

December 18, 2011

The Sunday of the Genealogy

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Sacred Theology, as Christians understand it, may be described as reflection on divine revelation. I believe this description merits several comments.

First, it says, "reflection on divine revelation," not "reflection on the content of revelation." Revelation is God's act. It cannot be reduced to a series of declaratory sentences, or propositions. For this reason, the "content" of revelation is not something separable from the act of Revelation.

For example, God does not simply declare, "I am one God---Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Rather, the Father reveals Himself in the Son (in the order of history) and the Holy Spirit (in the order of transcendence). The Church does not receive this Trinitarian revelation as a bare doctrinal proposition, but as the active experience of incorporation into Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Theological reflection on the Trinitarian revelation, therefore, is inseparable from sharing in the Trinitarian life of God.

Second, because divine revelation is not "given" without being received, it is logically impossible to have revelation without theology. That is to say, in the very act of receiving revelation the mind, elevated by grace, cannot but reflect on what it is receiving. This is necessarily the case, inasmuch as specific words are used in revelation. "Abba, Father" and "Jesus is Lord" are not just sounds. The person who makes these proclamations has some idea what they mean.

Third, the radical *locus* where revelation is given and received is the person of Jesus: "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). The eternal Son, known by the Father before ages, receives this revelation as a man: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son" (Matthew 11:27). Christian theology is derived from the reflecting mind of Jesus.

Fourth, this reflecting mind of Jesus is shared with those who commune with him in the Holy Spirit: "No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. . . . We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:11-16).

This reflecting "mind of Christ" is the Father's gift to those who confess His Son. Thus, when Peter confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," this Son disclosed the source of the revelation: "flesh and blood has not

revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

The source of Christian theology, which I understand to be reflection on "the things that have been freely given to us by God," is this "mind of Christ." Authentic Christian theology cannot be separated from entrance into the "thinking of Jesus." Since God has only one Son, how can we say "Abba, Father" except in sharing Christ's own knowledge of the Father? This is why he tells us, "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*" (Matthew 11:27). All knowledge of God---and all reflection on this knowledge---includes this experience of divine grace and election.

Christian theology, consequently, will resist presuppositions and structural restraints imposed from outside "the mind of Christ."

Over the centuries, there have been quite a few of these. Arianism was a clear example. At some point in his thinking, Arius stepped outside of the "mind of Christ," Jesus' reflective awareness of himself as God's eternal Son. Likewise, Nestorius---if I correctly understand him---placed a "second subjectivity" within Christ, a human being distinct from God's eternal Son.

I believe a departure from the "mind of Christ" can be discerned, likewise, in certain theories of Redemption. Various theologians adopted some theoretical moral or cosmological framework in which the death of Jesus made sense to them. In my opinion, this is going about it backwards. Soteriology---the theology of Redemption---should begin at the same point as all Christian theology; namely, the mind of Christ. The first question asked by Christian soteriology should be: "What did Jesus think he was doing when he took up the Cross?"

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