

## CTSA 2024 CONVENTION THEME: SOCIAL SALVATION

“. . . and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3:6)

God’s gift of salvation is the touchstone of Christian faith. When human beings experience salvation, God’s gift of God’s self, this experience can awaken a desire to know ever more deeply Jesus the Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and a desire to become part of the community of believers receiving this gift. Even so, we live in a time that presses a highly privatized understanding of the Christian faith, distorting what salvation means by reducing it to the individual and personal exclusively, thus dismissing its social nature. Salvation is always individual and personal, but it is always social as well.

Biblical narratives speak of God’ saving presence in history, such as in the Exodus account of the Israelites’ journey from bondage to freedom, or in the in-breaking presence of the Reign of God in the here and now as repeatedly announced by Jesus the Christ. At present, an effective challenge to the social sin of our time -- be it in the form of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, anthropocentrism, colonialism, and on and on -- requires an account of social salvation in keeping with God’s concern for the social order of the world. In this sense, social salvation addresses the ongoing human endeavor to recognize and resist social sin, in other words, to subvert structural evil in the interest of the ascendancy and visibility of the good.

Throughout the Christian theological traditions, theologians have debated the meaning of atonement in terms of expiation, sacrifice, justification, reconciliation, redemption, and oneness. Yet, in our time, effective ongoing human practices of resisting evil may not only build community among practitioners but also symbolize and create a unity of consciousness around the ascendancy of the good. As a result, might we understand salvation in history as furthered based on the degree to which the spiritual unity of the world becomes more visible? In other words, atonement (or at-one-ment) experienced as social salvation.

Is social salvation fundamentally a never-ending process in history that confronts and subverts evil, an ongoing interpretive process that *reads the past*, Jesus’ vision of the reign of God, *towards the future*, the promise of eternal life, *in the present*, the here and now of our lives? In a world of increasing divisions, be they political, racial, ideological, economic, and/or ecclesial, foregrounding a social understanding of salvation will encourage a greater commitment to the gospel’s promise that “. . . all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” (Luke 3:6).

The 78<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America will be held June 13-16, 2024 at the Marriott Inner Harbor in Baltimore, Maryland.

Confirmed plenary speakers include Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, O.P., Susan Abraham, and Vincent Miller. Kristin Heyer will deliver the presidential address.

Several theological subdisciplines can contribute to the depth of our understanding of social salvation. Below are a few initial ideas. I look forward to your own creative insights.

- In light of the 2023 theme, *freedom*, how might the expanse and/or limits of human freedom set the conditions for the possibility of social salvation? How might the threats to freedom today undermine not only liberating practices that subvert social sin but also undermine the ability to imagine a world more consonant with God's saving presence? Given that the ongoing process of social salvation requires active human participation, how might consciousness and freedom be cultivated so as to enhance the possibility of social salvation?
- How might understandings of the immanent and economic Trinity that foreground the relationality of God inform a social understanding of salvation? How might theosis and/or deification from Greek Orthodox traditions inform our understanding of the way that the personal and social are integral to one another in salvation?
- How might understandings of the *imago dei* that emphasize the social nature of human beings (Gen 1:26-31; 2:15,18-24; 4:1-2) inform a social understanding of salvation? In the context of escalating levels of violence and trauma experienced acutely by the most vulnerable human beings among us, how does this inform understandings of salvation? In the current age of the Anthropocene, how might the impact of global warming and ecological degradation inform and expand our understanding of social salvation?

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**SOCIAL SALVATION AS RE-EXISTENCE:  
THE RESISTANCE OF SURVIVORS,  
THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION, AND  
THE *POTENTIA* OF SACRAMENTALITY**

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Thank you, Professor Heyer, for the kind introduction. I thank Professor Pineda-Madrid for the invitation to share my theological reflection as a Mexican theologian in the United States.

A preliminary consideration: you will see a jaguar on the slides, symbolizing the near extinction of its species. In the Mesoamerican culture, the jaguar is associated with water: its roar is like the thunder before the storm that drenches the Earth. The jaguar represents the struggle of life as resistance and re-existence.

I trust that during this convention on Social Salvation, we will be able to continue opening ways of collaboration to serve God's creatures on the frontiers of life and death.

**THRESHOLD: LEARNING TO INHABIT THE RUBBLE**

The cries of women are heard around the world, as echoed in the past, with Rachel mourning her children in the Semitic world<sup>1</sup> or the *Coyolxauhqui* dismembered by her brother Huitzilopochtli<sup>2</sup> within the Mesoamerican world, both of which represent the life-giving force of women resisting violence.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Enrique Domingo Dussel, *El humanismo Semita: Estructuras intencionales radicales del pueblo de Israel y otros Semitas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 1969). On the Semitic interpretation of the political from the otherness, see Enrique Domingo Dussel, "'The Politics' by Levinas: Towards a 'Critical' Political Philosophy," in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, ed. Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 78-96.

<sup>2</sup> See, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011). A *descolonial* feminist analysis emphasizes the generative role of this Mesoamerican myth beyond the traditional interpretation of the dismembered woman, see Jennie Luna and Margarita Galeana, "Remembering Coyolxauhqui as a Birthing Text" *UCLA Raza Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2016): 7-32, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2dt752tn>.

In telling these stories, let us not forget those who were forgotten in the narratives of power. For example, in the biblical Abrahamic tale, let us not forget the cry of Hagar<sup>3</sup> that was hidden, already showing within those ancestral times the coloniality of hegemonic power that controls lives, territories, and narratives but never has the power to devastate the souls of the peoples who resist.

Let us remember here that the clamor of these women is not only of pain but also creative and life-generating during resistance,<sup>4</sup> like the “pagan” women of the Bible who give diverse faces to the people of God through their bodies, subjectivities, and symbols, coming from other peoples who God also blessed. Let us evoke the cry of Ruth,<sup>5</sup> the Moabite, who, after many vicissitudes, gave way in the descendants of her womb to David and his lineage. Let us also recall the story of the Canaanite woman in her encounter with Jesus,<sup>6</sup> whose name we, unfortunately, do not know, but whose rebelliousness in being treated like a dog by Jesus opened a crack in the conscience of the Galilean and his community to go deeper into the mystery of salvation.

And connecting those ancient stories with our time of the global civilizational collapse,<sup>7</sup> let us remember here—in the land of the Piscataway peoples colonized by Western Christian white communities, such as in Baltimore—the clamor of the searching Mothers (*Madres Buscadoras*)<sup>8</sup> of the disappeared who confront the

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<sup>3</sup> See, Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See, Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León, “Theologies from the Margins”, virtual lecture series, August 2, 2023, posted August 21, 2023, by Metropolitan Community Churches, YouTube, 1:07:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsDDH8uYJ4s>.

<sup>5</sup> Along with feminist sorority, it is necessary to decolonize the reading of the Bible from the perspectives of transborder nation processes and gynocentrism. See, Maricel Mena López, “Hermenéuticas liberadoras frente al racismo,” *Seminario de lectura popular de la Biblia 2023: Disputa Hermenéuticas en América Latina*, Sesión 7, posted on January 17, 2024, YouTube, 55:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UtfhoKK9-w>. For a postcolonial feminist reading of biblical women, see, Silvia Martínez-Cano & Mireia Vidal I Quintero, eds., *Miradas a todo color: Teologías feministas poscoloniales en un mundo en conflicto* (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> See, Ángel Méndez, *Festín del deseo: Hacia una teología alimentaria* (México: Alios Ventos, 2021), available open access at <https://aliosventos.com/index.php/aliosventos/catalog/view/70/371/1170>. For a queer reading of the passage of the Canaanite woman see the following interview: Ángel Méndez, “¿Qué hay detrás de la Teología Queer? TEDxIberoWomen, Mexico City, CDMX, November 2017, 15 min., 54 sec.: [https://www.ted.com/talks/angel\\_mendez\\_que\\_hay\\_detras\\_de\\_la\\_teologia\\_queer](https://www.ted.com/talks/angel_mendez_que_hay_detras_de_la_teologia_queer).

<sup>7</sup> See, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *How to Think about Catastrophe: Toward a Theory of Enlightened Doomsaying* (Chicago: Michigan State University, 2022). To explore the political ecology perspective, see: Víctor Manuel Toledo, *The Social Metabolism: A Socio-Ecological Theory of Historical Change* (New York: Springer, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Today, there are more than one hundred and twenty collectives of relatives of missing persons in Mexico. One of the most important networks that organizes their search is the Search Brigades (Brigadas Nacionales de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas México). For more information on current projects, please consult [https://www.facebook.com/brigadadebusqueda/?locale=es\\_LA](https://www.facebook.com/brigadadebusqueda/?locale=es_LA).

necropower<sup>9</sup> of the criminal gangs colluding with the narco-state in Mexico, the United States, Central America and in all the countries controlled by drug markets, arms, and human trafficking.<sup>10</sup> Nor should we forget in this account the women's clamor on the peaceful route for peace in Colombia<sup>11</sup> and Kurdistan,<sup>12</sup> building a "peace"<sup>13</sup> different from those negotiated between the power of governments, paramilitaries, and the armies of each country and region.

These cries are joined today by the cries of the women of South Sudan and Tchad<sup>14</sup> protecting their children amid forced migration, famine, and the humanitarian crisis produced by war.

