

CATHOLICITY & MISSION

- Topic: Considering “Generations” in Catholicity and Mission
 Convener: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union
 Moderator: C. Vanessa White, Catholic Theological Union
 Presenters: Bryan Froehle, Dominican University
 Linh Hoang, Siena College
 Cyril Orji, University of Dayton

The Catholicity and Mission topic group invited three presentations that focused the convention theme through lens of world church and mission theology. Bryan Froehle presented “Generations in World Catholicism: An Emerging Narrative”, Linh Hoang presented “Asian American Catholics: Generations of Church Participation?” and Cyril Orji presented “Tridentine Liturgy, Catholicity and Mission: What Hope for a New Generation of African Christians?”

What happens when generations, typically studied within a fixed cultural framework, are studied from a global view? How might this data affect current understandings of mission and catholicity? Brian Froehle’s original sociological research, “Generations in World Catholicism: An Emerging Narrative” analyses more than 10,000 pieces of empirical data as an initial approach towards an in-depth exploration of the demographics of world Catholicism. Froehle’s study of the global distribution of Catholics in two core generations, the 1970s and 2000s, provides data that can be used to infer retrospective (1950s) and prospective (2020s) generations. Statistical data shared in a series of PowerPoint slides included a generational breakdown of the distribution of Catholics in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, a generational view of baptisms worldwide, as well as the distribution of ministry personnel, including ordained and religious. Although the data are at a preliminary stage, Froehle suggests that the demographic shifts in Catholic populations (significant decreases in Europe and significant increases in Africa) require serious consideration by musicologists and ecclesiologists attempting to construct world church narratives. Froehle asks, “What does the data suggest about today’s Catholic story and the emerging directions of that story? What does the data suggest about stories we tell ourselves as church?”

Linh Hoang’s paper, “Asian American Catholics: Generations of Church Participation?” raises the question of how first and second/subsequent generations of Asian American Catholics understand and express their ecclesial affiliations. Hoang points out that for first generation Asian American Catholics, church participation is an ascribed characteristic, intimately connected to the experience of family; it is also a strategy that lessens the impact of social decline experienced in relation to limited English language skills. In contrast, second generation Asian American Catholics view church participation as an achieved characteristic. The fruit of an engaged spiritual journey, ecclesial participation is not the result of family obligation or the means of social advancement in an unfamiliar cultural milieu. The differences in generational approaches to church participation can be a source of tension in Asian American Catholic families.

Filial piety, however, remains a powerful social force uniting the generations, despite the tensions generated by first generation expectations for respect and obedience from the second generation. These differences signal the need for new pastoral strategies to address the changing understandings of leadership and ecclesial participation in second and subsequent generations of Asian American Catholics.

The final paper, “Tridentine Liturgy, Catholicity and Mission: What Hope for a New Generation of African Christians?” was presented by Cyril Orji. Orji explores the potential impact of Pope Benedict XVI’s reauthorization of the Tridentine liturgy on the missionary effort of the church in Africa and examines its implications for inculturation. Orji notes that the Pope’s *motu proprio* of June 2007 was authorized to meet the needs of those who have found themselves at the margins of the Church’s liturgical worship following the reforms of Vatican II. While achieving this conciliatory goal, the reauthorization of the Tridentine liturgy has not come without some unintended difficulties. Using Lonergan’s “sacramental vision” and his analysis of the development and use of language, Orji explored the extent to which these difficulties might be injurious to the growth of the emerging church of Africa. Orji argues that in an ecumenically consciousness world church more emphasis should be placed on developing African liturgies: appropriating the best of African culture while respecting the universality of the church.

A lively and engaging conversation among presenters and participants, moderated by Vanessa White, followed these presentations.

COLLEEN MARY MALLON
Aquinas Institute of Theology
St. Louis, Missouri