REIFYING ANALOGY IN NATURAL THEOLOGY

by Duane H. Larson

Abstract. Karl Schmitz-Moormann argues that the doctrines of God and Creation, usually explicated in Roman Catholic theology by using the analogy of being, must rather be conceived in light of evolution and an analogy of becoming. God the Trinity, characterized by unity, information, and freedom, provides the image toward which the creation tends in its evolutionary processes. Informed by Teilhard and others, the author hereby provides more of a new research program for theology's engagement with natural science than a fully developed theology.

Keywords: analogy of becoming; analogy of being; "called forth" creation; creation; evolution; freedom; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin; Trinity.

"When you say something in a new way, do not say anything new" (*Cum dicas novum, non dicas novae*). With the employment of this classic theological dictum in *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World*, the late Karl Schmitz-Moormann wanted to demonstrate his continuity with the classic Western (Roman) tradition while also arguing that the mainstream of that tradition coheres with the emerging worldview so mightily informed by natural science. Those already schooled in this worldview—such as, presumably, readers of *Zygon* —may not see an altogether new agenda, as it is in some debt to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Especially enticing, however, is the depth of Schmitz-Moormann's proposed engagement with the sciences. In a compact way, he brings into discussion much new scientific data as warrants for traditional and "newly stated" theological claims. Review of the scientific substance of Schmitz-Moormann's book belongs to my partner in this symposium. My task and hope is to illumine the

Duane H. Larson is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, 61 NW Confederate Ave., Gettysburg, PA 17325.

[*Zygon*, vol. 34, no. 2 (June 1999).]
 ISSN 0591-2385

question of how "new" or "traditional" Schmitz-Moormann's theology is and how fruitful it might be for further theological construction.

It would be easy to suppose that Schmitz-Moormann's work, like much else in the theology-science dialogue genre, is intended as a commendation of Christian faith to a sophisticated, if not disbelieving, audience. Much of the book can indeed be read this way. But Schmitz-Moormann's caveat—and an important one it is—comes early in the outline of his program: "having faith in the Creator, we look at the universe as the work of God. Since this universe is evolving, we look at the history of the creation in order to seek the intentions of the Creator" (1997, xiii). The faith presumption is significant. It places this theological exercise in the classic stream of faith seeking understanding and so assumes a theistically inclined audience. Equally, it presumes an evolutionary process that has only recently been affirmed by Pope John Paul II as within the work of God.

These dual assumptions—that God is the Creator and that evolution is the mode by which creation is ongoing—place the claims in a relationship of mutual qualification. A survey of the implications of this qualification would be interesting enough, and Schmitz-Moormann gives these implications some attention. His key interest, however, is the manner in which an evolutionary perspective qualifies dogmas other than the existence of God. And insofar as an evolutionary perspective may posit the human observer as the "point" of a major evolutionary branch, if not evolution as a whole,[1] the human experience and understanding of evolution's trajectory exercises a normative qualification of received theological tradition. Repeating Teilhard's platform, Schmitz-Moormann argues that "the human is key to understanding the universe"; indeed, "all our arguments begin with human experience" (1997, xiii).

"Hard" scientists may find this observation trivial. How else does one begin to understand but by human experience? With respect to theological methodology, however, this is an important and controversial claim. Schmitz-Moormann implies that foundationalist faith claims about beginnings (and endings) do not count, and this is much in accord with the "postfoundationalist" or postmodern sensibility. In view of evolution, a contemporary Christian cannot "deduct" from certain traditional presumptions. One must start, rather, with the human experience of reality's tending toward unity, consciousness, information, and freedom—what Schmitz-Moormann calls the great parameters of evolution. The constructive theological task begins once one has established this present-tense description of reality. Having performed that task in chapters 2–5, Schmitz-Moormann begins the theological reconstruction in chapter 6 by proposing that we characterize the world as "the called-forth creation" (*creatio appellata*).

