

Topic: Undergraduate Theological Education and the Public Church  
Convenor: Susan A. Ross, Loyola University Chicago  
Presenters: Denise Carmody, Santa Clara University  
Patricia O'Connell Killen, Pacific Lutheran University  
Terrence Tilley, University of Dayton

The panel was introduced by Susan A. Ross, who conceived the panel as a response to issues raised by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: in particular, how we prepare our students to be participants in the public church, how we deal with theological illiteracy, and how the generation of students we teach poses new challenges.

Denise Carmody began by saying how teaching has always been her first love and how important it is to link theology and experience. She entered the field because of her love of teaching. In her experience, undergraduate students need to have the tradition translated for them; they are theologically illiterate and have not learned how to appropriate the tradition with adult faith. The key to "translating" theology for our students is authenticity on the part of the teacher. We cannot assume that we are on the same level as our students, but we can be genuine. She is sure of the students' good will and spiritual goals, but they lack the knowledge of the tradition. In terms of the Jesuit commitment to justice, Santa Clara University emphasizes competence, conscience, and compassion. We need to draw on the idealism of our students but also help them realize the complexity of issues related to justice. We can model this by our teaching practices.

Patricia O'Connell Killen began by pointing to her geographic location in the northwest U.S., where there is no dominant denomination and noting what challenges this poses. She saw the two Vatican documents *Pascendi* and *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* as two bookends for the twentieth century, as representing both attraction and repulsion from the implications of modernity. In positive terms, ECE articulates some of the liberating dimensions of the Roman Catholic tradition, but it is negative in its simplistic way of applying it to contemporary life. ECE makes three key assumptions: (1) institutions are key; (2) expertise and seniority lead to authority; (3) valuing and knowing one's heritage are worth bothering about. Yet the students we teach do not share these assumptions. They face a different set of issues: (1) We live in the triumph of the "new voluntarism," where the power of institutions has considerably weakened, and where the quest for the self is key; (2) Our students do not "dwell" in a tradition, but rather "seek" experiences that have greater authority than institutions; (3) critical thought, which previous generations have seen as liberating from old traditions, is seen by students as threatening as they "construct" their own realities. She asked how we form students in a tradition when tradition is not valued, and how our teaching of Roman Catholic theology contributes to our students' ability to deal with the real world.

Terrence Tilley began by expressing his difficulty with the term "public church" and with the topic as a whole, but went ahead with comments on the four functions of the New Testament church as a way of structuring our thinking. First,

he noted that *diakonia*, service, is one way in which our colleges and universities are doing splendid work, in terms of the energy given to volunteer organizations. Yet this energy is not extended to the political sphere. Second, worship is a place where students get involved and take ownership, yet they are not prepared to deal with the reality of poor liturgies in parish contexts and the need to link worship and service. Third, in terms of kerygma, students find church teaching mostly irrelevant, and we cannot control students' acceptance of this teaching. Fourth, students do not seem to want to become involved in parish communities and lack a concern for institutional preservation.

In the ensuing discussion, a number of issues were raised. One participant noted that what was said does not apply in the same ways to Hispanic and Asian students who have stronger family structures. There was some discussion on assimilation and how it does and will work among different groups. Another participant commented on the need to take time in theological education and how the culture of "fast food" promotes an approach to learning that does not value time and hard work. Other issues raised included the use of literature as helping to convey meaning, the challenges of teaching in ecumenical environments, the difference between faith/meaning issues and institutional commitments, students' lack of normative criteria and their reliance on popular culture. There was also some discussion of curricular issues and the emergence of Catholic Studies programs on many campuses, and the various agenda that such programs promote. In addition, participants commented on the phenomenon of "postdenominational" churches and their attraction to young people, the issue of pluralism and how real engagement with diversity is often sacrificed under the guise of "tolerance;" why it is that some of the brightest students are the most conservative. The lively session concluded with an agreement that there are a number of issues at stake in teaching our students that need to be communicated to the bishops in implementing *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

SUSAN A. ROSS

Loyola University Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois