

POST-POST-CONCILIAR AND MILLENNIAL  
THEOLOGIANS – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Post-Post-Conciliar and Millennial Theologians/Perspectives in Context  
 Convener: Michael Canaris, Loyola University Chicago  
 Moderator: Katherine G. Schmidt, Molloy University  
 Presenters: Jens Mueller, Loyola University Maryland  
 Byron Wratee, Boston College  
 Michael Magree, S.J., Boston College

For the third and final year, this interest group highlighted the work of early career theologians, so-called “Millennial” scholars who were born after the election of Pope John Paul II (1978). This year’s panel focused on theological perspectives that highlighted the context of late capitalism and the technocratic paradigm both in theory and in the classroom. After consulting with the panelists, the moderator decided on an order of presentation that differs from the official program but is reflected below.

Jens Mueller presented a paper entitled, ““Teaching Theology during a Pandemic: Rethinking Teaching Strategies in Pluralist Contexts.” Mueller began his presentation with a provocative statement that the “Students are not ok,” which he also displayed on the screen. His thesis reflects a deep empathy for students’ spiritual and mental well-being, especially during the global pandemic. Mueller highlighted how various stressors—both routine and exceptional (like the virus)—disproportionately affect students in marginalized populations. For example, students of color were much more likely to cancel their educational plans in light of COVID. Then Mueller drew on ecclesial resources on education, especially Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, to highlight the theological concepts of solidarity and the preferential option for the poor.

Byron Wratee, the session’s second presenter, offered a reflection on the “technocratic paradigm” a la Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*. Wratee interpreted Francis’ critique as a one-dimensional understanding of our relationship to the created world, which Wratee helpfully countered with his own theological assessment of the role of creation in his upbringing. Wratee then offered the work of Howard Thurman, theologian, Civil Rights’ activist, and modern mystic. Thurman’s work, presented in the context of Wratee’s own work as a Black theologian, offers strategies for what Wratee terms “surviving in a technocratic wilderness.” His paper was entitled, “Sisters and Brothers in the Wilderness: The Technocratic Paradigm and Howard Thurman’s Wilderness Theology.”

Finally, Michael Magree, S.J., presented, ““Does the Past Have a Future? Theologies of Grace from the Temporal Margins.” Magree’s paper dovetailed nicely with the two papers above, as he laid out the disenchantment (Charles Taylor) of the context for doing and teaching theology. Magree argues that early Christian texts provide a space for experimentation in the classroom, as well as introduce students to a diversity in the tradition that is appealing and engaging. In addition, these texts provide “transformational theologies of grace,” making them relevant to the persistence of change and conversion in both theological and ethical debates. In short, Magree argued for an expanded notion of “now” in the context of liberal narratives of progress and the future, using the past as a resource for this expansion.

The session was well-attended with eighteen total audience members. After the presentation, the presenters engaged in a dialogue about commonalities in their papers. Discussion amongst the presenters and later with the audience focused mostly on teaching theology in the context of late capitalism and the technocratic paradigm.

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