

CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Intimate and Systemic: Addressing the Scourge of Violence through the Lens of Catholic Social Thought  
Convener: Kate Ward, Marquette University  
Moderator: Nicholas Hayes, Boston College  
Presenters: Megan K. McCabe, Gonzaga University  
Krista L. Stevens, John Carroll University  
David Kwon, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Megan K. McCabe presented a paper entitled “Clergy Sexual Abuse as a Failure of Catholic Social Thought: Taking the ‘Private’ Seriously.” Referencing both painful statistical data and compelling narratives, McCabe demonstrated that the global reality of sexual abuse in the church has made clear that the church has failed to understand the reality of interpersonal violence that is hidden from view for what it is: a violation of human dignity and the preferential option for the poor, a denial of justice, and a failure of the powerful to live in solidarity with the victimized. Historically, McCabe noted that laity and the magisterium too often have equated sexual violence with the violation of chastity and purity. Accordingly, they have deferred inerrantly too easily to hagiographic language associated with the church’s virgin martyrs to rationalize victimization. Such understandings must be jettisoned, McCabe argued, and clergy sexual abuse must be named for what it is. The work of feminist theologians and their language of integration would help the church immensely, McCabe observed, as would the application of the principles of Catholic social thought to the church itself and to “private” forms of violence if another world is to be possible.

In her paper presentation, “The Barbarian at Our Gate: A Common Good Argument for Stricter Gun Control,” Krista L. Stevens argued that the gun lobby is the barbarian at the gates of civil society and public debate. Stevens’ argument moved on three fronts. First, Stevens addressed John Courtney Murray’s understanding of civil society, grounded in natural law theory that presumes human’s ability to look at the natural world and determine that good is to be done and evil avoided. The move from “good is to be done and evil avoided” to specific policies that determine, at least legally, what is good and evil is complex. But these conversations must happen, Stevens emphasized. Next, Stevens’ explored how the gun lobby contributes to the breakdown of public debate around gun control by dominant economic influence and by creating a culture of fear that prizes individualism over respectable civil discourse. Finally, drawing on work by Firmin Debrabander, David Hollenbach, and Miguel De La Torre, Stevens demonstrated that the Church’s social teaching on the common good has the potential to transform the conversation about gun rights in ways that allow for healthy debate and a respect for human dignity.

The final paper presentation of this topic session was David Kwon’s “The Peacebuilding of *Jus Post Bellum*: Just Political Participation in Catholic Social Thought.” Kwon’s paper invited reflection on postwar conflicts that Kwon linked to broader structures of inequality that promote interpersonal and group violence and structures of terror. Kwon contended that just political participation as a central mission of peacebuilding contributes to the entire *jus post bellum* scheme while serving to

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protect and rebuild the common good and subsidiarity. Kwon's paper defined just political participation as locally based peacebuilding in light of Catholic social thought. Such a definition produces clear and realistic postwar goals and forestalls postwar problems, advocating for a local consensus, rather than simply imposing democracy and liberal values. This locally led peacebuilding agenda, Kwon argued, in the end, calls actors to think creatively about how they affect change, rather than rely on plots that subvert local policies through "elite" military and governmental imposition.

The conversation which followed these paper presentations examined the three different areas that cried out for social justice. A healthy exchange between attendees and panelists critiqued some of the realistic practicalities of the concrete responses McCabe, Stevens, and Kwon recommended to respond effectively to sexual violence, gun lobbying, and postwar realities. An important concern focused on who presently controlled the narratives associated with these realities and who had the power to transform them. That something must be done was clear; solidarity and the option for the poor are not optional. As the session concluded, it also became increasingly obvious that these critical moral issues need to be addressed in a *systemic* way that incorporates the rich wisdom of Catholic social thought for building a just common good.

PATRICK FLANAGAN  
*Saint John's University*  
*Jamaica, New York*