

SEMINAR ON THE TRINITY

The Trinity Seminar concluded its two-year focus on pneumatology by studying Yves Congar's most recent book, *The Word and the Spirit*.¹ This volume continues the project of his earlier three-volume work, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*²; while neither is a systematic theology of the Holy Spirit in the usual sense, readers will delight in hundreds of useful references and leads and Congar's occasional pithy remark.

The theme of this year's seminar was "Re-Imaging the Spirit: Mission and Person." Barbara Finan led discussion of the first five chapters of Congar's book, Walter Principe of the remaining three. Congar's thesis is succinctly stated in his introduction: "No Christology without pneumatology and no pneumatology without Christology" (p. 1). Just as Christ and the Spirit are the "two hands" of God the Father, so christology and pneumatology are necessary and reciprocal elements of Christian theology.

Congar is especially insistent on the unity of the missions of Son and Spirit, over against the tradition of the West which tends to subordinate the Spirit to Christ (Congar devotes one chapter to christomonism in relation to the *filioque*). The underdeveloped pneumatology of the West has allowed many christologies to develop which give insufficient prominence to the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ. The Spirit acted not only at Jesus' birth but also at his baptismal anointing, in the desert, in the synagogue, in his prayer, and at every other significant moment in his ministry and life. It is because of the Spirit, Congar argues, that Jesus is Son of God. This is true in both historical and eternal respects.

First, Jesus is Son of God *in forma servi*, one who receives and is made holy by the Spirit. After being raised from the dead Jesus is "constituted according to the Holy Spirit as the Son of God with prayer" (p. 91). Only then could Jesus send the Spirit; having received the condition of glory (Jn 17:5) Jesus sends the Paraclete "from the Father" (Jn 15:26).

Jesus is also Son of God by an eternal begetting ("begotten, not made" and thus *monogenitus* or *monogenes*). And yet in God's continual offer of grace and the successive moments in the history of salvation, Jesus becomes Son in a new way: Jesus becomes not simply *monogenes* but *prototokos*, the first-born into sonship but one in whom we all become sons and daughters. According to Congar, this quality of Sonship, in both stages, is the work of the Spirit who "is the agent

¹London: Geoffrey Chapman, and San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986; ET of *La Parole et le Souffle* (Paris: Desclée, 1984).

²London: Geoffrey Chapman, and New York: Seabury Press, 1983, ET of *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1979).

of sonship as the effect of grace and the reality of holy life in the divine economy" (p. 92). In this sense, Congar writes, the Word proceeds a *Patre Spirituque* ("from the Father and the Spirit") since the Spirit acts in every moment of the Word *in-carnate* (p. 93).

At the same time, specifying the *proprium* (distinct role) of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation is notoriously difficult. Some seminar participants observe in Congar a tendency to conflate pneumatology and christology by seeming to identify the glorified Lord and the Spirit (pp. 57, 83, 89). This may simply reflect Congar's deep affinity with the Eastern/Greek way of viewing the Trinity, as contrasted with the Western/Latin approach which tends to over-distinguish the persons from each other and from the divine nature.

The difference between East and West is especially apparent on the matter of the *filioque*. In the Greek view, *hypostasis* (roughly, person) proceeds from *hypostasis* without reference to *ousia* or substance. From the *hypostasis* viewpoint the Spirit proceeds from the Father, and from the *ousia* viewpoint the Spirit proceeds from the Father. But in the West which places priority on the divine nature, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Congar regards the *filioque* (and alternatives to it) as theologoumena which are not essential either to grasping the mystery of God nor to ecumenical consensus.

Some Easterners have claimed the *filioque* is responsible for christomonism, and cite as evidence the Western church's view that the church, the ministries and the sacraments are already constituted by Christ while the Spirit simply carries out the work of Christ. The Spirit loses its distinctive role in the economy; Christian life is seen as imitation of Christ rather than deification by the Spirit. V. Lossky has attributed several ecclesiological imbalances to the *filioque*: "the people of God are subjected to the body of Christ, the charism is made subordinate to the institution, inner freedom to imposed authority, prophetism to juridicism, mysticism to scholasticism, the laity to the clergy, the universal priesthood to the ministerial hierarchy, and finally the college of bishops to the primacy of the Pope" (Lossky cited by Congar, p. 113). Even if Lossky's charge is somewhat exaggerated, and even though the Orthodox churches can hardly be said to be without blemish, Congar agrees there is some justification for the charge of christomonism, especially in ecclesiology. The Spirit was often charged with guaranteeing the institution of the church, especially the magisterium, and at the same time the Spirit was seen as active in the inner life of believers. Congar notes some recent improvements in the area of pneumatology since Vatican II, especially in contemporary views of ministry and authority.

Congar's final chapter is devoted to the proposal that along with a pneumatological christology or a christological pneumatology, a pneumatological cosmism should be developed. The activity of the Spirit goes beyond the visible frontiers of the church, since redemption extends to all creation. (Cf. K. Rahner's proposal to do christology from the perspective of a universal pneumatology.) A cosmic pneumatology opens up fruitful avenues to other world religions, since claims about the universal and normative significance of Christ remain an obstacle in conversation with non-Christians. Cosmic pneumatology also points to the eschatological fulfillment of human/world history in which, Congar reminds us,

quoting from *Ad Gentes divinitus*, "The plan of the Creator, who formed (humanity) in (God's) own image and likeness, will be realized at last when all who share one human nature, regenerated in Christ through the Holy Spirit and beholding together the glory of God, will be able to say 'Our Father' " (p. 126).

Seminar discussion was wide-ranging and touched on more questions than answers. Note was made of the essential and perhaps irreconcilable differences between Greek and Latin understandings of "person" (human and divine); the importance of using terms like "immanent" and "economic" Trinity with the greatest precision so as not to give the impression that we have discovered the inner psychology of God; the presence of different theologies of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (which may be too well blended together by Congar); that although the Father may be source (*fons*) of all that is, perhaps the Spirit and not the Father is the *goal* of creation and redemption; that Jesus Christ and his role in our salvation is not in the least diminished by highlighting the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Responsibility for next year's seminar, which will focus on pneumatological ecclesiology, has been assumed by Kilian McDonnell and Barbara Finan.

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