

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Topic: Theological Anthropology from the Margins

Part III. Discussion of the Impact of Race, Culture, Class,
and Gender on Theological Anthropology

Moderator: Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

Panelists: Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

Orlando Espín, University of San Diego

Carl Starkloff, S.J., Regis College, Toronto

Christine Firer Hinze, Marquette University, Milwaukee

The third and final session of this three-session dialogue began with each presenter recapitulating the main points of their major presentation.

Carl Starkloff began his review, identifying the work of Victor Turner as the beginning point of his reflection upon marginality and liminality. Starkloff distinguished between marginality and liminality: "marginality into classes describes rejection through exclusions, while liminality symbolizes a deeper solidarity by means of temporary ritual and segregation for purpose of negotiating crises in life."

Starkloff restated his thesis, that is, that the process of liminality which has been ritualized in traditional cultures might provide a model for understanding and supporting "liminal persons" going through "a process of growth and healing crises" in modern society. He envisioned the Church as the source of the *communitas*, that is, those "designated persons who are 'there for' those undergoing" the crises. The challenge to theology posed by the life-engendering rituals of liminality is "to nurture the capacity of structure to encourage the liminal life-giving processes, without reducing those involved in them to the state of alienated classes."

Christine Firer Hinze restated the major points of her presentation by suggesting that an adequate understanding of the human in relation to gender must be framed by a correct understanding and practice with regard to marginalization and margins, and the relations of power. Hinze defined marginalization as an unchosen and destructive exclusion, which either betrays interdependence by withdrawing from, cutting off, or eliminating the other, or transgresses authentic separation by assimilating or subjugating the otherness of the other (see bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*). Citing the works of Darryl Trimiew, Sharon Welch and bell hooks, Hinze suggested that margins "can be privileged sites for seeing and hearing; boundaries that establish identity and healthy connections; places 'outside' from which critique and efforts at resistance and transformation may be launched; fences with gates that are salutary sites for learning what being human is about, and for struggling to live in authentically human ways." With regard to power, Hinze insisted that it is imperative that a theological understanding of gender attend to the "dynamics,

structures and patterns of power as it enables and constrains, shapes and shatters, builds up and corrupts human be-ing, in every concrete circumstance."

Having set the ground rules for theologizing about gender, Hinze argued for a "reflective, incarnational solidarity as the way to truthful and just understanding of humanity as male and female." She pressed this understanding further in the context of feminist theologies. Hinze argued that the "we women" of feminist theology arising among white middle-class professional women must include what political theorist Jodi Dean calls a "situated hypothetical third," which "is contextualized, situated in particular circumstances, and represents the specific needs and questions of persons a given dialogue may not be taking into account. Inviting and requiring thinking about and acting in relation to this 'situated third' fruitfully destabilizes any given 'we' by reminding its members of others outside and pressing them to think and act in ways that do take the third into account." Feminists, Hinze argued, must enter into solidarity with "men, in all their differences" and, as Michelle Messner suggests, with "multiracial feminists" as a condition of coming to "more adequate understanding of the human as male and female, gay and straight, in varying class, race, and cultural situations."

Using the works of Jodi Dean and Shawn Copeland among others, Hinze insisted that "reflective solidarity" as a feminist practice engage in critical thinking about, and acting with, those different from ourselves. Hinze concluded by stressing that "only from within a dynamic matrix of incarnationally solidaristic communications, relations, and practices can the human as male and female be truthfully glimpsed and responsibly theorized."

Orlando Espín began by defining culture as "the historically shared means and ways through which a people unveil themselves (to themselves first and then secondarily to others) as human." He continued by defining the centrality of culture to human life. Without culture a people fail to be human. Every aspect of life is cultural, therefore humanization and dehumanization are cultural processes.

Shifting to theological categories, Espín discussed the relationship between grace and sin to culture. The theology of sin and grace are central themes relating to cultural processes. The denial of the importance of culture is the denial of the very foundations of the Incarnation. Acculturation is essentially a dialogue between a cultural gospel entering into dialogue with another culture, that is, another way of being human. The moment of acculturation is a graced moment. The dynamics of one's own or another's culture which oppress (dehumanize) life are sinful. No culture is free of sinful dynamics.

Espín then focused on the starting point for a social-historical discussion of theological anthropology. To articulate the theological anthropology of a particular cultural group, one must start at the concrete level of the local and the familial. One must start with the ordinary, daily lives of a people (*lo cotidiano*), lives which are both graced and sinful. From the standpoint of popular religiosity, the mature women are the leaders and interpreters of religion. Mature women are the mediators of the culture and therefore of grace. Mature women of the cultural group attend to the victims in the daily relationship of the people.

