

## THEOLOGIES OF MARY

- Topic: Theologies of Mary in encounter with popular religiosity and culture: All generations shall call me blessed / (?)
- Convener: Dorian Llywelyn, Loyola Marymount University
- Moderator: Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, Loyola Marymount University
- Presenters: Elizabeth Johnson, Fordham University  
 Wendy Wright, Creighton University  
 Charlene Spretnak, California Institute of Integral Studies  
 Dorian Llywelyn, Loyola Marymount University

Current mariology reflects tensions both within academic theology and the life of the Church. Always something of a barometer of Catholicism, Mary has been a figure of particular interest to two generations of feminist theologians. More latterly she has become a focus of Latina/o theology, representing a shift from gender considerations towards cultural and ethnic perspectives. At the same time, a florescence of Marian devotion amongst younger American Catholics alerts us to the spiritual desires of a *post*-post-Vatican II generation.

The ambiguities concerning the nature of Marian piety and Mariology expressed in the title of this session were present both in the rich variety of presentations and the energies evoked in consequent discussion. In her comments, Johnson argued that under the influence of patriarchy, female images of the divine have migrated to the figure of Mary, a development which has ultimately disenfranchised women. A 'feminist-liberationist-historical-hermeneutical' approach restores Mary as a person in her own right, understood primarily as one of the communion of saints. This revisioning necessarily moves mariology from a primarily doctrinal-devotional perspective to a historical one. The historical Miriam of first-century Galilee is a Jewish peasant, the 'non-person' for whom 'God has done great things.' Consequently women and men of our generation can relate to her more easily as *compañera* rather than as patroness. Such a relationship can serve to inspire discipleship on behalf of the 'non-persons' of this world. This companionship mariology is, according to Johnson, 'biblically grounded, ecumenically fruitful, productive of religious sense, and serves the power of the God of history.'

Spretnak's presentation found post-Vatican II mariology guilty of an a-critical adherence to the assumptions and preferences of post-World War II modernity. She rejected the pressing interest in the biblical Mary as being over-focused on the sphere of the verbal, to the exclusion of other expressions of faith. Rejecting a liberation theology approach to Mary which concentrated on the power inherent in relationships, Spretnak protested the 'dethroning' of Mary as precluding the possibility of honoring and loving Mary: a companionship model of mariology is moreover not universally meaningful. She advocated instead a recuperation of those comprehensive 'symbolic, aesthetic, cosmological and mystical dimensions' of Mary which emphasize her unique ontological status. Spretnak holds that such dimensions are consonant with discoveries of post-

modern physics and complexity science. They are simultaneously attractive to the religious desires of the millennial generation, some of who yearn for the 'traditional practices of spiritual communion with Mary,' and a return to an appreciation of Mary as patroness and advocate.

Expressions of Marian piety in the many cultures of Los Angeles were the subject of Wright's contribution to the panel. Her interdisciplinary ethnographic research is anchored in the particular stories of people who venerate Mary, in a city where poverty and wealth live side-by-side with violence and ethnic rivalry. Wright seeks to employ Marian devotion to discuss the categories of 'spirituality' and 'popular devotion,' discovering within them a rich, latent theology which arises from the lived experience of experiencing intimate connection with Mary. The complex figure of this Angeleno Mary holds in tension many different sensibilities, as she simultaneously embodies the figure of sister and disciple, peacemaker and warrior, boundary-keeper and majestic queen.

The liturgy of Eastern Catholicism, according to Llywelyn, contains important correctives to the moralist predilections of post-Enlightenment theology. He argued that the figure of Mary serves as a paradigmatic bridge between theology and culture. Indeed, the canon of liturgy—*theologia prima*—is itself a product of and produces culture. Aspects of Marian devotion which particular groups find theologically unsatisfactory cannot be easily dismissed or superseded, for they represent the collective expression of countless generations of Christians. For Llywelyn, Eastern Christianity affirms a polysemic approach to the unity of all creation: Mary's maternity is both physical and symbolic, and her unique role in the economy of salvation continues in her active intercession for the Church. The many icons of Mary, so central to the theology and life, of the Eastern Church, affirm and celebrate the material reality of the Incarnation.

This well-attended session engendered lively discussion: questions were raised inter alia about potential tensions between feminist and Latina/o mariologies, particularly in regard to the figure of Guadalupe; the relationship between Mariology and pneumatology; and the nexus between the glorification of Mary and the disenfranchisement of women. Strong divergences of opinion exist around the volatile figure of Mary: she continues to exercises to unite people but also serves as a sign of contradiction. In the matter of Mary, few people are indifferent.

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