

Issues in Thinking about God

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Week 8: God and Salvation

- D Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1997
- K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 1970
- C. Mowry LaCugna, *God with us*, 1991

God and Salvation

- How is God-talk related to Christian views of salvation?
- God 'in itself' and God 'for us'
- Mutually exclusive concepts (Pascal) or related?
- Claim: Argument moves more easily from God's soteriological to his ontological reality than *vice versa*.

God and Salvation II

- Advantages: (i) Failure of philosophical theology is circumnavigated
- (ii) Notion of God is firmly Christian.
- Problem: 'Feuerbachian trap':
- The existence of an experience, a need or a desire does not constitute a reality.
- Some reject the soteriological approach (K Barth).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

- A God who 'exists' does not exist.
- I.e. there is no God who primarily exists.
- *What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in a religionless world? (Letters and Papers from Prison)*
- Concept of 'religionless world' is difficult:
- Does it mean 'secularisation'?

Bonhoeffer II

- Approach to God through Christ leads to the paradox that God is present where he seems to be absent.
- God of traditional religion avoids this troubling truth by locating God in the transcendent realm.
- There is some hope in decline of religion.

Bonhoeffer III

- Still: major difference between Bonhoeffer and 60s liberals.
- For B. the 'godless world' is the reality of 1944 - no reason to celebrate.
- Christians have to accept it according to Jesus' word:
- 'Take up the cross and follow me.' (Mt 10, 38)

Bonhoeffer IV

- *[Religious man] must therefore live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over or explain its ungodliness in some religious way or other. To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man--not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us. It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.* Letters and Papers from Prison

Bonhoeffer V

- What does this mean for our understanding of God?
- Christians must follow Jesus to the point where he is 'forsaken' by God.
- This opens up a new understanding of God in his being for others.
- The only way to this insight is through accepting a particular *practice*.

Karl Rahner (1904-1984)

- Starting point: why is the Trinity of so little theological and ecclesial significance?
- Differentiation between 'immanent' and 'economic' Trinity
- Immanent Trinity: Trinitarian Persons in their mutual relationship.
- In this they have different functions (Father - cause etc.)

Rahner II

- Economic Trinity:
- God in his relation to the world.
- Here the Persons have an identical activity.
- This means that for all practical purposes the differences between the Persons have become insignificant.
- Therefore Rahner's famous maxim is this:

Rahner III

- *The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. (the 'Grundaxiom')*
- Whatever the Trinity is must be identical with its revelation in salvation history.
- The Christ event 'symbolises' the Trinity:
- The Father in his absoluteness
- The Son as the principle active in history
- The Spirit who has been given to us and is accepted by us.

Rahner IV

- Critique: Reduces Trinity to its activity in the history of salvation.
- Important is mutuality: economic and immanent Trinity are said to be identical
- Not: one reduced to the other.

C. Mowry LaCugna (1952-1997)

- Follows Rahnerian idea of linking Trinity and salvation.
- Patristic explorations: only Augustine introduces the sharp separation of economic and immanent Trinity.
- Trinitarian self-communication in the Cappadocians significant for theology today.

LaCugna II

- *The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life. (God for us)*
- *Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood, and communion within the frame of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit. (God for us)*

LaCugna III

- For LaCugna consequences are more practical: ethical and ecclesial.
- Similarity with Bonhoeffer in this regard.
- Critique directed at Rahner fits her more:
- Danger of *reducing* God to function of human hope for salvation.
- Mind the 'Feuerbachian trap'.

Conclusion

- Thinking about God as alive in the 20th century as at any time before.
- Largely conditioned by modern challenges.
- Yet not only by 'giving in' to them or by 'defending' religion.
- In many ways stimulating interaction between modern insights and theological traditions.