

St. Vincent 2013

16th Conference on Catholic Theology in the Caribbean Today

[Editorial Committee Report No.1]

With an invitation from Archbishop Joseph Harris of Port of Spain and a promise of support, the Conference on Catholic Theology in the Caribbean Today will celebrate its 20th anniversary in Trinidad & Tobago next year, June 9-13. This was one of the many decisions taken at the end of the 16th Conference (June 17-21, 2013), just concluded in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

A planning committee comprising Ms. Bernadette Salandy, Mr. Felix Edinborough, Fr. Clyde Harvey, Fr. Martin Sirju and Bro. Paschal Jordam OSB has already been formed and mandated to co-op, wherever necessary, persons with events management and other requisite skills. Under the theme “History and Memory,” the 2014 Conference will seek to critically appraise the challenges, achievements, limitations of the process of theological reflection inaugurated in St. Lucia in 1994.



Felix Edinborough



Fr. Martin Sirju



Bernadette Salandy



Bro. Paschal Jordon OSB



Fr. Clyde Harvey

After a very cordial meeting between Archbishop Harris, Bishop Jason Gordon and the Conference’s coordinating committee to clarify the relationship between the AEC and the Conference, it was agreed that (a) the Conference will accept responsibility for all statements published in its name and (b) the AEC will utilize the expertise and resources of the Conference for research in the preparation of pastorals and other documents. Archbishop Harris has replaced Bishop Gabriel Malzaire as the new AEC liaison with the Conference.

Founders' Lecture



Msgr. Patrick Anthony (left) and Fr. Michel DeVerteuil CSSp



Archbishop Joseph Harris CSSp

Among the other decisions taken by the 16th Conference to mark the 20th anniversary of its existence is the establishment of a “Founders Lecture” to go along with the ‘Dr. Idris Hamid Memorial Lecture’ and the ‘Cheryl Herrera Memorial Lecture’. The Founders Lecture, to be named after the three founders of the conference, Fr. Michel De Verteuil CSSp, Msgr. Patrick Anthony and Archbishop Joseph Harris CSSp, will provide an ongoing opportunity to commemorate those who have contributed to the conference over the years such as the late Fr. Henry Charles, Sr. Diane Jagdeo OP and the Surinamese lay theologian Peter Sjak-Shie. At this year’s conference during a session called “Remembering Henry”, Fr. Martin Sirju led participants in an appreciation of the life and work of the late Fr. Henry Charles. In this new conference feature “Book-shelf Lime”, Fr. Charles’ book *Forgiveness Considered* was briefly reviewed while participants shared on how Fr. Charles had impacted their lives.



Fr. Henry Charles



Sr. Diane Jagdeo OP



Peter Sjak-Shie

This year’s conference was held at the RC Pastoral Center, Edinboro, Kingstown, under the theme “Vatican II and the Church in the Caribbean”. There were about 25 participants from the region and the diaspora, among them theologians, clergy, religious, catechists and pastoral workers. For the first time ever, there were three bishops at the conference: Archbishop Joseph Harris CSSp, Bishop Jason Gordon the bishop of Bridgetown and Kingstown, and Bishop Emeritus Malcolm Galt CSSp. From the

evaluation at the end of the 16th Conference most participants lauded the board and lodge arrangements but some found the 10 papers and two memorial lectures plus business sessions too demanding. For a list of papers presented check our website : caribbeantheologytoday.net. and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

The Vincentian public responded with great enthusiasm to the two public lectures on Creation Spirituality and the round table on the future of the Church in the Caribbean. Sr. Annette Chow's lecture on Creation Spirituality drew one of the largest crowds we have ever seen at a Memorial Lecture. The clear articulation of her personal journey towards the integration of faith and science sparked a lively discussion on how to catechise the contemporary youth. The round table format which was being utilized for the first time for the second memorial lecture worked so well that it might become a regular feature at future conferences. Presenters Dr. Miriam Sheridan, Prof. Terrence Julien and Sr. Annette Chow raised the challenges to the Church in the Caribbean today, as they saw them fifty years after Vatican II : the culture of death, violence and corruption, the new media environment, the shortage of clergy and lack of vocations, the hemorrhaging of laity. Suggested solutions from the other presenters, Archbishop Harris and Bishop Gordon, included the formation of pastoral teams to manage parishes, drawing upon the skills, talents and best practices among the laity; and discovering creative ways to impart moral values and habits to children and youths.

Women and Caribbean Theology Today

During the closing session of the 15th Conference in Kingston, Jamaica in 2011, it was agreed that (a) the 16th Conference (2013) would be held in Tobago, if the new center being built by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny was available, (b) that the theme/focus would be "*The role of women in the Caribbean church*" and (c) that Dr. Jennifer Rahim would be invited to deliver the Cheryl Herrera Memorial Lecture. Since then, two things happened (i) 2012-2013 was declared a Year of Faith to mark the 50th anniversary of Vatican II and (ii) Fr. Jason Gordon, a member of the Conference, was appointed Bishop of dioceses of Bridgetown and Kingstown. Bishop Gordon invited the Conference to reconsider the Tobago venue, since Trinidad had hosted several conferences in the past, and to come to either of his dioceses, Bridgetown or Kingstown.

