

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- Topic: "From Out of Motherhood: Considering the Human Condition from a New Perspective"
- Convener: Paul Crowley, Santa Clara University
- Moderator: Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Fordham University
- Panelists: Susan Abraham, Harvard Divinity School
 Rosemary Carbine, Whittier College
 Elena Procario-Foley, Iona College
 Michele Saracino, Manhattan College
 Laura Taylor, Vanderbilt University

The panel explored how a critical analysis of the category of "motherhood" might open up new insights into fundamental starting points for a theological anthropology, and how it might also serve to subvert unexamined assumptions about motherhood as the term is deployed in several theological and ecclesiastical discourses.

Susan Abraham's paper, "Post-Colonial Perspectives on Motherhood," treated the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Simone de Beauvoir. Spivak examines the Algerian Family Code of 1984 and asks how one can speak of motherhood without exploring its essentialism and its control of other narratives, especially political ones (e.g., motherhood is for the good of the polis). Beauvoir searches for a positive retrieval of the pregnant female body by seeing it as a creative site for the wholly other. Western notions of alterity are undermined when we recognize that a mother is a mother not just because she bears a child but because she decides to love a particular child. This element of "radical choice," which breaks from colonialist discourses, also puts the post-colonialist mother in alliance with "metropolitan feminists" of the Western world. This analysis could serve to further critique family codes in the U.S., which, like colonialist codes, link motherhood with patriotism, and more broadly, with political agenda.

Rosemary Carbine's contribution, "Artisan's of a New Humanity: Revisioning the Public Church in Feminist Perspective," proposed reconstructing the dominant Christic symbols in the Church's anthropological speech so that women can claim a place in the public Church, particularly in ministry. An examination of the Christology of John Paul II and Benedict XVI shows a linkage between Christology and Mariology so strong that the result is a religiously romanticized notion of motherhood and the practical exclusion of women from public ministry. Yet, according to *Gaudium et Spes*, public engagement is integral to building the Kingdom of God, and the saving work of Jesus Christ fosters "artisans of a new humanity." A public role for women can be reclaimed through a shift of focus from the person of Jesus to the ministry of Jesus. Motherhood would then be seen as key to understanding the generation of a new family of God, and generativity a major dimension of the Church's engagement with the world.

A theological anthropology of motherhood can also inform other long-standing theological issues. Elena Procario-Foley examined the relationship between Judaism and Christianity from a theology of motherhood. Motherhood entails three markers: (1) the presence of the child to the mother and of the mother to the child, a co-humanity that includes the abiding potential of their being in opposition to each other; (2) the pain of labor that is necessary to bring forth the child, a labor that ideally resolves in the reconciling joy of a healthy birth; and (3) remembrance, in that the mother never forgets the birth itself, and that the child in a certain sense knows this. Foley then applied these categories analogously to the relationship between Judaism as the mother and Christianity as the progeny religion, especially in the notion of the covenant, carefully noting where the analogy is vulnerable to critique.

How to construct a theological anthropology of motherhood is a yet more fundamental issue, one taken up by Michele Saracino in "Beyond Magical Thinking: Motherhood as a Metaphor for Theological Anthropology." Embracing hybridity requires that no one narrative of motherhood that can tell the stories of all, nor mute other stories. Just as Jesus was a man of many stories, so, too, is the story of mothers and their motherhood. Indeed, multiple contesting stories may vie within a single soliloquy, as motherhood itself entails emotional uncertainty and ambiguity. A maternal anthropology provides a protean metaphor of human experience, and implies that thinking about being human calls for a narrative approach, one that is less essentialist than porous and multi-layered.

Laura Taylor chose the twentieth anniversary of *Dignitatem Mulieribus* to further question essentialist, biological, and heterosexist assumptions of the theological anthropology of Church teaching on women. In light of these assumptions, motherhood freshly understood could serve to subvert these tendencies. She then proceeded to highlight and summarize the four preceding talks, raising questions that were then pursued in discussion: (1) Should we focus on retrieving the category of motherhood, or is it too beholden to the language and logic of hierarchy? (2) How can motherhood be inhabited in a practical rather than merely theoretical way? Here she turned to the example of "eco-nuns" who live out "motherhood" from a feminist perspective of care for the earth. (3) Are there alternative models of motherhood emerging not only from the current generation of feminist theologians but also from other voices?

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