

VOCATIONS OF UNIVERSITY THEOLOGIANs

- Topic: The Vocations of University Theologians
 Convener: Terrence W. Tilley, The University of Dayton
 Presenters: Susan A. Ross, Loyola University of Chicago
 Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Monmouth University
 Margaret A. Farley, Yale University

The participants in the session addressed the issues of the vocations of university theologians from the variety of social locations that shape their work. None were ever in priestly training, and all are currently involved in university teaching (Ross at a Jesuit university, Andolsen at a private, nonsectarian university, Farley at an interdenominational divinity school, Tilley at a Marianist university), but have taught in a variety of locations (e.g., Tilley and Andolsen at state-sponsored institutions, Ross and Tilley at small Catholic colleges, Farley in a Catholic seminary). The purpose of the seminar is to explore the distinctive ways theologians exercise their vocations in academic locations not clearly anticipated in their own education nor envisioned in magisterial texts and sometimes ignored in intra-Catholic discussions.

Ross addressed four issues. With regard to *method*, she pointed out that "teaching from faith" in a seminary may be methodologically quite different from "faith seeking understanding" in a university. Indeed, one diocesan bishop found this approach not "real theology." With regard to *other university disciplines*, Ross pointed out how often colleagues construe our work as indoctrination rather than critical reflection. The result, even in Catholic universities, can often be the disparagement of our disciplines. With regard to our undergraduate classroom *audience*, a majority may be nominally Catholic, but we are charged to teach and reach those of other traditions or no tradition at all. Nothing can be presumed. With regard to *graduate education*, Ross noted that her work would be done little differently in other locations. We cannot forget, too, the novelty of nonclerical theology, a *novum* sometimes not understood by clerics.

Andolsen construed our vocation as "a struggle to give an account of the hope to which we are called" while also "hearing others into speech" wherever we work. Nonetheless, standard practice is to teach *about* religion in nonsectarian and public institutions. Monmouth's students reflect the demography of religious affiliation in the U.S. She also reminded us not to ignore the public sphere of higher education where eighty to ninety percent of Roman Catholics are educated. She noted the *lack of institutional connections*, whether to the bishop, the parish or the Newman Apostolate in the secular universities. Our colleagues in such institutions often tempt us to be involved in the vogueish academic conversation of the moment to "fit in" and have someone with whom to talk. Whenever ethics and theology are done in such social locations the theologian is called to do *public theology*, which cannot appeal to faith warrants, however

committed a theologian is to her own tradition; part of that call is the call to be a *witness* to religious and intellectual seriousness, especially in the context professional societies.

Farley's institution is called to develop a learned clergy and a theologically sophisticated laity. Her *audience* demands that she teach Christian ethics as a Catholic who must "render intelligible in a public forum the values, questions and concerns that come out of the Catholic tradition yet are opened to a shared search for a common morality that has significance in however pluralistic a context." She finds herself working on challenging topics in the whole gamut of ethical issues with colleagues from divisions as different from hers as forestry, management, nursing, and history. This social location calls for the theologian not so much to be "confessional" nor "objective," but to be critically engaged in seeking justice, promoting compassion, and making peace in a diverse world. This diversity of tasks and contexts enriches her own work in and for the Catholic community. Like all Christians, we are called to do the works of mercy (not of war, alluding to Dorothy Day), but we exercise our vocations as we teach and do research in specific locations.

The discussion highlighted the different ways we deal with students, colleagues outside religious studies and theology, and church leaders. One problem is the presumption that religion is private, so our work is not really perceived as public. Theologians in such locations are not merely accountable to the bishops and the church, but also to secular (and sometimes religious) authorities and professional academic peers. Moreover, the bishops' influence seems to be declining even in religiously affiliated contexts. How will we express our proper accountability to the church if or as the bishops' academic importance wanes?

Two strong positions were taken in discussion: that Catholic (and other) theologians be allowed to have and express their foundational commitments as much as their colleagues, e.g., Marxist sociologists; and that in addition to the seminary and university, the parish needs to be seen as a locus for theology which the university theologians ought not ignore.

In each of these varied university locations, the theologians bring Catholic religious, theological and moral vision and sensitivities to bear in somewhat different ways, with different intellectual and academic political problems, for different varieties of students, with different colleagues, and for different purposes. Most of which are erased when one considers the theologians' vocations only in intra-ecclesial contexts.

TERRENCE W. TILLEY
The University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio