

THEOLOGY'S PROPHETIC COMMITMENT TO THE URBAN CHURCH

- Topic: Theology's Prophetic Commitment to the Urban Church
 Moderator: Margaret R. Pfeil, University of Notre Dame
 Panelists: M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College
 Most Rev. George Murry, Bishop of Youngstown, Ohio
 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Boston College School of Theology
 and Ministry

Post-Katrina New Orleans, the “rust belt” cities of Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Youngstown, as well as the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez call us to ask: What is theology's commitment to the urban church? Nancy Pineda-Madrid began the session with a paper entitled, “Femicide, Practices of Resistance, and the Possibility of Salvation.” The reality of more than six hundred women raped, sexually mutilated, and murdered on the Ciudad Juárez–El Paso border since 1993 constitutes femicide, distinguished from femicide according to three criteria: brutality, carried out on a massive scale, and with impunity. The systematic, sexual desecration of female bodies represents the horrific culmination of the heinous logic of a patriarchal system that reinforces pervasive devaluation of female lives. In response, particularly since 2001, various organizations have created practices of resistance, including marches, rituals, and commemoration of significant days, such as March 8 (International Women's Day). Some of these expressions are explicitly informed by Christian belief and practice, such as the Exodo Por La Vida march organized by the Ni Una Más network in 2002, bearing a cross from Chihuahua City to Ciudad Juárez, where it has since become a significant shrine. These practices suggest community as the condition for salvation, a deliverance that is collective and social in nature. Following Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's examination of the texts of the “empty tomb” tradition, these rituals connote a liminal space between cross and resurrection, a connection between the crucifixion of Jesus and these murdered women.

M. Shawn Copeland provided “A Theological Reading of the Factory,” arguing for the need to recover respect for the dignity of work, a central tenet of the Catholic social tradition. She focused in particular on the case of Detroit. Following the ravaging fire of 1805, Fr. Gabriel Richard gave to Detroit the motto, “We hope for better things. It shall rise from the ashes.” However, the arc from the heyday of the steel and auto industries to deindustrialization throughout the “rust belt” belies that hope. Detroit reflects what Lonergan termed the “long decline,” a breakdown in the social, cultural, economic, and political orders. Within the factories, the auto industry sacrificed human solutions and potential in favor of technological efforts to increase production efficiency and auto performance. The effects of “Fordism,” or more precisely, “Taylorization,” meant a breakdown in personal relations. The craftsperson of the old guild system gave way to the foreman, signaling a shift in focus from the dignity of the craftsperson and her work to a model of efficiency in which the worker became a fungible instrument of production. Racial and ethnic groups were pitted against each other, giving rise to mutual

suspicion and fear. The United Auto Workers, over time, grew increasingly distant from black and women workers. The degrading effects of alienation took a deadly toll on workers' minds, bodies, and spirits. A 1973 study reported sixty-five on-the-job deaths per day in auto factories. Unions failed to deal with this systematic dehumanization of the worker. There is a great need to opt for workers, as well as a need for reformation in our church so that it might serve as leaven in our society.

Bishop Murry gave a reprise of his 2009 address at the Woodstock Theological Center, "Ministry in the Rust Belt: A Bishop's Perspective," emphasizing that ministry in this region involves "the promotion of economic opportunity rooted in justice." Since Black Monday, September 19, 1977, when the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company announced the closure of much of its operation, the U.S. steel industry sharply declined, resulting in the loss of an estimated 40,000 manufacturing jobs and between thirty-three and seventy-five percent of school tax revenues in the Youngstown area. The church has responded to this economically distressed context by focusing on three areas: traditional ecclesiastical life, ecumenically oriented, collaborative social action, and health care for the poor.

The audience raised substantive questions touching upon the shortsighted corporate strategy of focusing on increased production at the expense of workers with a lack of awareness that we are *all workers together* and the feminization of poverty as well as of the work force with the shift of production overseas. One person noted the similarities between the reality of femicide and *mujeres desechables* (disposable women) used in *maquiladoras* in Ciudad Juárez and the crisis women in the Congo are facing. A Catholic News Service reporter inquired of the bishop whether the closure of parishes in the "Rust Belt" implies the need for structural change in the church. The bishop noted that merging of parishes provided the possibility of strengthening the church's presence in the city despite a marked decrease in the number of registered Catholics. An important role for the church in the "Rust Belt" is to witness to its faith claim that death leads to resurrected life. Dr. Copeland agreed, emphasizing the significance of an eschatological future that orients the church's political and prophetic task of prioritizing people—upholding the dignity of workers—ahead of decisions about their future.

MARGARET R. PFEIL
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana