

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

THE CITY OF GOD AND THE CITY OF ANGELS: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF URBAN VIOLENCE

Panelists: Maria Pilar Aquino, University of San Diego
M. Shawn Copeland, Yale University
Roberto Goizueta, Loyola University Chicago
Bryan Massengale, St. Francis Seminary

The members of the Black Catholic Theology group, which overflowed the assigned room, engaged in a lively discussion of the panelists' responses to Robert Gooding-Williams's work, *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Maria Pilar Aquino contextualized the issues discussed "within the scope of the . . . discourse of postmodernity," noting: (a) the authors' rigorous critique of the "pervasive ideology of race and racial politics in North American life"; (b) the "critique of the hegemonic conception of class, race and gender identities" based on a "universal and monocentric reference, the white North Atlantic male"; and (c) the "conscientious dissection of current neoliberal capitalism as a system" proven detrimental to the larger, impoverished, nonwhite population.

Seeing this positioning as a "critique of the current social order's articulation of racial ideology and . . . construction of racial representations as a privileged strategy to preserve and reproduce inequality" Aquino called for a "critical assessment" of the academic community's roles in the events of Los Angeles and the enlargement of the audience for this assessment to the entire CTSA.

Roberto Goizueta designated the work a challenging, "spiritual document." He focused on the "relationship between racism and space, or place, in our society," noting that the "suburbanization" of the U.S. and accompanying decline of urban centers has resulted in geographical segregation based on race and class and the transformation of the notion of space into "a means of exercising control and power." King was dangerous because he was not in the place he should have been. His presence and actions threatened the order and predictability of suburbia, resulting in a frightening randomness which exemplifies urban life. This randomness, urban violence and crime, "gets the attention of white America" because it is uncontrollable.

Goizueta called for an urban theology, one "born amidst the violence, insecurity, . . . randomness and chaos of urban life. It is a recognition that this

randomness has "always been the lot of the poor" and symbolizes the Reign of God (Matt 22:2-14; Luke 16:19-31). Thus, what does Rodney King have to do with Christian faith and theology? "God's grace is associated not with order but with disorder, not with well-established rules of behaviour but with randomness, . . . with the 'messy and open qualities of heterogeneous open spaces' " and, thus, with those who live there. Where then, he asks, is the proper place for the Christian theologian?

Bryan Massengale developed a "socioethical reflection upon the conditions for the possibility of urban violence" which lie "in the dynamic of indifference." The victims and perpetrators of urban violence are those deemed "the refuse of society." At the heart of urban violence "is a dynamic which enables the majority of society to . . . be tolerant of the waste and carnage of certain . . . human lives.

After exploring how groups are socially defined and come to be "regarded with indifference, Massengale noted that theologians are shaped and affected by dominant social discourse but must see themselves challenged by urban violence to further develop social sin as a category of analysis and reflection and to seek more inclusive narratives which celebrate rather than deny difference.

Finally, Shawn Copeland explored the theme of urban violence in terms of its challenge to the soteriology question, raising the need for a fuller exploration of its concrete meaning for the poor and the marginalized.

The entire group as part of its discussion raised again the need for fuller discussion of the workshop theme by the CTSA as a whole.

DIANA L. HAYES

*Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.*

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

*FULLNESS OF FAITH:
THE PUBLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THEOLOGY*
by Kenneth and Michael Himes

Presenters: Kenneth Himes and Michael Himes

The Catholic Social Teaching group discussed Kenneth and Michael Himes' *Fullness of Faith*. The primary effort of this book is to practice public theology by bringing specific theological doctrines to bear on concrete social problems.