

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY (I) – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Christian Resistance amidst Unjust Structures  
Convener: Clifton Stringer, St. Mary's University  
Moderator: Nicole Reibe, Loyola University Maryland  
Presenters: André Brouillette, S.J., Boston College School of Theology and Ministry  
Elisabeth Rain Kincaid, Aquinas Institute of Theology  
Jason Steidl, Fordham University

This year's first Historical Theology Topic Session addressed the difficulty of seeking justice in the midst of (often oppressive) social structures, analyzing the strategies of resistance used by Christians in different contexts. The session began with André Brouillette's paper, "Between Naïveté, Trust, and Shrewdness: Resisting Oppression with Grace. The case of Teresa de Jesús." Brouillette reminded us of the extent of opposition and oppression Teresa of Avila faced: her style of prayer dismissed as diabolical, her writings scrutinized by the Inquisition, her access to resources inhibited by the Index of Forbidden Books, her new monasteries opposed by civil and religious authorities, she herself eventually confined. Nevertheless, she persisted, following a fivefold strategy of resistance. Feminist scholars have noted Teresa's "not-so-naïve" rhetoric of a humility both Christian and shrewd; Teresa also sought out allies in other women harboring desires for renewal, in new confessors when necessary, in authorities or benefactors; she upheld obedience as a virtue and sign of God's will; at the same time, she trusted her own experiences of God radically, even when opposed by confessors or "learned men," winning her a kind of "inspired *parrhesia*"; and, finally, she suffered temporary setbacks with a lightly resigned yet never defeated grace. As a result, she died not just a "daughter of the Church," but one of the most influential saints.

The question of seeking justice in the social strictures of early modern Spain continued with Elisabeth Rain Kincaid's "Theories of Peace among the Spanish Scholastics: Contributions and Challenges." The Reformation-era Spanish Scholastics have long attracted scholarly interest because of their theologically motivated critiques of the Spanish Empire (e.g., the cruelties of its *encomienda* system); indeed, the movement led Charles V to promulgate the New Laws of 1542, which limited Spanish atrocities in the New World. Contemporary critics, however, not only note that the New Laws failed in implementation, but also suggest that the Scholastic concept of *ius gentium*, though presenting itself as a neutral system founded on universally accessible natural law, actually functioned to impose Eurocentric concepts of civilization and law upon the Indians, justifying (rather than critiquing) Spanish imperialism. Kincaid argued that these critiques, in drawing primarily on Francisco Vitoria's *de Indios*, misunderstand natural law in Spanish Scholasticism. She engaged two lesser-studied but more-representative works, Domingo de Soto's *de Iustia et Iure* and Francisco Suárez's *de Legibus*. Through a thorough analysis of natural law in each text, Kincaid showed that, rather than re-inscribing European legal and moral norms on subjected cultures, *ius gentium* sought to create space for political, legal and cultural diversity. Kincaid concluded with a suggestion that Suárez's understanding of the *ius gentium* can help us to apply Catholic Social Teaching in our contemporary contexts.

*Topic Session: Historical Theology (I)*

Jason Steidl shifted the discussion to twentieth-century American Catholicism with his exploration of how the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged racism in, “Christ as a Model for the Church: Chicano Activism and Grassroots Ecclesiology.” Noting that Mexican-American activists recognized the majority-Anglo Catholic Church as a bastion of political, spiritual, and financial power, Steidl explained that they sought to engage it through Christologically-grounded rhetorical, theological, and political paradigms. Thus, Cesar Chavez and his United Farm Workers brought the plight of Mexican Americans to the church’s attention by presenting Jesus’ ministry among social outcasts as a template for the church’s role in the farm worker movement: If the church claimed to follow Christ, it had a responsibility to advocate for the poor. Again, Ricardo Cruz and his radical student group *Católicos Por La Raza* protested James Cardinal McIntyre by interpreting the gospels’ story of Jesus overturning the tables in the temple courtyard as a call for Christians to overturn racist church and social structures. For Cruz, Jesus’ life was an example of prophetic action that used force to confront injustice. Steidl concluded by exploring how the formation and social location of these Chicano leaders shaped their Christologies and ecclesiologies, asking how their example might clarify our understanding of the church’s role in the world today.

ANDREW SALZMANN  
*Benedictine College*  
*Atchison, Kansas*