And even more urgently, let us listen to and integrate today, as an ethical and epistemological priority in our theologies of social salvation, the cry of Palestinian women resisting the ongoing genocide in Gaza through the ancestral wisdom of *Sumoud*, analyzed by the Palestinian philosopher Rana Khoury.<sup>15</sup>

What theology of social salvation do we, "professional theologians" working in academic institutions of power in the global North, wish to explore? How can we subvert the hegemonic epistemologies within our personal, collective, and university work, making room for an inspiration sourced in the divine *Ruah* that accompanies people in their resistances and re-existences? How do we open our imagination to the symbols of survivors created to find meaning in meaninglessness? What sacramentality of new life emerges from the resistance of survivors? How do we get out of the vicious circle of a theology of salvation that is erudite but disconnected from historical realities and complicit in holocausts old and new? How can we promote a theology of social salvation arising from the cries of the people that contribute to defusing the bomb of

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<sup>9</sup> See, Achille Mbembe and Libby Meintjes, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-40, [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/theoryfromthemargins/mbembe\\_22necropolitics22.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/theoryfromthemargins/mbembe_22necropolitics22.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> See, "Mexico. Events of 2023," Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2024/country-chapters/mexico>.

<sup>11</sup> The *Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres Colombia* is a feminist civil society initiative that promotes the construction of peace from below in the bodies and territories of women. See <https://rutapacifico.org.co/wp/>.

<sup>12</sup> See, Frédérique Geerdink, "The inspiring 'arms of struggle' of Kurdish and Zapatista Women," *Medya News*, October 25, 2021, <https://medyanews.net/the-inspiring-arms-of-struggle-of-kurdish-and-zapatista-women-article/>.

<sup>13</sup> See, Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León, *Transpaz(c)es y vulnerabilidad: sintiendo los latidos de las activistas antirracistas del colectivo Ilé y dos de la co-fundadoras de Black Lives Matter*, (PhD diss, Universidad iberoamericana, 2023), <https://ri.iberomx.handle/iberomx/6578>.

<sup>14</sup> See, Mumbi Kigutha, "Lament and Hope go hand in hand," *Global Sister Report*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/social-justice/lament-and-hope-go-hand-hand>.

<sup>15</sup> See, Rana Khoury, "Expressions of Sumoud as Indigenous Hope." For more information on this work, see "Palestinian Sumoud as Indigenous Hope: RCPI Fellow Rana Khoury's Civic Engagement Curriculum," *Religion and Public Life*, Harvard Divinity School, December 17, 2021, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/news/palestinian-sumoud-indigenous-hope-rcpi-fellow-rana-khourys-civic-engagement-curriculum>. See also this interview: Rana Khoury, "Expressions of Sumoud in Palestinian Higher Education," *Religion and Public Life*, Harvard Divinity School, August 22, 2021, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/news/2022/04/26/video-Expressions-of-Sumoud-in-Palestinian-Higher-Education>.

rivalry, hatred, and the sacrifice of the innocent for the sake of minority privilege in every time and place?

To be consistent with the *descolonial* and queer path we present here, let us first listen to some voices of wisdom from those who live on the peripheries of society and the churches as they describe what social salvation means to them.<sup>16</sup>



### IN THE CONTEXT OF NEO-COLONIALITY

To think of salvation in our times marked by a neo-coloniality of power on a global scale implies locating ourselves as a place of enunciation in the ruins of civilization<sup>17</sup> where the clamor of the systemic victims of today as of yesterday emerges.

The Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano<sup>18</sup> proposed the coloniality of power-knowing-being a few decades ago, leaving behind the theory of dependency with which his generation tried to understand the oppression of Latin American peoples in the context of the Cold War. It was no longer enough to resort to a liberal economic theory in explaining the economic exploitation linked to the geopolitics of the time. It was necessary to make a qualitative leap, understanding the web of economic and political power relations linked to the control of knowledge, which was carried out by instrumental reason. Then, in connecting all this with an ontological depredation, he

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<sup>16</sup> This video was made by Eduardo Velasco, with the participation of nine “*sabedoras y sabedores*” or wise persons, located in the interstices of hegemonic power. It can be viewed and downloaded from the following website of the Beyond Global Violence Initiative, a research project that I coordinate at Boston College, <https://re-existe.org/boston-college-bgvi-1>. E-readers may play the video within the document, print readers should visit the above the link.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The War that Must Not Occur* (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23906>.

designates the existential background<sup>19</sup> of hegemonic power. From there arises the idea of coloniality, in its trilogy of power-knowledge-being, that will make its way into *descolonial* thought.

In times of globalization and exclusion, as analyzed by Enrique Dussel<sup>20</sup> from Argentina and Mexico, the coloniality proposed by Aníbal Quijano as a theoretical framework for thinking resistance became more complex due to the appearance of new devices of control on a global scale, namely, digital media and criminal mafias. Both have been building transnational machinery that imposes new modes of enrichment through dispossession, as seen in various production sectors of goods and services, from agriculture to the cultural symbols that sustain a given culture.

### ON THE EPISTEMIC WARS IN PROGRESS

Given the above, thinking about social salvation in times of civilizational collapse is not an innocent task that can be done without the systemic violence that has a cognitive vector,<sup>21</sup> which is a part of the war strategy to deactivate the indignation of dominated peoples.

Indeed, we find ourselves amid epistemic wars directed against subaltern peoples, rendering their knowledge and ways of life invisible, dismantling their communal practices and subversive spiritualities that give them breath and sustenance. As Xóchitl Leyva<sup>22</sup> points out—a Mexican anthropologist, together with anti-systemic savants who accompany the diverse Indigenous resistances—extractivism is also epistemic because it usurps the capacity to generate knowledge from the victims themselves, manipulating their precariousness and thus strengthening the prevailing hegemony.

In this sense, epistemic extractivism has been denounced for decades by African and Asian decolonial thinkers<sup>23</sup> as “cultural pauperization,” giving way to policies of recognition linked to the recovery of the artistic and cultural heritage of colonized African peoples, as shown by the project of cultural repatriation of goods led by the

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<sup>19</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being. Contributions to the development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 240-270.

<sup>20</sup> Enrique Domingo Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical Global History. Reclaiming Liberation Theology* (Norwich: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges,” *Review*, 30, no. 1 (2007): 45-89, <https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/AbyssalThinking.PDF>; republished online at *Eurozine* as a similar version: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges,” *Eurozine*, June 29, 2007, <https://carleton.ca/mds/wp-content/uploads/santos-Abyssal-thinking.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Xóchitl Leyva, “Zapatista Knowledge: Theoretico-Political Ontoepistemic Alter-natives in Times of War and Civilizational Collapse,” *Global Tapestry of Alternatives* (May 18, 2023), <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2023-05-18/zapatista-knowledge-theoretico-political-ontoepistemic-alter-natives-in-times-of-war-and-civilisational-collapse/>.

<sup>23</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021).

French government of President Emmanuel Macron and criticized by Achille Mbembe.<sup>24</sup>

But what remains to be done is the re-construction of anti-colonial narratives and practices—no longer only decolonial, as Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui<sup>25</sup> from Bolivia acutely points out—which give way to a reinvention of the subjectivities and collectives in resistance that confront global hegemonic power, whether in its version of the capitalist hydra analyzed by the Zapatistas<sup>26</sup> in Mayan territory, or the confrontation with the necro machine in western Mexico, or the dismantling of necropower in South Africa.

### THE FLASHES OF SOCIAL SALVATION IN THE CRACKS OF POWER: A MESSIANIC IMAGINATION

Who are these subjectivities in rebellion against systemic violence that make possible the birth of a world different from the one imposed by the Anthropocene-Capitalocene?<sup>27</sup> In what *descolonial*, queer, and epistemic coordinates are they sowing other possible worlds? What narratives of ethical and spiritual indignation with *combative hope* do they construct to inhabit the surrounding rubbles? What names of divinity and what healing rituals do they invent?

Let us examine the *messianic theology* that the subalterns write step by step when they say enough is enough.

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<sup>24</sup> Achille Mbembe, “African Contemporary Art: Interview with Achille Mbembe” (September 2019), <http://katrinschulze.blogspot.com/2009/09/african-contemporary-art-interview-with.html>.

<sup>25</sup> “En tu reciente visita a México señalaste que en América Latina no se está en condiciones de hablar de pensamiento decolonial ni postcolonial. Afirmaste que lo decolonial es una moda, lo postcolonial un deseo y lo anticolonial una lucha. ¿Cómo seguir este camino anticolonial? / Yo creo que es una forma de poner en relieve que este proceso tiene larga data. Desde tiempos coloniales se han dado procesos de lucha anticolonial; en cambio, lo decolonial es una moda muy reciente que, de algún modo, usufructúa y reinterpreta esos procesos de lucha, pero creo que los despolitiza, puesto que lo decolonial es un estado o una situación, pero no es una actividad, no implica una agencia, ni una participación consciente. Llevo la lucha anticolonial a la práctica en los hechos, de algún modo, deslegitimizando todas las formas de cosificación y del uso ornamental de lo indígena que hace el Estado. Todo eso son procesos de colonización simbólica.” Kattalin Barner, “Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui: ‘Tenemos que producir pensamiento a partir de lo cotidiano,’” *El Salto* (February 20, 2020), <https://alicenews.ces.uc.pt/?lang=1&id=23864>.

<sup>26</sup> EZLN (Zapatista Army for National Liberation), *Critical Thought in the Face of the Capitalist Hydra I: Contributions by the Sith Commission of the EZLN* (Brisbane: PaperBoat Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> It is an expression coined by Paul Krutzen, winner of the Nobel Prize in 2016, and taken up by ecologists, social scientists, and philosophers to explain the civilizational model produced by techno-scientific instrumental rationality since the Industrial Revolution. A theological conversation with Victor Manuel Toledo can be found in the online issue of *Concilium*: Victor Manuel Toledo, “Entrevista con Toledo,” conversation with Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, in “Covid 19: Beyond the Anthropocene?” *Concilium* 2, online edition (2022): 28 min., 29sec., <https://concilium-vatican2.org/covid-19-2/>.



