

## HOPE: THE CHURCH'S PROPHETIC CHALLENGE

- Topic: Hope: The Church's Prophetic Challenge  
 Convener: Richard Lennan, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry  
 Moderator: James McEvoy, Woodstock Theological Center  
 Presenters: Richard Lennan, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry  
 Kristin Colberg, University of Notre Dame  
 Dominic Doyle, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

"Hope" is fundamental to the vocabulary of Christians, but hope is not always understood adequately. Often, hope suffers by way of comparison with its better-known companions in the triad that is "faith, hope, and love." This session sought to enable recovery of a positive grasp of hope and of its prophetic value. Specifically, the focus of the session was on the ecclesial dimensions of hope: its indispensable place in the life and mission of the church.

The session featured three presentations and a general discussion with all those in attendance. In the first presentation, Richard Lennan took as his theme "The Church as a Sacrament of Hope." His paper explored the connection between hope and faith in God's revelation, but explored too the incentive for both reform and renewal of the church contained in the notion of "sacrament." The final section of his paper focused on a dialogue with the trend in contemporary ecclesiological writing to discount the value of metaphors such as "sacrament of hope." Although the positive insights of this trend were acknowledged, the conclusion, drawing largely from political and liberation theology, was to affirm the importance of the metaphors.

In her paper, on "Conciliar Reception and Authority: Hearing the Hopeful Voice of the Church Today," Kristin Colberg examined the reception of Vatican II as an example of the church's *ad intra* challenge to hope. The paper identified the prophetic dimensions of conciliar reception and the way in which the reception of magisterial teachings can orient the Christian community to the future with hope. Reference was made also to the ways in which authentic reception can be frustrated and the damage that this does to hope within the Christian community and, therefore, to the church's mission in the world.

The implications of hope for the church's mission in contemporary society was the specific concern of Dominic Doyle's paper: "Lived Hope in a Secular Age: The Ecclesial Dimension." By comparing and contrasting the work of, among others, Nicholas Boyle, Charles Taylor, Pope Benedict XVI, and Tracy Rowland, this paper examined the variety of responses that the church makes to the challenges posed by the pluralism evident in today's world. The goal of the presentation was to identify those forms of response that enable the church to be a hopeful, albeit challenging, presence in society.

Discussion in response to the three papers ranged widely. One of the general topics canvassed in the discussion was why hope might be a particular need in today's world and church, especially among young people who experience vari-

ous forms of alienation. There was also interest in the dynamics of “hope,” its relationship to memory, and its place among the theological virtues. The ambiguity of magisterial practices in the church—encouraging theologians yet also pursuing the censure of theologians—was one issue cited as posing a difficult challenge to the possibility of a positive reception of church teaching and, therefore, of endangering hope.

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