

PROGRAM GROUPS

WOMEN'S CONSULTATION IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Ecclesiology, Authority, and Empowerment:
What Does Feminist Ecclesiology Have to Say about
Where We Are and Where We Want to Be?
- Conveners: Dawn M. Nothwehr, Catholic Theological Union
Colleen Carpenter Cullinan, College of St. Catherine
- Moderator: Elisabeth Brinkmann, College of New Rochelle
- Panelists: Jamie T. Phelps, Xavier University of Louisiana
Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, Catholic Theological Union
Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Manhattan College

Claiming that women have been faithful and steadfast to the prophetic and healing mission of Jesus Christ from the very beginning, Jamie T. Phelps discussed the progress of women's participation in the church community in "Women in Church and Society: Where Have We Been, Where are we Going, and for What Purpose?" Phelps shaped several questions about the developments on the part of women and of the episcopacy that have helped or hindered women's full participation in the church. Phelps highlighted potential transformative moments of dialogue with women in the recent history of the church, including *Mulieris Dignitatem*; the efforts to draft the Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns by the U. S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB); and the USCCB support of lay ecclesial ministry of women and men. While serious inadequacies exist in these documents' interpretations of women's theological anthropology, pastoral concerns, and capacity to act *in persona Christi*, each represent partial advances toward women's full ecclesial participation. Recalling the founding of the Oblate Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of the Holy Family in the antebellum period to the formation of the National Black Sisters Conference, Phelps pointed out that black Catholic women have a long history of claiming identity in the church. While regretting that efforts of white, black, and other women of color often proceed on parallel rather than overlapping paths, Phelps urged women to clarify "What moves us forward?"

In "From Orthoproxy to Orthopraxis: The Ethics of Right Representation," Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández contended that to speak with credibility, one must do so grounded in experience. This is particularly critical when one speaks representatively, in the place of another. When this representation is based on a presumed commonality in experience that Nanko-Fernández terms "homoproxy," it robs agency from the very persons represented. Because of the pervasiveness of homoproxy she experiences as Latina in the church and academy, Nanko-Fernández

questioned whether “orthoproxy” or right representation is possible. Homoproxy in an episcopal context and orthoproxy of los lectores y las lectoras in U.S. Hispano/a history illustrated the difference. The USCCB re-structuring of offices serving the diverse ethnic communities of the church into one Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church essentially serves, according to Nanko-Fernández, as a “Hallmark ecclesiology” that “homogenizes difference and squelch agency” in a distortion of diversity that marginalizes communities and obscures ethnic identity. In the employment of los lectores y las lectoras by factory workers, however, los oidores exemplified agency and representation through the democratic selection of readers and materials for their own education and empowerment. In conclusion, Nanko-Fernández called upon theologians to address the relationship and agency of Latino/a theologies to the agendas, strategies, and discourses of the church and the academy to form representative and accountable ecclesiologies.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee explored the significance of the “ordinary” in the lives of Christians and in the governance of the church through a dialogue between the insights of Virgilio Elizondo on the Guadalupan story and Elizabeth A. Johnson’s interpretation of the communion of saints in “At the Intersection of Authority and the Ordinary.” The Guadalupan narrative, Imperatori-Lee pointed out, centers on listening and being heard. Both the narrative of the apparition and the conflict between Juan Diego and the Ordinary Juan de Zumárraga turn on the capacity to hear and to respond and, in each case, hearing involves conversion. The apparition draws the church and its ministry from the center of society to its margins among the ordinary people of God. This movement from the Ordinary to the ordinary is amplified by Johnson’s interpretation of the communion of saints. In *Friends of God and Prophets*, Johnson emphasizes that the call and gift of holiness reside in the nonhierarchical and inclusive community of the ordinary and the equal through baptism and the indwelling of the Spirit. Echoing the universal call of *Lumen Gentium*, Johnson’s work affirms that such holiness is not differentiated by ecclesial order or canonical status, but is an essential quality of the ordinary lives of the people of God. Drawing together the insights of Elizondo and Johnson, Imperatori-Lee asserted that, in moving the marginalized and the ordinary to the center, a new ecclesiology emerges—an ecclesiology informed and transformed by the ordinary holiness of the entire people of God.

A lively discussion followed the presentations.

On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, the Ann O’Hara Graff Memorial Award was presented to Anne E. Carr of the University of Chicago. To mark the occasion, bouquets of flowers were also presented to two past recipients in attendance, Mary Ann Hinsdale and Susan Ross. A business meeting concluded the gathering.

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