***Polarized Intersubjectivity?***

The modern dream of democracy and universal rights committed suicide in Gaza, as Munther Isaac pointed out last Christmas evening from Bethlehem in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> Neither the narratives of the international rule of law nor the Christian fundamentalist theological justifications of the North Atlantic powers that supported the state of Israel were able to prevent the collapse. Worst of all, as a phenomenon of collective cognitive dissonance<sup>29</sup>—analogous to what happened with Nazism and Fascism in Europe in the first half of the 20th century—it has led to justifying in the name of God the colonialism of the state of Israel against Arab and Christian Palestinians, as Mitri Raheb has forcefully shown.<sup>30</sup>

But modern democracies have also shown their internal contradictions when they forget the people from whom the real power flows. President Biden's administration speeches blatantly use the humanitarian tragedy created by the genocide in Gaza to win votes in his election campaign under the pretext of the global leadership role of the United States in preserving the "free world" in a perverse satire of geopolitics in times of neo-colonialism.<sup>31</sup>

Today, we speak of "social polarization" as a euphemism to deny the internal contradictions of the world system, which has already been rigorously analyzed in its economic and political dynamism by Aníbal Quijano in Peru and by Immanuel Wallerstein and Catherine Walsh in the United States.<sup>32</sup> Polarization presupposes symmetry of power relations, narratives, subjectivities, and epistemologies—something that does not occur in the world system of the coloniality of power-knowledge-being.

Hence, it is necessary to name these asymmetries and do everything possible to reverse these processes of systemic violence based on the praxis and agency of the victims themselves and not of those who pretend to speak on their behalf.

For this very reason, to think of social salvation simply as a spiritual healing of social polarization without dismantling the asymmetries of power would only maintain the objective conditions of evil in the world, disguising the strategies of social invisibilization of the other and thus perpetuating the structural injustice that maintains the world-system.

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<sup>28</sup> Munther Isaac, "Christ in the Rubble: A Liturgy of Lament," 2023 Christmas Message, Bethlehem in Palestine, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbHzqU3ZdTts>.

<sup>29</sup> See, João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Bolsonarismo: Da guerra cultural ao terrorismo doméstico. Retórica do ódio e dissonância cognitiva colectiva* (São Paulo: Autentica Editora, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> See, Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2023).

<sup>31</sup> See, Pankaj Mishra, "The Shoah after Gaza," *London Review of Books* 46, no. 6 (2024), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n06/pankaj-mishra/the-shoah-after-gaza>.

<sup>32</sup> See, Immanuel Wallerstein, *World System Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024). See also, Walter Dignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press 2018).

### ***The Change of Narratives: Conflict or Genocide?***

Therefore, a change of narratives is necessary as an expression of the clamor of the subalterns that makes it possible to summon other possible worlds. This is more than just a rhetoric of the World Social Forum<sup>33</sup> as an alternative to the Davos Forum. It is a strategy of globalization of solidarity from below, as the Zapatistas say, or solidarity of “the social poets,” as Pope Francis<sup>34</sup> calls the social movements that live in the peripheries of the world of white and capitalist privilege, particularly in the global South, who weave other modes of communality, governance, agroecological production and spiritualities of life.

The new narratives that the subalterns generate when they say enough is enough are expressed in many ways. Sometimes, their imagination creates art in the streets or an armed insurrection to defend their territories. Other times, they perform symbolic subversions in the face of patriarchy that is indifferent to femicides, as is the case of the MeToo# movement of women, feminists, and *anarcho-feminists* in the globalized world.

### ***The Spiritual Insurgency of the Subalterns***

Combative decoloniality has a *spiritual* background that animates it. It is necessary to think theologically to unravel the powers of experience that arise from indignation and mourning within a *politics of the affections*, as Rita Segato says,<sup>35</sup> and as *contractions of messianic time*—analyzed by Giorgio Agamben in contemporary political thought<sup>36</sup>—that give way to new ways of life or re-existence, as proposed by Nelson Maldonado-Torres.<sup>37</sup>

It is a matter of investigating the intimate force which is at once inter-subjective, political, and spiritual. Inter-subjective is a *relational ontology*<sup>38</sup> created by those who have lost everything but dignity and hope, deconstructing the *feminicidal* world where

<sup>33</sup> See, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The World Social Forum: A User's Manual* (Madison: December 2004), [https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/fsm\\_eng.pdf](https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/fsm_eng.pdf). From its beginnings, the initiative for a world theological forum to gather the voice of the oppressed peoples has arisen in parallel: Luiz Carlos Suzin, *Teología para otro mundo posible* (Madrid: PPC, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> See, Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html). A critical reception commentary can be found at William T. Cavanaugh, Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, Ikenna Ugochukwu Okafor, and Daniel Pilarío (eds.), *Fratelli Tutti: A Global Commentary* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2024).

<sup>35</sup> See, Rita Laura Segato. *The War Against Women* (Birmingham: Polity Press, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> See, Giorgio Agamben. *The time that remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Meridian Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> See, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Atalia Omer, Joshua S. Lupo, “No peace without Decolonization: A Lecture and Interview with Nelson Maldonado-Torres,” *Contending Modernities*, April 9, 2024, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/no-peace-with-out-decolonization/>.

<sup>38</sup> See, Barbara Andrade, *Gott mitten unter uns: Entwurf einer kerygmatischen Trinitätstheologie* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988); Spanish version, Barbara Andrade *Dios en medio de nosotros: Esbozo de una teología trinitaria kerigmática* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2001).

the mafias that traffic people seem to have power over life and death. They certainly have control over the physical death of people and the territories they devastate, but not over life, with its strength of resilience, resistance, and re-existence of the survivors.

Something similar happens with the subjectivities of Afrodiasporic peoples who, in addition to facing the collective trauma of their ancestors' enslavement since the sixteenth century, have sought through their emancipation struggles ways to deconstruct the internal coloniality of the world-system that keeps many still trapped. Their spirituality of *Theo-quilombism* is, as shown by Cleusa Caldeira from Brazil,<sup>39</sup> for example, a mode of combative decolonial spirituality that challenges the world above and deconstructs its privilege, but above all that nourishes those living in the world below, be it in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

And so, we could go on telling stories of the *spiritual insurrection* of the subalterns, not only of those half a century ago as Thurman did in the United States,<sup>40</sup> Desmond Tutu in South Africa,<sup>41</sup> or my brother Gustavo Gutiérrez in Peru,<sup>42</sup> but also of today's insurgent peoples as well. From those original peoples defending Mother Earth from the voracity of mining and extracting oil and gas by Canadian and Chinese companies around the planet to the queer collectives that "twist" any hegemonic narrative that makes invisible diverse bodies; or the organized civil society that accompanies people in forced mobility, resisting the beast of the undocumented labor market that nourishes the economies of the global North.

Their rituals of survival, their memorials of ancestors on the path of resistance, and their politics of affections that generate re-existences are intertwined as a *pedagogy of love* that confronts the pedagogy of terror analyzed by Rita Laura Segato from Argentina and Brazil in the war against women, as well as Rosanna Reguillo<sup>43</sup> from Mexico in the narco-machine that produces *juvenidicios* or the systematic murder of poor-racialized-young-men in the peripheries.

A theology of social salvation in these troubled times of civilizational catastrophe will have to listen humbly to these narratives and cries coming from below and then, as a second act, think about the messianic promise and its (*im*)possible fulfillment, with the symbolic mediations and institutions necessary to preserve life. Then, we will be able to invoke and worship again with relevance the names of God that emerge from the peoples in resistance to evil in this hour of global disgrace.

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<sup>39</sup> See, Cleusa Caldeira, "Theoquilombism: Black Theology between Political Theology and Theology of Inculturation," *Perspectiva Teologica* 53 (2021): 137-159, <https://www.faje.edu.br/periodicos/index.php/perspectiva/article/download/4600/4606>.

<sup>40</sup> See, Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> See, Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> See, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> See, Rosanna Reguillo, *Necromáquina: cuando morir no es suficiente* (Guadalajara: NED/ITESO, 2014).

## FOR AN ANTI-HEGEMONIC THEOLOGY OF SALVATION

Although we tend to use the term salvation in a univocal sense, designating divine intervention in human history based on a hegemonic Hebrew-Christian narrative, the ambiguity of the term leads us to the mistake of forgetting the abyssal line that separates the subaltern peoples from the hegemonic world. Therefore, it is necessary to characterize the *locus enuntiationis* from which we speak of “salvation” to locate its limits and its potentialities, for no critical reflection can continue to claim an abstract universality without being complicit in some violence.

The decolonial, intersectional, and queer theology of social salvation that we propose here entails an *epistemic option* for those excluded from global privilege by perceiving from their experiences of resistance another way of being “beyond the essence” –in the phenomenological terms proposed by Emmanuel Levinas<sup>44</sup>—in opposition to the essence of the market which is made possible by the supplanting of the divine. Salvation is, therefore, anti-hegemonic, denying an ideological interpretation that assigns to some peoples the role of being blessed by God and relegates others to the idolatrous pagan world because they threaten the hegemonic divine order. This mirrors a theological perversion that Marcela Althaus-Reid pointed out with acuity some decades ago as an epistemological critique of queering any hegemonic narrative.<sup>45</sup>

Following a close but different path, we propose here three *descolonial* and queer epistemological criteria to describe the anti-hegemonic theology of salvation:

### *The Praxis of God’s People or the “Agency” of the Survivors*

The liberation theologies<sup>46</sup> of half a century ago codified the transformative action of the “people of God” in terms of praxis, wanting to assume the original biblical experience of the *Go’el* or liberating God from modernity as a model of the rationality of the fulfillment of history. Above all, they read the transformative role of the experience of the liberation of the oppressed, expressed from the perspective of the redemption of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, as the primary analog of salvation. From there, Jesus’ praxis in Galilee and his confrontation with the religion of the Temple were posited as the core of his preaching and realization of the Kingdom of God in intra-historical terms, all of which makes possible a co-creative reception of God’s action in the history of the oppressed as inspired by divine energy, promoting a just and peaceful society for all as the horizon of utopia.

