

WHITE PRIVILEGE AND RACISM

- Topic: White Privilege and the Work of Reconciliation  
Conveners: Laurie Cassidy, Trinity College  
          Alex Mikulich, St. Joseph's College  
Moderator: Cara Anthony, University of St. Thomas  
Presenter: Alex Mikulich, St. Joseph's College  
Respondent: Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Monmouth University

This session launched the twofold work of this developing group: to facilitate an ongoing critical reflection on why dialogue on racism and white privilege is a moral imperative for white Roman Catholic theologians and to investigate the impact of white privilege and racism on Church, society, and academy.

Using the convention's theme of reconciliation as a touch stone the session began with Alex Mikulich's paper entitled, "Working through White Male Privilege on the Way to the Cross: A Reinterpretation of Nicholas of Cusa's Learned Ignorance through M. Shawn Copeland's Praxis of Solidarity." Mikulich contended that spirituality and praxis of solidarity before the cross of Jesus offers the condition of the possibility of white male theologians to gain learned ignorance of gender and racial privilege and the capacity for repentance for complicity in racism.

Mikulich's argument developed through his reinterpretation of Nicholas of Cusa's spirituality of learned ignorance using the lens of M. Shawn Copeland's praxis of solidarity before the cross. He introduced Nicholas of Cusa's notion of learned ignorance as a spiritual path and described Cusa's three forms of ignorance. The main body of Mikulich's presentation reinterpreted Cusa's learned ignorance through Copeland's praxis of solidarity as a way to address white male privilege. Mikulich argued that at this crossroads, white male theologians may yet pursue the grace of Cusa's "wise fools" and learned ignorance of the multivariant ways that Black Catholic, African American, Latina, and First People's of the Americas have transformed Christianity and democracy itself.

In her response to Mikulich's presentation, Barbara Andolsen connected Cusa's unlearned ignorance with the rhetoric of white privilege today—a self-proclaimed, "colorblind," individualistic ideology. Andolsen explained that advocates of color blindness insist bigoted personal attitudes toward African-Americans are ancient history. Therefore, each person has an equal opportunity to succeed based solely on individual talent and diligence. Such obstinate social blindness allows whites to evade the demands of social justice. Justice requires that we examine regularly the social costs of white racism. Andolsen provided brief examples of racial disparities among children in the areas of health, income, education and exposure to the criminal justice system. She asked about the implications of current parish restructuring in a society characterized by *de facto* racial segregation in housing. Andolsen applauded Mikulich's emphasis on the virtue of solidarity, but raised concerns about a temptation for white theologians

to co-opt black theology for their purposes instead of confronting the full dimensions of white racism.

A lively conversation followed these presentations. John O'Brien raised two concerns. O'Brien challenged Mikulich about the place of resurrection and hope in his argument. He also wondered how white scholars who are also members of oppressed ethnic groups engage issues of white privilege. Sylvia Washington observed that white people often claim oppression as a way to distance themselves from understanding how they benefit from their whiteness. She also explained that people of color coopt the struggle for racial justice by not telling the truth in their interactions with white people. Anna Perkins explained the Jamaican concept of the "educated fools" and how this idea challenges us to see how education can impede the examination and owning of privilege. Colleen Carpenter Cullinan returned to Andolsen's question about how white scholars utilize the work of people of color. This question drew many of the participants into an energized exploration of the complex ethical issues involved in white people utilizing the scholarly work of people of color. As Cara Anthony brought the session to a close the participants complained that the time limit of the session had come too quickly, and many remained for the business meeting that followed.

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#### THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Topic: Critical Questions in Theological Anthropology  
 Convener: Anne M. Clifford, Duquesne University  
 Presenter: Erin Lothes Biviano, Fordham University  
 Respondent: Robert Daly, Boston College  
 Presenters: Jean Donovan, Duquesne University  
 Donald Cozzens, John Carroll University

This second session of Theological Anthropology as a developing group addressed two important questions: "What Is the Place of Sacrifice in Christian Identity?" and "How Are Sex, Sin and Grace to be Conceived in the Midst of the Church's Sex Abuse Crisis?"

Erin Lothes Biviano addressed sacrifice in the Christian tradition. She drew attention to the paradox of the Gospel imperative that one must lose one's life to save it (cf. Mt 10:39, Lk 17:33), which puts self-sacrifice and self-realization into tension. Arguing that it is not sacrifice that should be rejected, but aberrant theologies about it, Biviano proposed how the power of sacrifice to contribute to