

Foreword

IT IS COMMONPLACE IN FOREWORDS, PREFACES, AND BLURBS TO FIND THE attributions of creativity and interdisciplinarity. And, as far as I can see, there is hardly an embargo on these attributions when it comes to texts in theology: the tone approving, it is often said that such and such a theological text is “creative” or “interdisciplinary” or even both. Some of these texts may very well survive scrutiny, and justify attribution, most do not: there is a significant difference between being creative and being idiosyncratic and as large a difference between mediating fully mastered areas of inquiry and collapsing different areas of inquiry into each other. I want to suggest that Sarah Morice-Brubaker’s splendid new book belongs to that very special category of theology books which justifies both attributions. This is a book that puts into conversation the discipline of place studies, which is itself already interdisciplinary in that it allows under a single umbrella sociology, anthropology, human geography, and phenomenology, with contemporary theology, especially Trinitarian theology, with a view to the illumination of both. This incredibly complex operation is carried off with total aplomb and rendered in crystalline prose. If the results are probative rather than definitive, it suggests that this book is a first sounding in a remarkable fresh area of inquiry whose yield in the future is likely to be significant.

The Place of the Spirit is through and through a constructive work. It brings together a representative sample of thinkers of place, none of whom are theological in the strict sense, and asks the question whether, and if so how, this thinking can be brought productively to bear on Trinitarian thought and correspondingly whether, and if so in what way, Trinitarian thought can shed unexpected light on placial theories. Towards this end, Sarah Morice-Brubaker inserts the placial theories of Martin Heidegger and Edward Casey, Gaston Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan in two interlocking conversations. The first conversation is with patristic Trinitarian theology, more specifically the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine; the second conversation is with the very developed Trinitarian thought of Jürgen Moltmann and with the somewhat underdeveloped

Trinitarian thought of Jean-Luc Marion. The two conversations are interlocking in that while the patristic authors are at a relative disadvantage to their modern and post-modern successor who have available to them conceptual distinctions between 'place' and 'space' which play a central role in placial theory, Morice-Brubaker has no compunction about critically deploying figures such as Basil and Augustine against either Moltmann or Marion as the need arises.

There can be no doubt that Morice-Brubaker thinks that Moltmann's Trinitarian theology, which promiscuously exploits notions of 'space,' and similarly the Christianly flavored phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion, whose central metaphor with regard to the Trinity is that of 'distance,' have much to offer that is both experientially persuasive and theologically pertinent. This does not prevent her advancing criticisms, which are quite devastating and alone are worth the price of admission. Noting Moltmann's highly celebrated appeal to 'space' in his reflection on the relation between the Trinity and the other of creation in *Trinity and the Kingdom*, Morice-Brubaker explores whether there is a tension between Moltmann's perichoretic Trinitarian manifesto and his use of the Kabbalistic symbol of *zimsum*, God's contraction whereby a space of otherness is generated which enables God to be relational and thus, on Moltmann's view, enables God to be God. Morice-Brubaker does not criticize Moltmann for borrowing a notion from outside the Christian tradition, nor does she take Moltmann to task for making so central to his discussion of the relation between the Trinity and the world a set of spatial symbols rather than concepts. The real problem is the enigmatic origin of the activity of contraction which brings into being a 'space' of relative independence. One might have expected that it would traced back to the perichoretic relations between the persons of the Trinity, and that the role of the Spirit would be highlighted. Both of these expectations are disappointed. Thus the paradox of Moltmann's text: the overdetermination by the symbol of space and pneumatological underdetermination in which Moltmann does not account for the spacing of the divine and more specifically the placing of Spirit which is the ground of the Church. Thus, an ecclesiological deficit accompanies the pneumatological deficit. Scrupulous fair, Morice-Brubaker does not fail to track Moltmann's corrective move in *God in Creation* in which the Spirit plays a dominant role bringing God and world together in a kind of shared symbiotic energy, but unfortunately what gets lost thereby is the determinacy of the Spirit and

its transcendent agency. Here a somewhat overdetermined pneumatology turns into its very opposite.

