

CATHOLICITY AND MISSION—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Celebrating the Contributions of Robert J. Schreiter
Convener: Edmund Chia, Australian Catholic University
Moderator: Kevin Ahern, Manhattan College
Presenters: Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S. General Council, Rome
Gemma Tulud Cruz, Australian Catholic University
Kevin Considine, Calumet College of St. Joseph

Steven Bevans offered a brief introduction to the person and scholarship of Robert J. Schreiter, CPPS, one of the most recognized theologians in North America, especially for his cutting-edge thinking on the relationship between theology, mission, and culture in general, and on catholicity, contextualization, and reconciliation in particular. Bevans points to certain constants that can be discerned in Schreiter's work over four decades: first is what can be clustered under the rubric of a spirituality of solidarity and hope; second are the philosophical and social scientific tools he uses to articulate his particular way of doing theology; and third are the major themes that he develops in his theology, in particular his groundbreaking understanding of doing theology as local theology, his fresh approach to catholicity in the light of globalization, and his profound articulation of a theology of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Jeffrey Kirch then spoke on the topic of "An Enhanced Catholicity: Future Directions for a World Church." He began by calling to mind the introduction to the 2015 edition of the *Constructing Local Theologies* book where Schreiter recounts how the original text was received in 1985, as well as suggested some avenues for further development. Schreiter concludes by briefly commenting on the influence Pope Francis has had on the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of itself as a world church. Kirch then went on to compare some of Schreiter's works and ideas with that of Francis' and argues that both are concerned about developing an enhanced sense of catholicity. His presentation takes as basis that Schreiter's ecclesiology, as evident primarily in his two most well-known books, *Constructing Local Theologies* and *The New Catholicity*, offers a basis for developing the Roman Catholic Church's self-understanding as a world church in the 21st century.

The second presenter, Gemma Cruz, spoke on the topic of "Mission Tracks in the Bush: The Dresden Four Aboriginal Mission in South Australia in Dialogue with Schreiter's Theology on Contextualization and Solidarity." She began by giving an overview of the history of the Christian missions in Australia and focused on the important role the missionaries played in nation building especially since the nineteenth century. The presentation then explored the multifaceted and complex intercultural encounters in the context of a pioneering aboriginal mission in Australia in the nineteenth century, that is, the Lutheran mission in South Australia in 1838–53. Cruz offered an overview of the history of the Mission followed by a discussion of the key faces of the cultural encounters that occurred in the course of the mission, particularly as experienced by the key figures known as the Dresden Four. She then examined these encounters by reflecting theologically on how they resonate with the works of Schreiter, particularly his theologies of contextualization and spirituality of solidarity.

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The paper of the third presenter, Kevin Considine, was entitled “Can Dangerous Memories be Communicated? Extending Insights from the Intercultural Theology of Schreiter into Dialogue with Subculture and Racialization.” Considine began on the premise that Schreiter’s groundbreaking work on the connection between theological discourse and intercultural hermeneutics offers a sound foundation for projects that engage culture, globalization, and racialization within the United States. He then focused his presentation on the theological problem of communicating “dangerous memories” of racialized suffering by bringing Schreiter’s insights regarding semiotics and intercultural hermeneutics into engagement with the concepts of subculture and racialization. He concluded that the approach taken can assist theological communication through highlighting the false theological anthropology conferred through racialization and focusing upon culture and subculture as the locations through which communication is possible.

In the discussion which ensued, Schreiter began by affirming all of the reflections and analyses offered on his works and went on to suggest that there is still a lot to be done in the church-world dialogue. Questions raised included the emerging currents of global theological flows, the critical question of the role women in the church, and the challenges posed by the post as well as second modernity. Schreiter’s gift and uniqueness is his ability to engage a variety of sources, including the arts and social sciences, in his theological reflection on the major themes that the contemporary church grapples with.

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