

CHRISTOLOGY

- Topic: Constructing Public Christologies Today
Convener: Michael E. O'Keeffe, Saint Xavier University, Chicago
Presenters: William M. Thompson, Duquesne University
Sixto Garcia, St. Vincent dePaul Regional Seminary
Respondent: Pamela Kirk, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York

Perhaps the best way to summarize this engaging, three-part reflection on constructing a contemporary public Christology is to explore four central areas of concern evident in the exchange of papers (www.duq.edu/liberalarts/undertheology.ctsa) and articulated in the presentations. These four concerns might serve as the necessary foci when constructing a public Christology today, particularly one that is attentive to the "dangerous memory" of Jesus.

The first and most foundational involved an appreciation for the claim that the theologian's ability to articulate "the disclosive and transformative possibilities of Catholic doctrine" is based on the *a priori* gift of God, who has come to us through the Son and in the Spirit. Hence all Christological reflections are grounded in humility and thankfulness—in the gratitude and praise given to God for welcoming us into God's trinitarian life; in gratitude for the mystics and the saints, who have retrieved the dangerous memory of Jesus in important and at times repressed way and who continue to serve as models today (e.g., Teresa de Avila, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Thérèse of Lisieux); and in gratitude for those who are now participating in the conversation, particularly those who are working to render the Christ-event intelligible and practical for the larger U.S. publics.

Imbued with the spirit of humility and thankfulness, the theologian is then invited to consider how to retrieve this "dangerous memory." Here a number of important principles were unpacked. Perhaps the most important was a deep appreciation for the fact that all Christological reflections are "sited," i.e., grounded in particular persons, times, places, and circumstances that deeply affect (although not to the point of determinism) how the Christ-event is understood and applied. Hence whenever Christology is discussed, we must ask "whose Christology" is being examined, who has been "muffled" or excised from the conversation, and how these reflections affect others, particularly those at the margins of church and society. Here Garcia was particularly helpful, for he examined how the dangerous memory of Jesus is often domesticated by an ecclesial community that is deaf to the cries of the oppressed and indifferent to the way Christological claims have served the oppressors. Lamenting the sins of racism, classicism, and sexism, all three participants called for a "mysticism of open eyes" (Metz), and the necessary "critical distance" from personal and ecclesial experience to hear and contemplate the dangerous memory. In Thompson's words, "the Church must witness to the whole Christ, but to do so, it must recognize its own tendency to truncate the mystery." For Garcia, it is a constant struggle to choose "justice over healing, prophecy over unity, and crisis over peace."

A third area of concern involves the publics that contemporary Christology seeks to address. Here the focus was on the larger U.S. publics, particularly secular society and the civil order. Perhaps the most important claim here was the sense that Catholic theology could be public, that U.S. society was not so jaded or hopeless that the message of Jesus could not be heard. In this respect all three participants agreed with Michael and Kenneth Himes's *Public Theology*, which insists on the public character of Catholic theology. For all three, Christology cannot be limited to "purely private" concerns. In Kirk's words, it must engage "civil discourse, the conduct of citizens, and governmental policy." It cannot remain silent "in the face of Auschwitz and other horrors" (Garcia). It must become practical, and it must disclose and transform, not merely the secular order, but the individual and the ecclesial order as well.

The final area of concern involves the actual "participatory exchange" that occurs when the theologian seeks to make Christology public. Here a few claims were mentioned. First, in order to engage others, Catholic theologians must "make choices" about the kind of Christology they offer and the kind of publics they address. One cannot not choose. Second, one must practice the kind of humility that enables one to truly hear and appropriate the concerns of others, especially those on the margins. According to Thompson, "we do not know so much that we do not need to participate, but we know enough to do so." Avoiding the extremes of relativism and authoritarianism, he calls for an accommodation to the other so that we can truly participate in the sweep of history. Third, all three participants examined the limits of accommodation, claiming that relativism was unacceptable. Hence much was made of too much accommodation (e.g., silence in the face of institutional racism), and the symbol of the cross was offered as a limit to accommodation. Finally, Thompson made some suggestions regarding the importance of the leader as a "representative mystic" who facilitates the dialogue between church and society.

Although the nearly one hour and fifteen minute presentation left little time for questions, we did manage to raise several important issues, including concerns about the apocalyptic in Metz and the importance of the mystics for demonstrating how to do public Christology.

MICHAEL O'KEEFFE
Saint Xavier University
Chicago, Illinois