

TOPIC AREAS

BIOETHICS & HEALTHCARE ETHICS

- Topic: Prophetic Healthcare Ethics: A Panel Discussion on
Catholic Women Theologians on the HIV/AIDS Pandemic
- Convener: Teresia M Hinga, Santa Clara University
- Presenters/Panelists: Rachel Bundang, Marymount School, New York
Gemma Cruz, DePaul University
Paulinus Odozor, University of Notre Dame

This year's Bioethics and Healthcare Ethics session consisted of a panel responding to the book, *Calling for Justice Throughout the World: Catholic Women Theologians on the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*, eds. Mary Jo Iozzio, Mary M. Doyle Roche, and Elsie M. Miranda (Continuum, 2009). In their responses, the three panelists affirmed the urgency of the call for justice made in this book, especially for the women facing both the feminization of extreme poverty and feminization of this global pandemic. The panel applauded the creative use of stories of specific women in ways that gives face to, and drives home the multidimensional injustices, particularly the injustice of social death through rejection and stigma that haunts people with HIV/AIDS.

While the presenters applauded the editors' efforts to be inclusive by including a broad range of international contributors, they suggested ways in which to enhance both the quantitative and qualitative inclusiveness. For example, Gemma Cruz noted with concern the absence of an essay focusing on Thailand. She pointed out that "it is the only Asian country with a serious HIV/AIDS problem and a serious government program aimed at controlling it that dates back to 1989." Paulinus Odozor would have liked to see some inclusion of a "male perspective," arguing that notwithstanding the fact that this book itself was meant to be an improvement and companion to an earlier volume that was deemed short on women's voices, including a male perspective even here would reinforce the imperative to overcome the "us versus them" dualism so that "women and men to work together in concert" to curb the spread of AIDS. Rachel pointed out that the voices included seemed "too similar and uniform" in their description of the issues and challenges posed by HIV/AIDS and proposed that the inclusion of "cross-conversations" and even "counter voices" among the authors would have enhanced the prophetic edge of the essays. As she argued, the tremendous diversity and complexities of histories, identities, social-political and cultural contexts in which HIV/AIDS is experienced necessarily involves "juggling competing and even contentious claims" in the search for solutions to the complex challenges posed by

the pandemic. Naming, critically analyzing, and as needed, challenging these competing and contentious claims become an appropriate defining feature of a prophetic ethics of Healthcare in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The panelists also agreed that there is an enduring and urgent need for the church to scale up and mobilize fiscal, institutional and human resources in order to address effectively the glaring inadequacies in the provision of quality palliative health care, especially for the extremely impoverished millions, mostly women and children who lack basics that sustain life and are therefore doubly vulnerable to the pandemic. Besides this quantitative scaling up of resources, there is an urgent and enduring need to scale up efforts to address the cumulative and multiplicative impact of intersecting root factors, notably extreme poverty, religio-cultural sexism and injustices embedded in a global economy that seems to prioritize profits and the rights of capital over the rights of life. The many stories of anguish, pain, and resilience reported in the book mostly from the global south demonstrate how the cumulative/multiplier effect of these root factors, often makes HIV/AIDS a lethal disease instead of a chronic one as it has become for many, particularly in the global north.

Overall, the presentations and animated discussions that followed made it clear that *Calling for Justice Throughout the World* calls for the urgent development and adoption of a prophetic just ethics that not only demands better quality palliative healthcare for HIV/AIDS sufferers, but also raise and demand answers to questions of justice on their behalf. For example, it must confront the global multibillion-dollar industry that sexually exploits women and children to their detriment, when such women and children, euphemistically called sex workers, are turned into sexual slaves and coerced to have sex with as many as 30 “clients” per day without getting paid or even given food. What justice is there for them when the only thing they get from their enslavement is “a souvenir” in the form of infection by AIDS? What concrete actions of global solidarity would be necessary to ensure the elimination of this pandemic, which continues to be a threat to life for millions?

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