

SEMINAR ON PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

The Seminar on Practical Theology held two sessions, each convened by Mary Ellen Sheehan of St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology. In the first session, Michael McGinness of La Salle College, Philadelphia, summarized the results of his research on Donald Browning's work concerning method in practical theology. McGinness first developed Browning's major thesis concerning the place of practical theology as a university discipline. Browning sees practical theology as a point of intersection between religious claims and those of the sciences. The issue of method thus is crucial since the two realms are required to enter into mutual critique of each other's assumptions and claims.

McGinness then outlined Browning's five-stage method for coming to judgment in practical theology, an approach that Browning has developed both from ethical theory and from the empirical practice of pastoral counselling. In some well-chosen examples from Browning's work, McGinness illustrated the critical correlation between theory and practice, and in particular how close description and attentive analysis of practice affects the claims of both theological and psychological theory.

A lively discussion ensued among the twenty-five seminar participants who engaged McGinness's fine summary of Browning's work from their varied fields of practice. The participants included pastoral counselors, spiritual directors, religious education practitioners and teachers, and college and university teachers of systematic and pastoral or practical theology. Field educators working in M.Div. programs and a few D.Min. directors were also among the participants.

The discussion focused on the following themes: the shaping influences of Browning's thought, both confessionally and academically; the critical correlation of psychology and theology; elements that must be present in method in order to assure the critical character of practical theology; how practice critiques theory and theory critiques practice; the operative understandings of praxis; and the issue of praxis understood as transformation of human history.

The session concluded with the convener providing some time for the participants to evaluate the session and all agreed that both in its style or process and in its content or approach, the seminar had been an excellent session.

The second session was devoted specifically to the convention theme on inculturation. Lester de Souza, a D.Min. candidate at St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology, presented some of the results of his research on radical multiculturalism and its implications for liturgical practice. De Souza developed briefly his main theses that the notion of multiculturalism needs to be opened up into even more complexity that it presently holds in common understandings of the term. Multiculturalism is a radical notion in that it is a comprehensive reality which entails the constant interfacing of language, culture, race, class, gender,

geography, and generation differences. These notions, in other words, cannot be easily or cleanly differentiated and used separately for analysis. De Souza challenged the participants to examine their own radical multiculturalism as part of the seminar dynamic.

The fourteen participants included two people originally from India, two Canadians representing multiple cultural origins, and ten United Statesians from varied European backgrounds. All have worked or are working extensively within multicultural contexts. The discussion proved to be an invigorating one, even if at times difficulty—as varying notions of time, history, culture, and meaning making—emerged within the group. The session itself, in other words, was an exercise in dialogue, taken radically.

De Souza was challenged by some of the participants with respect to his claims regarding the word of God and liturgical meaning and practice, a discussion which itself revealed the prevalence of Western philosophical thinking on history, ritual, and time, and which thus illustrated several points made by the convention's major speakers concerning the fact that we are only at the very beginning stages of inculturation and the Christian gospel.

Again, in this second session, the concluding evaluation of the seminar confirmed the value of the seminar within the CTSA offerings. Practice and theory were engaged in the conversation and both limitations and new horizons were opened up among the participants. The participants are committed to continuing the seminar's process which can be described as follows. Seminar discussion normally tries to focus in some way on the convention theme. The presenters volunteer and are then decided upon through consultation with a steering committee chaired by the seminar convener. Presenters circulate their paper in advance and summarize it at the session in fifteen or twenty minutes, with the rest of the two hours given over to discussion. Mary Ellen Sheehan will continue as convener and consult with a small committee regarding presentations for next year's convention, at least one of which will be related to the convention theme.

MARY ELLEN SHEEHAN

St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology