

### SPRING EVENT – MID-YEAR GATHERINGS

- Topic: Teaching & Doing Theology in Real Time: Christianity and US Politics  
After the Epiphany Insurrection
- Moderator: M. Cathleen Kaveny, Boston College
- Presenters: Anna Floerke Scheid, Duquesne University  
J. Bryan Hehir, Harvard Kennedy School of Government  
Leo Guardado, Fordham University  
Stan Chu Ilo, DePaul University

The subject of the second online event, held March 18, 2021, was originally to be “teaching and doing theology amidst and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.” However, following the alarming events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 (and thanks to the flexibility of this virtual, between-conventions format), a panel was assembled to consider the implications and repercussions of those events for our work as theologians. At this event, “Teaching and Doing Theology in Real Time: Christianity and U.S. Politics After the Epiphany Insurrection,” moderator Cathleen Kaveny (Boston College Theology and School of Law) and panelists Fr. J. Bryan Hehir (Harvard Kennedy School of Government), Anna Floerke Scheid (Duquesne Theology), Leo Guardado (Fordham Theology) and Stan Chu Ilo (Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, DePaul) spoke from their specific fields of expertise and social and personal locations, offering rich and evocative social and theological observations and analyses. Small group discussions and plenary dialogue among attendees contributed further layers to the serious, but lively discussion.

Anna Floerke Scheid considered post-election unrest and the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol occupation from the perspective of the ethics of revolution and political resistance, pointing out that while there are limited conditions under which armed or violent resistance to the government may be justified, in a constitutional republic that protects freedom of speech and association, violent resistance is conscionable only after all non-violent avenues are exhausted. Christian churches should publicly stand against violent or armed means of protest or resistance; but, more importantly, churches should actively advocate for and educate their members concerning gospel-based ethics and practices of civic activism, non-violent direct action, civil disobedience, and the justifiability (or not) of armed or violent resistance in US and other political settings.

J. Bryan Hehir sketched the sharply political-religious landscapes inhabited by Catholic presidents John F. Kennedy and Joseph Biden: in 1960 Kennedy stressed separation of church and state and pledged not to let his faith influence his politics; today, Biden is openly Catholic and explicitly links elements of his agenda to Catholic social teaching. Biden, supported by the majority of Catholics, is also taking fire from “Catholic right” organizations and from some in the episcopate. Today, Hehir noted, religion is a significant player in US politics, but with multiple voices and distinct conceptions of religion’s role. Within a divided electorate and amid current health, social and economic crises, the potential of the Catholic Church to make a difference “lives in its social institutions; its social-moral visions; and in its “swing” role in the electorate.”

Leo Guardado drew attention to ways that, far from being a singular, out-of-character event, January 6<sup>th</sup> is in fact connected to the ways that the US has historically operated in the global south, particularly in Latin America. Drawing from Kelly Brown Douglas's work, he framed the insurrection socially and theologically as an example of the "deployment of a castle doctrine mentality to violently 'protect' and 'defend' white supremacy, racialized notions of private property, and racialized dynamics of turf or space. Guardado contended that as theologians and church, "we need to strategically reflect on our responsibility to do theology that is capable of responding to the ongoing polarization in this country," and to that end, echoed Floerke Scheid in underscoring the need to "develop theologies of nonviolence capable of exorcising the nexus between Christianity and violence, and transforming our understanding of Christian theology itself." For, "in this historical moment, the credibility of our God-talk finds its verification in the midst of the struggles against violence."

Finally, reflecting on U.S. political history and current political climate as an African living and working here, Stan Cho Ilo interpreted the events of January 6<sup>th</sup> as a form of embodied, public confession, wherein "the sins of America nationally and locally were on full display." These sins extend beyond white supremacy and nationalism to what Robert Lifton describes as a full-blown national "super-power syndrome." In the aftermath of January 6<sup>th</sup>'s powerful enactment of the nation's political sinfulness and pathology, however, public confession has not generated steps toward healing and reconciliation, because this was a "public confession without repentance." In the subsequent politicization of the January 6<sup>th</sup> events by all parties, "the sins on display that day have been denied, distorted, defended, or promoted" in different ways "depending on where people stand on Trump." The American Catholic church, as well, "failed in her response to this terrible event," in significant part due to Catholics' entanglements in the same political polarizations and unreflective biases that breed and entrench the national malaise.

From their different perspectives, panelists and participants alike recognized and reflected together on the urgent need for developing clear-eyed and constructive theological, pedagogical, and civic-practical responses to the political brokenness that January 6<sup>th</sup> epitomized.

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