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<sup>44</sup> See, Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu’être ou Au-delà de l’essence* (New York: Springer, 1974).

<sup>45</sup> See, Marcella Althaus-Reid. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000). See also, Joseph Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> An essential moment of a critical retrospective of Liberation Theology was the Continental Conference of Liberation Theology, held in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, in 2012. See, Congreso Continental de Teología, *La teología de la liberación en perspectiva: São Leopoldo, October 7-11, 2012* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Fundación Amerindia, 2012), <https://www.scribd.com/doc/170315593/congreso-continental-de-teologia-pdf>.

However, the background of praxis perpetuated a modern conception of emancipation as a paradigm of salvation.

Once this model showed its perverse side by affirming a privileged way of life at the expense of the invisibilization of many other subjectivities and epistemologies, it was then necessary to deconstruct this model of hegemonic salvation so as to explore different ways of life that emerge from the victims themselves in their multiple resistances. Thus, for example, amid the ongoing civilizational crisis, the social movements of victims have become a source of meaning in meaninglessness, making it possible to understand their political “agency”<sup>47</sup> as a criterion of salvation as a site where the human-divine happens as a deconstruction of hegemonic power and establishment of other ways of life centered on the intersubjective, the communal, and the symbolic as *messianic anticipation* of divine blessing.

### ***The Symbolic and Political Mediations of Anti-Hegemonic Salvation.***

The narratives of resistance<sup>48</sup> reveal the symbolic power of the victims in recreating the world from below, where only death seems to predominate.

These practices of performativity that emerge as a negation of hegemony—a hydra that has many heads, among them patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and ableism—have an ethical meaning that needs to be unraveled alongside an alternative political meaning to the hegemonic model that needs to be explored.

And in the depths of these subjectivities dismantled by systemic violence, there appears a *theological* dimension of human existence—as my brother Thomas Aquinas used to call it<sup>49</sup>—that makes them capable of facing the impossible by dint of eschatological imagination. It is about another mode of temporality that we can call alongside the Hebrew grammar, a messianic time that becomes “kairological time,” according to the Christian metaphor since it breaks “once and for all” —as The Letter to the Hebrews 9:12 says of the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus on the cross—the sacrificial logic analyzed by René Girard<sup>50</sup> that gives cohesion to the hegemonic world. This redemptive event occurs in the messianic bodies and establishes *another temporality* pregnant with the meaning of life in the face of death.

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<sup>47</sup> This term is associated with performativity as an ability to transform subjectivity from its vulnerability. Among several contemporary authors, Judith Butler is a frequent reference. See, Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Judith Butler, “Performative Agency,” *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 2 (2010): 147-161.

<sup>48</sup> Since 2019, a group of *descolonial* scholars in Mexico from different continents has promoted a reflection amidst intimate relationships with social movements facing diverse forms of violence. We seek to think critically about their resistances and new ways of living (re-existences), with particular attention to the spiritualities that animate them. A graphic memory of this process can be seen on the following website: <https://re-existe.org/re-exist-english>.

<sup>49</sup> Although for Aquinas, the “theological life” (*vita theologalis*) is the exclusive gift of divine superabundant love, it requires the dynamism of human passions to bear fruit (*gratia supponit naturam ac elevans*). From a phenomenological and *descolonial*, and queer perspective, we propose re-signifying “the theological” from the denied subjectivities that experience grace as love without condition or measure that they receive in their bodies and territories in resistance and re-existence. See, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.62.1.

<sup>50</sup> See, René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

In that nourishing soil of the *performativity* of the subalterns, the seeds of other possible worlds are planted. There is regenerated the capacity of the forgotten of the earth to pronounce life from their ethical-political indignation, opening the way to the whole world that is a promise fulfilled on the contrary.

A clear example of these symbolic and political mediations of anti-hegemonic salvation is the anti-memorials of women murdered by femicide or the anti-memorials of forced disappearances, where survivors change the hegemonic narrative that seeks to domesticate these different forms of violence by subsuming them in circles of re-victimization and manipulation of memory. The objective of such performativity of the victims is, on the contrary, to keep the wound open until the conditions of memory, alongside justice, truth, and reparation that this process of recognition requires, are fulfilled.

In this way, the anti-hegemonic salvation proceeds as the unfolding of memory through narrative actions, healing rituals, and ethical-political performances in public squares and in the intimacy of the community, which the victims weave in their struggles for mutual recognition as a critique of the world above and salvation that emerges from the world-below.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of this symbolic performativity is the recreation of the world of the dead or, literally, a “post-mortem politics” as proposed by Sayak Valencia,<sup>51</sup> the philosopher from Tijuana, to affirm life in the interstices of power as constructed by the collective survivors of ongoing massacres.

### ***The Messianic Instant as Ongoing Subversion and Eschatological Anticipation from the Reverse of Hegemonic History***

This whole process of anti-hegemonic social salvation is only possible if a *new temporality*<sup>52</sup> gives existential ground, spiritual sustenance, and humus of life to all these resistances. It is about a “messianic contraction” (1 Cor 7: 29) in the proper sense, as Paul of Tarsus captured it as the source of the new creation, given that it stops the spiral of violence in the bodies and territories themselves on the one hand, and on the other, it sows seeds of other life precisely where it is denied. From there springs grace as a gift of loving overabundance that saves the wounded social body of humanity and the whole of creation.

If we read these struggles from the perspective of messianic temporality, we do not reify them as sacraments of the divine, but we do recognize them as sources of meaning amid meaninglessness and, by the same token, as a window to the divine world that happens as grace. Within this experience of dismantling nonmeaning, an apophatic deep spiritual experience emerges that re-signifies the classical apophatism of my brother Meister Eckhart,<sup>53</sup> sourced from the spiritualities of those who inhabit

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<sup>51</sup> See, Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (Boston: MIT Press, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> See, Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, *Resurrection as a Messianic Anticipation: Grieving, Memory, and Hope from the Survivor's Perspective* (Mexico & UK: Alios Ventos, 2024).

<sup>53</sup> “Thus, God cannot work except in the ground of humility, for the deeper we are in humility, the more receptive to God.” Meister Eckhart, “Sermon Thirty-Four (Pf 34, Q 55) *Maria Magdalena venit ad monumentum etc* (John 20:1),” in *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 204-205.

the region of non-being, as we are exploring in recent research with colleagues from different countries and disciplines.<sup>54</sup>

That is why messianic temporality is proleptic: anticipatory of the divine world in the cracks of the human world as it occurs as resistance to systemic evil. It is a mode of being where the human-divine is realized as the grace of forgiveness that overcomes rivalry and resentment, thus stopping the spiral of hatred as the power of the victims communicates social salvation, a performativity never possible for the executioners as executioners.

But this temporality is also analeptical, that is to say, the creator of a past that wanted to be hidden by the trauma or by the victimizers, but that is re-created by the survivors. Therefore, the experience of contracted time brings back the experience of mourning as a perspective of life here and now for those who survived the collapse.

An emblematic case of this messianic temporality is the confession of the resurrection of the missing persons as a "fulfilled promise," according to the testimony of the searching mothers in Argentina and Mexico. When they manage to identify individual and human remains through DNA, after recovering them in life and clandestine graves, they can return them to their families. When this happens, the experience is narrated as a "promise fulfilled," thanks to this act of political love, where they expand their motherhood by placing their newly recovered children in their collective memory. They do not affirm the resurrection as an afterlife event but as a sacrament of the fulfillment of life in the hereafter amid the chiaroscuro.

## CONCLUSION

Let us summarize the foundational elements of social salvation we have explored.

### *The Social Salvation from the Reverse Side of Hegemonic History*

Throughout this *descolonial* theological journey, we have sought to go to the social peripheries and existences, listening to the cries of indignation and love for the lives of the victims of various forms of violence and their survivors. There, we have found some criteria of truth to deconstruct the hegemonic idea of redemption, delineating an outline for a *descolonial* theology of social salvation that emerges from the knowledge and spiritualities of the subalterns who say enough is enough; no more, this is it.

From the reverse side of hegemonic history and in the interstices of its earthly power, glimmers of divine Glory emerge as the agency of the survivors to weave other ways of living in common. What is paradoxical and consoling about this idea of *anti-hegemonic social salvation* is that it includes the perpetrators in a call to ethical, epistemic, and spiritual conversion. Above all, it strengthens the power of the victims as knowers of other ways of life and experts in humanity who are open to the gift of otherness, bearers of a relational ontology that goes beyond the logic of violent and sacrificial reciprocity.

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<sup>54</sup> The videos of the series of colloquia on Political Theology from the *descolonial*, mimetic, and apophatic perspectives can be viewed on the BGVI portal: <https://re-existe.org/boston-college-bgvi-1>.

### ***The spirituality of Resistance***

Social salvation in a *descolonial* perspective is a combative spirituality that emerges as an anticipation of a world to come, literally as labor pains, in the bodies of women and all the collectives of diverse resistances that celebrate the gift of being co-creators of these territories of life, as *Theoquilombism* explores it in the Afrodiasporic subjectivities all over the world.

It is a spirituality of life amid a “stark” civilization, which recovers the theological background of the divine kenosis experienced by the Logos of God made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, a lowering that is also expressed in the just people of history who live that proximity that redeems, precisely by deconstructing in their bodies and territories, the world system of oppression that is the hidden face of the globalization of the market.

A spirituality, after all, that celebrates life amid death. Or, as the searching mothers say, they learn to “cry while dancing” because the love for their missing children is not sublimated but transfigured into dance when the pain is shared with other mothers, strengthening the sisterhood amid their (*im*)possible mourning.

