

BLACK THEOLOGY

- Topic: Liberation and Communion
as the *Raison d'être* of *Missio Ad Gentes*
- Conveners: Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., Loyola University of Chicago
M. Shawn Copeland, Marquette University
- Moderator: Stephani Mitchem, University of Detroit-Mercy
- Presenter: Jamie T. Phelps, Loyola University of Chicago
- Respondents: Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology at Berkely
Susan Ross, Loyola University of Chicago
James Okoye, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago,
read by Paulinus Odozur, Spiritan International School
of theology (SIST), Enugu, Africa
Joseph Komonchak, The Catholic University of America

Phelps seems to have been inspired by three texts. The first two come from the documents of Vatican II: "the church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1) and "according to this plan [of God], the whole human race is to form one people of God, coalesce into the one body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit" (*Ad Gentes*, 7) These two Vatican II texts correspond to the biblical text of 1 Cor. 12 concerning the organic unity between the various parts of the body of Christ, and Gal. 3:28 about the equality in Christ of master and slave, male and female. The third set of texts seems to be the biblical account of the sociopolitical and internal liberation exodus (Exod. 3:7-10), to which is allied Luke 4:16-20 and Gal. 5:13-15.

Phelps sees *liberation* and *communion* as the driving force behind all church mission, and mission in the black community in particular. She isolates the contexts in the black community that require liberation, that is, the systemic racial and cultural arrangements which privileges whites and exploit blacks, renders black people and their culture invisible, promotes negative perceptions of black, and denies the richness and complexity of Black history and culture. Dominant/dominated relationships belie the pattern of relationships modeled by Jesus Christ and his Church understood as the Mystical Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13ff.).

The sociologically documented devaluation of blacks and black culture in America, including the fact that many blacks have internalized the dominant society's devaluation of them through self-hate, denies the true identity of blacks as a people made in the image and likeness of God like all other human beings. Therefore the task of mission in the black community takes on a threefold dimension.

1. Liberating blacks from their systemic oppression by supporting blacks in their self-initiated efforts to overcome black self-estrangement and the social and ecclesial estrangement of blacks within society and church as a prelude to communion.
2. Promoting the participation of blacks as subjects in the mission of the church, among blacks and nonblacks.
3. Forging a communion between blacks and nonblacks in the church which make visible the invisible communion of the members of the church among themselves, other Christians, other religious groups and even nonbelievers which is born of the Spirit.

To facilitate communion, Phelps advocates the establishment of social and ecclesial polycentric, multicultural communities and institutions.

Phelps's presentation was followed by critical responses centered on the meaning and significance of conversion, liberation, inculturation, sacramental mediation. Don Gelpi approached the issues through the lens of understanding personal and sociopolitical conversion in light of the three fundamental relationships believers have with the Holy Spirit: (1) justifying faith, (2) sanctification, and (3) charismatic empowerment of conversion. The theological virtues make it possible for Christians to aspire to liberate the oppressed by converting oppressive sinful groups into communities of graced sharing. Hope transforms our affectivity and enables us to hope and desire what God hope for and desires. Faith transforms our intellect and enables us to perceive reality through God's vision. Practical Christian charity arises in the context of personal moral conversion and transforms and directs our conscience (moral values) into a search for a just sociopolitical order.

Susan Ross reminded the participants that those who experience the white privilege of participating in the dominant culture have to acknowledge their complicity with the prevailing patterns of institutionalized sin and oppression on both the personal and social levels within the church. She cited a current pastoral situation in which a Southwest Side Catholic Athletic Association in the Chicago archdiocese voted against including the athletic teams from an African-American parish and added specific conditions for membership before admitting an Hispanic parish's team. She suggested that a sacramental dynamic should find expression in the resolution of the conflict by bringing the communities together for focused dialogue and common worship as part of the healing and reconciliation process.

James Okoye noted that Phelps's paper clearly identified the negative impact of the oppression of dominant culture, but not the positive reality that black African slave ancestors and their descendents had forged a new culture which was a product of their new experience of black people in the new land. Although the African American values of family, religion and community clash with the American ethos and are in danger of collapsing, one needs to shore up and root the church mission in this rich cultural soil of the African-African American

religious tradition. Okoye further cautioned against universalizing an "interpretive model," even that of liberation as recorded in Exodus. He suggests that the Covenant motif might be a more successful interpretive key for African Americans who need to place full trust in God, while at the same time seizing control of their destiny. Okoye suggested that the establishment of polycentric and multicultural communities and institutions need to be realized on the local parish and diocesan levels. The church understood as the inclusive "family of God" captures something of the African American soul.

Joseph Komonchak noted that the conciliar fathers did not speak directly of the social justice aspects of mission, but focused on church mission largely in terms of the encounter of cultures. The first two decades after the council were marked by an enormous emphasis on inculturation and overcoming "what was called Eurocentrism." The post-Vatican II Church acknowledged the wondrous variety of human cultures through the efforts of the church to embody itself in various cultures. He noted that a more recent shift in ecclesiology recognizes that catholicity is not simply a matter of acknowledging and treasuring cultural diversity. Catholicity is realized only when cultural and other forms of diversity are somehow integrated into a whole. Offering a cautionary note, Komonchak reflected on several contemporary instances in which insistence on cultural integrity has taken the bloody form of white supremacy or tribal and ethnic clashes (Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo). Komonchak suggested that perhaps the challenges of the historical moment rather than culture should be taken as the essential defining character of the local church. At times cultural integrity might need to be stressed. In other cases, the challenge will be to go beyond the cultural distinctiveness to a culture-transcending integration. A lively group discussion focused on multicultural churches; race and culture theory and the dialectic of cultural integrity and cultural transcendence ensued.

JAMIE T. PHELPS, O.P.
Loyola University Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

LATINO/A THEOLOGY

- Topic: *Missio ad Gentes* in the Context of Latino/a Catholicism
Convener: Orlando O. Espín, University of San Diego
Presenters: Gary Riebe-Estrella, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago
Miguel H. Diaz, St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary,
Boynton Beach, Florida

Each of the speakers made a presentation for about twenty-five minutes, followed by questions from, and dialogue with, those in attendance.