

MORAL THEOLOGY (II) – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation
Convener: Christine E. McCarthy, Marywood University
Moderator: Alessandro Rovati, Belmont Abbey College
Presenters: Kate Ward, Marquette University
Christina McRorie, Creighton University
Marcus Mescher, Xavier University

Kate Ward’s paper, “Experience in Catholic Moral Theology: Looking Forward and Back,” responds to Bryan Massingale’s challenge regarding Catholic moral theology’s failure to respond to the social sin of racism. This paper surveyed recent works of moral theology in *Theological Studies* and the *Proceedings of the CTSA* over the past 20 years. First, Ward quantified the occurrence of resources used to explicitly appeal to experience, including narrative of the author’s own experience; journalism and memoir; history; sociology and other quantitative resources; and literature and other arts, and briefly discussed benefits and limitations of each. Second, Ward demonstrated how experience is consulted even by authors who do not explicitly situate their theological works within a particular experiential perspective and who may imagine their work to be perspective-neutral. Finally, Ward’s essay explored what the two approaches to using experience—explicit and particular, and implicit and unstated—may be able to learn from one another and offer to the practice of moral theology as a whole. Promoting human experience, in all its difference and particularity, as a source for theological reflection, is an act of resistance with the potential to transform moral theology.

In her paper, “The paradoxes of doing moral theology in ‘the world’: Balancing confidence in reason with epistemic humility,” Christina McRorie proposed that theological reflection on the ambiguity of “the world” (understood in a generally Pauline/Johannine sense) as a context for moral agency offers a useful frame for considering these questions. While Catholic moral theology is premised on a fundamental confidence in reason, we are becoming more aware of how living amidst social and cultural sin can distort consciences and corrupt moral reasoning. This paper pointed to Bryan Massingale’s cultural analysis of racism and Pope Francis’ concern for the affective roots and results of economic inequality as examples of this growing awareness. It then proposed that theological reflection on the ambiguity of “the world” (understood in a Pauline/Johannine sense) as a context for moral agency offers a useful frame for considering the paradoxes of this. In this view, our own moral blindnesses are part of “the world” that must be identified, resisted, and transformed through grace. This paper concluded by suggesting that moral theologians therefore balance confidence in our ability to use reason to make moral judgments with an epistemic humility—and, moreover, that one mode of receiving grace will be to listen to the voices of those impacted by the moral blindnesses present in our field.

Finally, in his paper, “The Problem of Tolerance,” Marcus Mescher argues that the American embrace of the virtue of tolerance prevents Christians from adequately confronting social sin and working for transformation toward restorative justice. It begins by describing the problem of tolerance as morally inadequate for civic

Topic Session: Moral Theology (II)

duty and Christian discipleship. The second step of the paper, informed by feminist ethics and liberation theology, analyzes Kochurani Abraham's claim that "resistance can also be termed a 'feminist virtue'" in order to test whether and how virtue ethics confront social sin. The third step of this paper pivots toward a constructive argument to replace tolerance with solidarity, informed by the work of Meghan Clark. Mescher claims that the virtue of solidarity needs to be understood primarily in terms of mutuality (e.g., respect, trust, and responsibility), adding to typical definitions that relate solidarity to "social charity" and the common good. In short, this paper asserts that solidarity is the virtue where charity and justice meet, essential for personal and communal efforts to resist social sin and transform moral agency from prioritizing tolerance to promoting solidarity.

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