked about the implications of his argument for inter-religious dialogue and how it stood in relation to *Dominus Iesus (DI)*? He noted that a number of theologians have sought to bring trinitarian considerations into interreligious dialogue (such as Dupuis, D'Costa, and Pannikar). *DI* notes the affirmation by John Paul II that the Spirit is at

work in other religions. However *Nostra Aetate* is decidedly Logos-centric in its account of others religious traditions, so there are magisterial precedents. Ormerod's approach preserves the concrete consideration of other religious traditions, as required by *DI*. Another participant asked where this approach stood in relation to the question of divine suffering? Ormerod noted that his framework is that of classical theism and that the construct of contingent predication is designed to preserve divine transcendence.

Cruz was asked why Levinas finds it necessary or even tenable to undermine human agency, going so far as to describe the moral subject as a "hostage" subject to the trauma of responsibility? The questioner recalled that Jean-Luc Marion also feels compelled to undermine human agency, though for the sake of love rather than responsibility. Cruz responded that Levinas desires a model of moral agency and subjectivity not grounded on choice and the freedom of the will, thus showing clearly his distance from Kant. One is a subject before and beyond the choices that one makes for oneself. It is an open question whether it is possible to conceive of agency without choice. If, as Levinas claims, one is infinitely responsible for the other—*every* other—it would not be by choice; it is a responsibility imposed upon me (one would never freely desire so great a cross to bear). Though the work of Jean-Luc Marion on love and eros similarly erodes human agency, Cruz find Marion's claim that one is the beloved before and beyond one's own agency far more tenable than the Levinasian claim that one is a hostage for one's neighbor.

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