

## WOMEN'S CONSULTATION ON CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Women and Social Salvation
- Conveners: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education  
Margaret Mary Moore, Theology & Life Institute
- Secretary: Vacancy
- Treasurer: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium
- Award
- Convener: Julia Feder, Saint Mary's College
- Steering
- Committee: Rosemary Carbine, Whittier College  
Nichole Flores, University of Virginia  
Jessica Coblentz, Saint Mary's College  
Mary Jo Iozzo, Boston College  
Elissa Cutter, Georgian Court University  
Annie Selak, Georgetown University
- Moderator: Margaret Mary Moore, Theology & Life Institute
- Presenters: Phyllis Zagano, Hofstra University  
Taylor Ott, KU Leuven  
Joy Ann McDougall, Candler School of Theology

This panel explored the conference theme of social salvation in regard to women, particularly within the Catholic Church or from a Catholic theological perspective. The first paper, presented by Phyllis Zagano, was entitled "Deliverance, Women, Church, World." It examined Catholic Church structures and policies connected to the obstruction of women from Catholic diaconal ministry, which Zagano argued endangered the salvation of women in the church and ultimately in the world, because of the influence of religion on people's thinking and behavior. Zagano argued that despite the increasing placement of women in leadership roles in the Catholic Church, they also remain oppressed because of the underlying and persistent belief in their inability to image Christ. By denying women's diaconal ministry, she argued the church continues to demonstrate women's inequality with men which in turn has detrimental implications for women such as the denial of their full employment rights and benefits.

The second paper, presented by Taylor Ott, was entitled "It Was the Husband: Social Salvation and Our Fascination with True Crime." Ott led the audience into the fascinating world of true crime media and its popularity among women. She posited that true crime was a culturally and anthropologically significant site for feminist theological work considering the conference theme of social salvation, but also its inverse concept, social sin. For, according to Ott, true crime "implicates the social sins of misogyny, racism, homophobia, the prison industrial complex, dehumanizing paradigms, and economic disparity." She also argued they implicated "salvific themes of secure and safe connection." Further, the telling of stories of dead persons adds an eschatological dimension to their lives; the people live on even if their death was via brutal circumstances. However some stories of women continue to be told while others

are disregarded—revealing the silencing of certain women and particular stories, when they do not fit within the societal imagination of who is worth saving.

The final paper, presented by Joy Ann McDougall, was entitled “Rising with Mary: Vocation as Conversion to the Future.” McDougall reimagined vocation as a “conversion towards the future”. She used Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the risen Christ in John 20 to suggest how women might also rise with Christ by rising with Mary Magdalene on that life-altering day. She drew on a variety of theological work such as from Shawn Copeland, Elizabeth Johnson, Teresa Okure, and Delores Williams to reinterpret Mary Magdalene’s story as an archetype for feminist conversion. This conversion involved a “shedding of past preoccupations, a gifting of friendship with God, and a summons to share the Gospel with others.” McDougall concluded her paper with suggested images of a “Rising with Mary Magdalene” which entailed a life of flourishing wherein women participated in their social responsibility by participating in global women’s movements. In many ways, McDougall suggests a stance for women that gives them agency rather than hopelessness and continual victimization in a patriarchal church and society. At the same time, Mary Magdalene’s story of questioned credibility among the disciples of Jesus again highlights the ongoing obstacle for women as they seek agency and hope for their sex within the Catholic Church.

The subsequent conversation among attendees and panelists initially noted how the papers seemed unconnected and at the same time, were connected, by their highlighting of the common theme of the inability of church and society to take seriously women’s voices. It seems a given today that women’s voices need to be heard (even though in some spaces they are still silenced or marginalized). The greater challenge, particularly for the Catholic Church, and in light of its undertaking the synodal process from 2021 to 2024, is to take seriously women’s voices and respond to those voices in a way that is meaningful and positively impactful to them, rather than just simply listening. It was highlighted that the Madeleva Lecture delivered this year by Natalia Imperatori-Lee spoke incisively and serendipitously on this issue.

The session moved on to the presentation of the Ann O’Hara Graff Award. This year’s recipient was Lisa Sowle Cahill. In the acceptance of her award, Cahill aptly pointed to the conference theme by paying attention to the various communities which made it possible for her and us as theologians to do the work that we do. She encouraged the audience not to lose hope, particularly as feminist theologians because feminist theology has come a long way since she began her own theological journey. On this last point, Cahill provided the comparison between the state of CTSA when she first joined and the beginnings of WCCT due to the work of a few women theologians including herself, and the state of CTSA and WCCT now with its thriving numbers and the expansion of the varieties of feminist theological work. Christine Firer Hinze, Meghan Clark, and Susan Ross provided insight into Cahill as a long-time friend, colleague, teacher, author, inspiration, and mentor. Over fifty people were in attendance.

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