

CHURCH/ECUMENISM

- Topic: Who Are the Saints?
 Convener: Christopher Ruddy, The Catholic University of America
 Moderator: Joy Galarneau, Boston College
 Presenters: Elizabeth A. Johnson, Fordham University
 Natalia M. Imperatori-Lee, Manhattan College
 Susan K. Wood, Marquette University

Elizabeth Johnson's paper, "All the Saints; The Communion of Saints as a Dimension of Ecclesiology" proposed a recovery of the communion of saints as bespeaking "an inclusive participation in a sacred community brought about by the play of God's gracious Spirit from generation to generation and across the wide world." Her paper had three parts. First, she sketched the historical background of the communion of saints. In both its Jewish and Christian roots, the holiness of the communion of saints is centered not primarily in human, ethical achievement but in God's gracious gift; God freely consecrates the people and forms them into a holy community of "redeemed sinners," where grace superabounds.

Second, Johnson contrasted two paradigms for the communion of saints: the patronage and companionships models. The patronage model, absent from the New Testament and the early Christian centuries, derived from imperial Roman civil patronage practices and conceived of the saints as intermediaries between a regal, distant God and the "little people" who lacked influence. The companionship model, by contrast, is deeply rooted in Scripture and early Christian texts and sees the saints as part of a community of memory which releases the power of their witness into contemporary life; such companions are not patrons, objects of a cult, or even exemplars, but a faithful throng cheering contemporary believers onward.

Third, Johnson proposed that Vatican II's teaching on the universal call to holiness has opened the way for a renewal of ecclesiology and Christian life, particularly for a heightened appreciation for the often hidden holiness of everyday life. This inclusive, egalitarian vision also raises a challenge to receive and celebrate more fully the holiness of women in the Church, especially a recognition of the sacredness of marriage and sexuality, as well as to empower women (and all believers) to become the subjects of their own histories of holiness in the Church.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee's paper, "More than This: Narratives, Holiness, and the People of God," began with the claim that narrative is the proper medium for ecclesiology, for it points to the lived reality of the people of God, especially the lay poor who make up the vast majority of believers, and prevents ecclesologists from developing static, idealized presentations of the Church. Imperatori-Lee then drew upon Elizabeth Johnson's work on Mary and upon Latino/a practices and theologies of popular religion to broaden notions of saintliness and holiness. From Johnson, she highlighted the "real" Mary's particularity, historical embeddedness, quotidian holiness, and companionate solidarity. From Latino/a practices

and theologies of popular religions, she emphasized a preference for narratives and the experience of the lay poor as bearers of the *sensus fidelium* and “conveyors” of tradition over against a deductive, doctrinal, text-based, “virtuosi-focused” ecclesiology. She concluded by affirming that greater attentiveness to the narratives of ordinary believers and ordinary communities would allow for the emergence of ecclesiologies generated by those “splendid nobodies” whose abundant holiness often remains unknown to academics and ecclesial leaders but which resounds across the centuries.

Susan Wood’s paper, “Communion of Saints and the Salvation of Non-Christians,” argued that the presence of ‘non-Christian’ saints in the communion of saints indicates both the universality of God’s offer of salvation, as well as the dual protological and eschatological unity of all humanity. Wood began by recalling the presence of saints before Israel (e.g., Abel, Enoch, Noah) and outside Israel (e.g., Job, Melchizedek, Queen of Saba), as well as among pagans and foreigners in the New Testament.

She then made four central points: (1) Scripture reveals that salvation is not limited to a chosen people but extends to all times and places; (2) faith is necessary for salvation, but implicit faith may suffice; (3) saints of all times make up the communion of saints; and (4) the communion of saints represents the eschatological unity of which the Church is a sign and instrument; salvation is inherently communal.

Vatican II, she argued, makes clear that all may be saved, but was less clear on the relationship of the small “seed community” or “messianic people” to those outside the visible Church. Wood proposed that a greater understanding of the protological and eschatological unity of humankind would allow for a deeper recognition that “salvation reflects our unity as members of the one human race, the recapitulation of that race in Christ, the new Adam, and our interconnectedness with one another and with Christ through the bonds established by the Spirit.” That same Spirit, as *Gaudium et spes* #22 stated, offers to all people, in a manner known to God, the possibility of being made partners in the paschal mystery.

The concluding discussion among the participants and the 110 attendees was wide-ranging and substantial, covering such issues as ecclesial authority, ecumenism, Vatican II’s teaching on the salvation of Christians and other persons, the unicity of Christ’s salvific mediation and the possibility of other mediations, and interpretations of the “*communio sanctorum*” as “holy things” and “holy people.”

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