This is how the 16th Conference came to St. Vincent and why women such as Dr. Anna Perkins, Dr. Sylvia Rose-Ann Walker, Dr. Jennifer Rahim, Sr. Annette Chow SJC, Sr. Rose Leon SJC, featured so prominently. The coordinating committee of the conference tried to retain the focus on women while incorporating the theme of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. This was well illustrated by the last presentation at this year's conference, Peter Jordens' excellent research paper on the role which women played at the Second Vatican Council and how women are mentioned and treated in meticulously researched post-Conciliar documents. Without dealing directly with the question of the ordination of women, Jordens demonstrated from internal evidence within the conciliar and post-conciliar documents that there was need for ongoing dialogue and *aggiornamento* on the role of women in the Church in the Caribbean.

Although women form the vast majority of the active participants within the churches in our region, women like Dr. Anna Perkins, show that they can contribute much more to the local church than simply ushering and reading at services or taking care of the flowers for the altar. A professional Caribbean theologian, Dr. Perkins brings a rigorous intellectual scrutiny to what the Bishops of the Antilles have said/are saying about Caribbean peoples and their history. Beginning with the Second Vatican Council's new approach to history, its new historical consciousness, she examines how "the

Caribbean Church presents its own particular articulation of historical consciousness in the pastoral and theological enterprise of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC)”.



Dr. Anna Kasafi Perkins



Dr. Sylvia Rose-Ann Walker



Sr. Annette Chow SJC

In her paper for the conference “The Shadows of Yesteryear : The Antilles Bishops and History after Vatican II”, Perkins focusses on a 1992 AEC document *Evangelisation for a New Caribbean* whose subject was “the importance of history as a category...as it wrestled with the five hundredth anniversary of the coming of Christianity to the region.” Perkins believes that “history since Vatican II has been and important category for framing theological reflection and pastoral activity within the Caribbean, especially given its history of denial, denigration, silencing and submerging”. The historical consciousness of the Pastoral could have been deepened, she writes, “by an appreciation of the historical nature of Christianity itself”. Here again we can see how the proposed new collaboration between the AEC and the theology conference could be beneficial.

Dr. Jennifer Rahim was inadvertently delayed in Canada and could not be there in person to deliver her paper “A Conversion at the Border: The Meaning of the Syrophoenician Woman for Caribbean Cultural Discourse”. Since the paper has been published on our website for a while, participants were asked to comment on it online (website, Facebook, Twitter or e-mail) and prepare for the proposed Skype conference with Dr. Rahim and the editorial committee in August.

Dr. Sylvia Rose-Ann Walker, another Caribbean woman, brings literary scholarship (reader-based poststructuralist theoretical/critical approaches) to bear on theological reflection. In her paper “Out of the Depths – A Literary exploration of Post Vatican II Caribbean Images of God and the Church” she argues that the religious images in the works of some Caribbean writers challenge some accepted ways of thinking and speaking about Catholic Christian identity thereby serving to “stimulate the mind to a more accurate and penetrating grasp of the faith” (*Gaudium et Spes* #62). With quotations from Marlene Nourbese Philip’s “Cyclamen Girl” (from *She tries her tongue, her silence softly breaks*), John Robert Lee’s *Canticles*, Mervyn Morris’ *On Holy Week* and Marcia Douglas’ “In the beginning, there was laughter. God was lying down at the bottom of the sea, taking an afternoon nap...” (“What the Periwinkle Remember” in Nalo Hopkinson ed. *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root*); Walker parallels the Caribbean

writers' quest for a voice to articulate indigenous spiritual experiences with Caribbean theology's reach for its own space, language, tone and texture.

The quest for a theological space where we can “talk we talk” without fear of being defined, categorized or managed has been one of the goals of the Conference and no one has pursued this task more assiduously than Dr. Gerald Boodoo of Duquesne University. In his paper this year, “Vatican II and Catholic Theology in the Caribbean” Boodoo examines the impact of the Second Vatican Council on theology in the Caribbean some 50 years after. He argues that Catholic theology in the Caribbean now has “ a more decidedly local flavor and has come into its own...(but) the local churches don't seem all that much ‘local’...”

In evaluating what has been happening in Catholic theology in the region Boodoo claims that “we in the region are not tied to any one ideological and/or theological perspective. We give eclecticism a good name! And make it a way of doing theology!” He goes on to argue that “the power of eclecticism is the drawing on a multitude of varying methods and sources in order to better understand and describe the loci of research”. Rebutting the traditional criticism of eclecticism as transgressive of disciplinary boundaries and lacking continuity and consistency in theory and thought, he warns against alleged “sound methods” aimed at perpetuating domination. He pleads for the emancipation of ourselves from what Marley would call “mental slavery” and proposes a theological posture which may not “fit into neat systematic categories and maintains eclectic, transgressive characteristics that have been forged out of violent involuntary personal and structural associations”. Boodoo believes that if we pursue this path we will come to “a space that recognizes our theological endeavor in the region as a sort of tower of Babel ... where we become empowered to speak many different languages along with their attendant epistemological and cultural perspectives and which also seems like foolishness to those who want to consolidate power and recreate empire in our midst, even using the name church to do this”.

Editorial Committee of the Conference