

PUBLIC THEOLOGY – INTEREST GROUP

- Topic: Freedom
 Conveners: Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College
 David DeCosse, Santa Clara University
 Moderator: Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College
 Presenters: Victor Carmona, The University of San Diego
 David DeCosse, Santa Clara University

This interest group will facilitate a multi-year shared space for theological scholars to gather across various interdisciplinary fields to further develop and future the praxis of doing Catholic public theology in the twenty-first century commensurate with a postcolonial, multiracial, global people of God. To align thematically with this year's convention, this inaugural session centralized and problematized different prevalent discourses and practices of limited and limiting realizations of freedom in the United States to which Catholic public theologies critically and constructively respond, especially in light of multiple intersecting systemic and structural oppressions. Showcasing recent salient publications that interweave ethics, history, and systematic/constructive theology about theologies of freedom and freedom movements, this session offered a panel that engaged with critical and constructive theological views, both historical and contemporary, about how more just alternative visions of Catholic discourse and praxis around freedom emerged from contextual, liberationist, decolonial, and human dignity-based perspectives about the divine, relationality in suffering and in hope, and embodiment in the body politic. After introductions about the interest group itself, the conveners, and both panelists, each panelist presented, and then the fifteen attendees enjoyed some small group discussion, followed by broader questions and discussion with the panelists.

In his presentation titled, "The Reign of God, Freedom, and US Immigration Policy," Victor Carmona interlaced narrative case studies of migration studies, US Latine theology, and ecclesial and political movements to critically analyze freedom in/and immigration policy and reform. Contextualized by migrant experiences of deserts, of hypermilitarized crossings, and of increasing border walls, Carmona drew on and extended Spanish biblical studies scholar José Antonio Pagola to stress divine compassion and tenderness in Jesus' preaching and ministerial praxis for the reign of God. Divine tenderness reveals a theological praxis of compassion that attends to and seeks to criticize and change the limited and limiting realizations of freedom in current US migrant experiences.

David DeCosse grounded his presentation in his recent book *Created Freedom under the Sign of the Cross: A Catholic Public Theology for the United States* (Pickwick Publications, 2022). He traced different approaches to freedom, with concrete cases ranging from progressive and populist to libertarian and authoritarian views. DeCosse then crafted a constructive theo-ethic of freedom at the nexus of creation and the cross, in conversation with Karl Rahner, David Hollenbach, and M. Shawn Copeland. He also argued that any such Catholic public theology must account for freedom in terms of the body, relationships, history, the moral good, and God. The

aim is a Catholic public theology of freedom that is credible about constraints related to race, gender, and sexuality and liberal, too, in its affirmation of religious freedom.

After both presentations, the moderator encouraged small group discussion. Attendees gathered in four groups and discussed this prompt: Theologians increasingly read and respond to, as well as refashion their theological praxis in light of, ecclesial and political signs of the times, as well as constructively imagine and concretize more just alternative visions of freedom and the common good. Describe and analyze in your view some of the conceptual and practical challenges regarding freedom in these publics we inhabit and also some of the ways that public theologians might respond to these challenges in our time, marked by globalization, political polarization, racial and gender-based violence, ecological violence and the climate crisis, or other forms of injustice, violence, and unfreedom in which we live, move, and have our being in the present moment. Groups engaged this prompt in diverse ways, then reconvened for an open-ended discussion about conflicting operative views of freedom that fuel this polarization and violence on the one hand and promote immigration reform, bodyrights, and healthcare on the other hand. In sum, freedom is actualized in relationships of mutual reciprocal rights and responsibilities to create the common good. The session concluded with gratitude to the panelists for an enriching session and discussion, and with an invitation to attendees to share further ideas for future sessions with the conveners. The second year of this interest group intends to address social movements for a multiracial, multicultural, and multifaith democracy, in conjunction thematically with next year's convention theme of social salvation.

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