

CATHOLICITY AND MISSION – TOPIC SESSION

- Convener: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education
- Moderator: Kevin Considine, Catholic Theological Union
- Presenters: Margaret Mary Moore, Theology and Life Institute
David de la Fuente, Fordham University
Ramon Luzarraga, Saint Martin's University

The three presenters in the Catholicity and Mission Topic Session delivered relevant and engaging papers, all of which meaningfully connected with the session's trajectory to explore:

the multiple meanings conveyed by the concept of 'baptism' in relation to the concepts of Catholicity and Mission, including the historical violence enforced upon indigenous persons and lands in the name of Christ, the contemporary reality of decreasing numbers of persons baptized into Catholicism and rather identifying as nones, and the ongoing debates within Catholicism about authentic belief and practice creating polarizations within.

For her paper, "De-coding the so-called Doctrine of Discovery," Margaret Mary Moore suggested that the Doctrine of Discovery was never a "doctrine" of the church. She showed how the ideas began with papal bulls in the sixteenth century authorizing Spain and Portugal to colonize new territories and to baptize countless numbers of Indigenous peoples along the way. She suggested that by de-coding this "doctrine," we can reevaluate the meaning of the sacrament of baptism, offer a healthy ecclesiology to our fellow Christians, and have a deeper appreciation of the healing and empowerment of self and others that baptism intends. Moreover, she suggested that understanding this harmful theology as something other than "doctrine" can offer a pastorally effective strategy for ministry among Indigenous youth in the United States, especially in light of the heightened awareness in recent years of the scandal of the Catholic-run Indigenous boarding schools in Canada and the United States.

In his presentation, "Pentecostalizing Catholicity and Mission: Jennings and Yong on the 'Baptism of the Multitude,'" David de la Fuente explored a "Pentecostalization" of the Catholic theology of baptism and its attendant missiology by drawing first on the writings of Willie James Jennings on baptism, and second on the missiology of Amos Yong. He showed how Jennings expresses a theology of baptism that is anti-oppressive because it is "Pentecostal" and connected to unity-in-diversity in the Spirit. He then showed how Yong offers a Pentecostal theology of missiology that is rooted in Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit and yet is expressed inclusively so as to edify the church catholic. He concluded that both thinkers contribute to a Pentecostalized vision of the "baptism of the multitude" that can actualize the theology of baptism itself as empowering and liberating.

Ramon Luzarraga's presentation, "The Box Score of Baptism: US Catholic Missionary Christianity in the Caribbean" explored how the Catholic Church in the Anglophone Caribbean was administered by one religious congregation in charge of

each territory and the interplay between local and colonial power and cultures in creating something new. The drive to administer baptism and other sacraments in these territories exposed a tension within these congregations. The number of persons baptized and receiving other sacraments was quantified by these congregations to justify the mission as something worthy of support by their donors, but their clergy fell short in enculturating themselves in Caribbean life. Despite that, their legacy in the Caribbean thrived under native leadership, with baptism and the sacraments understood by Caribbean people as God confirming their unique identity as such.

From questions posed by attendees, a lively discussion followed the presentations. Much of the conversation focused on ways to interpret the Doctrine of Discovery, both in historical context and in contemporary intercultural contexts. Notable questions revolved around “heresy,” intercultural hermeneutics, de-colonization, the definition of doctrine, the hierarchy of truths, the role of land in identity formation and empowerment, and the distinct ways that Caribbean Catholicisms provided an alternative theological praxis of Christian life through empowerment of local peoples. Larger questions included: What language do we use to describe a theological praxis whose effect is horrific violence even though it is not based in “official” doctrine? How do we name a theological praxis when teachings of lesser magisterial authority are manipulated as if it was doctrine for nefarious purposes? How do we theologically communicate for the common good in intercultural and de-colonial contexts to form a more just ecclesial body?

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