

AFRICAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: The New Forms of Martyrdom and Sainthood in Africa
 Convener: Cyril Orji, University of Dayton
 Presenters: Marinus Iwu, Duquesne University
 Cyril Orji, University of Dayton
 Theresia Hinga, Santa Clara University
 Moderator: Paulinus Odozor, University of Notre Dame

The session made the argument that postcolonial African societies face numerous challenges as a result of the intersecting systems of domination (kyriarchies) in the continent. These are not without fatal consequences as one would imagine. But ironically, the tragedies have also produced incredibly honest men and women who challenge unjust structures, even at the expense of their life. Some of these continue to endure massive suffering and even death.

Drawing from Karl Rahner's well-reasoned argument for determining new forms of martyrdom and Jon Sobrino's amplification and application of Rahner's argument to his Salvadorian context, Dr. Cyril Orji argued that there is a fast growing historico-cultural type of suffering in Africa that validates a rethinking or broadening of the traditional concepts of martyrdom and holiness. Using the recent controversial law in Uganda that sanctions gays with prison terms and death as an example of how the powerless *other* is disembodied in a legally "justifiable" way, Dr. Orji showed how an active struggle to dismantle unjust structures of violence can lead to a free and radical acceptance of death, i.e., martyrdom, on the part of those seeking to bring about a just social order.

In this light, that Dr. Marinus Iwu critiqued the Catholic process of canonization, arguing that the standard Catholic procedure marginalizes Africans. His paper critically reviewed the standards laid out by the Catholic Church for recommending people for canonization and showed how the process eliminates countless Africans who ordinarily should have been on the list. Dr. Iwu showed how some victims of the ongoing religious and ethnic violence in Africa are potential saints and martyrs, and calls for a more inclusive formal process that justifiably takes everyone into consideration. According to Dr. Iwu, the practical ecumenism among the Churches that John Paul II suggested can be better realized if the Churches can initiate a process that recognizes as worthy of sainthood the heroic witnesses of members of different faith confessions. All those who lost their lives in religious riots, for example, regardless of whether they are Christians, Muslims, or members of the African Traditional Religions, should be judged worthy of sainthood. In this way, according to Dr. Iwu, they can become the seed of unity and solidarity among Africans of ethnic and religious groups. In Dr. Iwu's view, this will be a creative way of allowing some good to come out of a major social ill that plagues postcolonial African societies.

Dr. Theresia Hinga was to present on the new forms of martyrdom and sainthood among African women "who are frequently the victims of extreme violence and injustice, precariously living as they do at the intersection of the multiple

systems of domination.” However, due to some unforeseen circumstances beyond her control Dr. Hinga could not make it to the session. Nevertheless, between the issues raised by Dr. Orji and Dr. Iwu the session had a very lively conversation. Everyone in the audience had something good to contribute.

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