Performativity of symbols of *post-mortem life*, not in the afterlife outside space-time, which will be a gift according to the hope born of faith in the living God. But post-mortem life in the hereafter of necropower is confronted by the tenacity of those who bet on the change of this world.

### ***Re-Existence as a Way of Life***

Finally, social salvation in an anti-hegemonic perspective can only be perceived as re-existence from below the scale of privilege, from the non-place of the disinherited of the Earth, from the cracks of the necro-power that controls bodies and territories but has also become the poison of instances of power, including the modern state and religions.

Re-existence is a precarious way of life redeemed from its desire for power. A vulnerability assumed as a meeting point with other wounded subjectivities, to walk in the mutual accompaniment that empowers the subaltern, heals the wounds produced by systemic violence, and, above all, celebrates the life that is stronger than death.

Forms of life that emerge in the peoples who resist the depredation of trans-criminal powers in the Amazon and the extractivist war in the Congo, in the resistance to forced migration in Tijuana and Lampedusa, in the sisterhood between Hindu, Christian, and Muslim women in Kerala, India, and in the strength of mothers who care for their children and the refugee children they adopt in Kibera in the suburbs of Nairobi, Kenya.

In short, social salvation is possible when we inhabit the interstices of hegemonic power with combative hope, welcoming God’s unconditional love as revealed in the Galilean Jesus as the superabundant gift of the Divine Sophia.



**SAVING (CATHOLIC) HIGHER EDUCATION:  
CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES OF HOPE  
AND RESILIENCE**

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**INTEGRATED RESPONSE**

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**SUSAN ABRAHAM – INTRODUCTION**

That the news is bad, regarding Catholic college closings is evident. Rather than rehearse the statistics and metrics regarding enrollment, financial and institutional pressures in the United States, this paper presents a rhizomatic reading of postcolonial, anticolonial and antiracist theoretical materials which present possibilities for the future direction of higher education. While I am not specifically engaging Catholic universities as such, it is important to remember that the particularity of Catholic higher education institutional identities is entangled with the state of higher education in general. Further, I take a global view, through theoretical, theological, and literary materials, laying the foundation for a different view of preparing the global citizen of tomorrow. With Charles Mills’ understanding that “all social structures are political and reflect the reproduction of political power and advantage,”<sup>1</sup> I argue here that higher education institutions are mirrors of the larger culture, replicating all the power dynamics of the larger culture. This reality calls for a prophetically counter cultural stance that is aided by a sophisticated reading of cultural politics, by focusing on temporality, rather than geopolitical and racially unstable categories. Additionally, as Nancy Pineda-Madrid requested, I take one idea from postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, to focus on postcolonial temporality as a critical dimension for cultural politics. To assay a tentative definition of social salvation from such a temporal

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Time,” *Time and Society* 29, no. 2 (2020): 298.

perspective, I will say that social salvation is a negotiation of temporal imaginations about the past and future to speak prophetically and critically to the present time.

My reading foregrounds cultural materials, to *highlight* the political and to *suggest* the theological. I do so because the US context (including the theological academic context), is obsessed with the cultural and its power dynamics, like other ethnoreligious contexts. I also acknowledge the work already being done by colleagues at CTSA in this regard. This paper is simply an appendix to those conversations. I write as an administrator-faculty of seven years, straddling multiple roles in a small legacy institution. While I certainly hope to sound more than merely an administrator, I will speak from my professional and personal social location as a Catholic (Syro Malankara) immigrant from India-now-US citizen, academic dean at a progressive Christian seminary, in Berkeley, California. Progressive seminaries in the United States are the canary in the coal mine of higher education, particularly as it relates to theology and religion departments. That is, culturally, the health of seminary education in the United States parallels the health of academic departments of theology and religion because its health correlates with the cultural influence and significance of religion and theology.

As Mills argues, when speaking of time, it is critical to remember that the human experience of temporality is simultaneously social and political. He writes:

“Radicals want to claim that the social structure itself is “political,” in the sense of reflecting political power and advantage. . . . [Hence] the Social life of time will be intimately entangled with the political life of time. As creatures at least partially material...we are always located in both space and time. So, if there is a geopolitics, a politics of space, then clearly there should also be a Chronopolitics, a politics of time.”<sup>2</sup>

Mills further argues that we all have “time maps” that we operate from, and taking a closer look at contested times will provide a different perspective on racialization and colonialism. Such time maps are everywhere, including in current management manuals. Yann Cramer, for example, asserts that an understanding of the Greek concepts of *chronos*, *kairos* and *aion* are critical for innovation management.<sup>3</sup> In his management parlance, these terms, “without their esoteric meanings,” can be usefully applied to management of innovation.

Since both radical political theory and some current business practices use theorizations of time and temporality, I think it opportune to bring such a consideration to the topic of the salvation of higher education. I believe that academic higher educational institutions, including Catholic ones are experiencing time sickness. That is, there are multiple and contradicting notions of time in play that are becoming increasingly unwieldy and difficult for institutions, sickening them. Tracking these contradictions of

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<sup>2</sup> Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Time,” 298.

<sup>3</sup> Yann Cramer, “Aion, Kairos, Chronos: 3 time-concepts to master in innovation management”, *InnovToday*, November 1, 2018, <https://innovtoday.wordpress.com/2018/11/01/aion-kairos-chronos-3-time-concepts-to-master-in-innovation-management/>.

temporality adds a significant dimension to other analyses of identity that are more commonplace in the academy. Helping manage multiple temporalities could be strategic for those of us who are navigating the headwinds of financial, enrollment and loss of cultural significance in our institutions. The prevalence of anxiety at all levels in academic institutional life (and its impact on individual mental health) needs further development. The fear of death and ending, which are existential concerns are exacerbated by climate change, racial strife, political, religious, ecclesial and theological polarization. Time is out of joint, as the bard declared centuries ago.

Institutional and personal time sickness was intensified by the pandemic. Worldwide, the pandemic forced a profound rupture in our experience of time. Using the familiar categories of *chronos* and *kairos*, Siobhan Kattago in her essay "Ghostly Pasts and Postponed Futures: The Disorder of Time during the Corona Epidemic,"<sup>4</sup> asserts that the disruption between *chronos* and *kairos* was that of being caught between ordinary time and the time of the crisis of the pandemic (the lockdown).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the pandemic was also an experience of being caught between *chronos* and *aion*, with its sense of an eternal present (temporarily closed).<sup>6</sup> We can all recall what the initial years of the pandemic did to all of us. Many of us in institutions facing closures or cuts move through similar temporal disruptions and disturbances.

For those of us who belong to minoritized groups—racialized people, gendered people, queer people, trans people—time is always disturbed and disrupted. We are always in lockdown—caught between *chronos* and *kairos*—or, we are always temporarily closed—caught between *chronos* and *aion*. In lockdown, the "grammar of how time is articulated by distorting past, present and future" is violently disturbed, while in temporarily closed contexts, "the indeterminacy of the duration of time" is deepened. In both cases however, there is a heightened sense of the time of "now," or the present.<sup>7</sup> Achille Mbembe points out that the present global economic context creates "its own temporal regime."<sup>8</sup> Here, precarity is the norm: "the becoming Black of the world."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Siobhan Kattago, "Ghostly Pasts and Postponed Futures: The Disorder of Time during the Corona Epidemic," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1401-1413.

<sup>5</sup> Kattago, 1402

<sup>6</sup> Kattago, 1404

<sup>7</sup> "When most activities are temporarily closed, it is as if we are stranded between *chronos* as chronological time and *aion* as eternity. With the pandemic, everyday patterns of life increasingly exemplify what François Hartog has defined as the regime of presentism. The antithesis to futurism, the experience of time as presentism denotes the temporal duration of a continuous present tense. Presentism is the 'sense that only the present' exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of the unending now." Kattago, 1404.

<sup>8</sup> Achille Mbembe, "The Becoming Black of the World," in *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Mbembe writes: "...In the era of neoliberalism, capitalism and animism—long and painstakingly kept apart from each other—have finally tended to merge. The cycle of capital moves from image to image, with the image now serving as an accelerant, creating energy and drive. The potential fusion of capitalism and animism carries with it a number of implications for our future understanding of race and racism. First, the systematic risks experienced

Thirty years ago, Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, pointed to the “enunciative present,”<sup>10</sup> as a reality in the lives of colonized lives, speaking of course to the eternal present of racialized and colonized reality. Nevertheless, racialized and colonized beings are not without power, as they are aided now by the ghosts of their pasts and their dreams of the future. Bhabha’s “enunciative present,” in contrast to the presentism tracked by Kattago is a negotiation of the multiplicities and binaries of temporalities, disciplines, methods, histories, geographies and ideologies. Its primary concern is to highlight how the postcolonial love and care of the self may not be sundered from the love and care of the other. Another concern of the enunciative present is to attempt to gather the fragments of life, including the temporal, the intellectual, the creative, the spiritual and the affective. Consequently, above all, it seeks alliances and solidarities as a key dimension of the enunciative present.

### TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER – RESPONSE 1

Chronopolitics<sup>11</sup> dominates higher education. Tenure is defined temporally and in relation to those without tenure. And so there are those with tenure and without tenure; pre-tenure and non-tenure; full-time and part-time; one-semester contracts, one-year contracts, three-year contracts, and the gold-standard, evergreen contracts. Rights and privileges shift accordingly—access to sabbaticals, number of course credit hours taught, premium teaching days and times, the list continues. Susan’s call to reflect on chronopolitics and the “time sickness” of higher education is vitally important.

For Susan, our time sickness is a racialized one born of Empire, where time is seen as linear and progressive, and centered on an advanced Euro-American “civilization” that defines the academy. What does this mean for higher education in general, and

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specifically by Black slaves during early capitalism have now become the norm for, or at least the lot of, all of subaltern humanity.... Such practices borrow as much from the slaving logic of capture and predation as from the colonial logic of occupation and extraction, as well as from the civil wars and raiding of earlier epochs. Wars of occupation and counterinsurgency aim not only to track and eliminate the enemy but also to create a partition in time and atomization of space. In the future, part of the task of empire will consist in transforming the real into fiction, and fiction into the real.” Mbembe, “The Becoming Black of the World,” 4.

