

abundant because Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, proclaims a God who is other than we, whom we are to love in order to know completion of the self.

Klein argued that such existential alterity is inescapable even when the Other comes stripped of any patina of piety. How else does one explain our contemporary fascination with aliens? If alterity is the absolute fecundity that is humanity, and philosophy skewers itself with a rejection of that which is beyond the self, then the alterity of discourse become the only possible project for contemporary philosophy. The deconstruction of Derrida is premised upon allowing *différance* its voice, because only the paradoxically silent interlocutor can forestall the hegemony of logocentricism. "Banish the *Ontos*, and only *différance* can quicken the womb of discourse. Yet what dynamism of the human spirit accounts for our disquietude at what has come before?" Klein suggested that a careful shepherding of language will allow our fellows to see themselves as constituted by what Aquinas called an admixture of potency and act. Aquinas reminds us that we are the only earthly creatures who know themselves to be limited and who define themselves as awaiting completion. The existential meaning of his *reditio in seipsum completa* is the assertion that we cannot be ourselves without ceaselessly completing ourselves in something other than the self.

Klein concluded: "That we yearn for angels and aliens does not prove their existence anymore than desire for God proves God's, but the question that the believer and the nonbeliever can contemplate is the meaning of human existence, that open-ended question that cannot know closure without coming to rest in something outside itself."

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CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

- Topic: Ecclesiology and Reconciliation in U.S. Catholicism
 Convener: William A. Clark, College of the Holy Cross
 Moderator: Eileen Burke-Sullivan, Creighton University
 Presenters: J. Michael Byron, University of St. Thomas
 Joseph Hartzler, Franciscan School of Theology
 William A. Clark, College of the Holy Cross

This new developing group seeks to use the tools of contextual and practical theology to focus on the situation of the church in the contemporary U.S. The presentations and discussion were aimed at examining the convention theme, "Reconciliation," from this point of view.

J. Michael Byron opened with a paper entitled "The Church in the U.S.: Sign of Reconciliation?" Borrowing a metaphor from novelist Barbara Kingsolver, Byron evoked the image of the Christian community as a "dwelling of

hope." The church's mission of reconciliation in the world is that of providing "the bridge between that which is hoped for and that which is." In the wake of the abuse scandals, the church itself needs such a bridge, and yet by some "the very need for internal reconciliation is itself regarded as capitulation before something sinister." Here lies the "fault line" in the U.S. church today, characterized by the difference between conceiving sacrament in primarily objective and "metanarrative" terms, or in primarily existential and relational terms. Byron elaborated five ecclesiological "correctives" for a truly reconciling church. Such a church must understand itself as: (1) pragmatic, recognizing "that a sacrament of reconciliation is acknowledged as such on appeal to its salutary effects in human well-being"; (2) dynamic, "known as a doing rather than as a static being"; (3) eschatological, rather than immutable, and so able "to attend to *all* the data of history"; (4) truly Catholic, welcoming "the challenge of rendering itself credible in each particular context"; and (5) dialogical, and therefore seeking "openness, the presumption of good faith and good will, and a lack of fundamental suspicion."

In "The Redemptive Role of The Church: Lonergan and Reconciliation," Joseph Hartzler continued the themes of contextualization and dialogue. Referring to Harvard Law professor Martha Minow, Hartzler noted that, in processes of reconciliation, the recognition of context is not the end but rather the beginning of the required analysis. The anthropological vision of Bernard Lonergan is a useful tool for understanding the context within which the church in the U.S. must seek reconciliation today. "To be authentic human persons and authentic communities requires that we follow the transcendental precepts: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in Love. Through this self-constituting process, we create society, culture, and human history." However, progress along this line is not inevitable, because we can substitute various biases for these transcendental precepts. For Lonergan, bias—whether individual, group, or general—is the neglect of truth (and the ideas and questions that lead to its discovery) in preference for immediate gratification, group advantage, or short-term solutions. As such, bias "creates situations that result in decline, inauthenticity, and social breakdown." It is the process of redemption, taking place within a community of love, which can move us beyond such decline. This process in the church must lead us to confront clericalism, an example of group bias made evident in the abuse scandal. The notion that the scandal is now "history" is itself an example of general bias that would short-circuit the reconciliation process by avoiding ultimate issues in favor of the quick solution. In place of these biases, "dialogue is a vital and instrumental component in the process of reconciliation in the present ecclesial crisis."

In the final presentation—"Fruits of Division, Or Seeds of Reconciliation? The Role of Local Church Communities"—William Clark added a specific concern for local church communities. Citing both the church's abuse scandal and the recent abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, Clark noted that the oft-ignored

local level can be a key indicator of, as well as a profound influence on, the condition of the larger society. Within the church, the local community unites the ideas of church, eucharist, and incarnation. The community constantly struggles to maintain "a meaningful relationship between its own smallness and sinfulness" on the one hand, and "the cosmic breadth of the Christian vision" on the other. Therefore, the local community is where "the People of God encounter their ongoing need for reconciliation." It thus exercises a certain *de facto* authority within the church. As Rahner and others have stated, the local community, gathered in the Eucharist, is the *event* of the universal church.

The scandals demonstrate the danger of failing to make the ministry of reconciliation tangible within local communities. Yet the community itself can become a faction, celebrating Eucharist as a nostalgic barrier against change, or as a tool of short-term political activism. "Such approaches arise from existing social divisions, and are dead ends with regard to the church's pilgrimage toward universal reconciliation, because they refuse to dwell *within* the tensions that make a truly inclusive Eucharist the astounding sacramental sign that it is." Insofar as it has avoided these temptations, while still seeking to enliven the exercise of the local community's proper authority, the lay group "The Voice of the Faithful" may be a useful reminder of the Eucharistic community's ministry of reconciliation.

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THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Topic: Hermeneutics, History, and Doctrine
 Convener: James Le Grys, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
 Moderator: James Buckley, Loyola College in Maryland
 Presenter: Thomas Guarino, Seton Hall University
 Respondent: Anthony Godzieba, Villanova University

This session offered a discussion of the contemporary search for a hermeneutics appropriate for theology. The focus was on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, with attention given as well to the response of Emilio Betti.

In his paper, "Historicity and Truth: Gadamer and the Search for a Hermeneutics of Doctrine," Thomas Guarino began by noting that many significant Catholic documents hold that certain doctrines are universally and perduringly true, continuously normative throughout varying cultures and differing epochs. He contended that such doctrines require a hermeneutical theory congruent with this assertion. He argued, furthermore, that the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, while contributing much to contemporary interpretative theory, can only be appropriated in a qualified way by Christian theology. The reason for such quali-