In the case of Marion Morice-Brubaker contends that similar deficits, that is, pneumatological and ecclesiological deficits, are arrived at by a very different path. Marion's desire in *The Idol and Distance* and other texts to prevent conceptual idolatry is approved, and his desire to exclude place from the description of God is commended. The notion of 'distance' helps to achieve both aims. At the same time it is not clear that 'distance' or 'filial distance' does not reinscribe space into the triune divine. Morice-Brubaker suggests that this reinscription might have been prevented had Marion not effectively elided the Spirit into the Son, and thus deprived the triune God of the power of placing which Basil rightly determines to be the activity of Spirit. While Morice-Brubaker is sympathetic to Marion's reasons, especially his resistance to Hegel's conflation of the Trinity in its entirety with the Holy Spirit, from a theological point of view not only is much foreclosed trinitarianly, but it becomes difficult—if next to impossible—to get a theologically satisfying view on the church. The church seems to waver between being absorbed by 'filial distance' and simply being a fact. Neither the distinction or relation of the church to the empowering divine is truly accounted for.

Throughout this book the suppleness of Morice-Brubaker's prose is married to conceptual subtlety and historical finesse. For Morice-Brubaker it is important to understand that the pneumatological deficits of Moltmann's and Marion's positions do not provide cause for pneumatological exaggeration that would displace entirely the activity of the Father and the Son. *The Place of the Spirit* does not decide in favor of the Holy Spirit as the sole agent of sanctification and indwelling, as that transcendent reality that conditions growth and meaning in dynamic life, no more than it supports or rejects Augustine's view of coinherence of the three persons in all acts that belong to and together constitute salvation history. One gets the impression that this is theological scruple more than failure of nerve, and perhaps also more a theological decision than a justified deferral. It would be easy to think here of Morice-Brubaker playing a kind of peace-maker role between Eastern and Western understanding of Trinitarian missions. What is more likely going on, however, is a mulling over such questions as to whether a decision between Eastern and Western inflections of Trinitarian missions is necessary theologically, how we are to make this decision, and what follows ecclesologically. If only in passing, Morice-Brubaker also

makes an important contribution to the vexed question as to whether in speaking of the Trinity we speak of the immanent and economic Trinity or solely of the economic Trinity. It must be granted that throughout *The Place of the Spirit* the focus is on the economy. It is clear that Morice-Brubaker is sensitive to the potential problem of duplication in the classical distinction, but she certainly is concerned with the tendency in the classical tradition to think of the immanent Trinity as occupying a different space to the economy Trinity. Crucially, however, in her work we are not dealing with an economic reductionism, which often supposes what it wishes to deny by insisting that we only experience God for us, never God *in se*. Here the critical realism plays in *The Place of the Spirit* a salutary role. For a Basil or an Augustine, the Trinity is economy because the Trinity is surpassingly real. It turns out that one comes to know through scripture and the light and life of faith that Trinity is also surpassingly generous: it is the activity of gift. As with the issue of the Spirit's role in the constitution of church, so also here Morice-Brubaker refuses an either-or without providing a flaccid both-and. The chapter on the Cappadocians and Augustine displays a high degree of analytic finesse. Erudition is masked by the seemingly effortless rendition of theological programs anxious to set limits to our circumscription of a divine that cannot be circumscribed. Morice-Brubaker beautifully underscores the all important reversal in which it is the triune God who circumscribes us, who places us in existence, positions our knowing, and actively locates us in the very particularity of our lives in a world that we constantly negotiate or—to use the idiom of place theory—constantly ‘navigate.’ If, arguably, the Cappadocians in general, and Basil in particular, do a slightly better job than Augustine, Morice-Brubaker underscores the existential power not only of Augustine's insistence on the limitations of our knowledge, but also of his fierce determination in his anti-Manichaean writings not to allow God to be associated with space. One cannot credit Morice-Brubaker enough that when she brings early Christian thought to our attention as both a productive and critical theological resource, she does not fall a hapless victim to anachronism. There are questions that the Church fathers did not ask. Our retrieval of them will necessarily involve saying more than they said; we are invested with the responsibility of developing their ideas. The good news is that there are such ideas to be developed, and in their development in and through conversation with placial thought, these figures are a match for the very best that contemporary Trinitarian thought has produced.

The Place of the Spirit is a marvelous debut by an immensely talented young theologian of wonderful intelligence and superior writing skill. Much can be expected of Morice-Brubaker. This is book of deep and resonant sounding; more will follow. The author is completely aware of this and acknowledges it explicitly in her last chapter, and implicitly by having as the title of her last chapter, "Notes toward a Trinitarian Theology of Place." If these are notes, then they are deep ones; and if this book provides no more than a map—notice the placial metaphor—the orienting capacity of such is very strong. We get a strong sense as to where the journey will lead, but remained intrigued not only because we do not see all the way, but we have learned not only to trust the author of *The Place of the Spirit*, but come to expect being surprised by invention and by having familiar constructs turned around and looking very different. We have come to expect reversal. And this is as it should be; for this is what Morice-Brubaker has been speaking about all along.

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