

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Grace at Work in the World  
Convener: Daniel Scheid, Duquesne University  
Moderator: P.J. Johnston, St. Olaf College  
Presenters: Craig Danielson, Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
Jaechan Anselmo Park, O.S.B., University of Toronto  
James T. Bretzke, S.J., Boston College

In his presentation, “Integral Humanism: A Comparative Analysis of Person and Polity in Catholic Personalist and Hindu Nationalist Thought,” Craig Danielson compares the work of Catholic theologian Jacques Maritain and Hindu nationalist Deendayal Upadhyaya and their contrasting conceptions of integral humanism. Both describe humanisms that are critical of bourgeois liberalism, free market economics, and top-down collectivism like communism, all of which Upadhyaya and Maritain see as inhuman. Upadhyaya articulates an emanationist and collectivist understanding of nationhood. The nation is an organic entity, has its own soul, and is a natural, innate human goal. This worldview was later claimed as the official philosophy of India’s ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. Danielson draws on Maritain and his Catholic personalist thought to critique Upadhyaya’s nationalism, arguing that this conception of nation subsumes human persons or minority groups, leaving them theologically and politically illegitimate. Conversely, Danielson also suggests that the Western Church could learn from Upadhyaya’s critique of conversion, that it is too individualist and bourgeois liberal, hence explaining many Hindus’ resistance to conversion altogether.

In his paper, “Thomas Merton’s Contributions to Contemplative Dialogue with Buddhists: From Self-emptying (Sunnyata) to No-self (Anatta) to Trans-Cultural Maturity and the Spiritual Family,” Jaechan Anselmo Park investigates Thomas Merton’s evolving understanding of “contemplative dialogue.” First, Park explores Merton’s understanding of Buddhism by comparing Buddhist concepts of *anatta*, *sunnyata*, and *nirvana* to Christian ideas of the true self, the apophatic mystical way, and divinization. Merton argues that the notion of the no-self may become a bridge for connecting Christianity and Buddhism via the process of self-emptying or kenosis. Next, Park charts out three paths of Merton’s approach to contemplative dialogue: the experience of a spiritual family and the sense of a shared spiritual home with other contemplatives; the goal of interreligious dialogue is not in communication but in communion, in expressing humanity’s original unity-in-diversity and thus the spiritual communion of all people; and trans-cultural maturity, in which contemplatives transcend their own culture or religion. Merton hoped that through contemplative dialogue, monastics would strive for spiritual communion and thus become witnesses of the fundamental unity of humanity to a world that was becoming ever more materialistic and divided.

Finally, James Bretzke presented “Inculturing the Seeds of Grace in the ‘Swamp’ of Endo’s *Silence*,” which reconsiders themes in Japanese author Shusaku Endo’s 1966 historical novel *Silence*. Viewing the novel as an exemplar of the inculturation of grace, Bretzke turns to Zen Buddhism, the religious cultural tradition of Japan, to uncover aspects of the novel that Western readers may miss, and to underscore elements of Endo’s theological vision. Endo’s portrayal of Japanese Buddhist practices of *Zazen* (quiet sitting) and *Koans* (meditation riddles) reveal ways in which Fr. Rodrigues is

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able to experience *Satori* (enlightenment) and thus hear or understand God's apparent silence. For example, as a Jesuit, Fr. Rodrigues would have prayed for the third degree of humility, the freedom to imitate Jesus and share in his poverty and his being scorned and treated as worthless. So, when he tramples the Fumi-e (the likeness of Jesus), Fr. Rodrigues is not abandoning Jesus but fulfilling his identification with Jesus. Later, when Rodrigues forgives Kichijuro for his betrayal, Bretzke argues that, for Endo, the most important or enduring service a priest can perform is not confecting the Eucharist but is the ministry of forgiveness of sins.

In the discussion following the three presentations, questions ranged widely. Danielson commented on the idea of a "national soul" in India today, as well as the status of conversion laws. When asked about disagreements in interreligious dialogue, Park reported on the experience of Western monks and nuns in the USA, that many felt they were approaching the same goal but in a different way. When asked why Martin Scorsese altered the ending of the book, Bretzke explained that the growing sound of the cicadas during the funeral indicates that Fr. Rodrigues had apostatized Christianity but had not given up on Christ, and that his apparent rejection of the faith was in fact an expression of finding God in all things.

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