<sup>10</sup> “The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance. The struggle is often between the historicist teleological or mythical time and narrative of traditionalism—of the right or the left—and the shifting, strategically displaced time of the articulation of a historical politics of negotiation.” Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35.

<sup>11</sup> I will follow Susan in drawing on Charles W. Mills in my use of chronopolitics. For Mills, chronopolitics concerns the “temporal dimensions” of power relations between groups or the representation of those power relations (through narratives of causality, meaning, morality, seniority, and so on). Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time,” 299.

Catholic higher education in particular? Temporal entanglements<sup>12</sup> are laden with power, and ongoing colonial temporalities function to maintain a hegemonic status quo—even as higher educational spaces become more diverse.

Temporal power relations include the imposition of Christian ones—even at secular schools. School calendars accommodate Christian holidays, coded as winter and spring breaks.<sup>13</sup> Festivities are rebranded as holiday parties and egg hunts. Christian time is visible (even if coded) and accommodated. The same cannot be said for those from other faiths. Even at schools that offer interfaith ministries, their sacred time is barely visible and optionally accommodated. During Ramadan at LMU, we get an email request to *consider* accommodating students who are fasting. We do not get separate university notifications for Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, or Sikh holy days. Eastern Christian calendars are completely absent. We want to cultivate an inclusive Catholicity but have no idea how to do it, and we marginalize the students we aim to include in the process.

I don’t know that anyone at my institution wants to be caught up in *chronos* without a deeper sense of meaning. We certainly understand that a new *aion* is emerging. But what do we do to face it, how ought we do it, and as Susan asks us, when? How do we live our mission and “seize, with Kairos, the opportune moment?”<sup>14</sup>

#### **SUSAN ABRAHAM – PEDAGOGIES OF HOPE: LEARNING AND TEACHING IN COMPLEX TIMES**

At a recent conference of Protestant Seminary leaders, President Lee Butler, Jr. of Iliff School of Theology asserted that a golden age for theological thinking has certainly passed, but reminded those present that the purported “golden age” was the age of “white steeple theology.” Such theology, highly racialized, invested in political and cultural power that was and continues to be exclusionary in multiple ways, is facing the challenge of complex time. White steeple theology formed people in particular ways and habits, and created an ecosystem in which their history, their present work and effort and their future security were guaranteed by the churches. Painfully, this time has ended. White steeple theology further, is being asked to acknowledge its ghostly racial, patriarchal and kyriarchal past while at the same time, being challenged to change, include and negotiate with different temporalities, histories and futures. The kairotic moment of the present then, is replete with opportunity. One of the critical negotiations, for example, is the one we have to make with students, especially regarding their time. Adult students, and increasingly traditional age students, are

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<sup>12</sup> Achille Mbembe reflects on the temporalities of postcoloniality through the lens of displacement and entanglement. Displacement is not just about the dislocation of peoples in space, but time itself is displaced and “on the move,” in transit back, and forth, and between competing temporalities. Thus, there is not a singular, progressive, chronological line between the time of colony and postcolony, nor a rupture that signifies a change from one to the next. These shifting temporalities are also entangled in the postcolony, “an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures...each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones.” Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 16.

<sup>13</sup> See Khyati Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Cramer, “Aion, Kairos, Chronos.”

simply not available at the times the academy is available. They are operating on a different time, because of financial and family responsibilities. Students increasingly ask for flexibility, for hybrid learning contexts, for synchronous, asynchronous and in person experiences. Many signal that the only commitment they may make is to a year, often just a semester. Many, further, find the semester-long development of a course and its ideas to be too demanding and seek shorter and faster courses. More than anything, they want tangible rewards in return for their investment of time, energy and financial resources. For those of us who are placed in leadership positions in academic institutions, such a sea change of academic habits brings with it chaos. We must deal with competing issues: faculty who are only available for eight months of the year, alumni who have a rosy-hued memory of college or graduate school (The old building! The dining hall! The basketball court! The dorms! The café!), donors who are clear that the money comes with strings attached and those strings get pulled every which way with extreme urgency depending on cultural and political contexts, boards bent on revenue drivers and cutting costs to address urgent financial imbalances, and new prospects wanting to know how much they can earn with the degree from the institution even before they have begun an application.

The enunciative present for institutions, therefore, is very complex, made more so by the clashing temporalities within the institution. Administrators, faculties and boards often need to speak prophetically while being financially grounded and solvent. While all must understand and be able to articulate the “why” of an institution, there are different urgencies at play when articulating the mission of an institution to different audiences. Sometimes, these issues take on an unprecedented urgency, while the traditional work of teaching, formation and research of faculty are much slower.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, the rending of civic, political and social life demands urgent and immediate answers even as the work to reimagine, think, dialogue and write demands time and financial resources that stretch every institution. This results in a clash of temporalities, leading to severely strained relationships between faculty, administrators and boards.

As Elie Wiesel asserted in *The Gates of the Forest*, God created humankind for the love of stories. Such stories are also compelling vehicles for a contemporary theological imagination. For an imaginative primer on how to survive and continue to dream with multiple temporalities, I read Octavia Butler, a premier Afrofuturist and the foremost African American science fiction writer, whose work seems to be a chronicle of the present moment in the United States. Butler’s background is Christian (and, as she said, “Religion kept some of my relatives alive, because it was all they had. If they had not had some hope of heaven, some companionship in Jesus, they probably would have committed suicide, their lives were so hellish”<sup>16</sup>), but *Christianity*

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<sup>15</sup> Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (University of Toronto Press, 2016). As the publisher’s description states, the book focuses on the individual professor and their intellectual production. See “The Slow Professor,” University of Toronto Press, <https://utorontopress.com/9781487521851/the-slow-professor/>.

<sup>16</sup> Octavia Butler, “Octavia E. Butler: Persistence,” interview by unattributed interviewer, ed. Charles E. Brown, *Locus*, June 2020, excerpts available at <https://www.locusmag.com/2000/Issues/06/Butler.html>.

comes up short in her work. The books of Butler's *Parable* series are explorations of multiple temporalities and fine examples of the enunciative present in which African Americans can visualize a useable and livable future. In the first of the series, the *Parable of the Sower*, Butler depicts a dystopian world, in which climate change and violent racist politics have completely changed the landscape of the world. Set in the future United States, in California, Butler sketches the life of Lauren Olamina, a young Black girl journeying to Northern California from Southern California. *Parable of the Sower* begins on July 20, 2024, and the night sky is full of stars. The protagonist, a fifteen-year-old black girl recalled that her stepmother used to say that in years before, so many stars were not visible in the night sky, because of city lights: "lights, progress, growth, all those things we're too hot and too poor to bother with anymore."<sup>17</sup> In other words, by July 2024, climate change has changed life as we know it. The *aion* is one marked by planetary destruction. The story also captures the *chronos* of often-desperate lives of the community that Lauren belongs to, ravaged additionally by drugs, gun violence and sexual assaults of women and children.

Butler wrote this book in 1993, and one wonders whether she meant it as a purview of life in the future, or a chronicle of her present, or a novel about *our* present, set in the past. The book profoundly challenges us to acknowledge clashing temporalities, while providing ways to navigate them through the experience of reading it. Lauren Olamina, the protagonist, lives in an ever-present time of lockdown and closure, moments of continual multiplicity, crisis and redemption. Aware of this transcendence of time, she responds theologically. It is not the theology of traditional Christianity of course, because in that future time, Christianity has become mired in evil. Instead, she reminds her followers to "shape God," because unnecessary suffering is the result "poor Godshaping."<sup>18</sup> Social salvation requires better Godshaping. Lauren Olamina is a survivor, and because of the failures of traditional Christianity that failed to protect both people and the earth, she becomes the founder of a new religion called "Earthseed." She is therefore the sower. Clashing temporalities then require her to enunciate a different message of salvation, one that is grounded in the earth and one that sees human beings as earthseed: "We are Earthseed. We are flesh—self-aware, questing, problem-solving flesh. We are that aspect of Earthlife best able to shape God knowingly. We are Earthlife maturing, Earthlife preparing to fall away from the parent world. We are Earthlife preparing to take root in new ground, Earthlife fulfilling its purpose, its promise, its Destiny."<sup>19</sup> In her case, salvation for the people of Earth requires leaving Earth for the stars, as Earth has become unlivable. What Butler has done is to wrest the narrative of time and temporality away from hegemonic temporal formations that provide no future for Black people.