This creation would appear to evince the unity, freedom, and relationality of the persons of the Trinity. Here Schmitz-Moormann echoes the

"consonance" mode of theology and science's relationship advocated by Ernan McMullin. That is, having established that the universe exhibits an ever greater unity of diverse—though individually free—phenomena that are ecologically necessary to each other (consider, on a smaller scale, the Gaia hypothesis) and aimed wholistically toward consciousness, Schmitz-Moormann then suggests that this scientific evolutionary worldview resonates with the worldview put forward by the social version of the doctrine of the Trinity. Schmitz-Moormann does not make as strong a use of the method of analogy of being (*analogia entis*) as others in the Roman Catholic tradition have done at this point, but he eventually exceeds McMullin's tentativeness by arguing more for an analogy of becoming (*analogia fientis*). Thus the crux of his constructive proposal: "that this creation in its structures of becoming is *ad similitudinem Trinitatis*" (p. 134)—that the creation is predisposed to becoming more like God the Trinity. One might ask whether the authors are aware of how crucial this proposal is methodologically as well as substantively, for the crux is also a hinge. The proposal swings from the age-old advice to say things in a new way without saying anything new to controversial territory in which it is evolution itself that "leads us closer to God." Indeed, "there seems to be no other way to get closer to the triune God" (p. 134).

How strictly are we to understand that evolution is God's chosen mode of creativity? Might one suppose that Schmitz-Moormann even suggests by such statements that evolution is God's intended mode of sanctification? Has all attempt at soft consonance been tossed off and a whole conflation of an evolutionary worldview with traditional theology here been proposed? I think not. But my denial is based on the supposition that Schmitz-Moormann and Salmon offer us here more a bracing program for theology's future work than such explicit theological reimagination. And so we must look more closely at the proposal.

I noted earlier that classic Roman Catholic theological method works greatly from the principle of the analogy of being, whereas Schmitz-Moormann here suggests that more fruit is found when working from a principle of the analogy of becoming. Except for Karl Rahner's writing in Christology from an evolutionary perspective, and Teilhard's work in general, not much in Roman theology has been developed until recently along the lines of the analogy of becoming. One discovers voluminous material in theological dictionaries on the methodology of the analogy of being but finds precious little formally on the analogy of becoming, except for esoteric references in medieval Latin. When the analogy of being is applied to the Trinity, one encounters, after the example of Augustine, the notion that various "traces of the Trinity" (*vestigia trinitatis*) are etched in creation. This concept of the traces is problematic on at least two significant counts. First, via the *analogia entis*, it was tied too closely to neoplatonic ontology, in which nothing really changed and the "really" significant was

in the realm of unchanging ideas rather than in the creaturely order. Second, trinitarian thinking that was so tied to neoplatonic ontology finally exercised no control over or exhibited no relevance to the doctrine of creation. Karl Rahner and Karl Barth together are famous for noting this irrelevancy, particularly in criticism of Aquinas.

Schmitz-Moormann argues not only that trinitarian doctrine must exercise control over other doctrinal formulation but that it must do so along the lines of the analogy of becoming. Further, it is by this renewed predication of becoming that the language of *vestigia trinitatis* may be reemployed. God the Trinity "becomes" as well as the creation, and the creation is to "become" in just such a way as God the Trinity *already* does. God the Trinity "becomes" so through union of the three distinct persons. Union has the paradoxical consequence of further establishing each individual's distinctiveness even as the "whole" becomes both more whole and more one. Such is the dynamic of love, explicated in the Christian, especially Eastern Orthodox, tradition as *perichoresis.* The three persons of the Trinity are and become one God and are yet distinct only in dynamic communion. Schmitz-Moormann does not fully rehearse this line of trinitarian thinking but is correct in so summarizing (or intuiting) it.

Of possible trinitarian traces, Schmitz-Moormann notes three, correlative to the "great parameters" of evolution. They are union, information, and freedom. Of these, the "most evident" of this trinitarian life is the evolutionary dynamic of union. The process of union in physical evolution itself eventuates in "new levels of being" (p. 48). With Teilhard, Schmitz-Moormann sees this process as the motion of love in the universe, uncognizable at the lower structures but named for what it is when perceived under a higher consciousness. The experience of love—if we accept human experience as the point of departure (p. 48) and recognize love as more a dominating force for creation than a merely moral instigation in the godhead—proves the point. Love is a law, a metaphysical mandate. "On the human level in the eyes of faith, which see the trinitarian God as the *Urbild* to be imitated by creation, [love] becomes the decisive force. To draw closer to the triune God, to continue the path of creation, there is only one law: 'love one another'" (p. 135).

