

TRADITION AND APOCALYPSE: HISTORY, RACE, AND
CHRISTIAN TEMPORAL BEING – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Tradition and Apocalypse: History, Race, and Christian Temporal Being
 Convener: Grant Kaplan, Saint Louis University
 Moderator: Mark Miller, University of San Francisco
 Presenters: Jennifer Newsome Martin, University of Notre Dame
 Anne Carpenter, St. Mary's College of California
 Grant Kaplan, Saint Louis University

The panel began with introductions by Mark Miller, and then proceeded with twenty-minute presentations by each of the three presenters to a well-attended group of in-person attendees.

In the first paper, “Our Once and Future Mother: Apocalyptic Mariology, Tradition, and the Religions,” Jennifer Newsome Martin provided a critical assessment of some of the fundamental arguments of David Bentley Hart’s recent *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief* (2022), which offers a meta-critique of certain conceptualization of religious tradition. While Hart’s book focused its primary critiques upon St. John Henry Newman and Maurice Blondel, Martin’s response appealed to Charles Péguy’s posthumous *Conjoined Note on Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy* (1924), recently translated alongside the *Note on Bergson and Bergsonism* (1914), both of which presuppose a Bergsonian philosophy of time and both of which offer an alternative view of theological history—though perhaps no less specified toward futurity—with Mariology and Christology firmly at its center. In her view, Péguy via Bergson can successfully navigate a narrow middle way between modern historicism and dogmatic traditionalism which is able to affirm the precariousities of the historical expressions of tradition as corroborating rather than challenging their divine origin. Her paper suggested that a more rather than less dogmatically specified strategy for dealing with the problem of history and tradition preserves more robustly than Hart’s essay the ecclesial community handed on when Christ says to John from the cross: “Behold thy mother,” and to Mary, “Mother, behold thy Son.”

Next, Anne Carpenter presented “Grace From Above and From Below: Blondel and Theologians of the Underside.” The paper studied the way Blondel weights the life of Christian tradition itself with the duty of a Yes or No to God, and further weighted that duty with the burden of Christian tradition’s modern “underside”—considered in the shape of the religiosity of Black persons enslaved in America, as recovered by M. Shawn Copeland. The paper argues, with Blondel and Copeland, that the “body” of Christian tradition is to be had in the letter of an action that contains in itself an infinite spirit—in what Blondel calls the literal practice of religion, and in what Copeland calls knowing Jesus crucified. Far from retreating into the invisible pneuma of a pure Christianity, or from sinking into the sightless eyes of a purely material Christianity, Blondel and Copeland suggest a living unity, one lived in human beings; a unity which, since human, persists in a hylomorphism of material contingency and spiritual exigence. Here is a living unity that becomes God’s instrument for a human action that is able to bear God, and to bear God’s judgment.

Following these two papers, Grant Kaplan presented “A Tainted Tradition? A Conversation with Hart and Jennings.” In the presentation, Kaplan focused first on Willie James’ Jennings’s critique of tradition latent in some of his recent work, especially *After Whiteness*. The presentation began with an outline of the general shape of modern secularity’s critique of tradition, and hinted at possible resources in Pieper and Gadamer. Kaplan then treated Jennings, not so much as an exception to, but instead exemplary of contemporary theological attitudes toward tradition. This section spent less time adjudicating Jennings’ critique of a “diseased social imagination” than it did thinking through its potential consequences for Catholic theology. The presentation then skipped over its treatment of Hart, already taken up ably by Martin’s presentation, to recall the Catholic Tübingen School’s notion of “living tradition,” a term that had raised eyebrows during much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but that was given a stamp of approval at the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum*, 12). For purposes of brevity, Kaplan focused on the understanding of living tradition expounded by Johann Sebastian Drey in his 1819 “Spirit and Essence of Catholicism.” Tradition, for Drey, functions something like language, and it notes both the inevitability of change within it, as well as the necessity of relying on the past.

Mark Miller deftly moderated a lively question and answer that lasted roughly forty minutes. The papers presented generated questions both to individual presenters and to the group.

GRANT KAPLAN
Saint Louis University
Saint Louis, Missouri