

WOMEN'S SEMINAR IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

Catherine LaCugna's book *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* was the focus of this year's session. The seminar format was a panel review of aspects of the work considered relevant to the Women's Seminar in Constructive Theology. A response from LaCugna was followed by a one-hour general discussion.

All of the panelists saw *God for Us* as a work of major proportions, both in scope and scholarship. The following summary presents some points for discussion raised by the panelists.

Susan Wood (St. John's University, Collegeville) introduced the question of method in LaCugna's approach. After deconstructing post-Nicene trinitarian theology's development of an immanent Trinity which concentrated on God's existence separate from any historical manifestation, LaCugna moves toward reconstructing a trinitarian theology "from below." Wood wondered whether LaCugna's theology of praise could answer the challenge of political and social problems which liberation theologians seek to address. She also encouraged further exploration on the extent to which soteriological questions raised by Arianism might receive insufficient attention in a theology which is so rooted in pre-Nicene thought as is LaCugna's.

Jamie Phelps (Catholic Theological Union, Chicago) commented on the trinitarian aspects of LaCugna's book by stressing its emphasis on the relational, personal, communal dimensions of the Trinity. Points raised for discussion were: How does a theology like LaCugna's, which considers "adoration" the only appropriate response to the mystery of the economic Trinity, avoid being too individualistic in its accent, too far removed from political concerns? What is the relationship of adoration to justice? of divinization to being fully human?

Sally McReynolds (St. Mary College, Leavenworth, Kansas) discussed pastoral implications and thought that LaCugna's basic optimism about the human person glides too easily over darker aspects of human lives and institutions. She found LaCugna's model of Trinity as mutuality-in-loving-relatedness very helpful. McReynolds closed with the account of experience of loving mutuality in communion among gays voluntarily carepartnering persons with AIDS.

Ann O'Hara Graff (Loyola University, Chicago) set the *social location* of LaCugna's work in the academy. Her placement of the Trinity in the center of Christian life as relational has practical and political implications. Its communal emphasis is "helpfully countercultural" and "of a piece with feminist, womanist, and liberation theologians concerned to recover our fundamental connectedness." Implicit in LaCugna's model is an argument against all forms of domination, secular or ecclesial, which "mirror a false monarch of the *a se* God." Graff

questioned whether a more explicit criticism of aspects of North American culture and the Roman Catholic Church might not have been appropriate. Finally Graff raised the issue of the lack of critique of the names of the Trinity itself.

A brief summary of LaCugna's extensive response can only highlight certain points. LaCugna mentioned the Greek Orthodox tradition, the liturgy, and the experience of lived monastic piety as having a formative influence on her thinking. Key to her understanding of Trinity is the idea that person, not substance, is the "ultimate ontological category." Communion, not community, is the appropriate expression for divine interrelatedness. To Graff's question about the naming of God as Father, Son, and Spirit, LaCugna replied that all language about God is "analogous, partial, fragmented." Language which eclipses the dignity of certain groups or individuals blocks true praise of God. Nonetheless, changing language alone will not "bring about the communion of persons promised by baptism into the name of God." The Christian imagination needs to trust itself "to follow its own course" to find a nuanced response to the question of gender and God-language.

Questions from seminar participants on LaCugna's book addressed issues such as the place of Scripture in the development of a trinitarian theology, the intra-divine relationships, the analogical character of the concept of "person," and the relationship of LaCugna's theology to feminism.

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