Jamie T. Phelps began by providing participants with two definitions of racism. The first was a sociopolitical definition developed by James Boggs. The second was a moral definition circulated by the U.S. Bishops in their pastoral letter, "Brothers and Sisters to Us: Racism in our Day."

Phelps then articulated two theoretical assumptions which undergirded her paper: first, that "race" is a social construction which is the product of nonvalidated, liberal, philosophical, scientific and religious theories about the relation between humanity and a person's mental, physical, and physiological characteristics, most notably skin color; and second, that "racism" is a reality which has served to justify the oppression of peoples and nations based on the false premise of race. She stated that although the Church and society have promulgated universality as an ideal of human community and taught that our Church, like God's grace, is inclusive and available to all, often its discriminatory and racist practices contradict these ideals and teachings.

Phelps drew on the works of David Theo Goldberg, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, and Cornel West to uncover the paradoxical way in which the more "modernity committed itself progressively to idealized principles of liberty, equality, fraternity" and the more it "insist[ed] upon the moral irrelevance of race" (David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 3) under the pressures of colonial discovery and the practice of slavery, the more a multiplication of racial identities became possible, thus prompting practices of racial exclusion and rationalization. In this regard, Phelps paid close and critical attention to the works of Kant and Hume relative to race. She then posed several questions for further theological research. First, Is the exclusive anthropology contained in most theological writings and their silence about the issue of race indicative that our theology, like our philosophy is all too often constructed within the realm of a universalism which ignores historical pluralism and particularism? Second, Are the contradictions between the Church's proclamation and its practice rooted in an implicit adoption of the false philosophical assumptions of "the human" promulgated by the Enlightenment philosophers? Third, Do the changes found in Church documents relative to the historical experiences of Blacks, for example, slavery, segregation, discrimination, and racism, indicate a shift in the philosophical assumptions which contradicted doctrinal proclamations? Phelps concluded with the assertion that the contradictions between the Church's contemporary assertion about the universality of the human and the Church's exclusionary practices in relation to African-Americans will only be overcome when a profound shift is made in the Church's philosophical assumptions about the human which were absorbed uncritically in the modern milieu.

A lively discussion ensued during which several themes emerged: first, the impact of economic class in relation to multicultural, multiracial gender analysis; second, the absence of a body of theological work relative to the current welfare debate, particularly as regards poor women of color and poor white women; third, the impact of class, gender, and race on theological reflection regarding work; fourth, the impact of these issues (race, culture, class, and gender) on

theological education in terms of faculty and student relationship to the "cultural other." Fifth, Is our theology sensitive to the need to reinterpret our theological categories, including that of theological anthropology, in light of the changing racial, cultural, gender and class horizons of our global church and society?

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SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

Topic: Locating Liturgy: Worship in Its Contexts

Presenters: Nwaka Chris Egbulem, Amen Foundation, Washington D.C.

James Empereur, San Fernando Cathedral, San Antonio

William Reiser, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester

Susan Roll, Christ the King Seminary, Buffalo

Having devoted its recent meetings to the theoretical work of such figures as Kilmartin, Chauvet, and Schmemmann, the group turned more concertedly to questions of practice in this year's session. The four panelists presented papers providing description and analysis of liturgies in the following contexts, respectively: African, gay and lesbian, Latino, and women's communities.

Drawing from his extensive research and writing on the rite Zairois in the Congo, Nwaka Chris Egbulem posited the Zairian Mass as the premiere result of the inculturation movement in Africa. In both its achievements and shortcomings, the rite contains lessons for the universal church about the process of inculturation as an encounter between gospel and culture that is characterized by genuine reciprocity and mutual respect. An adequate treatment of the Zairian rite requires attention to both the ritual text and its actual celebration, especially since the latter easily surpasses the former in its engagement of and sensitivity to the local culture. The text is conservative in that it is based on the structure and content of the Mass of Paul VI, albeit with notable modifications. The introductory part, which includes a litany that individually names official saints but only collectively refers to African ancestors, is symptomatic of the compromised quality of the text as an exercise in inculturation. In their celebrations of the rite, however, the local churches have successfully incorporated the unique genius of their music, dance, orality, poetry, and costumes. In addition to these cultic elements of African life, Egbulem perceives the further need to introduce the African experience of conflict and the struggle for liberation into the liturgy.

In discussing the gay and lesbian context, James Empereur worked from the premise that good ritual is an expression of spirituality. The church's liturgy has the potential for gay and lesbian persons to be an antidote to the denigration of their bodies experienced among family, society, and church. To the extent that