

CATHOLICITY & MISSION

- Topic: Mission as a Call and Witness to Holiness
 Convener: Gemma Tulud Cruz, Australian Catholic University
 Presenters: Stephen Bullivant, St Mary's University College, United Kingdom
 van Thanh Nguyen, Catholic Theological Union
 Ruth J. Chojnacki, DePaul University

Stephen Bullivant's presentation, "Teachers and Witnesses: The New Evangelization and the Social Sciences" sheds light on Pope Paul VI's famous words: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41). This fundamental insight, most obviously exemplified in the lives of the saints and martyrs, has recently received key support from the disciplines of sociology and cognitive anthropology. Bullivant's presentation explored the link between practicing one's beliefs and the transmission of the faith. It focused especially on what is arguably, if counterintuitively, the key challenge facing the new evangelization: the failure of the Church in the West to retain those brought up as Catholics. More widely, a case was made for close dialogue between those concerned with the new evangelization and our social scientist colleagues, especially since strands of social-scientific research enhance our understanding of both the theory *and* practice of mission.

Drawing on field study in the Tzotzil Maya community of Santa Maria Magdalenas, Ruth Chojnacki's presentation, "Decolonizing the Saints, Reclaiming the Land: Liberation Practice in Mexico's Maya Highlands" showed how conversion to Vatican II Catholicism enabled Maya peasants in highland Chiapas to transform divinized patron saints into everyday historical companions. The cult of the saints arose within the frame of patron-client relationships facilitating negotiation of otherwise inexorable political-economic burdens like taxation across imperial distances. In today's Mexican Maya highlands, demythologization of divinized patron saints by Catholic converts enables decolonization through an analogous dialectic with liberating, rather than accommodating results. Prescribed rituals appeasing village patrons inevitably results in debt, forcing indigenous *campesinos* into peonage and, in the worst case, off ancestral lands. With conversion, once-displaced Maya peasants deploy critical skills entailed in biblical literacy to demythologize reigning patrons, earthly as well as heavenly thus freeing their community simultaneously from traditional ritual obligations and political-economic peonage.

Finally, van Thanh Nguyen's presentation "'Equipping the Saints' (Eph 4:12): The Tasks of Theological Education Today" tackled the biblical dimension of mission insofar as it is expressed or carried out through theological education. Nguyen first did an exegesis of Ephesians 4 and pointed out how God distributes different gifts to each member of the church so that it can be built up. Some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; yet all are to lead a life worthy of their calling. Nguyen then discussed how, according to the author of

Ephesians, the experts are charged with the task of “equipping the holy ones (saints) for the work of ministry” (4:12). In particular, the experts are charged to foster the truth and bind people together in a common effort to build up the church and the human community. Using Ephesians 4 as a basis for reflection Nguyen then proposed three essential tasks and challenges of theological education today: (1) form character and virtues; (2) prepare every believer, especially the laity, for works of service and; (3) be committed to multicultural ministry and mission.

The session concluded after a vigorous and animated discussion.

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