

LONERGAN—CONSULTATION

Topic: Grace at Work in the World
Convener: Darren Dias, University of St. Michael's College
Moderator: Nicholas Olkovich, St. Mark's College
Presenters: Alison M. Benders, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
Christopher Hadley, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
Christian S. Krokus, University of Scranton

In her paper, “Advantages of a Theological Anthropology based on Lonergan’s Understanding of Human Beings as ‘Originators of Value,’” Alison Benders highlights the need for an alternate conception of theological anthropology, one no longer centered on abstract notions of human freedom but on a rich conception of moral agency that recognizes human persons as originators of value. Drawing on Lonergan’s thought and recent work by Robert Doran, SJ, Benders re-conceptualizes human beings as *imago Dei* for their emerging and evolving capacity to initiate love. Benders also sketches out the implications of this revised perspective for key notions of creation, sin, grace, and redemption. Here, human dignity is viewed as inherently awash in God’s grace, and our failure to maintain basic societal justice is itself an expression of sin. When divine love is expressed freely through individual authenticity, Benders argues, it can transform the social order and the values within it. Benders discusses the recent rise of white supremacy and recurrent racism in the United States to highlight the concrete implications of this view.

The paper “Sacralization and Desacralization in *Laudato Si’* and *The Benedict Option*” by Christopher Hadley, SJ, refers to the work of Robert Doran’s *The Trinity in History* to examine the competing conceptions of secularization in Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* and Rod Dreher’s *The Benedict Option* (2017). While noting some constructive overlap between these two works, Hadley describes them as presenting fundamentally contrasting and opposed approaches for conceiving grace in the secular world. *Laudato Si’* recognizes the Church’s deeply-rooted relationships to wider society in its responsibility to the suffering poor and to natural ecosystems, and it calls for a reconciliation that would redeem these broken relationships. Dreyer’s *Benedict Option*, by contrast, laments the loss of political and cultural prestige for conservative Christianity in the West and argues for a return to a narrowly defined counter-cultural “orthodoxy” and a renewed embrace of traditionalist moral attitudes. Hadley argues that *Laudato Si’* offers the richer and more genuine expression of orthodoxy, which powerfully expresses what Lonergan describes as the theme of “law of the cross,” according to which charity does not return evil for evil but transforms death and suffering by redemptive love.

In his paper “Lonergan, the Law of the Cross, and Sufism,” Christian S. Krokus considers Lonergan’s understanding of the “law of the cross” as a heuristic lens for regarding the relationship of Christianity to Islam as one of fraternity rather than rivalry. Krokus highlights three aspects of the law of the cross: recognition of death as the consequence of sin, the transformation of death by love, and emergent new life. This dynamic, Krokus argues, as revealed in the missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit, is also found in the peaceful surrender to God practiced in Sufism. Krokus focuses on two Sufi texts that demonstrate this connection: Al-Ghazali’s autobiographical text *Deliverance from Error* and Attar of Nishapur’s 13th-century Persian classic

Consultation: Lonergan

Conference of the Birds. Drawing from relevant passages, Krokus argues that the three steps of Lonergan's law of the cross are evident in both texts, and that this suggests important implications of Lonergan's theology for religious pluralism. The gift of God's love is cruciform, and this law of the cross is operative wherever we find genuine self-sacrificing love.

The conversation that followed focused on Lonergan's law of the cross, as it related to each of the three papers, and on discussions of orthodoxy and political identity among U.S. Christians. A strong point of emphasis was the universal implications of Lonergan's understanding of love and value. Lonergan's law of the cross is not only found in Christianity but revealed in the suffering and passion of the world, and it should be celebrated wherever it appears. The fears of the end of "Christian America," in contrast, reflect a carefully-guarded conservative political identity that mobilizes a narrow conception of orthodoxy to resist cultural change and loss of cultural privilege.

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