

MORAL THEOLOGY (II)—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: The Role of Grace in Moral Theology  
Convener: Christine E. McCarthy, Fordham University  
Moderator: Alessandro Rovati, Belmont Abbey College  
Presenters: Andrew Kim, Marquette University  
Scott G. Hefelfinger, Augustine Institute  
Christina A. Astorga, University of Portland  
Rene Sanchez, University of Portland

Andrew Kim's paper, "Created Grace and Human Agency in Aquinas," examines the effect of Augustinian and thomistic theologies of grace as applied to human agency and decision making in the context of the dialectical tension between the extreme "external" and "internal" locus of control perspectives. According to situationist psychology, human decision-making is profoundly influenced by exterior stimuli operating beyond the control or even consciousness of the individual agent. Data from research conducted in experimental psychology, such as Stanley Milgram's infamous obedience experiments, is introduced to substantiate this "external locus of control" point of view. Consequently, John Doris, a leading thinker in situationist psychology, maintains that traditional conceptions of virtue ethics, presuming an "internal locus of control" need to be reexamined. The reexamination project, however, has tended to focus primarily if not exclusively on the acquired virtues. Kim concludes that, whereas Augustine's theology of grace emphasizes an "external locus-of-control" understanding of grace, Aquinas's theology of grace emphasizes an internal locus of control, particularly in his insistence upon the reality of created grace in opposition to Peter Lombard. Ultimately, Kim argues that these differing emphases lead to importantly distinct conceptions of the nature of infused virtue.

In his paper, "Christian Prayer: Where Grace Dances with Desire," Scott G. Hefelfinger explores St. Thomas Aquinas's characterization of prayer as "the interpreter of desire." For Hefelfinger, exploring the meaning of this phrase, especially through the lens of the Lord's Prayer, proves to be richly rewarding; prayer serves both to express and shape our desires. For Aquinas, prayer is fundamentally a communion of love that forms our desires. In his work *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI provides a fascinating confirmation and deepening of this view. Firstly, he unfolds the scriptural foundations for this same view of prayer, showing how the words of prayer "go before us" and we are called to adapt our minds to them. Secondly, he shows the deeply christological foundations of prayer; to pray is to enter into Christ and his prayer. In sum, Benedict XVI helps us to see that prayer is fundamentally about conforming ourselves to Christ.

By bringing Aquinas and Benedict XVI together, Hefelfinger demonstrates in a carefully systematic and deeply scriptural way what prayer is and the role it plays in the moral life; prayer is the place where grace helps to shape our desires and conform them to Christ. This twofold function of prayer has some beautiful and concrete ramifications. Firstly, with regard to liturgical prayer, the words attentively spoken slowly mold the heart and its habits into a christocentric shape. Secondly, with regard to personal prayer, the perennial problem of distraction takes on new meaning as the way desire emerges and offers itself to be measured and shaped by Christ's desires. In both cases, we see that our desires are rightly brought forward and expressed in prayer,

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in order to be recognized and measured by the light of Christ. In this way, prayer can be seen as a place where grace dances with desire, where the two come together in an interplay that moves the believer towards an *imitatio Christi*.

With their co-authored paper, “Resisting the Logic of the Empire: Prophetic Lament and the Filipino Notion of ‘Lakas’ (Power),” Christina A. Astorga and Rene Sanchez interrogate the logic of empire as systematic uniformity which gives rise to the loss of culture and places it in conversation with prophetic lament and the nonviolent power of *lakas* in the 1986 Filipino Revolution. The logic of the empire subjects people to a totalizing system, ontologically numbing individuals and communities from questioning large aspects of their lives. Prophetic lament, in its three characteristics—memorable, contextual, and embodied—counters the logic of the empire. The Filipino notion of *lakas*—*lakas ganda* (gracious power), *lakas awa* (compassionate power), and *lakas saya* (joyous and celebratory power)—at the base of the non-violent Filipino revolution of 1986, converges and diverges with prophetic lament. Paradox is at the heart of both, in the tension of justice and compassion, but the Filipino *lakas* draws from the power of subversive joy rather than the from the power of lament.

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