

SPIRITUALITY AND THE SCANDAL OF THE MUNDANE—SELECTED
SESSION

Topic:	Spirituality and the Scandal of the Mundane: Race, Racism, and Religious Identity
Convener:	Marinus Iwuchukwu, Duquesne University
Moderator:	Karen Teel, University of San Diego
Presenters:	Marinus Iwuchukwu, Duquesne University Elisabeth T. Vasko, Duquesne University
Respondent:	M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College

In his paper, “Navigating the Challenges of Race Relations: Toward Effective Inter-religious and Intra-religious Dialogue among and between Muslims and Christians as Appropriate Response to Justice and Mercy in Contemporary Society,” Marinus Iwuchukwu asked the following questions: “Does the general belief in racial bias or assumed racial superiority filter into interracial religious relationships?” As he argued, little attention has been given to race and racism within inter-religious efforts, practical and theoretical. Yet, the problem of the color line remains an issue for Christians and Muslims. Moreover, in a global economy anti-racist efforts cannot always be easily separated from inter-religious concerns. Drawing upon scholars like Jacques Dupuis, George Yancy, and M. Shawn Copeland, Iwuchukwu proposed a framework of inclusive religious pluralism attentive to race. Within this framework, the kinds of dialogues that will flourish are those of social action and of life.

In her paper, “Ordinary Evils and Ordinary Hopes in the Context of White Racism: Reflections on Spiritual Praxis,” co-authored with Duquesne University undergraduates Alexandra Ketter and Nicolas Kroger, Elisabeth T. Vasko argued that the lack of spiritual discernment on racial formation within the theological academy is scandalous as it covers up a theological imaginary rooted in the hegemonic. Drawing upon the work of M. Shawn Copeland and Emilie Townes, Vasko posited that hope lies in covenanting to commitment, not to perfection. As evil is transmitted through life’s ordinariness, so is hope’s possibility. Through storytelling, encounter, and an ethic of listening rooted in concrete relationships, it is possible to contest the race script. In this pedagogical paper, Vasko, Ketter, and Kroger began to illustrate aspects of this process by weaving their stories together in a dialogical fashion.

After drawing connections between Iwuchukwu’s and Vasko’s presentations, M. Shawn Copeland turned to the session theme and highlighted the biblical usage of the word scandal as a stumbling block. In her responses, Copeland pointed to the ways in which racial and religious division are not only obstacles to the enactment of Christ’s mission of justice and mercy, but are also idolatrous within religious frameworks that refuse to acknowledge the *imago Dei* of all persons. She concluded that spirituality is always an embodied reality through which one navigates a terrain “that too often conspires against the vulnerability and patience of living out the following of Christ.” Copeland asked whether Christianity, in its present forms, has the capacity to resist racism.

Selected Session: Spirituality and the Scandal of the Mundane

A thought-provoking discussion followed the papers and response, raising questions about the nature of teaching, listening across boundaries, and our responsibility as the CTSA to address the issues of inter-religious and interracial dialogue.

ELISABETH T. VASKO
Duquesne University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania