

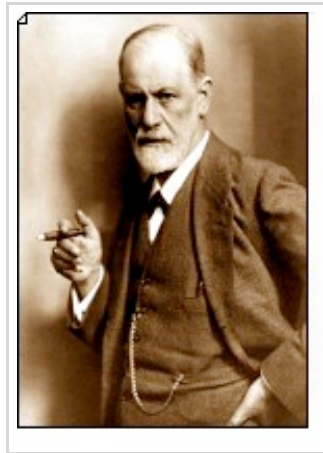
drulogion

thursday theological thoughts

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 07, 2006

Theological Parapraxes

Do you ever hear a preacher or worship leader say something odd about God that made you do a double take? Have you ever been busted for one of these foibles yourself? Have you ever been humored by the implications of the statement? Have you ever realized after the fact that this unintended phrase revealed the mind the speaker?



I would like to give these moments a name: **theological parapraxes**. A

"[paraprax](#)" is an unintended action that reveals one's hidden thoughts, first celebrated by Sigmund Freud. Although Freud was quite proud, he was not arrogant enough to give this phenomenon its street name: "Freudian Slip." A theological paraprax is an unintended statement that reveals one's actual theological leanings.

For instance, I recently heard a Catholic Priest preach a sermon on John 14:6. During his exposition, he accidentally switched up the verse . Instead of the only way to the Father being through Jesus, he said that **the only way to Jesus is through the Father!** Now this slip-up was an innocent mistake, and we all make mistakes. But this was more than just a mistake; it was a theological paraprax, for it reveals the structure of a Catholic theology of ministry and grace.

At the most obvious and most humorous level, one could hear the Priest's reversal of John 14:6 as implying that the only way to Jesus is through a "Father" - a Catholic priest. Now the Catholic conception of sacramental ministry is a lot more complicated than simple mediation of Jesus via the Priest. But I couldn't help but do a double-take. It is at least enough to raise an eye-brow.

At a deeper level, this theological paraprax reveals a Catholic

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understanding of nature and grace. According to the classic maxim "Grace Perfects Nature," the Catholic habit of mind posits a natural human capacity given by the creator ("the Father") which is actualized in us by grace ("Jesus"). So the only way to Jesus is through the Father.

Now am I implying that this sweet Parish Priest was thinking all this when he mixed up the verse? No. That's what makes theological parapraxes so interesting: they reveal the assumptions and trajectories of our formation.

Any thoughts?

What theological parapraxes have you encountered or committed? Please share your stories!

Labels: [Practice of Theology](#)

posted by JohnLDrury @ 11:16 AM

[10 comments](#)

10 Comments:

At [6:42 PM, June 07, 2006](#), [ap](#) said...

While preaching on God's ability to overcome terrible odds, I cited Gideon and three hundred men taking on the Midianite horde, except I left off the 'd'. Yep--they defeated that Midianite whore.

At [11:03 PM, June 07, 2006](#), [millinerd](#) said...

the Catholic habit of mind posits a natural human capacity given by the creator ("the Father") which is actualized in us by grace ("Jesus").

Might that be paraprax that shows drulogion thinks Catholics are modalists?

;))

At [1:13 PM, June 10, 2006](#), [Ken Schenck](#) said...

I often have to add "by God's grace" to comments. The parapraxis is that I think we traditions that tend toward the legalistic side have a tendency to focus on human action and will. I've trained myself well enough that I don't think most people would notice the mental hiatus that often occurs in my head between the phrases "can live above sin and "by God's grace" that I hurriedly tack on so my theology is orthodox.

At [1:27 PM, June 10, 2006](#), [Christin](#) said...

ap, Can you hear the uproarious laughter coming from the Taylor household?;-)

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At [8:12 PM, June 10, 2006](#), [ap](#) said...

it's definitely a story a taylor would appreciate! that's why i love them!

At [10:09 PM, June 10, 2006](#), [David Drury](#) said...

Well, I imagine many humorous examples are coming to mind for us all (Like "AP"'s example).

The video of the youth pastor messing up the line "Lot pitched his tents" is not really a "theological paraprax" but merely a run of the mill Freudian Slip...

But perhaps when a pastor on our staff spoke of the High Priest Annas and pronounced it much like a private body part he was in reality showing a latent anti-semitism?

You be the judge!

At [1:41 AM, June 14, 2006](#), [Samuel Bills](#) said...

I resonate with what Ken pointed out - I was at a baby "dedication" at a Wesleyan Church where the pastor exhorted the congregation after the part where they agreed to support the child saying "the primary responsibility for this child's salvation now rests on you..."

I am reminded of one of the many well intended but theologically divergent prayers I prayed off the cuff leading worship in chapel at school - one in particular involving thanking the one God for the many faces we see God through in history (father, son, holy spirit) I must have forgotten whether the modalism thing I heard about in theology 101 was what we do believe or don't believe - it is afterall difficult to keep them straight :)

At [9:24 AM, June 14, 2006](#), [Ben Robinson](#) said...

Yesterday a gentleman who was leading worship prayed to "Jesus, Father." It seems he had the unity of the Godhead in mind but perhaps needed a refresher on the distinction between the three persons.

At [1:18 PM, June 14, 2006](#), [caseyloeks](#) said...

Ben-

I was just thinking the same exact thing when I was reading this. For a couple years, I went to a pentacostal church and everyone prayed these passionate prayers but threw in "God", "Lord", "Jesus", "Father", and "Holy Spirit" seemingly at random. I think hearing a lot of that growing up, it made me a bit confused about the trinity and about the three distinct persons involved. I wonder what that could say about some people's parapraxis.

["The Father is Greater than I" \(Bible Brain Buster...](#)

[Even what is impossible with God is possible with ...](#)

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Casey

At [4:51 PM, June 23, 2006](#), [Mark W.](#) said...

Thank you for being honest. You expose your own theological parapraxes in your choice of the example of a Catholic priest transposing words, i.e. "mediation of Jesus via the Priest."

However, your "deeper level" explanation seems forced and does damage to the Catholic habit of mind concerning the Trinity. As a Catholic, I believe most of us are much more likely say and think that the "only way to Jesus" is not through the Father, but by the Holy Spirit.

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