

## RESEARCH GROUPS

### WORLD CHURCH THEOLOGY

- Topic: Engendering World Church Theology  
Convener: Gerald M. Boodoo, Xavier University of Louisiana  
Presenters: Jane Carol Redmont, Graduate Theological Union  
Anna Kasafi Perkins, Boston College

Jane Carol Redmont addressed "Women as Global Church: Feminist Ecclesiologies in Multi-Continental Perspective." She presented a five-continent overview of feminist ecclesiologies in three sections: methodological comments on "mapping feminist ecclesiologies"; a multicontinental overview highlighting the work of five theologians or clusters of theologians; and directions for future reflection in feminist ecclesiology. She noted the broad and introductory nature of her presentation and the fact that all of the theologians cited are self-described as feminists (exercising a preferential option for women) and are part of a broader population of women theologians around the world. All these thinkers have in common a concern for women as actors or agents in the church, hence the title "women as global church."

Redmont anchored her paper in the work of Virginia Fabella and Mary John Mananzan of the Philippines, with reference to Fabella's longtime leadership in EATWOT, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians; Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana, Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro of Kenya and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians; the Con-spirando collective, a Chile-based continent-wide group publishing the journal *Con-spirando*, a Latin American journal of ecofeminism, theology and spirituality; Rosemary Radford Ruether of the U.S.A.; and Dorothee Soelle of Germany.

Redmont then listed some directions for future praxis. The first is the inclusion of feminist ecclesiologies in research and course syllabi, paying attention to the fact that ecclesiology is not always a systematic preoccupation of feminist theologians, but exists in both explicit and "embedded" forms, such as rituals and prayers, poems, proverbs, pastoral reflections and stories both written and oral. Second, attention must be paid to the question of ecumenism and ecclesial boundaries in feminist ecclesiologies, which also includes reflection on the dynamic relationships between culture, gender and religion. Third, further study is required of the "primacy of praxis" that seems to predominate in feminist ecclesiologies ("life and work") and of its relationship to new formulations of ecclesiology and to more established ecclesiologies ("faith and order"). Fourth, attention must be paid to the languages of ecclesiology: in the course of cross-cultural communica-

tion, theological concepts are literally lost in translation. Fifth, she recommends a focus on the relationship between ecofeminism and ecclesiology which causes shifts in understandings of *ekklesia* and *oikoumene*. Redmont noted that as feminist ecclesiologies place women at the center of their thinking and consider them as subjects of ecclesial history and action, they may also be kenotic ecclesiologies.

In the second presentation, Anna Kasafi Perkins examined the promise that is World Church from the perspective of a Caribbean woman theologian born after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Her presentation, entitled "Engendering World Church: A Caribbean Woman's Perspective," was emboldened by Theresa Lowe Ching's claim that Caribbean Christians are especially equipped by their circumstances and experiences to present the alternate vision that the Church and society so desperately need. To that end, Perkins called upon the experiences of the Caribbean people, especially Caribbean women with their ability to "*talk back*" even in the face of violence, silencing, dismissal, and dehumanization. The activity of *talking back* is not an end in itself, but calls forth a response, the appropriate one being dialogue or conversation—the recognition of the humanity of the other. Human conversation mirrors the life of the Trinity and the life of the Trinity informs the life of the World Church. Oliver Davies's representation of the life of the Trinity through the metaphor of speech (the Father and Son speak with each other and the Spirit is the breath that passes between them and enables the Church to participate in the divine conversation) assists in deepening the call for World Church to be a Church that is open to the many voices and experiences of women and of those who are considered to be outside the Church. Engendering the Church requires taking women's diverse lives, experiences and leadership capabilities seriously by allowing them a fuller role in shaping the Church we are becoming. Similarly, truly becoming a World Church requires *talking back* and listening keenly to those voices in our midst and outside whom we ignore or want to silence.

The discussion that followed centered upon exploring the theme of *talking back* as presented by Perkins and gave group participants the opportunity to explore the meaning of this phrase in their various contexts.

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