

GOD/TRINITY—TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: Walter Kasper's *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*
- Convener: Nancy Dallavalle, Fairfield University
- Moderator: Manuel Cruz, Belmont University
- Presenters: Gloria L. Schaab, Barry University  
Christopher M. Hadley, S.J., Lonergan Research Institute, Toronto  
Greg Zuschlag, Oblate School of Theology

Animated by the Year of Mercy, the God/Trinity Interest Group session focused on an examination of the trinitarian theology that grounds Walter Kasper's work.

Gloria L. Schaab ("Mercy in an Evolving Cosmos") explored Kasper's correlation of mercy with compassion, which leads him to consider "the God who mercifully suffers with us." Pointing out that a metaphysical perspective excludes the possibility, and questioning whether this corresponds with biblical understandings, Kasper contends that the Scriptures do not contradict a metaphysical scholastic theology. He supports his claim by locating the divine suffering in Jesus' humanity and nuances divine omnipotence as the omnipotence of love which allows one to be affected by suffering without being under its control. Schaab offered two alternative approaches to divine mercy in dialogue with divine omnipotence and suffering from evolutionary theology: John Polkinghorne's kenotic God and Arthur Peacocke's vulnerable God.

In their proposals, Polkinghorne and Peacocke reinterpret the metaphysical attributes through a divine self-limitation of omnipotence and temporal and causal divine immanence leading to divine vulnerability and suffering. Both stress the cross as symbolic of divine suffering, with Peacocke emphasizing the divine omnipotence of love in the resurrection. It is this full dynamic of the paschal mystery in Christ and in creation—passion, death, *and* resurrection—that epitomizes divine mercy and symbolizes *both* aspects described by Kasper: "the omnipotence of love [which] entails allowing oneself to be affected by suffering without being under its control."

Christopher M. Hadley, S.J. ("Toward an Ontology of Divine Mercy") suggested that the trinitarian theology proposed in Kasper's *Mercy* bears substantial similarities to Hans Urs von Balthasar's paschal trinitarianism. Both theologies take the Son's position on the cross as the aesthetic measure of the merciful space that God makes for sinners and the suffering world. From this common economic-trinitarian standpoint, the analogical pointers in the direction of the mystery of the immanent Trinity are much the same according to both Kasper and Balthasar. Both of them take the kenosis in Paul's Philippians hymn as the interpretive key for God's triune act of being, seen as a making of space for the other. Hadley claimed that, by taking mercy as "God's defining attribute," Kasper is refocusing the dramatic aspect of the trinitarian economy, with more direct ramifications on the polity, sacramental presence, and social action of the Church than Balthasar's focus on God's glory allows. Kasper's work, Hadley argued, can serve as a constructive frame for reading Balthasar, and a corrective for some of some discussions of von Balthasar's work.

Greg Zuschlag ("A Metaphysics of Divine Mercy? An Examination of Donald Gelpi's Trinitarian Theology of Personhood") explored, in light of Kasper's recent "systematic reflections" on the Trinity, the idea of whether or not divine mercy can

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be conceived of not just in existentialist and personalist categories but also in metaphysical ones. After highlighting the problems facing the dominant classical and modern metaphysical traditions for understanding God, Zuschlag proposed that the alternative metaphysics put forth in Donald Gelpi's Peircean-inspired philosophical theology opens a way to think divine mercy in metaphysical categories given its ability to define both "freedom" and "person" metaphysically in a way that does justice to biblical and trinitarian assertions that God is imminently relational and personal.

Questions from the audience traced some tension among the theological frames of the presenters, a tension that often reflected the discussion surrounding Rahner's *Grundaxiom*. The economic turn Rahner seemed to imply also surfaced in discussion of the relationships among the divine persons and the question of temporality in the divine life. Additional queries touched on whether the notion of "making a place for suffering" would presuppose a need in the other, and whether the encounter with a suffering other would have an effect on God. Further studies might also explore whether theories of atonement could be articulated in this framework.

NANCY A. DALLAVALLE  
*Fairfield University*  
*Fairfield, Connecticut*