

SPIRITUALITY – TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: One Baptism
 Convener: C. Vanessa White, Catholic Theological Union
 Moderator: Michael Rubbelke, Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary
 Presenter: Simeiqi He, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology
 Presenter: Emmanuel Osigwe, Mount St. Mary's University
 Respondent: Hansol Goo, Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary

The Spirituality Topic Session featured two papers and a response on the theme of “One Baptism.” Michael Rubbelke as moderator gave a brief introduction of the theme and the presenters.

What followed first was Simeiqi He's presentation. She gave a detailed paper on the topic of “One Baptism, One Life and One Love: Spiritual Convergence between the East and West.” Using the work of French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, He looked at the theme of baptism through Teilhard de Chardin's concept and writings on original sin. She stated that Teilhard rejected the original writings of original sin and saw the theological necessity of baptism as a soul's reawakening into life. He also gave light to the influence of Asia on the writings of Teilhard, specifically the influence of China, where he spent over two decades during the time of war, conducting geological, archaeological, and paleontological work. He saw the merging of the East and the West as essential so that the “earth can be complete. Besides focusing on the work of Teilhard, He also turned her attention to the contributions of Asian scholar Fang Dongmei, one of the most renowned Chinese philosophers of the twentieth century, who brought Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity into a creative synthesis, while invoking many Teilhard's concepts. She stated that both Teilhard and Dongmei agreed that the concept of original sin in its original rendering can no longer address the realities of the modern world.

Emmanuel Osigwe looked at the perspective of one baptism from the context of the spirituality and experience of African indigenous initiation rites. He opened his remarks by looking at the significance of Vatican II's (*Gaudium et Spes, Nostra Aetate, Ad Gentes Divinitus*) articulation of the importance of culture in renewed interest in the understanding and dialogue between Christian and non-Christian religions. As he stated in his presentation “the council adopted a salvation history approach that sees these older religions as *preparatio evangelica*, with inherent goodness or elements of goodness. We can properly see cultures as a locus of the divine.” He particularly saw as important, the council's reinstatement of the catechumenate with its emphasis on formation. Ultimately Osigwe's presentation focused on the intersection of faith and culture, from the perspective of identity creation through the initiation processes of indigenous African culture and the Roman Catholic Sacraments of Initiation. This shift in appreciation of the richness of diverse cultures to the understanding of faith has been welcomed by the African communities. Osigwe stated, “For the Churches in Africa, this new openness to cultures represents a paradigmatic shift.” He continued, quoting Laurenti Megasa, a Kenya theologian who states, “Contact between Christianity and African religion has historically been predominantly a monologue, bedeviled by assumptions prejudicial to the latter with Christianity culturally more vocal and

ideologically more aggressive.” This new appreciation and understanding of cultural difference have contributed to a greater openness to African initiation rites. Osigwe, specifically looks at the Ikwerre initiation rituals which are deeply rooted in their spirituality and are largely similar to Christian initiation rites. As Osigwe stated, “Located in the southern part of Nigeria, the traditional religious spirituality of the Ikwerre is the fulcrum of life of the people.” Osigwe gave a brief synopsis of the initiation of Ikwerre into adulthood into age sets or groups from an early age. Within these rites, the individuals are welcomed into the community and serve the purpose of rejuvenating the whole group. This is a time of immense joy and celebration. Osigwe related many similarities between Christian initiation rites of baptism and confirmation with the Ikwerre initiation rites into adulthood. Some of these include the importance of telling the story of the communities, the selection of a “guardian” or “sponsor” with these communities to watch over and guide the person who is to be initiated, also a time of seclusion or retreat as the person prepares to be initiated. Osigwe’s conclusion focused on the importance of inculturation as one looks at the journey of initiation.

Hansol Goo gave an eloquent response in light of the two papers given. Time was then given for questions and clarifications in light of the two papers and response.

C. VANESSA WHITE
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois