

FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY/METHOD—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Susie Paulik Babka, University of San Diego  
Moderator: Stephen Okey, Boston College  
Presenters: Lieven Boeve, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven  
Judith Gruber, Loyola University New Orleans  
Julius-Kei Kato, King's University College at the  
University of Western Ontario

In “Joseph Ratzinger’s Conversion to Truth: A Reading Key for a Theological-Ecclesial Programme,” Dr. Boeve suggests that one possible explanation for Pope Benedict XVI’s resignation is the cognitive dissonance that resulted from the conflict between his belief that the Church is a beacon of truth in the world and the reality that the church has fallen victim to its own hubris. Underlying this is Benedict’s understanding of conversion, which is the turning away from egocentrism toward the divine. Through confession, the individual is led by the gift of God’s love to the truth represented in Christ. Because this truth is seen as objective, there exists an asymmetrical, hierarchical, and oppositional relationship between the Church and the world, and so the Church must call the world to conversion. However, the failures of the Church, most notably the worldwide clergy sexual abuse crisis and cover-up, have undermined the moral authority of the Church to call for conversion. Boeve suggests that Benedict’s resignation is an effort at dissonance reduction, both for the former pope personally and for the Catholic community more broadly. His resignation may open space for the Church to recognize its own need for conversion.

In her paper “Postcolonial Conversions: Displacement as a *Locus Theologicus*,” Dr. Gruber argues that postcolonial deconstructions not only challenge theology but also provide resources for theology to consider the centrality of conversion. Common to many postcolonial thinkers is the claim that identity is dependent on relationships of difference with “others,” which Gruber characterizes as “hybridity.” The Catholic tradition has itself emerged from this process of differentiation. Yet rather than see this as contrasting with traditional, teleological interpretations of history, Gruber uses Michel de Certeau’s notion of “the weakness of faith” to show how displacement is central to the Catholic tradition. De Certeau argues that Christianity is based on the absence of the original founding event that has been interpreted and reiterated by the tradition. The passing of this tradition relies upon a particular way of speaking, which in Christianity is the ongoing appropriation and conversion of other ways of speaking. Gruber argues that Christianity is therefore always a process of conversion that, despite its risks, enables theologians to offer more accurate and complex interpretations of Christian identity.

In “Conversion in a Postmodern World: From Monoreligiosity to Interreligiosity,” Dr. Kato argues that we ought to be religious *inter*religiously rather than *multi*religiously. Interreligiosity recognizes that not only is our world full of diverse persons and cultures, but that in the current context of globalization all persons are becoming hybridized themselves. This ought to inculcate a hermeneutic of suspicion toward exclusionary or imperialistic approaches to other faiths. What this means for a postmodern understanding of conversion is that one ought to engage with members of other faiths openly, risking the encounter and the possible

recognition that God has graced others as much as God has graced us. Kato interprets the Christian teaching on the Incarnation to mean that God subjects God's self to the process of human development, and so radical diversity and hybridity ought to be seen as part of God's plan for humanity. While Kato recognizes that this may be difficult for many Catholics to accept due to the metanarrative of "no salvation outside the church," he hopes they will come to see that conversion from monoreligiosity to interreligiosity is a fuller way of encountering the mystery of God.

Following this, the session featured a lively conversation. Questions included the role of Ratzinger's developing understanding of the Incarnation in his view of the Church-world relationship and the other factors contributing to his resignation. The recurring theme of hybridity was also highlighted in Gruber's and Kato's papers in relation to the difficulty of asserting identity and the asymmetrical relations of power that often mark hybridity. The papers were further interlinked by an overarching question regarding the common ground between Benedict and postcolonial discourse in terms of autonomy and the hiddenness of power.

STEPHEN OKEY  
*Boston College*  
*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*