

THEOLOGY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Topic: Doing Theology in Global Perspective
Convener: James Wiseman, The Catholic University of America
Moderator: Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Boston College
Presenters: Richard Gaillardetz, The University of Toledo
Patricia Lamoureux, St. Mary's Seminary and University
James Wiseman, The Catholic University of America

Because of our increasingly multicultural, multireligious, and globalized contemporary situation, theologians are called upon to incorporate into their work relevant insights from the theologies of the Two-Thirds World; from Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and feminist thought; and from other religious traditions. The three presenters, all of whom have been writing monographs from this perspective for the Orbis Books series *Theology in Global Perspective*, addressed the topic out of their particular specializations: ecclesiology, moral theology, and spirituality, respectively.

Richard Gaillardetz noted that to see the church in global perspective is to privilege the traditional ecclesial characteristic of catholicity. However, catholicity in a global ecclesiology requires moving beyond assumptions about the church's geographic and numerical expansion to what Robert Schreiter has called "a new catholicity," one in which the category of reception receives greater attention. Whereas standard missiologies stressed the ecclesial moment of proclamation, theologies of reception remind us that any proclamation will be received (or not received) in a particular cultural context, drawing from the cultural material at hand. Gaillardetz went on to suggest three ways in which a transformed episcopate could be a positive agent in the cultivation of the catholicity of the church. First, the episcopate might fruitfully draw on African tribal conceptions of leadership that stress the importance of a "listening leader." Second, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has embodied this listening leadership by developing immersion programs that allowed their bishops to gain firsthand experience of the plight of the people. Finally, he discussed the witness of Bishop Samuel Ruiz from Chiapas, Mexico, whose pioneering vision of a truly "autochthonous" local church led him to draw richly from the insights of indigenous Mayan cultures in the development of pastoral initiatives and in the formation of catechists and deacons.

The second presenter, Patricia Lamoureux, began by noting that the renewal of moral theology called for by the Second Vatican Council requires the discipline to be more Christ-centered and biblically oriented. Drawing on her recent research into the way the governing metaphor of discipleship can be more amply used in moral theology, she discussed three key themes: discipleship as a journey in response to a call, the role of character and virtue, and the central symbol of the reign of God. Lamoureux suggested that these themes can be enriched in dialogue with four realities that have not been prominent in Eurocentric thought: the communal worldview characteristic of African culture; the Latin American

liberationist focus on the call of the poor as the “ethical place” from which moral reflection should proceed; Confucian ethics and the notion of *tao* as integrating the individual and social dimensions of character and virtue; and the “third eye vision” proposed by Asian theologian C.S. Song.

Finally, James Wiseman spoke about teaching Christian spirituality from a global perspective. Having just done so in a course taken primarily by D.Min. students, he drew on some of the ways his students had profited from studying aspects of spirituality characteristic of many Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These included an understanding that justice is among the most important spiritual questions of our time, together with the attempt of theologians on those continents to develop “integral” spiritualities, that is, ones that transcend such dichotomies as body/soul, sacred/profane, and contemplative/active. However, the fact that some of Wiseman’s students came from Asia and Africa also allowed them to sound a note of caution, lest what appears novel and fresh to North American eyes be uncritically accepted as unqualifiedly good. One such student observed that the familial and communal emphasis of his native culture, for all of its strong points, also has a shadow side, for it tends to make young people overly dependent on the family, excessively cautious, and thus often afraid to take risks and welcome challenges.

The session ended with a half-hour of questions and discussion from the floor, some of it centering on why the work of Bishop Ruiz was viewed unfavorably by the Vatican. There were also questions about how the pedagogical goals advanced by the presenters could best be realized in the classroom and in the church as a whole.

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