

DEVELOPING GROUPS

WORLD CHURCH THEOLOGY

Topic: World Church Theology Today
Convener: Gerald M. Boodoo, Xavier University of Louisiana
Moderator: Phillip J. Linden, Jr., Xavier University of Louisiana
Presenter: Robert Schreiter, Catholic Theological Union
Respondent: Monya Stubbs, Vanderbilt University

In a well-received presentation addressing "World Church Theological Trends," Robert Schreiter looked at theological trends needed to serve a world Church in a changed and changing world. He briefly developed an image of the world Church looking at the positive and negative aspects of globalization, ideas about governance in a globalized world, and our understanding of the universality of the Church today. He then turned to four theological trends which he sees our current world is evoking both in the Church and for the Church.

The first trend is toward a new fundamental theology. Using the four traditional *demonstrationes* of fundamental theology, Schreiter shows how a new fundamental theology can take shape. The *demonstratio religiosa* today needs to include a new theory of religion which sees religion as coexisting with modernity and postmodernity, and it must address the relation of religion and violence. The *demonstratio christiana* would need to provide a description of the many ways Christians believe and belong, as well as an argument for Christianity in relation to the other translocal religious traditions. In addition, Christianity will have to profile more strongly the importance of justice and reconciliation. The *demonstratio catholica* would need to situate Roman Catholic Christianity among other forms of Christianity and explain how it embodies and exemplifies a genuinely world Church. The *demonstratio theologica* needs to expand its theological epistemology to include cultural hermeneutics, intercultural hermeneutics and the work on biblical exegesis developing in Asia and Africa.

The second theological trend is the development of a theology of solidarity. According to Schreiter there are three features of the world Church which prompt this. First, the emergence of theologies of identity which force the need to understand unity in genuine difference. Second, the fragmentation of postmodernity, both in the wealthy world, and increasingly in poor countries. Third, the chasm between the few rich and the many poor in societies. "From the point of view of population, the world Church is a poor Church. Here issues of solidarity are more than notional ones; they demand concrete action."

The third theological trend is a renewed theology of the Holy Spirit. This trend is supported by the vast number of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians who find belief in the Holy Spirit compelling. That the Holy Spirit appears to be given an ever diminishing role in recent Roman documents also points to the need to have a more developed theology of the Holy Spirit in order to better understand God's work in the world.

The fourth theological trend is a new theological anthropology. Apart from the items mentioned under a theology of solidarity above, four additional issues need to be cited. First, women: "Issues of identity, equality, and difference play themselves out within every setting with regard to women . . . the contribution of feminist thought to theological anthropology is an area where promising beginnings have been made, but where a great deal more work can be done." Second, though the Roman Catholic Church has condemned racism, a lot more work has to be done on what causes racism and why it persists. Third, developments in biomedicine raise questions about what this means for our sense of the human and the beginning and end of life. What about healing through biogenetics? Fourth, teleology: What makes human beings, and human life, meaningful and worth living?

In responding to Schreiter, Monya Stubbs specifically addressed Schreiter's question as to how the Church must take up issues of Christian life today on a worldwide basis, and not just in the crucible of Western European thought. She framed her response from a biblical scholar's perspective highlighting that the systemic exclusion and silencing of most biblical interpretations developed in terms of other cultures, as well as those of minority subcultures, reinforces a problematic that Schreiter correctly wants the world Church to overcome. One way around this according to Stubbs is if biblical scholars assume responsibility for their interpretations by explicitly identifying the frames and categories they employ to make sense of the text. Such a task requires that interpreters clarify not only the analytical frame used to ground a reading in textual evidence, but also the hermeneutical and contextual frames that influence and shape interpretive results. In doing this in a comparative manner, Stubbs maintains that "all readings of the text are considered legitimate until proven otherwise, instead of an interpretation being judged insignificant because it moves beyond the traditional bipolar interpretive process to make explicit the three-dimensional elements inherent in every biblical analysis."

The numerous questions and lively discussion following the presentations focused mainly on the pragmatic issues of what would theological education look like in a world Church, how does one understand and navigate the multiple religious identities of persons in the world Church, the issues of power and power relations in the world Church, and the place and role of the Roman Catholic Church in all this.

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