

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Topic: Theological Anthropology in Relation
to the Personal, the Social, and the Institutional
Convener: Phyllis H. Kaminski, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana
Moderator: Mary Ann Hinsdale, Boston College
Presenters: Rosemary P. Carbine, College of the Holy Cross
Marie Vianney Bilgrien, Instituto Tepeyac Institute, El Paso, Texas

The session differed from the format that appeared in the convention program. Mary Ann Hinsdale announced at the opening of the session that Marie Vianney Bilgrien could not present her paper titled "To Be or Not to Be! Who Is to Be a Bishop?" Bilgrien was elected to a leading role in her religious community, which required her to attend a meeting that conflicted directly with the convention. Rather than read Bilgrien's paper, Hinsdale noted that Rosemary P. Carbine's paper, titled "Reclaiming a Dialogical Notion of Personhood for a Feminist Public Church" would be followed by a response from Mary C. Doak, University of San Diego.

In her paper, Carbine posed two main questions for approximately 20 attendees to consider regarding a recent trend toward a dialogical/narrative approach in U.S. public theology: "What theological insights does it offer to redress persistent patriarchal limitations on who speaks for the public church? How does it help us to rethink our conventional notions of public/political participation and—by implication—personhood?" As Carbine observed and supported with feminist theoretical and theological analysis of what is called a deliberative model of democracy, "Engaging in public life consists of a communicative practice that is still largely restricted by prevalent patriarchal principles of political voice, participation (agency, access, representation), and power to effect meaningful socio-political change." Such pressing questions merited further and sustained feminist theological attention.

In addressing these questions, Carbine elaborated a constructive feminist theology of the public church, by retrieving some key theological points regarding narrative in feminist, womanist, and mujerista theologies. Drawing on the writings of Mary Ann Hinsdale, Diana Hayes, and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Carbine outlined potential contributions of narrative to an alternative rhetorical practice of public engagement beyond rationalist debate, thereby expanding a heretofore patriarchal clerical face and voice of the public church. The U.S. Bishops pastoral on women and General Congregation 34 of the Society of Jesus were utilized as examples of such rhetorical practices in intra-church dialogue which proved instructive models for religious engagement in the U.S. public sphere that attends to both clerical and everyday Catholic voices. Carbine concluded by laying out the theological significance of narrative for a dialogical / relational notion of personhood, arguing through the work of Elizabeth Johnson and Linell Cady that narrative "draws our attention to the dialogical and therefore deeply relational understanding of public life and of the person . . . a major ingredient for any adequate feminist public theology to address some of the most pressing issues in our time . . . which epitomize the forgetting of such relationality." In sum, Carbine's paper reflected in political and theological depth on the phrase "the personal is the political" popularized in U.S. second wave feminist movements. Carbine claimed that

narrative connects personal and political liberatory praxis, especially an eschatological praxis of active hope in building a more just future; it builds a bridge between personal life and political engagement, between present unjust realities and a future more emancipatory communal life.

Mary Doak continued the conversation by noting that Carbine elaborated a truly constructive theology of narrative, public theology, and a relational anthropology, all through a feminist lens. First, Doak agreed that civil society and other forums for reasoned debate are often exclusionary, giving an example from the work of Cornel West regarding the way in which U.S. public discourse frames Black as a problem for civil society. Such exclusion prompts other ways of engaging in U.S. public life. Second, Doak concurred with Carbine's theological turn to narrative in order to rethink ways of engaging in U.S. public life, drawing on insights from Paul Ricoeur about a narrative understanding of our fundamentally connected personal and communal life. Related to the session topic of theological anthropology, Doak introduced her view that human beings are "hardwired" to resonate with experiences rather than statistics; thus, narratives in the public square hold potential to change the way we think and act in response to others, much differently than in our thinking and acting in philosophical reasoned debate. Third, Doak raised the following questions for further discussion. How can theology guide a narrative process of making a self-in-relation to the present and to a projected more just future? Narrative emphasizes daily lived realities as a primary resource for theological reflection; how do our self and communal narratives in the public sphere engage church tradition? And, does narrative serve as a way to engage in public life that parallels or sets aside reasoned debate?

A fruitful discussion followed, using Carbine's and Doak's comments as a starting point. Some attendees affirmed a feminist approach to public theology as a way to refute the charge among some contemporary Catholic theologians that feminist theology has run its course. While Carbine's paper explored the theological implications of narrative for religious engagement in U.S. public life, some attendees noted the profound pastoral implications of narrative, pointing out the connections and often radical dissonances between the institutional church's pastoral and public narratives. Discussion primarily centered on how theology can help avoid self-deceptive and distorted narratives of ourselves and our communities, drawing either on theological symbols such as Trinity, Christology, and eschatology or on the scriptural prophetic tradition as possible theological resources for self as well as cultural criticism.

The session concluded with a brief presentation by Paul Crowley, Santa Clara University, chair of the leadership team for the Topic Session on Theological Anthropology. Crowley explained that the team hopes that future sessions will take

an intentionally interdisciplinary approach. To achieve that goal, Crowley listed several possible topics for the session's forthcoming call for papers, all inspired by the next theme (Generations) and locale (Miami, FL).

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