

MISSIOLOGY AND MISSION THEOLOGY

Topic: Mission in Prophetic Dialogue
Conveners: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union
Colleen Mary Mallon, St. John's University, New York
Moderator: Eileen Fagan, College of Mount Saint Vincent
Presenters: Paul Kollman, University of Notre Dame
Colleen Mary Mallon, St. John's University, New York

Two important dialogues were explored in this session: Paul Kollman presented "Mission and the Perils of White Privilege" and Colleen Mallon presented "Can We Talk?: Mission and the Dialogue with the Social Sciences."

Kollman began by reviewing recent scholarship in the area of white privilege, highlighting the advantages amassed by people perceived to be white. The pervasive unconsciousness associated with white privilege was critically assessed from a variety of scholarly viewpoints: Peggy McIntosh's "invisible knapsack," Mark Smith's sensorialization of race, and Shannon Sullivan's "soft patter" of white privilege. Recent engagement of white privilege as a theological starting point, particularly in the work of James Perkinson, exposes mainstream theology's complicity with modern racial ideology. But can these assessments, framed primarily in a United States "history of race, racialization and racism" speak to prototypical missionary contexts "where white missionaries meet nonwhites outside the United States"? Kollman asserts, in agreement with James Perkinson, that although white missionary privilege and white privilege function differently, they are linked to certain "Christian and European habits of mind" captured in W. E. B. Dubois's words, "whiteness is ownership of the earth forever and ever. Amen." The "invisible knapsack" of white missionary privilege includes practical entitlements such as "ease in moving through airports and places of entry, the acquisition of work permits and visas, connections to networks that bring material and other advantages." Moreover, the knapsack can secure an immunity that spares missionaries from experiences of raw adversity which plague the lives of the people they serve. Kollman concludes by reflecting on the ethics of missionary practice. Calling for a coming-to-consciousness of white missionary privilege and its destructive effects, Kollman advocates a "double consciousness" where the missionary, without losing a sense of self, recognizes that "one is always being 'signified upon' in racializing ways."

In the second presentation, Mallon explored contemporary theological and anthropological concerns surrounding the communicative practice of dialogue within a missiological context. Locating dialogue's theological significance within the communicative life of the Trinitarian mystery, Mallon asserts that "dialogue is a Vatican II phenomenon, unique in its approach and its estimation of the world." In particular, theologies emerging from the French theologians at Vatican II expressed an ecclesial vision of dialogue as way-of-being church in the world. While others debated "the how" of dialogue (kerygmatic vs. incarnational

approaches), the actual practice of dialogue, evidenced in the bloom of myriad ecclesial groups, points to a reception of dialogue as a necessary and fertile dynamic of the church's life and mission. However, rooting the human activity of dialogue within the Divine life does not solve the concrete, historical dilemmas that accompany the practice of effective communication; critical awareness of interest and social location expose the power inequalities embedded in contemporary discourses. Can we talk? Mallon poses this question to three cultural anthropologists, James Clifford, Michael Featherstone and Talal Asad. Clifford's analysis of ethnographic authority calls for methods that are dialogical or polyphonic since all ethnographers are participant-observers and all indigenous informants are, themselves, authoring alternative, inventive identities. Featherstone's geographical approach to globalization contextualizes the question "Can we talk?" Our failure to recognize that the globe has always been a dialogical space of contesting modernities contributes to a sense of "crisis" and the false perception that a "unified" modernity is under threat from a "disjunctive" postmodernity. Asad's concern for Western hegemony leads him to explore the West's practice of *authorizing space*. His analysis of the word "local" betrays the unconscious epistemic content operating uncritically in Western ethnography. A view from the social sciences exposes both the need for dialogue and its profound risks. While rationalities disciplined in diverse cultural worlds pose significant challenges to dialogue, it is unconscious complicity with the energies of Western exceptionalism that demand awareness, contrition and accountability. Can mission theology approach Shawn Copeland's vision where theology "apprentices itself in a nonappropriative and nondominative way to the knowledges and cultures" of marginalized peoples?

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