

CHRIST

- Topic: "Impasse and Beyond: Engaging the Current Christological Controversies"
- Convener: Kathleen McManus, University of Portland
- Moderator: Thomas Weinandy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Presenters: Susie Paulik Babka, University of San Diego
 Anna Bonta Moreland, Villanova University
 Randall S. Rosenberg, Fontbonne University

The past decade has been marked by much activity and controversy in the area of Christology, particularly as manifest in the critical aftermath of *Dominus Iesus*. These controversies signal not only an opportunity for creativity, but also a danger of polarization and impasse. Conscious that differences in interpretive horizons require a response of genuine conversion, the session participants sought to explore the roots of contemporary Christological conflicts in dialogue-generating ways that might lead us beyond seeming impasse. The challenge of pluralism, both interreligiously and within Christianity, ran as a thread throughout the three presentations.

Susie Paulik Babka's presentation, "Comprehending the Other: Finding an Interpretation of the Incarnation through Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," engaged Masao Abe's concepts of compassion and emptying, and John Zizioulas' concepts of otherness and communion. Babka noted that, while "otherness" as the distinction between created being and divine being is necessary to any discussion of the Incarnation, it often creates an impasse when maintaining the uniqueness of Christ in interreligious dialogue. Using the related concepts in the work of Abe and Zizioulas, Babka explored this impasse toward retaining the doctrine of the Incarnation as enhancing rather than obscuring dialogue. In Christ, Christians understand God's being as including comprehension of the other: if ontology and epistemology are related, Christ is God comprehending human life in a way previously unknown by God, but implied in the original act of divine creation, especially through the self-emptying described in the kenosis hymn in Philippians. Comprehension of the other, Babka stressed, is inseparable from compassion for the other. The doctrine of the Incarnation maintains that these ideas are not abstract or otherworldly, but concrete and tangible, especially in the cross, which reveals that compassion (*suffering with*) has become suffering *as*.

Anna Bonta Moreland's presentation, "Christian Orthodoxy and Religious Pluralism: Epistemological Considerations," sought to show how the epistemological commitments of Gavin D'Costa, Terrence W. Tilley, and Perry Schmidt-Leukel shape their respective positions on the theology of religious pluralism. Moreland engaged the post-*Dominus Iesus* disputation among the three over whether other religions serve as a preparation for salvation (D'Costa), are salvific in principle (Tilley), or are different but equally valid paths to salvation (Schmidt-Leukel). Moreland set herself three tasks in her paper: First, to uncover the different epistemological assumptions lying beneath each theologian's position in order

to demonstrate how these shape varying positions on religious pluralism; second, to weigh each epistemological option against the other; and third, to take up the analysis of *Dominus Iesus* itself, answering the charge of “deep inconsistency” lodged against it. While the balance of the presentation was limited predominantly to the work of D’Costa, the later discussion provided opportunity for Moreland to elucidate her other rich points, including, in particular, the position of Tilley.

Randall Rosenberg’s presentation was entitled “The Controversy of Christ’s Knowledge: A Conversation with Lonergan and Balthasar.” Attentive to their different theological styles, Rosenberg examined the desire of both thinkers to articulate a position that included the inadequacy of the ocular metaphor for Christ’s knowledge, the centrality of Christ’s mission, and the use of mystical resources. Rosenberg maintained that Bernard Lonergan’s more theoretical treatment, that is, his explanatory account of knowledge and his analogy from knowing, represents an advance on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s lack of systematic coherence. Nevertheless, while the explanatory potential remains underemphasized in Balthasar’s work, Rosenberg urged that its aesthetic-dramatic emphasis be promoted, and not reversed. Balthasar’s mode of presentation challenges Lonergan to expand his theological style by asking whether theology is not simply about understanding, but rather about an understanding that is richly grounded in and accompanied by the aesthetic-dramatic operator on human consciousness. Rosenberg concluded by suggesting that a way beyond the impasse is for theologians to distinguish and articulate the respective human operation or level of conversion primarily operative at any given moment in the systematic-theological project.

Thomas Weinandy moderated the intense and lively discussion that ensued between the presenters and the very full audience in attendance.

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