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From neoexclusivism to humility

Kate Oatis | May. 20, 2011

DAYTON, Ohio -- Gerard Mannion's recent book featured prominently in Day 2 of the Ecclesiology Investigations Research Network's conference on ecclesiology and exclusion [1] at the University of Dayton.

Ecclesiology and postmodernity posits the theory that the Catholic church has responded to the relativism and cultural pluralism that Mannion says figure prominently in the world today with what he calls neoexclusivism, characterized by an us-vs.-them approach and exemplified by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's dogmatism.

Mannion constructs an ecclesiology based on a virtue ethic as a way to obviate the church's response, said Dennis Doyle, Ph.D. and professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton. But where Mannion falls short, Doyle said, is in labeling a person's attempt to place him or herself resolutely into a faith tradition as neoexclusivist.

Rather, Doyle asked: "Is it not impossible and even undesirable to do away completely with the belief that belonging to and participating in one's own community is superior to not doing so?" In this light, Doyle suggested, tendencies to identify with a particular religious group or faith tradition might not carry such charged associations.

Paul Lakeland, Ph.D. and professor of Catholic studies at Fairfield University in Connecticut, addressed Mannion's notion that what is necessary by way of a response to the postmodernist impulse to neoexclusivism is a posture of humility.

Among Lakeland's challenges to Mannion: "Can any institution committed to the defense of a metanarrative allow itself to employ anything more than the appearance of humility, if true humility means a readiness to admit that we are open to correction?"

In an assent to Mannion, he went on to cite examples by which he says the Catholic church has shown itself to be resolutely lacking in humility, including Australian Bishop William Morris' unceremonious firing "for his extremely mild thoughts about the role of women in ministry."

Editorial note: This is a convivial group.

You can read more coverage of the conferencehere: "Immigration, exclusion and the church."[2]

[Kate Oatis is a freelance writer and director of communications for the Sisters of St. Francis of Tiffin, Ohio, and former features editor for the *Catholic Chronicle* in Toledo. She will provide conference snippets from May 19-22 and a wrap up of the conference next week.]

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Links:

[1] http://exclusionconference.ecclesiological.net/
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/immigration-and-church/immigration-exclusion-and-church