

finds a natural resource for just the kind of regrounding of traditional theology that Carr envisions.

Prof. West responded enthusiastically that he felt all of the presentations were very helpful and that he was quite happy to have found so many unexpected allies in the Catholic theological community. He went on to define himself as a Christian, radical democrat, twentieth century thinker which puts him in a very difficult position vis-à-vis both the wider academy and other Christian social and intellectual circles. He compares his own work to that of a jazz artist: at once both deeply grounded and practiced in the tradition, but also radically open to spontaneity, improvisation and creativity. He believes that this is the type of intellectual (as opposed to academic) most needed in our time. He went on to respond to the specific proposal of the presenters as well as questions raised from the floor. Of particular interest to the group was his distinction between "multiculturalism" and "multicontextualism."

JOHN J. MARKEY

*Graduate Theological Union  
Berkeley, California*

## PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

### THE THEOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Presenter: Lauren Pristas, Benedictine College, Atchison, Kansas

The presentation dealt with four documents: Acts 7:54-60, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, and the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. Prof. Pristas' historical and literary analysis of the texts emphasized the portrayal of martyrdom as union with Christ and its detailed description in contemporary liturgical language. Polycarp's martyrdom in particular is presented as a liturgical sacrifice in which the priest and the victim are one. His prayer blesses God for his past favors and present benefits (Polycarp's martyrdom is acknowledged as a blessing), and couches its petition in an expression of confident trust in God's continued fidelity. The structure is that of the Jewish *berakha* and Christian Eucharistic prayers.

On the basis of her analysis, Prof. Pristas then described seven theological characteristics of martyrdom in the early Church. First, martyrdom is a consummation in the physical order of something which has already been

realized sacramentally. Second, the union between Christ and the Christian constitutes the Christian life and defines its moral task, namely always to live in a manner which authentically reflects the reality of this union. Third, the martyr is only a disciple and claims to be nothing other than a Christian. The martyrdom accounts, therefore, remind us of our call in Christ and encourage us to attain God in our own circumstances. Fourth, martyrdom is a grace, not to be presumed but to be desired. Fifth, personal fidelity to Christ defeats evil forces, not personal control over them. Real evil, namely sin and denial and not the forces which can take away life, separate the Christian from God. Sixth, the early Christians had a very lively sense of persecution as real evil. Indeed, one of the reasons offering oneself for martyrdom was prohibited is the personal complicity with evil this involves. Seventh, one cannot read these texts without realizing that these Christians have no doubt that our real life is hidden in Christ with God. What is real to them, sometimes in quite literal and physical ways, is not the pains of the present age but the hope of the world to come.

In the discussion which followed several issues were addressed. First, the biblical basis of the accounts was considered, particularly Paul, Revelation, and the Maccabean martyrs as a literary model. Second, the possible heterodox, i.e. Montanist, origin of some of the accounts was discussed. Some thought that heterodox was too strong and the terms marginal or sectarian would be more appropriate. Third, the genuine liturgical descriptions of martyrdom give the accounts a christological quality. Fourth, contemporary attitudes were considered. Many individuals today, particularly students, find the deeds of the martyrs incomprehensible and even nonsensical. Our society uses the word "martyr" with a lack of precision, which makes discourse concerning the theology of martyrdom difficult.

KENNETH B. STEINHAUSER  
*Saint Louis University*  
*St. Louis, Missouri*