

## HISTORICAL THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: Thinking Catholic Interreligiously/Freedom  
 Convener: Elizabeth Huddleston, National Institute for Newman Studies/Duquesne University  
 Moderator: Rita George-Tvrtkovic, Benedictine University  
 Presenters: Joshua R. Brown, Mount Saint Mary's University (Maryland)  
 Robert Trent Pomplun, University of Notre Dame

This session was comprised of two papers, each approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes in length, followed by a question and answer session that filled the remainder of the allocated time.

In his paper, “The Cultural Challenges of Creation: Catholic Faith and Chinese Reason in Giulio Aleni’s *Wanwu zhenyuan* 萬物真原,” Joshua R. Brown spoke about how Giulio Aleni *Wanwu zhenyuan* 萬物真原 sought to present a Catholic doctrine of creation to a Chinese audience and render it credible by appealing to arguments from both classical Scholastic philosophy and theology and concepts from Chinese intellectual traditions. Brown analyzed and assessed Aleni’s work as a model for Catholic theology that both draws upon Chinese philosophies and that seeks to learn from Aleni’s successes and missed opportunities as a way to look towards the further development of a Chinese Catholic theology of creation.

In his paper, “Faith and Reason in the Tibetan Writings of Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733),” Robert Trent Pomplun introduced the notion of belief in Tibetan Buddhism, with a focus on how the Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri used the terms *dad pa* and *yid ches*, which are usually translated as “faith” and “conviction.” Desideri’s Thomistic theology of faith and its sources were introduced and then compared to the terms and phrases used in his Tibetan writings, which showed that Desideri gradually developed his Tibetan vocabulary to communicate certain Thomistic notions about the certitude of faith, its cultivation as a virtue, and its role in perfecting the intellect. Desideri’s translations and explanations of the infused virtues of faith, hope, and love were then compared to canonical lists of the types of faith in Buddhism, showing how Buddhist notions of what was known to reason and what was known to faith allowed Desideri to criticize certain aspects of faith in Buddhism while accepting others. The paper concluded that Buddhist notions of vivid, enthusiastic, and convinced faith described their implicit faith properly to the degree that they recognized the qualities of a true refuge as they make acts of faith, hope, and love to buddhas and bodhisattvas (even if they were explicitly mistaken about the objects of their devotion). At the level of implicit faith, then, Desideri believed Buddhists to have understood the formal object of faith, its importance as a virtue, its necessity for salvation, and the crucial role it plays in theology and philosophy.

The session was attended by around ten people including the presenters and administration team. The discussion that followed prompted both speakers to clarify points and speak to further research on their respective topics. Brown was asked about the possibility of an analogue between Rabbinic and Patristic biblical commentators and the Chinese commentators spoken of in his paper. He answered positively that there is an analogue between the three respective traditions.

In the questions that followed Pomplun's talk, the group concluded that (1) Buddhists shared these notions of faith because they were found in texts considered canonical by all Buddhists; (2) that Desideri had witnessed a great deal of Buddhist practice, including liturgies and meditations, but that he did not always understand their significance; (3) that Desideri accepted the Buddhist philosophy of the Middle Way as true for all created things, but not for God; and (4) that Desideri distinguished carefully between religion as a virtue, faith as a body of teachings, and faith as a law established by legitimate political authorities.

This was a very interesting and well-received session!

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