

SPIRITUALITY

Topic: Bishops and Spirituality
Convener: James A. Wiseman, The Catholic University of America
Moderator: Cara Anthony, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota
Presenters: Eileen Flanagan, Neumann College
Michael E. Lee, Fordham University

Eileen Flanagan's presentation, "Bishops' Impact on the Spirituality of the First Poor Clares in America," incorporated Bernard Lonergan's theological method to illuminate both the challenges and opportunities faced by two Italian blood sisters in their dealings with the American bishops whom they encountered over a forty-year period, from the time of their arrival in the United States in 1875. Three waves of momentum were identified to interpret the unfolding of the Poor Clare venture: Wave One—Rejections (1875–1876); Wave Two—Acceptance but Problems (1877–1888); Wave Three—Acceptance but Problems and Misunderstandings (1889–1916). Focusing on the First Wave, Flanagan situated the hopes and predicaments of the nuns within the ecclesiastical and historical context of 19th-century America that prompted rejection or acceptance by a particular bishop. Conflicting priorities stemming from the missions of the bishops and the Poor Clares surfaced, especially in relation to issues of finance and of Franciscan, ecclesiastical and episcopal jurisdiction. Addressing these conflicts shaped the sisters' discernment regarding adaptation or mitigation of the Primitive Rule of St. Clare of Assisi they sought to follow.

In the next presentation, Michael Lee spoke on "Episcopal Metanoia: Naming the Change in Archbishop Romero." Lee's paper examined the notion of conversion in the writings and homilies of El Salvador's Archbishop Romero in order to judge whether his actions after becoming archbishop could themselves be characterized as a conversion. Lee began by examining several episodes both before and after Romero's appointment as archbishop to substantiate the claim that, in fact, Romero did change significantly after the dramatic events of March, 1977, which included the murder of Fr. Rutilio Grande. The paper next examined how Romero himself treated the notion of conversion in his writings, homilies, and diary entries. Finally, based on the data examined in the second part, Lee identified criteria for conversion that emerge from Romero's writings. These criteria help support the claim that the archbishop's change can indeed be characterized as a conversion. They also suggest ways in which Romero's *metanoia* might inform contemporary Christian spirituality's appropriation of the concept of conversion.

Following the presentations there were many questions from the floor, along with one attendee's observation about the way in which the two papers appropriately complemented each other. Finally, Sandra Schneiders, who is widely recognized as one of the leading scholars in the field of spirituality and who is heading the committee charged with planning the spirituality session at the 2008 convention, made a number of observations about the special character of this very

interdisciplinary field and the importance for those engaged in the teaching of spirituality always to be mindful of this.

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