

CATHOLIC STUDIES

- Topic: *Missio Ad Gentes* and the Academy: Programs in Catholic Studies
 Convener: Thomas F. Ryan, St. Thomas University
 Presenters: Mary Ann Hinsdale, Boston College
 Nancy A. Dallavalle, Fairfield University
 Vincent J. Miller, Georgetown University

The presenters in this group, together with several other scholars, have gathered regularly over the last few years to examine Catholic studies and have publicized their findings in various fora. They have learned that the term "Catholic Studies" is polyvalent. On the one hand, it can refer to something that is done, to the study of Catholicism across times and cultures, in its sources and influences, in all its richness and ambiguity. The term also can refer to a new and increasingly important phenomenon at Catholic, private, and state universities around the country, that is, the coalescence of Catholic studies into programs. Some conceive of these programs as interdisciplinary *missiones* flowing out from the postmodern academy. Others see them as evangelizing *missiones* to the academy. The group's presentations addressed the challenges posed by the second sense of this term, that is, by the emerging programs in the field.

Hinsdale's presentation, "Catholic Studies: Evangelizing or Colonized?" was based on her 1999 investigation of Catholic Studies programs currently in operation in the U.S. and Canada. It sketched a fourfold typology of programs or approaches: apologetic, cultural studies, intellectual tradition, formational. While most use a combination of these approaches, with one or two dominating, she regards the emergence of these programs in North American Catholic colleges and universities as a response to the challenge of "handing on the faith" to a generation thoroughly steeped in the culture of postmodernity. Those entrusted with handing on the Catholic Intellectual tradition (theologians, educators, and pastoral ministers) in such a context can learn much from the development of contextual theologies. Critically responding to John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's "Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures" (1993), her presentation used the work of Aquino, Kwok, Schreier, and Tilley to argue for an *intercultural* approach to developing a Catholic Studies curriculum.

Dallavalle's presentation, "Catholic Studies and Preaching to the Choir: Lessons from Women's Studies," compared the overlapping concerns of Women's Studies and Catholic Studies programs. To the extent that they serve as advocacy programs, they suggest that students "need" this information. They see themselves as providing a countervoice in academia, and they offer a formative community. They also share legitimacy concerns as academic programs, concerns which include the questions of defining scholarship in the face of established constituencies, of defining standards for expertise, and of whether

such studies programs will result in their topic being highlighted or marginalized in the academy. Finally, Dallavalle suggested three points of direct scholarly interplay between Catholic Studies and Women's Studies. First, each offers a critical historical perspective, seeking to overcome accounts that are overly romanticized or overly focused on victimization or decline. Each is also particularly concerned with materiality and the body. Lastly, each sees itself as interdisciplinary and at the same time models the problems of conceiving of a truly interdisciplinary field of study.

Miller's presentation, "Deconstructing Disciplines: Catholic Studies and Theology," sketched two approaches to Catholic Studies programs. He did so not only to confirm the variety of forms they can take, but also to highlight concerns about their relation to theology. The first approach ("expressive/deductive") studies the culture of Catholicism as an expression of its particular religious/doctrinal vision. Full appreciation of this religious *Weltanschauung* can only be obtained through comprehensive engagement with its manifold intellectual, artistic and cultural manifestations. The second ("analytical/inductive") takes a social history or cultural studies approach. Learned discourses are contextualized within the complexities of a concrete culture, and popular culture is valorized as a useful entrée into the complexities of the tradition. Miller expressed methodological concerns about the first since, in his review of programs, he has found that it often provides a way of doing theology under another name and without attending to the critical problems that have emerged in the discipline in the last three decades. Both approaches raise funding questions. If programs are simply descriptive in mode or uncritically restorationist, then they could siphon financial support away from theology programs, particularly if the latter advance critiques that disturb the sensibilities of wealthy donors.

After a short break, there ensued a lively discussion primarily against the background of Catholic Studies programs at Catholic institutions. Some wondered about the proper mix of advocacy and critique of Catholicism within these programs. Others questioned the extent to which an institution's founding charism, its students' socioeconomic backgrounds, or its status as a coed or single-sex institution affect whether it develops a program and, if so, what kind.

The session was well attended. Though the end of its allotted time brought the group's formal discussion to a premature close, it continued informally afterward. The scholarly attention devoted to this topic, the prevalence of programs around the country, and the lively conversation at this session all suggest the importance of this topic and the need for continuing study of it.

THOMAS F. RYAN
St. Thomas University
Miami, Florida