

excluded from decision-making power. Given that these persons often have more theological training and greater worldly expertise than do the clergy, it is time to follow Pope Paul VI's direction in *Octogesima Adveniens* and admit that Christians everywhere need to participate in discerning principles and devising local political strategies. Finally, Gudorf suggested that strong personal relationships with particular victims of injustice are necessary for sustaining the work of political resistance in the face of defeat, rejection, tiredness, and the social stigma of dissidence. Drawing on her experience as the parent of two mentally disabled children, one Hispanic and one black, she explained that it has been knowing, living with, and loving these children that—more than anything else—has kept her and her husband relatively constant, honest, and committed in their social justice work.

The discussion that followed focused on the specific issues of self-interest and power identified by Daniel Finn. One participant suggested that self-interest and seeking power seem to presume a view of the self as individual rather than relational. A second person urged the development of a spirituality and theology of asceticism in relation to the use of power, like an asceticism of using wealth. A third member proposed that power in itself is neither good nor bad, but that it is best used to empower and facilitate.

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NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

Topic: Autobiography as Theology
 Convener: Nancy Pineda-Madrid, St. Mary's College of California
 Presenter: Donald Gelpi, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
 Respondent: Alejandro García-Rivera, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

Recently, Donald Gelpi finished his theological autobiography manuscript, *Closer Walk: Confessions of a US Jesuit Yat*. This manuscript formed the basis of his presentation, Personal Reflections on My Experience of Theology as Vocation. He began with a humorous story that illustrated the origins of the word *Yat*, a term that New Orleanians use to identify themselves. Gelpi painted an intimate and stimulating self-portrait of the various experiences, communities and intellectual traditions that have shaped his theology over the course of more than 30 years. Gelpi explained his aim in writing his theological autobiography:

I hope to retell the story of my life with a focus on the kinds of experiences which have lead me to develop the kind of theology I have to date formulated and published. Since my closer walk has prompted me to wander down some new and unfamiliar theological paths, I retell my story in the hope that it will assist those who find what I have written

strange, puzzling, or just plain unintelligible, to understand how the system I have been creating evolved into the shape it currently exemplifies.

Throughout his presentation Gelpi made clear that he hoped that his remarks would encourage the participants "to share with one another [their] own personal sense of vocation as theologians," with particular attention to the formative experiences of their lives.

Gelpi identified five complex and interrelated circumstances of his life as integral to his sense of "vocation as theologian." They are

- (1) my experience of a vocation to the Society of Jesus;
- (2) providential experiences during my formation as a Jesuit;
- (3) my appropriation of the American philosophical tradition as a graduate student, and associate and assistant professor at Loyola University of New Orleans;
- (4) my involvement in the Catholic Charismatic renewal; and
- (5) my experience of the John Courtney Murray Group.

These five points served as the framework for Gelpi's presentation.

While growing up in the racially charged climate of New Orleans and while a student in Belgium, Gelpi confronted the question of what it means to be an American. Moreover, he completed his initial theological studies during Vatican II. These experiences convinced him that "one cannot do systematic thinking responsibly unless one does so in an inculturated context." This eventually led to his decision to focus his doctoral studies on the principal thinkers within the U.S. philosophical tradition whose work engaged significant religious issues (C. S. Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, George Santayana, A. N. Whitehead, and Ralph Waldo Emerson).

As a doctoral student at Fordham, Gelpi's experience of charismatic prayer contributed to what later became his theology of conversion, his approach to teaching theology, and his plan for theological research. Gelpi concluded by inviting the participants to share their understanding of vocation as theologians in light of their life experiences.

In his response, García-Rivera highlighted the formative role of various communities in the development of Gelpi's theology, and called attention to the way Gelpi's loyalty to community has marked the different periods of his life and thought. Gelpi's manuscript could just as easily be described as an autobiography of a community. García-Rivera identified and commented on what he has observed as characteristics that distinguish Gelpi's vocation as theologian: loyalty, courage, patience, and humility.

In the subsequent discussion a number of key themes emerged. First, vocation as theologian necessitates loyalty to the context in which a theologian does theology. For example, in the so-called Third World, liberation theology emerges as an endemic expression, while in the United States a theology of conversion is more pertinent. Second, doing theology in this country would suggest engaging the American intellectual tradition. Yet for the most part theology being written in the United States tends to ignore this body of literature.

Why is this tradition so pervasively disregarded? The American story seems utterly crucial to the endeavor of producing theology here. How might we continue to excavate this legacy?

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BIOETHICS AND HEALTHCARE

Topic: The Vocation of the Moral Theologian: Theory and Practice
Convener/Moderator: Mark Miller, St. Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Presenter: Thomas Shannon, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

The science and technology of genetics today presents the ethicist with an enormous methodological challenge in assessing the tremendous innovations which introduce the unknown both in regard to consequences and parameters. In an attempt to sketch a moral methodology for the contemporary ethicist, Shannon first drew from Catholic history. There was the manualist methodology of seeking probable opinions. This was replaced by the post-Vatican II struggle for moralists between the ecclesial role of presenting Church teaching and the vision of informing and guiding the correct use of conscience, described in part through the exercise of *epikeia*, "the virtue of those who correctly understand and apply moral truth." The latter methodology involved something of the shift to the subject, to postmodernity, to experience. How, now, does the moral theologian serve the whole Church, particularly in "the formation of a community that realizes its moral truth from within itself and has that experience validated through [a] reappropriation of the tradition"?

Shannon first offers two serious cautions. Historical consciousness ought to reveal to us that all is not sweetness and light in human moral thought and action. An acknowledgement of the evil rampant in history, the sufferings of whole peoples, the destruction of nature, and so forth are part of who we are. Genetic innovation contains within itself at least the potential for much evil, such that the role of the moral theologian must include an attentiveness to systemic distortions in the face of the good genetic research can do.

Second, Shannon suggests that moral theologians, precisely in their role of assessing genetic knowledge, must recognize their own limited perspectives. Accordingly, a major part of our role "is to listen and to learn and to begin incorporating the reality of other perspectives into our thinking and writing." Such attentiveness, however, may mean that *hybrid* forms of thinking will arise—and a key question to face is whether or not a hybrid can retain some validity beyond the *purity* of the original identity. Perhaps a unitary Catholic approach to moral issues must give way to the reality of "multiple sources of