

EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: The Theologian in the Early Church
 Convener: Alexis James Doval, *Saint Mary's College of California*
 Presenters: Mary Ann Donovan, *Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley*
 Daniel Van Slyke, *The Liturgical Institute of St. Mary of the Lake*

Donovan's paper, "From Deed through Word to Reflection: Early Patristic Theology," explored the role of the theologian in the pre-Nicene period. She began with context, and part I addressed the meaning of the word "*theologia*" in the period, the issue of demography, and elements of commonality among Christians. Non-Christians of the period, following Varro, had a poetic or mythical meaning for theology, a physical meaning, and a political or ritual meaning—none of which concerns itself with the mystery of God as God. Christian authors were slow to use the term *theologia* because of the prevailing non-Christian usage. While in this period demography deals in educated guesses, Rodney Stark's study is currently the most useful. He proposes that Christians remained a tiny minority. Minimally these Christians adhered to the Rule of Faith; to a rite of initiation that summarizes the Rule of Faith; to the Scriptures (although the canon of Scripture remained fluid); and to regular celebration of the Eucharist.

In part II Donovan considered the work of Irenaeus. His method begins from the Rule of Faith, which summarizes God's saving deeds recounted in Scripture. From texts in *Adversus Haereses* I and II she showed that for Irenaeus the role of the learned Christian is to explain the difficult passages of Scripture in keeping with the Rule of Faith, and to explain God's saving work while always respecting the limits of human knowledge in face of divine transcendence. He moves from God's deeds through the Word to reflection. He developed his method to meet the needs of his small, mostly Greek, Christian community in a distant western city.

Part III focused on Origen, who, like Irenaeus, begins with the saving deeds of God as recounted by the Church's tradition and the Apostles. Never a bishop, and only later in life a presbyter, Origen was above all a teacher and student of the Scriptures. The preface to *De Principiis* shows that unlike Irenaeus, Origen differentiates in the tradition between what is firmly taught and what is matter for speculation. Most unlike Irenaeus, he encourages speculative reflection, yet he shares Irenaeus's approach to reflection that roots all his work in Scripture. Moving from the saving deeds of God to Scripture-based reflection, the pattern of theological work in Origen as in Irenaeus, is typical of writers in the period.

Discussion focused on three topics. (1) Is unity the chief role of the bishop and research the chief role of the theologian? Each has some responsibility for both, but differences in emphasis are also present. (2) Is there progress in the life of grace according to Irenaeus? He shows intersecting progressions of the human

race and the individual, both distinctly Trinitarian. (3) The Spirit has a role in the work of the theologian, just as he does in the life of the Church.

Van Slyke's paper, "Liturgy as *fons theologicus* in the Fifth Century? Scrutinizing the Source of *lex orandi lex credendi*," focused on the meaning and context of the original version of the statement, *ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. He described Prosper of Aquitaine's *Indiculus de gratia Dei* as an annotated collection of statements bearing the authority of the bishop of Rome and written against Julian of Eclanum's opinions on the relationship between divine grace and human free will in 439. He then argued, on the basis of a comparison with Prosper's other works, that his *lex supplicandi* refers to Paul's exhortation to prayer in 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and embraces all Christian prayer for non-Catholics and penitents, rather than primarily referring to the liturgy (that is, the communal prayer of the assembled faithful). This is opposed to the view that Prosper is referring to the solemn orations of Good Friday or to supposed "prayers of the faithful" or "universal prayers" in the primitive Roman Mass. He added further support from other early Christian interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:1, including those of John Cassian, Ambrosiaster, Pelagius, and Eucherius of Lyons, none of whom conceive of the precept in terms of liturgical prayer alone. Van Slyke went on to describe *Prosper's legem credendi* as a very particular viewpoint on the relationship of human free will to the grace of God, as opposed to a general *regula fidei*.

In part II, Van Slyke noted that the final chapter of the *Indiculus* does indeed include an appeal to the liturgy, for in it Prosper invokes the exorcistic rituals of the catechumenate in defense of his theological anthropology. Here the influence of Augustine is quite obvious. Moreover, when Prosper sets forth his purpose in both the introduction and the conclusion of the *Indiculus*, he cites the apostolic see as his source of doctrine on this difficult question. Thus Prosper somehow sees the prebaptismal rituals as reflecting the authority of the bishop of Rome. Subscribing to a developing theology of Roman primacy, he utilizes a "method of authority" whereby he refutes opponents with citations bearing the authority of the Roman bishop. It is in this context that Prosper understands the *lex supplicandi*; it falls within and supports the doctrinal competence of the bishop of Rome.

Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* inverts Prosper's words to read *lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi*, and explains that the ecclesiastical hierarchy has rights over divine worship. In doing so, Van Slyke provocatively argued, the pope demonstrated an understanding of the relationship between doctrine and liturgy that is very much in keeping with that of Prosper. In this respect Pope Pius XII was a better historical theologian than those who claim the authority of ancient tradition for their claim that the *lex orandi* (understood as the liturgy in general) is the *lex credendi* (understood as doctrine in general).

Ensuing discussion explored three topics. To a request for an example of nonliturgical prayer from this period, Van Slyke suggested Christians praying for the conversion of their pagan spouses (for example, St. Monica). It was pointed

out that the principle of *lex orandi lex credendi* was already utilized by Basil in his appeal to baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. This sparked further discussion about the meaning of the Latin phrase and the use of the liturgy and the bible in doctrinal discussions in general.

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THOUGHT OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

- Topic: Newman as Theologian
 Conveners: Edward Jeremy Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College
 Kevin Godfrey, Alvernia College
 Presenters: John T. Ford, The Catholic University of America
 James Keating, Pontifical College Josephinum
 Edward Jeremy Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College
 Robert C. Christie, DeVry Institute

John Ford opened the session with a summary of his paper, "Newman as a Contextual Theologian." Although Newman sometimes denied that he was a theologian—perhaps for strategic reasons—he often wrote about the pressing theological issues of his day. However, in contrast to most nineteenth-century deductive Catholic theologians, Newman generally approached theological questions inductively, starting from a concrete situation. As he later stated, he needed a "call" to write. Such an approach, given Newman's rhetorical skills, gained him an immediate audience; however, the appeal of such contextual writings ordinarily wanes with the passage of time once the original historical context fades from view. Yet, contrary to such expectations, Newman's theological writings tend to possess a "chronic vigor" for at least three reasons: (1) the historical situations that Newman originally addressed are still perceived as presently relevant; (2) his theological insights are still applicable to current theological issues; and (3) his religious viewpoints are still both personally persuasive and spiritually satisfying. By viewing Newman as a contextual theologian, one understands why some contemporaries objected to his theological positions and why others welcomed them enthusiastically. As a contextual theologian, Newman's theological contributions remain appreciated today.

James Keating's presentation, "Newman as a Theologian of Prayer," followed. One of the characteristic elements of the Cardinal's thought was his focus upon the interior life. As a thinker of profound faith, he seemed incapable of separating his prayer-filled belief in God from his intellectual labor. God