

CHRIST

- Convener: Thomas G. Weinandy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Moderators: Patricia Walters, Rockford College
Elena Procario-Foley, Iona College
- Presenters: Kelle Lynch-Baldwin, Ohio Dominican University
John Dunn, School of Theology, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Of the many christological images that abound in our Catholic tradition, Christ the King appears to have been either largely set aside as irrelevant or because of its historical misuse for coercion, has been relegated to the periphery of faith. The wariness towards Christ the King is not without merit, especially in light of feminist, liberation, and post-colonial critiques. However, Kelle Lynch-Baldwin proposed in her paper, "Patrick of Ireland and Christ the King: Opportunities for Recovering a Tradition" that an examination of the early Irish understanding of kingship through the lens of the premier Irish saint, Patrick, provides an opportunity for rehabilitation of Christ the King.

The paper proceeds in three sections. First, there is an outline of the early Irish concept of kingship and the relationship between the Irish king and the people. Moving from the historical to the theological, the second section provides a summary sketch of the Christology presented to the Irish through the primary Patrician text, the *Confessio*. Finally, the understanding of the early Irish historical and theological foundations provides a framework that is helpful to a contemporary understanding of Christ the King.

In the Irish royal sense, the kingship of Jesus Christ becomes understood as his *governance*, where, just as Jesus proclaimed that the "reign of God is at hand," he guided his disciples by walking among them, and expanded their understanding of the covenantal relationship, the rule of God. The governance of Christ guides believers in the covenantal relationship of love of God and neighbor, as well as in the justice that flows from God's love for the world, i.e., grace. It follows then that participation in the "active love" of Christ for the world occurs in the day-to-day lives of believers where implicit acknowledgement that, as "king," Jesus Christ governs their lives. The recognition that the reign of God is both present in time and transcends time offers persons of faith today, as it was with the early Irish Church, not only a sense of harmonization of the temporal and cosmological worlds, but also a validation that, by leading lives in concert with their Christian faith, their lives *become* the prayer; "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Adopting the Irish royal model of a king as one who governs from a position of accompaniment, the kingship of Christ becomes one where, in the words of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "leadership functions as integrating, enabling, focusing, facilitating, inspiring, empowering and challenging ministry to the community." In this vein, a kyriocentric Christology excludes previous kyriarchical

structures of domination and power. Christ the King, the one who governs one's life in love and justice, is a leader who directs believers to live abundantly because he calls for their full participation in his kingdom. This entails a stance of "active love" that is intimately connected to the spiritual sphere. In this manner, understanding the royal office of Christ is relevant today, because it transforms understandings of kingship to one rooted in love rather than domination; thereby promoting an abiding faith that integrates faith and life.

John Dunn in his paper, "Women at the Cross: Christological Reflections, examined the multiply attested presence of disciples at the cross (John 19:25-6) or the presence near the cross of women and others who had followed Jesus from Galilee (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40). He asked: "What significance can we draw for a theology of the cross by treating these women and others as active and participating subjects at the event of the cross?"

Using Edward Schillebeeckx's 1995 attribution of a double contrast experience of God and suffering first in Jesus' public ministry and second his journey to the crucifixion, the presenter proposed that the women shared both contrast experiences in their own way. He concluded that not all Jesus' disciples abandoned him, at least not at the cross. Nor was Jesus unsupported in his last hours. Nor did the Reign of God, come to an end at the cross. It remained part of the women's own choice and commitment, which they held in tension with the sufferings of the dying Jesus on the cross. In this participatory treatment of the crucifixion, what is opened up here is the context of love evidenced by these faithful followers. Love, suffering, indignation at, and resistance to, the power of evil and violence, all meet together at the cross.

The presenter then proposed that our own understanding of the cross can be treated in a manner analogous to the experience of these women. The cross can be retrieved as an inclusive, participatory symbol, as an event *into which* believers are invited to enter, in a ritual way. They can live through their own contrast experience of suffering and evil, and with love, as Jesus and the women did. This participatory symbolic approach offers some connection with the theology of baptism (Cf. Mark 10:35-40 and Romans 6:3-10).

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