CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY THEORY

Topic: The Church in a Globalized World: Dialogue or Disengagement
Conveners: Vincent Miller, Georgetown University
            Michele Saracino, Manhattan College
Moderator: Gerard Jacobitz, St. Joseph's University
Presenter: Lieven Boeve, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Presenter: Vincent Miller, Georgetown University
Respondent: Robert Schreiter, Catholic Theological Union

The session followed the format as it appeared in the Convention Program. Lieven Boeve began the conversation with his paper entitled, "Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief?" He argued that for Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, Europe is a continent in crisis, which only a Europe that rediscovers its Christian roots, can survive. For this reason, Joseph Ratzinger argues—in one of his most recent books *Values in a Time of Upheaval* for example—that Christians should contribute as a creative minority so that "Europe can reclaim the best of its inheritance in order thereby to be of service to humanity as a whole." For Ratzinger, the crisis of Europe is indeed a matter of belief or unbelief, a rationality and morality grafted to Christian revelation or radical Enlightenment thinking. Only reason that can be reconciled with Christian revelation really has the right to claim to be rational. Boeve showed that Ratzinger's argument does not stand on its own, but rather fits within the framework of the so-called neo-Augustinian fundamental theological options that structure his theology from within a dual, asymmetric relationship between the eternal and the temporal, Church and world. Later in his presentation, Boeve distinguished between positions that reject the theological *necessity* of a dialogue between Church and world (context) because the truth of revelation cannot in essence be touched by it, and those that maintain the necessity of the said dialogue but want to reconsider its *nature* because of the changed context. Elaborating on the last position, Boeve demonstrated how a reading of Europe's situation in terms of plurality, instead of mere secularization, offers new possibilities to engage in dialogue with the world again.

Vincent Miller continued the conversation with his paper entitled, "A Purer Church: Standing against the Erosions of Globalization, or Swimming with the Tide of Cultural Heterogenization?" in which he explored how differing analyses of the cultural effects of globalization suggest different theological and ecclesial responses to globalization. Miller considered two such analyses: globalization as cultural homogenization and as cultural heterogenization. The first analysis is the most common. Global capitalism and the culture industries spread Western materialism, a global hyper culture of consumer goods, and pop culture to all corners of the globe. This analysis defines globalization primarily as a force of cultural erosion, thus it inspires responses that aim to preserve the integrity of religious culture against this global onslaught. Such theological concerns are evident in a range of theological movements across the ideological spectrum—from theologies of

inculturation to the postliberal and radical orthodoxy movements. Cultural homogenization is not, however, the only description of the effects of globalization found in sociological and anthropological literature. Arjun Appadurai argues that changes in technology enable ever smaller and geographically dispersed units of culture to be self-sustaining. Thus, globalization produces not only the erosion of particularity, but its intensification; giving rise to a sectarian communal ecology where ever smaller, and purer communities come into being. This is evident in the denominationalizing of Catholicism, and the rise of more intentional notions of parish. Communities are in danger of becoming self-selecting enclaves of the like minded. The new forms of community made possible by the Internet and other technologies reinforce this sectarianism and disconnect Christian community from geographical space. Communities cease to be places where we practice communion with those that differ from us, and the ongoing argument of tradition is in danger of being reduced to a collection of dispersed, static monologues. From the perspective of this analysis, theological responses to globalization aimed at fighting cultural erosion simply reinforce these other effects of globalization. For Miller, Robert Schreiter's insight that globalization poses a challenge to and opportunity for Catholicity remains valid. Miller ended his presentation by claiming that responding to this challenge of globalization requires the preservation and development of habits, practices, and structures of communication to make local communities places of true communion, both within themselves and among the broader communion of the Church.

Responding first to Boeve, Schreiter noted that the Neo-Augustinian worldview that was being espoused in Church circles in Europe has a very paradoxical, if not contradictory, relationship to the efforts at creating a New Evangelization in Europe. This is so because it advocates seeing the Church in a superior mode from the world such that the Church has nothing to learn from the world. This is not an invitation to dialogue, and it is hard to see why a secular society would want to engage in a dialogue in which it is not seen to be a contributor. Schreiter then posed the question of how Neo-Augustinianism could show its respect for the Other. Turning to Miller's paper, Schreiter stated that Miller makes a genuine contribution to the globalization discussion by his concept of "micro-communities" that communication technology makes, which shows how globalization disengages by its homogenization. The need to cultivate ever more the habits of Catholicity is important to maintain legitimate heterogeneity, yet preserve relationships. Schreiter's response was followed by fifteen minutes of discussion with the audience.

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