In the following and even more astonishing novel, *Parable of Talents*, published in 1998, Butler exemplifies Mbembe's caution that the contemporary task of empire is to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Butler writes of how "the pox" had changed the world forever, and that for many people living the American Experience (no American Dream for many), the violence simply intensified. In the year 2032, a

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<sup>17</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 115:8 reflects a sense of how we become like the God or Gods we worship.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, "Prologue to 2027," in *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 151.

politician is running for the presidency of the United States with the slogan “Make America Great Again,” (a temporal claim), and has as followers people who claim to be from the “Church of Christian America,” who spew hate and violence against anyone who threatens their idea of the ideal citizen. Difference is intolerable to these folks and their primary desire is protection for themselves and their way of life. They also have within their ranks a more radical group that possesses things like electric collars and other restraining devices that they actively use on other human beings that they have enslaved. Since the book is a collection of memoirs, it calls to mind the use of imaginative temporality to challenge a reader’s anticipation for a linear account of narrative and experience of time and asks us to inhabit a more complex time than just a presentist one. As such, one needs to have the tenacity and the capacity to follow a narrative that surprises and shocks as it weaves through the past, present and future while challenging the reader to reimagine what is meant by self, neighbor, world, transcendence, immanence, spirituality, religion, family and nation because each occupies a different temporal reality. The first chapter of this astounding chronicle, set in the year 2032 begins thus,

I have read that the period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to as “the Apocalypse” or more commonly, more bitterly, “the Pox,” lasted from 2015 to 2030, a decade and a half of chaos. This is untrue. The Pox has been a much longer torment. It began well before 2015...and it has not ended. I have also read that the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic and sociological crises. ... I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive. I have watched as convenience, profit and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation. I have watched poverty, hunger and disease become inevitable for more and more people.”<sup>20</sup>

There is much more to say about this book, and of Butler’s work as a whole. Incidentally, several African American musical artistes like Rihanna, Janelle Monáe and Beyoncé use Afrofuturist motifs in their work and in their fashion (Beyoncé specifically drawing on Butler in *Lemonade*).<sup>21</sup> These artistes speak directly to our students, even if they may not speak to us. They tell compelling stories and in ways that are different than what we do.

### TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER – RESPONSE 2

Susan challenges us to envision education beyond the Euro-American model. The “golden age” of the Western university is over. But that golden age never existed at all. Or if it did, it was a golden age for only a select few. The push to diversify our

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<sup>20</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of The Talents* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> See Hilton Als, “Critic at Large: Beywatch,” *The New Yorker*, May 23, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/30/beyonces-lemonade>.



educational institutions is therefore an important one, for it recognizes worlds beyond the Euro-American framework. But these attempts easily fall into another trap dominating higher education today: neoliberal market relations and competitive individualism. The result is polarization, isolation, and entrenchment.

I love my institution and believe wholeheartedly in its mission. But it is like virtually every other school of higher education: structured according to extractive and hegemonic temporalities that marginalize, deplete, and silence those living within other temporalities. At a place like LMU, these power relations are almost never framed through exclusivist language. But they can be detected in nostalgia for a university past; strategies aimed to meet current market demands; mental health initiatives superficially about *cura personalis* but really about productivity; increasing divides between tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty; "generous" extensions of tenure clocks due to COVID without reconsideration of tenure standards or the whole tenure system; DEI programs focused on calendar-based outcomes instead of mission or values.

Within endless debates about Catholicity, Susan invites us to uncover what temporalities are in play, and which ones we are privileging. And why. And for whom. An eschatological hope recognizes that our age includes the past as well as the future; it is already but not yet. An eschatological hope informed by postcolonial temporalities holds on to multiplicity for that past, and the present, and the future. The process of social salvation is one that recognizes what Achille Mbembe calls "planetary entanglement." It is a multivocal perichoresis of pasts, presents, and futures through a critical humanism<sup>22</sup> that aims to "make [a living] community."<sup>23</sup> We are Earthseed, and we shape God. Perhaps ironically, this does not involve ensuring that everyone feels "at home." Instead, it is the opposite. It requires that we, as Mbembe says, "walk anew the paths of humanity in companionship with all species...to begin by recognizing that at bottom there is no world or place where we are totally 'at home,' masters of the premises."<sup>24</sup> We are sojourners together.

Let us pause again to discern in this moment. How can we resist the larger neoliberal forces dominating our higher education spaces? How can we challenge hegemonic temporalities and promote diverse temporalities where no one is "home?" How can we live our missions with eschatological hope and a perichoretic dance of past, present, and future in a planetary entanglement?

### SUSAN ABRAHAM – PEDAGOGIES OF RESILIENCE

In the mid-1980s, Nicholas Lash wrote with some urgency about the responsibility of theologians to speak about eschatological hope.<sup>25</sup> While not directly about temporality or issues about time, the essay grapples with the cognitive content of Christian ideas, especially the problem of power, eschatological hope and

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<sup>22</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 75.

<sup>23</sup> Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 229.

<sup>24</sup> Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 229.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Lash, "The Church's Responsibility for the Future of Humanity," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1986), 186-201.

community.<sup>26</sup> Among his probing questions: How is a church that sees its social responsibility in terms of prophetic criticism avoid falling into the trap of a new Manichaeism?<sup>27</sup> How will the church explain in legible terms the idea of eschatological hope, the future of humanity and its complex relationship to the present?<sup>28</sup> He further challenges theological thinking to acknowledge the prevalence of sin in all of us, and our collective reluctance to think about love and forgiveness for all. Above all, he puts his hope in a church of the people that arises from shared experiences of suffering, drawing on Karl Rahner: “I find it difficult not to believe that, in the burgeoning of [base] communities—from Latin America to Africa, from Asia to the United States; communities that have grown up primarily among the oppressed, the invisible—we have the most striking single sign of the vitality of Christianity.”<sup>29</sup> In the 1980s, it was clear that the church was growing in the global South and indications are that it is continuing to do so. If growth of the church is in the global South, Catholic institutions would do well to think on a more global identity.

Contrast this view with that expressed by Ted Smith in his book, *The End of Theological Education*. Smith tracks the emergence in our time of *Homo Optionis*, and primarily in Western contexts, a “historically contingent but powerful set of social processes that operate on us, forming us as certain kinds of individuals. . . . Such an individual is a person defined by having choices” even as (specific and limited) choices and options are forced on the individual by the economic framework of neoliberalism. Church becomes a choice among other choices, becoming an example of “voluntary affiliation.” Voluntary affiliation has given rise to the “nones.” However, the typical “none” is poorer and has less formal education:

Despite caricatures that run through sermons and pop sociology, the “nones” are not primarily wealthy white urbanites skipping church to sip mimosas at brunch. They are also young Black men denied access to steady employment, white women raising children by themselves in a shredded rural America, otherwise documented immigrants for whom affiliation would be risky, queer youth who have fled families for their safety, and overworked overwhelmed people who can’t imagine what it would be like to have time to go to church and worry that they would be looked down on if they did. Even in a time of unraveling, lack of affiliation is tangled with other marginalities in tight knots of mutual reinforcement.<sup>30</sup>

Nicholas Lash writing in 1986 and Ted Smith writing in 2023 have very different notions of what the idea of “voluntary affiliation” may mean. Lash, and earlier than him, Rahner, were also drawing on very different assumptions of human freedom, liberation, and social salvation than the reality of individualization that Smith is

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<sup>26</sup> Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 201.

<sup>27</sup> Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 190.

<sup>28</sup> Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 194-196.

<sup>29</sup> Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 200.

<sup>30</sup> Ted Smith, *The End of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 84.

pointing to. The desiccation of institutions of higher education and of religious affiliation in the US is directly related to its neoliberal culture of individualization, oriented as it is to comfort, convenience, complaint, consumption, competitiveness and the circus afforded to the privileged.<sup>31</sup> Temporality here is experienced as *chronos*. Time is money. "My effort" is worth money. *Chronos*, is the way we measure worth. The temporality of these attitudes creates impossible and unlivable futures because it only provides a fantasy of a future for some individuals. The future imagined here does not contribute to the common good. There is no possible way that processes of individualization can bear the weight of an age even as it is the mark of an age. The planet cannot bear such extraction, and neither can communities or academic institutions. Take Smith's words on how neoliberalism works in universities: "In an ironic transfiguration of their own value, universities establish standards for tenure, promotion, and salary that encourage academics to neglect schools as formative institutions that they help govern and to regard them instead as places to stand as they cultivate their individual brands."<sup>32</sup> The neoliberal context is the water we swim in. When a commitment to the common good hollows out public good, reactionary politics finds a foothold and racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia (among other dehumanizing exclusions) become more overt. If individual achievement is the sole marker of faculty in universities, the whole enterprise is headed towards doom.

Knowledge production and its limits are explored in a very creative way in another example of science fiction. Liu Cixin's *The Three Body Problem* asks a simple question, and one familiar to theologians: are human beings worth saving? Within the United States, this global award-winning series was relatively unknown until the producers of the film version of *The Game of Thrones* pictured it for US audiences. Liu's book was followed by a limited domestic release of a Chinese version TV series, available on Prime for US consumers. An entity no less than Ross Douthat in an opinion piece in the New York Times excitedly comments on the "three interpretations" of the book.<sup>33</sup> However, he manages to make it about the clash of civilizations, rather than the clash of temporalities that the Liu Cixin emphasizes in the novel.

A computer engineer and science fiction writer, Liu's work has garnered science fiction awards all over the world. Like Octavia Butler before him, he is the recipient of the Nebula and Hugo science fiction awards. In *The Three Body Problem*, part of a trilogy, Liu asks deep questions about the future of humanity. Once again, in a nonlinear narrative, attempting to capture the complexity of the contemporary moment, Liu asks why many human beings assume that if we were indeed contacted by an alien extraterrestrial civilization that they would behave benignly towards us, especially when our own histories of encounter with each other are shot through with extreme violence. Correspondingly, Liu's alien civilization, the Trisolarians, also known as the

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<sup>31</sup> See "PSR's Dean Exhorts Graduates to Defy Christian Capitalism and Nationalism," Pacific School of Religion, May 25, 2023, <https://www.psr.edu/news/psrs-dean-exhorts-graduates-to-defy-christian-capitalism-and-nationalism/>.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *The End of Theological Education*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> See Ross Douthat, "Three Interpretations of 'The Three Body Problem,'" *New York Times*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/three-body-problem.html>.

San-ti, are only interested in colonizing Earth and consider human life on Earth to be like the life of bugs.

