

NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

THE IDEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES OF EVIL AND HOPE IN AMERICAN CULTURE: REFLECTIONS ON *KEEPING FAITH* BY CORNEL WEST

Presenters: Elizabeth Linnehan, St. Joseph's University
Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union
William D. Lindsey, Belmont, North Carolina

Respondent: Cornel West, Harvard University

The text by Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (Routledge: New York, 1993), is a series of essays and reflections on some current ideological, philosophical and social problems in the U.S. Each presenter, therefore, chose some aspect of his work on which to focus and offered a short reflection on and critique of West's larger project in this chosen context.

Prof. Linnehan chose to focus particularly on chapter 7 of West's work, and commended him on his decision to engage the philosophy of Josiah Royce as a source for understanding tragedy in the American context. She agreed with West on the inadequacy of Dewey for understanding genuine social evil and gave further insights into Dewey's project. She then elaborated on some aspects of William James's work that might enhance Royce's perspective and contribute to West's analysis. Finally, she challenged West to expand his project by including a wider reflection on moral evil and moral responsibility.

Prof. Bevans offered three comments on West's work. First, he agreed with West's analysis of culture as something dynamic and always developing for better or worse; in this sense, culture is something that is not intrinsically "safe." Secondly, he concurred that a significant root problem in American culture is the ideology of individualism, and applauded West's attempt to retrieve more communal and tradition-based constructs of reality. Finally, he found in West's notion of "prophetic pragmatism" an important source of inspiration for Roman Catholic theology.

Prof. Lindsey offered a critical delineation of West's "prophetic pragmatism" and a resounding affirmation of what he termed his "prospective perspective." He then offered a possible practical application of West's work by putting it in dialogue with Prof. Anne Carr's project of "reframing theology." In West, he

finds a natural resource for just the kind of regrounding of traditional theology that Carr envisions.

Prof. West responded enthusiastically that he felt all of the presentations were very helpful and that he was quite happy to have found so many unexpected allies in the Catholic theological community. He went on to define himself as a Christian, radical democrat, twentieth century thinker which puts him in a very difficult position vis-à-vis both the wider academy and other Christian social and intellectual circles. He compares his own work to that of a jazz artist: at once both deeply grounded and practiced in the tradition, but also radically open to spontaneity, improvisation and creativity. He believes that this is the type of intellectual (as opposed to academic) most needed in our time. He went on to respond to the specific proposal of the presenters as well as questions raised from the floor. Of particular interest to the group was his distinction between "multiculturalism" and "multicontextualism."

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PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

THE THEOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Presenter: Lauren Pristas, Benedictine College, Atchison, Kansas

The presentation dealt with four documents: Acts 7:54-60, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, and the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. Prof. Pristas' historical and literary analysis of the texts emphasized the portrayal of martyrdom as union with Christ and its detailed description in contemporary liturgical language. Polycarp's martyrdom in particular is presented as a liturgical sacrifice in which the priest and the victim are one. His prayer blesses God for his past favors and present benefits (Polycarp's martyrdom is acknowledged as a blessing), and couches its petition in an expression of confident trust in God's continued fidelity. The structure is that of the Jewish *berakha* and Christian Eucharistic prayers.

On the basis of her analysis, Prof. Pristas then described seven theological characteristics of martyrdom in the early Church. First, martyrdom is a consummation in the physical order of something which has already been