

CHRIST—TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: Grace at Work in the World
Convener: O. Ernesto Valiente, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
Moderator: Steven Battin, University of Notre Dame
Presenters: Daniel Castillo, Loyola University Maryland
Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, Wake Forest University School of Divinity
Michael Anthony Abril, Aquinas Institute of Theology

In his paper, “Behold the New Adam: Christ, the Gardener, and the Global Eco-Social Crisis,” Daniel Castillo developed the foundations for an eco-liberationist Christology through a theological reading of the first resurrection account in the gospel of John (Jn 20:1–23). Drawing upon contemporary biblical scholarship and current discussions regarding Christ and *imago Dei* (i.e. Tanner, Kelsey, and McFarland), Castillo’s presentation argued that John’s gospel symbolically elucidates an implicit New Adam Christology, which corresponds to an implicit *imago Dei* anthropology found in Genesis 2. Castillo explained that, in Genesis 2, God gives humanity the vocation of “serving and caring” for the soil and all that comes from the soil (Gen 2:15)—that is, the symbolic vocation of “gardener.” According to Castillo, John’s account appropriates the creation narratives of Genesis in order to present the Resurrection as the in-breaking of a new creation. Within this context, he argues, John depicts the Risen Christ as a New Adam who fulfills the vocation to “serve and care” for neighbor and earth (Gen 2:15). Accordingly, the call to hear and respond to the “cries” of the earth and the poor is affirmed as intrinsic to the grace-filled life of Christian discipleship.

In her paper, “The Grace of Resilience for the Work of Resistance: Christology, White Guilt, and White Fragility,” Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo offers a Christological interrogation of sin and grace in relation to white guilt and white fragility, both of which are barriers to racial justice and reconciliation in the United States. The paper’s argument unfolded in three parts. First, O’Donnell Gandolfo analyzed the various roles that white guilt and white fragility play in preventing relatively well-intentioned white people from facing personal complicity and/or actively resisting structural racism. Then, she asked whether or not returning to more traditional understandings of personal sin and guilt might be helpful for understanding the moral complicity of white people in systemic racism. Unlike those who stress forgiveness as the grace needed to help white Christians overcome their guilt and fragility in order to enter into solidarity with people of color in their struggle against racism, O’Donnell Gandolfo proposes that the grace of Christ that responds to this problem is primarily the grace of resilience. This grace, she argues, can empower white folks both to face the truth of their personal complicity without falling apart and to courageously enter into the work of resistance, without which reconciliation will be forever a dream.

In his presentation titled “Grace Liberating the Voice of the Poor: Sor Juana’s Christology,” Michael Anthony Abril built on recent retrievals of Sor Juana’s Ines de la Cruz’s theology to argue that her Christology is central to appropriating her liberating message within U.S. Latin@ theology today. Abril explores how Sor Juana’s

Topic Session: Christ

baroque drama, *The Divine Narcissus*, casts Christ into the surprising role of Narcissus—the self-absorbed villain from Greek myth whose own self-love is the very definition of Narcissism. He argues that, in Juana’s version, the self with whom Christ-Narcissus falls passionately in love is Human Nature. Thus, Abril claims that human nature not only discovers its true meaning and dignity in the love of Christ, but also that it is only through the intimate union of Christ’s divinity with his humanity that the real beauty and radiance of Christ’s divinity shine forth. For Abril, the purpose of grace with regard to nature is not to beautify something ugly, but rather to reflect and magnify the beauty of nature as an intrinsic mirror of Christ’s divine splendor. In this way, Abril concludes, Juana envisions an intimate and cooperative relationship between nature and grace that is discovered within the very person of the incarnated God-man.

The conversation that followed the presentations focused on the different interpretations of Christ—as the gardener and Narcissus—and on their capacity to effect conversion, particularly in situations confronting structural racism.

O. ERNESTO VALIENTE
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
Boston, Massachusetts