

CRITERIA FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

- Topic: St. Augustine and Johann B. Metz on Catholicism and Public Life
Convenor: Matthew L. Lamb, Boston College
Moderator: Sara Butler, Mundelein Seminary
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The Criteria for Catholic Theology continuing group had decided to address the theme of the convention on Catholicism and public life by drawing upon the perspectives of St. Augustine and Johann B. Metz. Michael P. Foley examined St. Augustine's underlying attitude toward political involvement and civic-mindedness in the *Cassiciacum* dialogues. Specifically, it was argued that the several seemingly contradictory statements on patriotism in the dialogues were part of a larger twofold strategy of Augustine's. The first prong of this strategy is to "break the spell of patriotism," to expose its often sordid underpinnings and self-love, while the second prong is to subordinate civic-mindedness and public-spiritedness to the love of wisdom, thereby ennobling and purifying them. The result is the praise of a citizen who loves the truth first, and in that truth is able to render better (albeit less zealous) service to his country. Ultimately, all of this is made possible by the Incarnation, though the Christ event does not change the fundamental reality of the *polis*. The *Cassiciacum* dialogues thus contain important foreshadowings of the *City of God* and indicate a greater consistency of political thought over St. Augustine's lifetime than is often imagined.

Several questions and comments were made afterwards. Joseph Komonchak asked what Augustine's term for civic-mindedness is, and was told that it corresponded to *virtutes civiles*. He also asked what role the Church played in all this, which led to a discussion about how, while the Church is not mentioned by name in the *Cassiciacum* dialogues, the "authority of the sacred mysteries" is described several times as an essential part of the conversion which frees the subject to participate in the truth on the level envisioned by Augustine. Other questions included a clarification on Dennis Trout's understanding of Augustine's political attitudes (mentioned briefly in the paper).

Matthew L. Lamb reflected on the political theology of Johann Baptist Metz with its retrieval of apocalyptic. Metz holds in tension the apocalyptic interruption of human history by the absolutely supernatural coming of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the affirmation of human development in history through technologies, sciences, and scholarship, on the other hand. This latter is evident in Metz's work on the project for interdisciplinary collaboration at the University of Bielefeld, and in the writings of his student, Helmut Peukert. Lamb indicated how Metz's notion of apocalyptic interruption privileged the many concrete histories of suffering that give the lie to modern ideologies of progress as automatic and technological. Apocalyptic interruption retrieves aspects of St. Augustine's notion of time as presence as distinct from, and critical of, the notion of time as an inexorable

continuum in which human history is trapped. Just as Metz had emphasized an "eschatological proviso" as a critical corrective to a purely this-worldly quest for liberation and justice, so now the emphasis upon apocalyptic interruption and the many concrete histories of suffering indicate, as Metz powerfully articulates in his "Theses on Apocalyptic" (poorly translated in his *Faith in History and Society*), that human history can only be redeemed and fully justified by God. Justice cannot be solely a human achievement as only God, and God incarnate in Jesus Christ, can raise the dead and bring about a perfect justice in the kingdom of God.

Lamb went on to show how Metz's writings on apocalyptic interruption parallel St. Augustine's notion of *interpellare* where Augustine brings out how Jesus Christ is priest *because* He is sacrifice, victor *because* He is victim (cf. *Confessions* X, 43). Metz's attention to the histories of suffering could be linked, in terms of Bernard Lonergan's work on the law of the cross as the graced inner intelligibility of history, with the theology of Christ's passion in St. Thomas Aquinas. Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate takes into His mind and heart all the concrete sufferings of each and every human being throughout human history. All the concrete, unique, and most painful histories of suffering are present in Christ's love for each and every human being on the Cross. The forces of evil and death could not destroy the Word Incarnate. Because of the depth and prevalence of histories of injustice and suffering, humans in history cry out for an apocalyptic interruption by Jesus Christ as truly God and truly man.

Paul Griffiths, Joseph Komonchak, and Jill Raitt initiated important discussions in the group on the extent to which Metz holds together both apocalyptic and historical development in his efforts at interdisciplinary collaboration. It can often appear that, in his later writings, Metz so emphasizes apocalyptic that the human good in history is overshadowed, if not cancelled. Perhaps Metz's understanding of apocalyptic is analogous to Augustine's notion of conversion to Christ and Aquinas's analysis of the theological virtues. The human goods of intellectual and moral excellence/virtue are not negated by faith in Christ; rather their goodness is sustained and elevated by the apocalyptic presence of Christ Jesus.

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