

history as a surprising and new event. This originality is what allows the Christian claim constantly to be renewed in the midst of everyday life. The category of history is thus intrinsically related to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, a mystery coinciding with a concrete sign received by people who belong to history. The radical concreteness of the encounter also precludes a separation of culture and politics. From the early drama *Our God's Brother* to the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II has advocated the concreteness and particularity of the Christian vision of reality. Christianity never turns its face from abysmal social injustices, yet it eschews the ideological subsumption of the Christian fact under the generic categories of social reason. The *metanoia* described in chapter 3 of EIA, Albacete concluded, implies a new style of life and a new way of reasoning about reality itself.

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CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

- Topic: Social Sin: A Contested Concept in Catholic Social Teaching
 Convener: William P. George, Dominican University
 Moderator: Thomas J. Poundstone, Saint Mary's College of California, Moraga
 Presenters: Rosemarie E. Gorman, Fairfield University
 Margaret R. Pfeil, University of Notre Dame

"Social sin" has been a key element in the development of recent Catholic social teaching. This session examined both the problematic aspects of this concept and its promise for advancing theological reflection and pastoral practice.

Rosemarie E. Gorman discussed Juan Luis Segundo's contribution to the topic. She argued that Segundo's attempt to ground social and structural sin in Paul's notion of the "power of sin . . . is a promising step that deserves further consideration." Through a critical retrieval of Karl Rahner's analysis of concupiscence, Teilhard de Chardin's understandings of *entropy* and *negentropy*, and Nicolai Berdyaev's emphasis on *means* as well as ends or values, Segundo moves beyond fixed, immobilist understandings of original sin to an evolutionary understanding that, as Gorman puts it, does "justice to the complex relationship between structural determinants and creative freedom." Segundo's mature understanding of social sin also involves, as a corollary, a retrieval of Paul's understanding of faith as that which, in Gorman's words, "counters sin's power over social mechanisms," and leads us to "reexamine our means, not in light of abstract goals but as efficacious for a creative love in the present that God will make complete in the new heaven and the new earth."

Margaret Pfeil showed how social sin, despite its status as a contested theological category, has entered into magisterial teaching. But she called for a more complete correlation between social sin and social reconciliation than is presently found in that teaching. Against the backdrop of recent structural attempts at reconciliation in the wake of massive human rights abuse in Latin America, Pfeil discussed five "insights" that must occur if the correlation is to be more fully realized. These insights center on conversion and reconciliation as a *process*, the ministerial practice of reconciliation, a more adequate notion of examination of conscience, a deeper appreciation of the relationship between personal conversion and structural transformation, and certain ecclesiological implications of correlating social sin and social reconciliation.

The presentations provoked a lively discussion that demonstrated both the timeliness of the topic and the need for further development. In response to a remark that the notion of social sin is not nearly so "contested" as is personal responsibility for evil, Gorman suggested that Paul's dialectical understanding of sin offers the best way to handle the issue of premoral evil, and she stressed that, for Segundo, personal responsibility for evil occurs when passive individuals allow structures of evil to control their lives. Pfeil remarked that evil is a larger category than sin, and that for John Paul II, at least, social sin identifies not every evil but only specific kinds.

A question about the relationship of the two presentations (what would Segundo accept in the magisterium's understanding of social sin, and vice versa?) pushed the discussion towards further considerations of personal responsibility, attitudes towards violent revolution, and traditional understandings of the sacrament of reconciliation. It emerged that while the overlap between Segundo and the magisterium is considerable, for Segundo understandings of sin as a personal failure and of the sacrament of reconciliation as the proper remedy for this failure are insufficient. Indicative of the manner in which considerations of social sin may spur theological and pastoral development, in response to a discussant's reminder that, traditionally, the sacrament of reconciliation calls for "a promise to change," Pfeil emphasized that this promise to make amends must often be structural, not just personal.

One questioner noted a lack of attention in the presentations to the diachronic dimensions of sin, something assumed, for example, in Augustine's theory of biological transmission of original sin. Another participant asked whether papal letters of apology, which, unlike "truth commissions," do not clearly identify past "sinners," might not be an example of the "cheap grace" mentioned during the presentations. Pfeil suggested that the "five insights" she had discussed could be developed both to cover the diachronic issue and to explore possible inadequacies in papal writings which seek to deal with past wrongs.

This line of questioning led to remarks about the church's difficulty in acknowledging itself as socially sinful and a comment about a perceived de-emphasis on social justice since the 1971 synodal document, *Justice in the*

World. In partial response, Pfeil stressed again that while John Paul II is wary of the term *social sin*, he has nevertheless appropriated and incorporated it into his considerable body of social teaching. A group member noted as well the expanding character of John Paul II's thought: terms such as social sin, defined in a specific context, may be consistently applied to other areas in which the terms were not originally used.

"Who has the right to preside at a liturgy of reconciliation? Who plays church for the church when it needs reconciliation?" These questions, posed but left unanswered, nicely identified the direction of the conversation as the session ended and clearly indicated the need for further reflection on the topic of social sin and social reconciliation.

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CHRISTOLOGY

Topic: Christologies of the Second Vatican Council
Convener: Michael E. O'Keeffe, Saint Xavier University, Chicago
Presenter: Robert A. Krieg, University of Notre Dame

Robert Krieg's examination of the christological aspects of the Second Vatican Council was divided into three parts.

Part I explored the importance of the Second Vatican Council, the paradigm shift it inaugurated in Catholic self-understanding, and its continuing relevance for Catholicism. Two claims were central. First, Krieg drew a parallel between Vatican II and the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, claiming that just as we are still trying to understand these events and our entrance into an atomic/nuclear age, so too is the church trying to work out its new self-understanding in light of the council. Hence far from being passé, the council, understood both as an event and as a collection of documents, is a watershed in the life of the Catholic community that cannot be downplayed. This fact is particularly important to keep in mind as we face undergraduate students who view the council as ancient history, and as we prepare for a new administration in Rome, which will increasingly look back to the council in order to understand the way forward.

Krieg's second point was then to unpack the christological themes of the council, which of course had to be teased out of the documents since christology was not its central focus. Although Krieg admitted that some of the council's christology was problematic, such as the council's christomonism and its failure to present a developed pneumatology or a sustained examination of God as creator, the council nevertheless "authorized a paradigm shift in Catholic christology," both by inference and by explicit affirmation.