

GENERATIONS RESPOND TO *SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM*: 50 YEARS LATER—
INVITED SESSION

Topic: Generations Respond to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: 50 Years Later
Moderator: Patricia Beattie Jung, Saint Paul School of Theology
Presenters: Mary Hines, Emmanuel College
Bryan Massingale, Marquette University
Elisabeth Vasko, Duquesne University

In this session three generations of Catholics responded to the impact on the liturgy of *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC) on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. Mary Hines reflected on her response to SC from the perspective of someone who was already in college during the Second Vatican Council and thus from someone who has clear memories of the preconciliar Church. She noted that three insights from the council captured her imagination in those heady days of the sixties. (1) Far from an earlier pattern of withdrawal, the Church had turned to the world in a spirit of true dialogue, with openness even to learning from the world. (2) Images of the Church in *Lumen gentium* (LG) were far more welcoming and inclusive of the gifts of the laity, especially of women. (3) And perhaps most extraordinary of all, LG no. 12 affirmed that the work of the Spirit was not confined to the hierarchy.

Hines argued that the Liturgical Movements in Boston (and elsewhere) in the late 1950s and early 60s paved the way for the three-fold emphases of SC on (1) the connection of liturgy and social justice, (2) openness to ecumenical connections, and (3) the full participation of the laity. In spite of the current retreat from much of the council's promise, Hines remains convinced that the momentum for change and renewal they unleashed is an ongoing work of the Spirit that will not ultimately be undone.

The second speaker, Bryan Massingale, opened with a story from his boyhood. Following the discovery one Sunday morning that someone had spray-painted black the face of the Mary statue on the church grounds, his black Catholic parish and family embarked on a difficult, if not divisive, debate: was this an act of racial pride or a desecration? Massingale argued that an important legacy of SC was its revolutionary teaching on inculturation (nos. 37, 39, 119, and 123). Embedded in the liturgical renewal inspired by SC are fundamental questions: how should we image God? Does any culture have the right to claim to be the normative or privileged vehicle for accessing the Divine? If God can be approached solely or best through Latin and European cultural products in worship, what does that say about those for whom this culture can only be accessed in a secondary way or through assimilation?

For Massingale, the promise and challenge of SC are concretely experienced in the ongoing project to create forms of worship and prayer that are “authentically Black and truly Catholic.” And yet this, like other efforts at liturgical inculturation, has encountered stiff resistance. Massingale noted that many do not consider non-European cultural expressions really “Catholic”—or even the “sacred!” He asked: can the Church truly be the Body of Christ if operationally the divine is revealed, mediated, or encountered only in white/European cultural products? Do not such operational beliefs and practices make the Church complicit in idolatry?

The final panelist, Elisabeth Vasko, engaged SC from the perspective of a young Catholic feminist, not yet born at the time of the Council. She argued that worship only makes sense when it goes hand in hand with mission, and this is only possible if and when all the faithful have the opportunity to participate in shaping Christian identity and mission. The struggle for full active

participation of all in the context of kyriarchy is a matter of justice that extends beyond the struggle for women's ordination and the use of inclusive language. It is a struggle for personal integrity in the midst of hegemonic discourses that seek to silence through a politics of fear, intimidation, and shame. This vantage found vivid powerful existential expression in the story of her discernment of whether to baptize her daughter into the Church, which she has known only as stubborn rather than open to change.

At issue is not only the way hegemonic discourses marginalize those who are already vulnerable in the community but also the way they usurp the powers of the imagination. Calls to doctrinal obedience do not invite and inspire disparate groups to come together and work toward human flourishing. It is time for a new conversation, one that invites passionate engagement with the human community and the natural world. Participation in this conversation is the responsibility of all the faithful.

Vasko claims that young people are only going to be willing to commit themselves to the Church if they see it as welcoming and relevant. The creation of such a faith communion is going to require that the entire people of God, including the Roman Catholic hierarchy, get serious about reform: within its internal structures of governance and its promotion of social justice in the public sphere. This is where members of the current hierarchy can take a cue from their own history, as many of the documents of the council call Christians to *metanoia*.

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