

FALL EVENT – MID-YEAR GATHERINGS

Topic: Teaching & Doing Theology in Real Time: Summer 2020 and Black Lives Matter
Moderator: Jon M. Nilson, Loyola University Chicago
Presenters: Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Fordham University
Craig A. Ford, St. Norbert College
Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Loyola Marymount University

The first online event, “Teaching & Doing Theology in Real Time: Summer 2020 and Black Lives Matter,” held November 10, 2020, focused on our theological work amidst and in light of the racialized violence and protests of summer 2020 and the Movement for Black Lives. Speakers and discussion focused on pedagogy and institutional efforts to advance racial justice.

Craig Ford focused on this pedagogical question: “How can I create an antiracist classroom, where the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable is not only a theme of Catholic Social Teaching, but becomes an epistemic principle, a way of coming to knowledge about ourselves, the world around us, and God?” He described his efforts to invite students in his Theological Foundations course to inspect the racialized lenses through which they view the world and supporting social structures, and into transformed ways of seeing no longer “through the lenses of American exceptionalism, but through the eyes of the world’s victims.”

Nancy Pineda-Madrid identified the cultural, religious, and racial-ethnic complexity of Los Angeles and reflected on race as a social construct. She challenged participants to consider how we as theologians can fully-heartedly affirm the truth and urgency of the Movement for Black Lives that crescendoed in summer of 2020’s nation-wide protests over the extrajudicial killings of George Floyd and other unarmed black men and women and at the same time continue to listen to and find ways to better include other minoritized groups in conversations about anti-blackness and white supremacy in the US.

Jeannine Hill Fletcher noted myriad anti-racist efforts at Fordham over the last five years. Yet Fordham, which like most North American Catholic universities remains a “predominantly white institution challenged to systemic redress,” stops short of fully grappling with the university’s and the church’s deep implication in America’s racist history, and chooses incremental steps over visionary or costly engagement in prophetic acts of reparation.

Moderated by former CTSA President Jon Nilson, whose 2003 presidential address, “Confessions of a White Racist Catholic Theologian,” was a call-to-arms to CTSA theologians to acknowledge and combat racism and white supremacy, the session included robust small group discussions and a thoughtful concluding dialogue.

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