

CHRIST – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation  
Convener: Steven Battin, University of Notre Dame  
Moderator: Brianne Jacobs, Santa Clara University  
Presenters: Laura M. Taylor, College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University  
Jean Donovan, Saint Leo University  
Joseph Drexler-Dreis, Saint Mary’s College of California

Laura M. Taylor began with a presentation entitled “Encountering Christ in the Borderlands: A Theology of the Cross/ing.” The driving question of her paper was, “How can Christians reconcile a liberating God of life with the suffering and precarious deaths of those fleeing conditions that make life in their homeland unsustainable?” Taylor argued that holding the blistered feet of the border crosser alongside the feet of the crucified Christ might enable North American Christians privileged by citizenship to hear the voice of Christ in the cry of the migrant. Drawing on border studies and recent anthropological work on migration, the first part of the paper discussed the history of the US-Mexico border, the present US strategy of “prevention by deterrence,” and its effects—psychologically and physically—on migrants fleeing war, violence, and poverty in their homelands. In the second part of the paper, Taylor proposed the wounded feet of Christ and the border crosser as a bi-directional hermeneutic key. On the one hand, walking alongside Jesus in the borderland enables contemporary re-memberings of his teaching and praxis, with four implications. On the other hand, attending to the two pairs of wounded feet encourages re-membering four points regarding human life: the sacredness and precariousness of the flesh; the entanglement of hope for new life and the experience of unjust violence; connectivity and accountability; and a preferential option for the unauthorized border crosser. Taylor concluded by elaborating on Elaine Scary’s premise that while torture is used to destroy or “unmake” the world of its subjects, our imaginations can be used to positively transform or remake it.

Jean Donovan, in “Images of Jesus that Divide Us: Peacemaking with Contextual Theology,” argued that the ways Christians answer the Christological question “Why did Jesus die?” either perpetuate religious hatred and intolerance, or assist in removing stumbling blocks to building a more peaceful world. The paper examined the role of the Passover story in shaping one traditional Catholic response to the question. Donovan began with a methodological point about contextual theology, particularly as advanced by Steve Bevans, in order to theoretically situate her discussion of the ongoing need to critically examine the expressions of Christian faith relative to changes in the world. After examining the contextual influence of Melito of Sardis in promoting the equivalence between the mystery of Christ and the mystery of Passover, Donovan argued that the Passover story promotes an idea of redemption that entails saving endangered persons through either vengeful violence (the plagues against Egypt and the killing of the firstborns) or the blood rite of ritual slaughter (the paschal lamb). Christianity’s assimilation of the Passover narrative thus translates Jesus’ suffering as soteriologically necessary, and perpetuates unreflective acceptance of the view that new life is brought about by the necessary suffering of the other, nonbeliever. In

*Topic Session: Christ*

contrast (and resistance) to the Passover narrative, Donovan related a tragic true-life story in order to convey an alternative way of thinking about why Jesus died. A six-year old boy slipped into a raging river during a family fishing trip. His father managed to save him but lost consciousness and was unable to be revived. A family friend commented that, like any parent, “he did what he had to do.” Like the father, Donovan concluded, Jesus died because he did what he had to do. When disentangled from the violence of Passover narrative and imagery, it can be said that, “in the midst of a heartbreaking situation, Jesus did the right thing.”

Joseph Drexler-Dreis concluded the session with a paper entitled “Christology and Primitive Accumulation: Enclosure Strategies and Obstacles to ‘Another Possible World.’” He began by noting that, in their respective contexts of Roman empire and racialized and global capitalism, Jesus and the Zapatistas each announce that another possible world has irrupted in the very struggle for that other possible world. He maintained that, despite this similarity, a tension persists between the Christian hierarchical power of “another world” given from outside of history and the Zapatista’s emphasis on humans’ power to create “another world” outside of hierarchical relations. In the first section of his paper, Drexler-Dreis examined the relationship between “freedom” and primitive accumulation. He argued that primitive accumulation is a form of both material and epistemic “enclosure,” which forced human relations to conform to capitalist work-discipline. This history of force occurred with the development of abstract concepts, such as freedom, which functioned to conceal the historical struggles for and against primitive accumulation. The second section addressed the relationship between primitive accumulation and the Kingdom of God. Drexler-Dreis argued that the kingdom as an abstract theological concept can function to constrain the possibilities of the meaning of freedom, legitimizing particular forms of constraint on human relations that are conducive to capitalist modes of production. In the paper’s final section, Drexler-Dreis examined how the Zapatistas’ prioritization of the *longue durée* of historical struggle can inform an understanding of the in-breaking of the Kingdom that orients struggles for freedom unconfined to the fetishism of the modern world-system.

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