The second great evolutionary parameter, information, is more readily judged as spiritual because it is, by nature, nonmaterial. Nonmaterial information, even if materially stored, is causally effective. Various forms of classical metaphysics had little difficulty in asserting that information is communicated to the creation from the divine. Again, analogically, if God is a plenitude of information, then everything is somehow informed "by its participating in some infinitesimal way in the information present in God" (p. 136). Arthur Peacocke's theory that God relates to the world through the mode of top-down causation, much as "the conscious brain

states could be top-down causes at the lower level of [neurons]" (quoted on pp. 136–37), serves Schmitz-Moormann's program here. He would rather this scheme be understood, however, not in some heavy-handed way, as if God's communication of information were continuous and dense, if not even imposing. God still more "evokes" or "calls the creation out" of itself in its freedom, and this mode of calling out (*creatio appellata*) is in its own way the most basic mode of information communication in the universe. It is most basic because, ultimately, God the transcendent "speaks" to God the immanent without compromising the integrity of the material creation. God speaks to God's self and in so doing would woo the creation outward and onward. Evidently, such communication to the creation is perforce more indirect than otherwise. Schmitz-Moormann avoids the term, but his is a panentheistic doctrine of God.

If Schmitz-Moormann thus severely limits the kind of information that may be communicated from God to human being (thus providing a new spin on God's self-limitation or *kenosis*), and even would qualify the Whiteheadian model that has informed him at this point, he does so because the evolutionary parameter of freedom would appear for him to be the more significant trinitarian trace. He knows the ramifications of his choice, for it attacks the center of a theological tradition that predicated God's transcendence in the terms of predestination. The possible incongruity between God's will and creaturely freedom has also been among the most troubling of theological problems, admitting probably of "no rational solution" (p. 140). Indeed, the very idea of predestination, Schmitz-Moormann suggests, is linked to the preceding worldview of a static universe, wholly other than and separate from God, that relied on a very specific and active notion of God's providence. This universe is no such static order. This universe instead is characterized by freedom. Although freedom, especially through union and complexification, eventuates in waste and evil as well as greater good, that is the price God chooses so that a free *creatio appellata* may answer the call of Love. Freedom is valued so highly by the divine that the divine is willing to suffer and endure crucifixion for its sake (pp. 144–45).

It may be Schmitz-Moormann's and Salmon's all too brief, though honest, description of the problem of theodicy that finally drives home the recognition in the reader that no one theological locus or implication in this book has been argued fully. Further, terms such as *evil*, *sin*, *predestination*, or even *spiritual* are themselves tendered with assumed meanings that are too general for the theological technician. And the bearings of this program for a theology of creation upon other themes such as justification and sanctification are not noted. Nor should or could they be, other than in an intentionally systematic text. That is why this book should be regarded as a programmatic proposal, and a trenchant one at that.

There are many avenues by which one could criticize, praise, and build upon this program. That is what proposals are for. Those whose theological method would begin from some doctrine of revelation (say, a theology of the cross) may be inimical to the natural theology style here adopted. Yet the closing portions of the book regarding the reality of evil are as useful for a theology of the cross—contextualized by evolution—as one could desire from a non-Roman Catholic perspective. From within the Roman perspective, one might anticipate that Schmitz-Moormann's program would find corroboration and development in the thought of Bernard Lonergan. Indeed, I suspect that the method of analogy (of becoming) so vigorously employed by Schmitz-Moormann would, through Lonergan, finally become the "method of reification" toward which Schmitz-Moormann appears to tend. A keener recognition of his panentheism will help to advance this method. Further, a most promising agenda would be the "renormalization" of the doctrine of the Trinity's control over the doctrines of creation, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, and so on. This is nicely begun in contemporary theology itself (see, among many, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Miroslav Volf, and Michael Welker), although it is yet to be achieved with any thoroughness in the dialogue between theology and science (Larson 1995, 173–75). Finally, the theism here proposed, in general, may be useful for Jewish and Islamic theologians as well.

Thus the proposal could have significance for dialogues beyond that which here concerns us: between theology and science. Schmitz-Moormann and Salmon have put to us a necessary and provocative book. We are saddened that Karl's work was cut short. It is to us to give his thought careful consideration. May the next act of the program begin in earnest.

Note

1. Of course, this presumption by Schmitz-Moormann is hotly debated by others, theists and nontheists alike.

References

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. 1991. *God For Us, The Trinity and Christian Life.* San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Larson, Duane H. 1995. *Times of the Trinity*. New York: Peter Lang.

McMullin, Ernan. 1988. "Natural Science and Belief in a Creation." In *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology*, by Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and William Stoeger, 49–79. Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory.

Schmitz-Moormann, Karl, in collaboration with James F. Salmon, S.J. 1997. *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World.* Cleveland: Pilgrim.

Volf, Miroslav. 1997. *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Welker, Michael. 1994. *God the Spirit.* Trans. John Hoffmeyer. Minneapolis: Fortress.