

CATHOLICITY AND MISSION—TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: From the Heart of the World Church: Catholicity, Mission, and Catholic Higher Education
- Convener: Margaret Eletta Guider, O.S.F., Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
- Moderator: Margaret Eletta Guider, O.S.F., Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
- Presenters: Iheanyi Enwerem, O.P., Dominican Institute, Ibadan, Nigeria
Susan Abraham, Loyola Marymount University
Orfilio Ernesto Valiente, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

Mindful of the hopes and exigencies of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the document's global implications for Catholic higher education, this session explored some of the key missiological challenges encountered by Catholic colleges, universities and theological institutes as they endeavor to engage the interactive dynamics of catholicity, culture and social context in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The presentations focused on three case studies of institutions in Nigeria, India, and El Salvador. Conscious of the institutions' respective moorings in the multifaceted histories and colonial legacies of missionary activity, the panelists identified several paradoxes, ambiguities, competing claims, and generative questions that were disclosed as a result of their efforts to assess the degree to which these institutions have succeeded or failed in advancing integral evangelization through the ministry of higher education.

Dr. Iheanyi Enwerem, a Dominican friar and political scientist, addressed the topic of "Catholic Higher Education and Mission in Nigeria: The Contributions of the Dominican Institute (DI), Ibadan, Nigeria." As past president of the DI, he provided substantial background on the history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria as well as the emergence and growth of Catholic institutions of higher education in recent years. Conscious of the Nigerian socio-political reality, Enwerem, while acknowledging the distinctive contributions of Catholic higher education, soberly examined both internal and external factors that have contributed to the inability and, at times, failure of Catholic educational institutions to effectively counteract, deter, and prevent the multiple forms of moral decadence and social unrest characterized by widespread corruption and ever-increasing violence. Using the DI, a ministry of the Nigeria-Ghana Dominican Province, as an example of how an educational vision, driven by charism and critical consciousness, can assist an institution in incorporating into its mission the redressing of violence, corruption and social injustice, Enwerem discussed strategies for action informed and influenced by the Dominican tradition, including the importance of making equal educational opportunities available and accessible not only to men but also to women.

Prof. Susan Abraham began her presentation, "Catholic Convent School Education and the Nation-State," with general statistical data on Catholic higher education in India. In framing her topic, she argued that in order to understand the role and function of educational institutions pertaining to "minority religions" in India, one must recognize that "the form of secularism that governs Indian education

systems is a form of negotiation: as long as nuns, priests and brothers turn out ‘good’ women (and men) for the nation, students of all religious views may coexist in a Catholic ethos.” Informed by this insight, she assessed the degree to which Catholic women’s colleges in India are in a position—ecclesially, culturally, religiously, politically and economically—to defend and advance the human dignity, rights and flourishing of women and girls. Amidst the social, cultural, and religious influences that permit injustice, dehumanization, and brutal violence against women of all ages to persist, Abraham observed that the constraints of gender norms and training must be constantly and prudently negotiated with governmental as well as religious authorities. Drawing upon thought-provoking narratives about specific Catholic women’s colleges, members of their sponsoring congregations, and alumnae, Abraham illustrated their potentially transformative and liberating power, while acknowledging the unrelenting forces of conformity and submission that determine the limits of the possible.

Prof. Orfilio Ernesto Valiente, in “The University as Agent of Social Transformation: The Case of the UCA in El Salvador,” provided a comprehensive historical analysis of the Jesuit-run Central American University (UCA), founded in El Salvador in 1965 as the “wealthy family’s educational alternative to the increasingly leftist National University.” Within ten years the UCA assumed its mission and prophetic role as the social conscience of a nation whose popular majorities were weighed down by the oppressive realities of injustice and inequality. Tracing the evolution of UCA’s institutional identity from the time of the civil war until the present, Valiente addressed the UCA’s ongoing challenges as its leaders negotiate not only the university’s *public* role and function now that “the nation has transitioned from a time of war to an uneasy process of democratization and reconciliation,” but also its Catholic identity and Ignatian charism given the local and global changes that have occurred within the Church and the Society of Jesus.

Engaging dialogue took place among the panelists and with members of the audience. Points of discussion and debate included: prophetic witness in contexts of violence, conflict and corruption, the limits of negotiation and social compromise, the forces of secularization and de-secularization, post-colonial consciousness, religious persecution, economic disparity, financing of Catholic higher education, measures of success, and, finally, the significance of charisms and the relative autonomy of institutions sponsored by religious orders *vis-à-vis* Church authorities.

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