

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation  
Convener: Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Fordham University  
Moderator: William Clark, S.J., College of the Holy Cross  
Presenters: Colleen Cross, University of Notre Dame  
Jennifer Owens-Jofré, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

In her paper, “Rituals of Contestation: Religion and the U.S. Detention and Deportation Crisis,” Colleen Cross analyzes the contribution of religious ritual and practice in responding to the violence and injustice present in the United States immigration detention and deportation system. First, Cross provides context on the larger situation of immigrant detention and deportation in the United States, focusing on the human costs of migration resulting from current U.S. policies. Second, Cross presents a brief case study of the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants, one of many religious groups which use ritual and liturgy not only for the purposes of ministry but fundamentally as a contestation against the legitimating discourse of the state on the issue of undocumented immigration—most significantly raising questions related to identity and dignity, membership and citizenship, and nationalism and sovereignty. Focusing on two key religious practices, an amended version of the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary and an interfaith prayer service, Cross demonstrates that religious rituals such as these not only help to make present those like detained and deported migrants who are made invisible in society today but also fundamentally seek to transform the underlying relational patterns that contribute to these instances of structural violence. Challenging a particular understanding of nationalism and ultimately rejecting a mode of belonging that is based on nationality or citizenship, Cross examines how religion plays a significant part in peacebuilding by “deconstructing and reimagining” these identities, as Atalia Omer says, through the lens of the *imago Dei*. Her concluding remarks analyze the relationship between the aims of pastoral ministry and political contestation in religious peacebuilding, considering how these tensions can be a source of conflict but also how they can allow the pastoral and ritual elements of ministry to develop and flourish.

Jennifer Owens-Jofré continued the session’s exploration of practices that aim for social transformation through non-violent means in her presentation, “*Las Caminatas por la Paz y las Misas en el Barrio*: How Nonviolent Practices in East Los Angeles Witness to the Kin-dom of God.” Owens-Jofré uses the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz to frame an eschatological future through the concept of the Kin-dom of God, looking at the practices of a small collaborative of women at Dolores Mission Parish in East Los Angeles as a case study. These women had been instrumental not only in calling Fr. Greg Boyle, S.J., to his vocation with what is now Homeboy Industries, but also in initiating *las caminatas por la paz* and *las Misas en el barrio*, which they see as having had a significant impact on the decline in gang violence the neighborhood surrounding the parish experienced. Tracing its roots back to the pastoral cycle, the model for practical theological reflection which Owens-Jofré engages was developed British practical theologians John Swinton and Harriet Mowat to include the four steps of (1) current praxis, (2) cultural/contextual analysis, (3) theological reflection, and (4)

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formulating revised practice. Using this framework, first-person interviews, and participant observation, Owens-Jofré presented the contours of practices by parishioners responding to police violence through peace walks and the neighborhood Masses that work in tandem with *Proyecto Pastoral*, the social service arm of Dolores Mission Parish, to offer alternatives to violence.

William Clark, S.J., moderated a compelling discussion among the wider audience that brought in the expertise of others working in parish-based advocacy, and explored further the possibilities of interfaith collaborations and the mobilizing of Catholic communities to address the pressing needs of our world.

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