Carmen Nanko-Fernández

Carmen Nanko-Fernández is Professor of Hispanic Theology and Ministry and director of the Hispanic Theology and Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She is also author of Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire (Fordham University Press, 2015), analyzes theological, philosophical, and political descriptions of “flesh” as metaphors for understanding how social discourses materialize in human bodies. She is also author of The Touch of Transcendence (WJK, 2007) and of Planetarios: Lives, Postcoloniality, and Theology (Fordham University Press, 2010) and of Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire (Chalice Press, 2004). Rivera is currently committed to developing a project that explores narratives of catastrophe in Caribbean thought.

Rivera served the AAR board as At-Large director (2014-2016). She was also book awards jury (2012-2015), and served in Steering Committees of various groups, including Theology and Religious Reflection and Latina/o Critical and Comparative Studies, among others.

Carmen Nanko-Fernández - Bio

Carmen Nanko-Fernández has presented in a variety of academic and pastoral venues including the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. A past president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHUTS), Carmen received their Virgilio Elizondo Award in 2012 for “distinguished achievement in theology.” The scholarship and work of professor Nanko-Fernández in theological education, campus ministry, professional associations, and on editorial boards reflect ongoing commitments to agency, mentoring, access, and justice particularly for communities too often underrepresented, marginalized, and minoritized in the academy, religious institutions, and in publication/media.

Carmen Nanko-Fernández - Statement

I come from the margins of the AAR though I have a 20 year pin and served as co-chair of two program units. Since 1998 I haven't missed a meeting, but I cannot say that our spaces feel like an intellectual home or that home is the best metaphor for our Academy. I prefer plaza, cognizant that such sites, constructed in the moment like our annual and regional gatherings, or construed fluidly through our publications, online presence, and social media are non-innominate spaces that bear the consequences of colonial baggage and exclusion. Plazas can be open, yet partially bounded spaces, allowing for exchanges, movement, spiritual debate, creative expression, and resistance.

As a Latina Catholic theologian and religion scholar, I am grounded in a complicated particularity that influences my perspective. Admitting my location illuminates potential areas of intersection and shared commitments. Election is not about “my vision” but about exercising leadership that invites investment and ownership by members. Toward that end I focus on two mission-related questions: (1) Who are we? (2) ¿Y qué? (So what?)

1. Who are we?
2. ¿Y qué?

How can we come to values of diversity and inclusion beyond an anecdotal sense of who belongs and who is missing, who attends and whose participation is obstructed? While work has been done expanding diversity in terms of program units, inclusion and access within units and certain leadership committees remains strikingly inadequate. The agenda and wisdom of underrepresented constituencies have much to offer the whole.

Data from meeting surveys and employment services indicate teaching remains the primary profession. Concern for shifting responsibilities and pedagogies call for new evaluative standards. Recently AAR produced helpful guidelines for evaluating “Scholarship in Religious Studies for Promotion and Tenure” and “Digital Scholarship.” Why are such collaborative resources among our best kept secrets?

Changes in publishing detrimentally affect scholars particularly from underrepresented racial/ethnic communities. Exorbitant pricing keeps scholarship partially bounded spaces, allowing publishers are less inclined to “take a chance” on newer perspectives that push boundaries of religious studies and theologies. These decisions impact diversity of faculty, pedagogies, resourcing, and presence in the public square.

If our mission includes collection, analysis, and monitoring of field-related data and trends, then our current membership profile and resources available on the web need updating/revising. If we seek to inspire new generations, our digital imprint and trends, then our current membership profile and resources available on the web need updating/revising. If we seek to inspire new generations, our digital imprint and trends, then our current membership profile and resources available on the web need updating/revising. If we seek to inspire new generations, our digital imprint and trends, then our current membership profile and resources available on the web need updating/revising. If we seek to inspire new generations, our digital imprint and trends, then our current membership profile and resources available on the web need updating/revising.

Mayra Rivera

Mayra Rivera is Professor of Religion and Latin Studies at Harvard University. She is also chair of the standing Committee on Ethnicity, Religion, and Rights and a faculty member in Harvard’s doctoral program in American Studies.

Rivera works at the intersections between philosophy of religion, literature, and theories of coloniality, race and gender—with particular attention to Caribbean thought. Her research explores the relationship between discursive and material dimensions in shaping human embodiment. Her most recent book, Poetics of the Flesh (Duke University Press, 2015), analyzes theological, philosophical, and political descriptions of “flesh” as metaphors for understanding how social discourses materialize in human bodies. She is also author of The Touch of Transcendence (WJK, 2007) and of Planetarios: Lives, Postcoloniality, and Theology (Fordham University Press, 2010) and of Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire (Chalice Press, 2004). Rivera is currently committed to helping the AAR have a significant and visible role in articulating a vision of the value of the rigorous study of religion across academic disciplines and professions—through programming and workshops, collaboration with other organizations and through further development of its online informational materials.

Advancing the goals of promoting the public understanding of religion, an outward looking goal, requires equal attention to the vitality of the organization internally. The AAR has sought to develop structures and processes that keep it aware of how its practices and policies might become ever more inclusive. Committees on Women, Persons with Disabilities, Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Graduate Students, and LGBTQ Persons ensure that the organization continues to deepen the engagement with a diversity of constituencies. I would prioritize learning about the concerns of these groups as well as assessing the practices of the AAR to make sure they continue to be attentive to the needs of its minoritized constituencies. I am also committed to seeking ways to foster meaningful discussions about the transformations in scholarly fields and the relationships between them, which should be reflected through its programming, awards, and the like. I would also seek to continue ongoing efforts to address the problems faced by Contingent Faculty, both by supporting their strong participation in the AAR programs and through advocacy in the academic world. Furthermore, ensuring the vitality of the organization toward the future requires prioritizing efforts to recruit and support the participation of graduate students at all levels.

The AAR has had a formative role through all stages of my scholarly development. It would be a privilege to serve the AAR as vice-president.

Carmen Nanko-Fernández - Statement

The American Academy of Religion is committed to fostering excellence in the academic study of religion and serving the broader society by contributing to the public understanding of religion. If elected, I would strive to help the AAR pursue both of these dimensions of its mission. I served the AAR Board of Directors as At-Large Director at a time when the board was focusing on strategic planning. It would be an honor to serve at this new stage when the goals defined by the strategic plan are being implemented.

Excellence in the academic study of religion requires fostering a robust diversity of perspectives and a culture of broad participation in the debates that currently shape society. My academic positions—in the study of religion, in ethnic studies and in the humanities—have made it imperative for me to communicate across disciplines and articulate the value of religious studies for the humanities in general and the value of the humanities for our society. This includes educating the broader public in the complex histories and traditions that our membership studies, as well as modeling ways of engaging religious sensibilities in the broader culture, beyond those limited examples discussed in public debates. I am committed to helping the AAR have a significant and visible role in articulating a vision of the value of the rigorous study of religion across academic disciplines and professions—through programming and workshops, collaboration with other organizations and through further development of its online informational materials.

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Mayra Rivera - Statement

Vice President

Serves a one-year term. The current Vice President will automatically become President-Elect next year and President the following year without additional elections. During their tenure, the Vice President will have the opportunity to affect AAR policy in powerful ways; in particular, during the presidential year, the incumbent makes many of the appointments of members to openings on working groups. In addition to serving on the Board of Directors, the Vice President also serves on the Executive, Audit, and Program Committees.

The two candidates appear in alphabetical order. A brief biography and a personal statement have been provided by each candidate on the ballot.