

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Emerging Methods in (Meta-)Confessional Comparative Theology
 Convener: Peter Feldmeier, University of Toledo
 Moderator: Reid Locklin, University of Toronto
 Presenters: Laurel Marshall Potter, Boston College
 Megan Hopkins, Boston College
 Respondent: Marianne Moyaert, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Laurel Marshall Potter's paper was entitled "All Catholic Theology is Comparative Theology." She began the session by reflecting on the importance of the results of the 2019 Extraordinary Synod of the Amazon, both in its preparatory document and its post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*. Here, Pope Francis sought to promote and embrace a "church with an Amazonian face." In contrast to the typical comparative theological agenda whereby Christians meet the religious other in order to broaden Christian theological perspectives, Potter highlighted the need to apply this method *ad intra*, and examined the complexity in doing so. This included stretching boundaries in comparative categories, principally derived from Catherine Cornille's *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, and providing a kind of ritual hospitality to the cultural and theological sensibilities/visions found in Amazonian (and Salvadorian) Catholicism. The Amazon Synod was controversial from the start, where the preparatory document was publicly denounced by prominent cardinals as "pantheistic idolatry" (Cardinal Brandmüller) and "a direct attack on the lordship of Christ," an "apostasy" (Cardinal Burke). What Potter was arguing for was a robust engagement with inculturation described in Vatican II's *Ad Gentes*. The central problem, Potter argues, is that there is a necessary permeability between Amazonian culture and Amazonian Catholicism. But this, she argued, is not different than the imagined normativity of European culture and European Catholicism, with its permeability. Drawing on Boaventura de Souza Santos's work that has striven to decolonize Catholicism from its "Epistemic North," and open a way to engage the "Epistemic South," Potter demonstrated with alacrity the staunch embeddedness of many of the nay-sayers to this larger inner-church dialogue. She also demonstrated that many of the same arguments against southern inculturation were used against liberation theology in decades past. Potter further argued that many of the tools of comparative theology can and ought to be used to make coherent sense of significant inner-church differences.

Megan Hopkins's paper was entitled "Ritual as Comparative Source Material: Illustrated through Eucharist and *Dhikr*." Drawing on insights from Marianne Moyaert, et al., she argued for greater emphasis in the comparative project on ritual as a key source. See especially Moyaert and Geldhof, *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*. The discipline has, she argued, been so focused on comparative texts that it has become "dualistic, disembodied, patriarchal, and colonial." Without dismissing the importance of dialogue based on the textual traditions, she argued for "turning toward ritual and lived experience as primary source material...allowing the work of a comparative theologian to more accurately reflect lived religiosity." Hopkins demonstrated how the sources from which we theologize determine how we understand

the Divine as well as the kinds of questions or interests we bring to bear across religious traditions. To demonstrate how ritual comparison would work for a constructive comparative theological project, she compared Catholic Eucharist to the Muslim, Sufi ritual of *Dhikr*, the practice of the repetition of God's name or short devotional mantras in community while engaging in ritual movements. It is through this ritual that Muslim participants remember, represent, and participate in God's self-disclosed speech, with an ultimate aim of communion with God both personally and collectively. In comparing these two ritual traditions, Hopkins first framed the project from a "phenomenological approach," involving specific criteria with which comparativists should approach rituals. Then Hopkins provided a "theological approach" that included both first principles and intended transformations through the lenses of both traditions.

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