

CHRISTOLOGY

Topic: Dialogue: After Auschwitz, after John Paul II
Convener: Tatha Wiley, Metropolitan State University
Moderator: Thomas West, College of St. Catherine
Presenters: Tobie Tondi, Rosemont College
John Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union

In the first paper of the session, Tobie Tondi emphasized that from its initial formulation Christology has been “in dialogue.” She focused on three twentieth-century events as “orienting” for Christology and soteriology. First, appealing to Rabbi Irving Greenberg’s proposal for both Judaism and Christianity to reconsider traditional articulations of belief after the Holocaust, Tondi first discussed the acknowledgment of the influence of Christian supersessionism in the Holocaust as one of the most fundamental challenges to Christianity in the twentieth century. She then considered the Second Vatican Council as the “orienting event” that broadened the Catholic view of God’s universal offer of salvation in its understanding of world religions. Finally, working out a constructive direction of her own, Tobie reoriented traditional Christological and soteriological beliefs in the new cosmology.

John Pawlikowski titled his paper “Pope Benedict XVI on Jews and Judaism: What He Has Said and What Might We Expect?” In his view, Pope Benedict XVI has clearly demonstrated during his brief papacy a strongly critical attitude towards antisemitism and Nazism. There is little doubt that he will emphasize these themes during the remainder of his tenure. The one troubling aspect of his stance thus far, however, has been his insistence that Nazism was a neopagan reality that took over the soul of Europe much as secularism is taking hold in the Europe of today. No scholar would deny Nazism’s neopagan dimension. But what Benedict has not done is express any clear recognition of Christian complicity in the Holocaust. In that regard his outlook is weaker than that of Pope John Paul II. Prior to coming to the papacy, Benedict offered some interesting theological kernels about a possible distinctive (but not distinct) redemptive path for Jews. But these are only kernels and need fuller development. Whether he will issue any major theological paper on Christian-Jewish relations during his papacy remains to be seen. In a March 2006 Wednesday general audience he expressed views which appeared to return us to the replacement theology of the past. Some conservative Catholics interpreted this address as a papal call to convert Jews. In his somewhat controversial address at Birkenau, Benedict did clearly affirm the continuing validity of the Jewish covenant. This is a positive move.

Both papers provoked questions from the twenty-five participants in the session. John Pawlikowski was asked to speculate further on what the new pope’s views on the relation of Christianity to other religions and the way Benedict conceives of their salvific value. Tobie Tondi addressed a question about the depth of revision needed in Christian theology, given its supersessionist claims. On attitudes of Christians toward those of other religious traditions, group discussion

highlighted the difference between the lives of ordinary persons who, in neighborhoods, schools and workplaces, are engaging with those of other religious commitments and those whose work within the Church keeps them at a distance from non-Christians. As one participant suggested, it is increasingly difficult for the former to discount the salvific value of other religions. The fear that the Church is gradually returning to a pre-Vatican II theology of religion was expressed. The group's discussion showed the continuing relevance of the question of how Christians conceive of their relationship to Jews and sensitivity to the way in which the traditional symbols of covenant and election are understood.

The session ended with appreciative remarks to this year's presenters and an invitation to participants to contribute papers for the 2007 meeting. Those interested are encouraged to contact the present convener at <tathawiley103@msn.com>.

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