News



Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu (second from left) receives the 2023 Ann O'Hara Graff Award June 8 at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Among those honoring the theologian at the award ceremony were (from left) Susan Abraham of the Pacific School of Religion, Layla Karst of Loyola Marymount and Jennifer Owens Jofré of St. Louis University. (NCR/Heidi Schlumpf)



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For her role as a public theologian, teacher and mentor, especially to undocumented students, Cecilia González-Andrieu was recognized with the 2023 Ann O'Hara Graff Award at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America. The convention is being held June 8-11 in Milwaukee.

González-Andrieu, professor of theology and theological aesthetics at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, 'publishes and speaks widely as a public theologian and is committed to faith that does justice," said Jessica Coblentz of St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, in presenting the award June 8.

The award is named for the late feminist theologian who died in 1996. It is given annually by the CTSA's Women's Consultation in Constructive Theology group to a woman scholar who represents the qualities of scholarship, faith and lived experience present in O'Hara Graff's work.

At the June 8 award ceremony, Layla Karst of Loyola Marymount praised the self-described "activist scholar" who has "walked her talk alongside the lives of her students and colleagues." She noted that González-Andrieu's course, "Meeting Christ in Faith and Art" is one of the most popular courses in the theological studies department.

In helping students find their own voices, González-Andrieu provides witness to "the power of theology to speak into the real lives of people on the margins and empower them to work for liberation and justice," Karst said.

"Her writing often holds in tension a prophetic critique of the way things are and an unfailing hope of the way things can and will one day be," Karst said.



Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles receives the 2023 Ann O'Hara Graff Award June 8 at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Milwaukee. (NCR/Heidi Schlumpf)

At Loyola Marymount, González-Andrieu helped organize scholarships for undocumented students and has "served as mentor, advisor, pastor and cheerleader for almost every undocumented person who has come through our university," Karst said.

Susan Abraham of the Pacific School of Religion also noted González-Andrieu's advocacy on behalf of custodial and facilities staff at Loyola Marymount. "Nothing escapes her attention," Abraham said. "When it comes to the kind of work we tend not to see, she sees it and calls it to our attention."

Jennifer Owens Jofré of St. Louis University followed González-Andrieu's model and brought the voices of two young Latina women to the award ceremony, sharing quotes from former students.

González-Andrieu "helped form my moral compass," said Alejandra Angel, a former student and current theology teacher and campus minister at St. Mary's Academy in Los Angeles. "There was no classroom like hers, since her learning spaces included attending student-led protests, accompanying DREAMers at LMU, and working toward more just wages for staff."

Alumna Cristy Castillo, who is currently in graduate school at Barry University in Miami, said González-Andrieu pushed her " to see my *latinidad* from a different perspective and ask the questions I now attempt to answer within my research."

In accepting the award, González-Andrieu recalled her mentor, the late Alejandro García-Rivera, who worked with many Latina theology doctoral students. "He left us work to do and I challenge you mightily to do it," she said, noting his "exhortation to take up room and to become people who extend invitations to the type of beauty that can only happen when we all love each other 'without distinction.'"

González-Andrieu pointed to three projects she is currently involved in: Discerning Deacons, a global group working to restore women to the diaconate; Catholic Women Preach, whose website features more than 400 homilies by women; and Haciendo Caminos, a new project to support Latino and Latina master's-level students at Catholic universities and theology schools.

"This is about building up the beauty of this church that we love so much but [that] needs our critical edge to build its prophetic potential," she said.

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