

CATHOLIC THEOLOGIES,
INTRAFAITH DIALOGUE, AND PLURALISM

Topic: Between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis: Contemporary Catholic (Liberation) Theologies, Intrafaith Dialogue and the Enduring Challenge of Pluralism

Convener: Teresa M. Hinga, Santa Clara University

Presenters: Ana María Pineda, Santa Clara University
Jean Molesky-Poz, Santa Clara University
Teresa Hinga, Santa Clara University

This panel took its starting point from the observation that within religious traditions themselves there are many variations of perspectives and practice. The panelists explored examples of efforts at applied theology within the African (Hinga), Hispanic (Pineda), and Native American (Molesky-Poz) contexts. The overall goal was to demonstrate the *need* and the *fact* of intrafaith dialogue, as well as to map the *promise* and *challenges* of such dialogue.

Focusing on Africa, Teresa Hinga discussed the historical emergence of the African Independent Churches, highlighting how these churches arose in response to the ambiguity of missionary forms of Christianity and missionary entanglement with cultural and political colonialism that contradicted the Gospel ideal of equality among human beings. She discussed the emergence of Black theologies of Liberation in South Africa as another attempt by Africans to reconcile their newfound Christian faith with the problematic of apartheid. Hinga also highlighted the “Circle of Concerned Women Theologians” and their embodiment of intrafaith dialogue. Recognizing the radical diversity of religion and culture operational in the African context, the members of the Circle have committed to the dialogical method not simply as a goal in itself, but as a means of awakening and nurturing a genuine pluralism that is a necessary condition for a peaceful coexistence amid such differences.

Next, Ana María Pineda examined the embodiments of intrafaith dialogue within the Hispanic context. She noted that Virgilio Elizondo’s “Educacion Religiosa para el Mexico-Norte Americano” (1968) was a pioneering voice that affirmed the link between faith and culture, focusing on the experience of Mexican-Americans and giving validity to the notion that God manifests in the lives and struggles of these marginalized people. Elizondo’s efforts encouraged other Hispanics to enter the work of theology and to join in the task of articulating a theology situated within the social-cultural realities of the United States Hispanic community.

Jean Molesky-Poz began with Michael Bahktin’s insight that dialogue is a matter of communication between simultaneous differences. She then examined the dialogical-theological praxis of a Maya and Jesuit parish, Santa Maria Chiquimula, in the Guatemalan Highlands that has initiated acts of reconciliation between Catholics and those who keep ancestral practices. The church is developing a new

theological praxis that enables the indigenous community to reclaim sacred geography, rituals, and time, including the 260-day calendar. Molesky-Poz also discussed reconciliation projects such as the Tekakwitha Conference and the 2001 Pacific Northwestern Pastoral Letter on the Columbia River watershed. In all cases, she demonstrated that the dialogical process has affected a profound healing in the Native American communities, affirming not just the communal identity and agency in the Church, but also the reclamation and emergence of distinct indigenous spiritualities and orthopraxis within Catholicism.

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