The novel is set against the backdrop of China's cultural revolution and the violence it unleashed. The novel explores social themes, but also presents the idea that science itself, as we think about it, is also heavily influenced by culture, its violences and exclusions. Hence, the certitude that scientists and researchers have about their knowledge production is challenged when relativized by a different species and their civilization's perspective. Liu's characters variously condemn humanity at large, either damning all to a fate at the hands of the Trisolarians, or narrowly thinking about the salvation of one's own family and descendants. The characters, mostly scientists, decide that most human beings are not worth saving. One of the characters in the novel, Ye Wenjie after the brutal attacks on her family by the Red Guards reads Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and notes that:

The insanity of the human race had reached its historical zenith. The Cold War was at its height. Nuclear missiles capable of destroying the earth ten times over could be launched at a moment's notice, spread out among the countless missile silos dotting two continents and hidden within ghostlike nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines patrolling deep under the sea.<sup>34</sup>

Ye decides that she is going to contact the aliens, despite a message she receives from Trisolaris that informs her that the San-ti are colonizers, who will annihilate human beings. Human beings are not worth saving, she decides, and on contacting an individual San-ti, she addresses them as "Lord" and proceeds to build a virtual reality game that she will use to socialize human beings to the eventual arrival of the San-ti. The game takes players through a series of scenarios explaining that time on Trisolaris is extremely complicated, given that the planet has three suns which exert different temporal and climate pressures. Depending on which sun is closer to the planet and depending on its relative distance from the other suns, the planet is ravaged by climatic conditions that lead either to utter destruction or to short stable eras. The action of the three suns on the planet is slowly destroying the San-ti civilization and they are now looking for a future in the stars. Earth seems to them like a paradise, with a stable sun, one temporal reality and centuries of climatic peace and calm. To settle their civilization, they are willing to kill the bugs on Earth, aka the humans, and settle the planet for themselves.

Religion is not absent in the novel. Wang Miao, another character in the book sees a series of numbers marking time in his sight that seems to have no physical basis. Tormented by the countdown, which seems to be a countdown of hours, minutes and seconds to his death, he wanders around, until "his subconscious" brings him to St. Joseph's Church in Wangfujing. He hears the snippet of a hymn: Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove, and is filled with grief and sadness. Other characters pray to the Buddha and people constantly talk about ultimate questions of existence and relationship. Yet, religion seems to be utterly inadequate to the problem facing him and

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<sup>34</sup> Liu Cixin, *The Three Body Problem* (New York: Tor, 2006), 270.

Earth. The book ends, however, with a reflection on the tenacity and resilience of life. Liu writes:

Look at them, the bugs. Humans have used everything in their power to extinguish them: every kind of poison, aerial sprays, introducing and cultivating their natural predators, searching for and destroying their eggs, using genetic modification to sterilize them, burning with fire and with water. Every family has a bug spray, every desk a fly swatter. ... This long war has been going on for the entire history of human civilization. But the outcome is still in doubt. The bugs have not been eliminated. They still proudly live between the heavens and the earth, and their numbers have not diminished from the time before the appearance of the humans. The Trisolarians who deem the human bugs, seemed to have forgotten one fact: *the bugs have never been truly defeated.*<sup>35</sup>

His point seems clear: Life will survive (also Butler's point). These novels also raise many theological questions, the enunciative present for Liu: Why *should* we survive, or, in other words, why should human beings be saved? What is human knowledge for? How do we understand ourselves? How do we appreciate the utter gift of life? Why are we preoccupied with our singular death when the death of the whole world is imminent? How do we overcome our desires for domination, competition, control, power, status, wealth and recognition? Aren't we behaving like aliens toward each other? Who then, are the Outsiders? The Insiders? The Pure? The Impure? Who has, or what is, good knowledge? Bad Knowledge? How shall we empower our children to face the reality of planetary and human end, soon? How shall we teach them to hold firm to their humanity despite this scenario? Butler and Liu demonstrate that the imaginative construction of the future, which is also keenly attentive to the past, to critique and speak to the present is an urgent necessity for our survival, and both also agree that our religious traditions are hopelessly failing at this task.

### TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER – RESPONSE 3

In my darker moments, I'm not sure that we *should* survive, or whether the dumpster fire that is higher education should be saved. But then I remember that I am falling into the trap of a "golden age" mindset. The planet—and the university—will survive, even if it is taken over by the bugs. So, the question is not whether, but how, and for whom. And let's be honest, higher education (and, yes, the CTSA) was always a post-apocalyptic dystopian reality for many of us who have to scrape together life in the interstices.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine argues that memory itself includes multiple temporalities—past, present, and future—in the present's recollection of the past and

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<sup>35</sup> Liu, 388, emphasis added.

anticipation of the future.<sup>36</sup> For Augustine, memory creates an image of an object or a notion of emotions and feelings in the mind.<sup>37</sup> And so, we recall something without the body actually seeing an object, feeling the pain, experiencing the joy, and so on.<sup>38</sup>

This is, of course, true to some extent. But the mind–body unity means that memory encodes on both mind and body, and the body retains memories that long have been suppressed by the mind. The body can even react very physically as if that object or event indeed were present—regardless of whether the conscious mind is aware of the past object or event. Traumatic memory is an actual re-living of the moment. The body–mind responds to the memory as if the person is experiencing the event in the present. This trauma isn't just encoded on one body, it is also passed down to future generations.

And so, of course, time and space are radically interconnected and marked by trauma. And our discussion of time is bound up with bodies. Time exhausted, depleted, exploited. Bodies exhausted, depleted, exploited. Communities exhausted, depleted, exploited. A planet exhausted, depleted, exploited.

For Johann Baptist Metz, William Cavanaugh, and Shawn Copeland, the work of healing is rooted in the Eucharistic call to remember, to see in the crucified Christ the crucified victims of history, and then to re-member the broken body of Christ, limb by limb, person by person.<sup>39</sup> As Copeland says, the Eucharistic practice of re-membering requires “risking memory, overcoming forgetfulness, [and] collectively taking responsibility.”<sup>40</sup> What would it mean for a Catholic institution to reframe its educational mission through Eucharistic memory with unflinching honesty across time and space, and re-membering our multiple temporalities into healing, transformation, and liberation?

### SUSAN ABRAHAM – CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that social salvation is a negotiation of temporalities, a place to create the possibility for an enunciative present, while charting an imaginative and livable future. An enunciative present is a negotiation of the simultaneous multiplicities of past, present and future, that holistically attends to the intellectual, spiritual and affective dimensions of human life. Both Butler and Liu demand that human beings cooperate with each other and with the earth for the survival of the species and for the survival of the planet. I focused on science fiction mainly because of personal predilection, and because the cultural frame of science and religion are useful ways to think critically about both. Further, as we lose students to STEM classes, conversations about the cultural frame of science may be an important angle to create an integrating

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<sup>36</sup> Roland Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of Memory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleanore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 151.

<sup>37</sup> Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of Memory,” 151-152.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Chadwick, trans., *Saint Augustine Confessions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188.

<sup>39</sup> See M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 64.

learning context. I have also not theorized the effect social media has on the experience of time, though Liu's focus on the pedagogical potential of virtual games brings in that element.

I have emphasized that a reflection on temporality offers theologians a different theoretical and theological space to think about religion and theology, and its histories and practices. Theologians are uniquely qualified to think about complex time, a perspective that could bring another dimension to the existing analyses of cultural differences. I have only (inadequately) engaged with a couple of literary sources, without delving into a rich vein of materials and ideas from philosophy, theology, cultural theory, feminist studies and queer theory, many of which analyze the potential of temporality for its critical and constructive potential. But my tentative attempt was taking Chela Sandoval's plea seriously to bridge "the theoretical apartheid that separates disciplines today."<sup>41</sup> Like Ted Smith, I am also much more concerned about the omnipresence of individualization processes which are death dealing to human attempts to create collaborative and shared spaces. Achille Mbembe points out in this regard that an earlier form of critique of power and capitalism is inadequate to our age where

Capital hardly needs [the laboring nomads] anymore to function. A new form of psychic life is emerging, one based on artificial and digital memory and on cognitive models drawn from neurosciences and neuroeconomics. With little distinction remaining between psychic reflexes and technological reflexes, the human subject becomes fictionalized as an entrepreneur of the self. This subject is plastic and perpetually called on to reconfigure itself in relation to the artifacts of the age.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, extractive individualism is baked into neoliberalism. We are all beneficiaries and victims of this economic order. Conversely, another strand of critical reflection on individualism from African American politics asks whether certain forms of individuated politics are critical for our time today. Arguing that visions of a better society may best arise from the pew than the pulpit, Eddie Glaude asserts that to act is always to act in a world of suffering and possibility.<sup>43</sup>

At the presentation at the annual convention of the CTSA, Tracy and I decided to gather thoughts from the audience. We received a windfall of thoughtful and promising avenues to explore. These are a select few of the many excellent responses. We strongly

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<sup>41</sup> Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 70.

<sup>42</sup> Achille Mbembe, "The Becoming Black of the World," 4.

<sup>43</sup> Eddie Glaude, *We Are The Leaders We Are Looking For* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024), 114. He writes: "I understand that to act in the world involves suffering and possibility. This is the double connection of experience: it is primarily a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection...it also involves our acting, reacting, experimenting, and tinkering with the environment; that what we do can, in fact, improve or transform our conditions for living. We are not stuck with a world where all is settled beforehand, and where we are left to sit on our hand to praise or lament. Much more is required if a better world—if salvation rightly understood is to be had." (Emphasis in the original)

feel that these probings are an organic aspect of our presentation and offer stimulating paths forward.

- What are the differences between the enunciative and annunciative present? That is, feminist and womanist praxis theologies speak into the enunciative present (coloniality) in annunciative ways (eschatological praxis).
- To save Catholic education, we need to rediscover the foundation of the Christian story. The youth thirst for spirituality to construct their human lives. Our job as theologians is to tell the Christian story compellingly. Perhaps our questions should be: What is Catholic in Catholic education? How Catholic is Catholic education?
- How is time sickness contributing to student mental health crises and problems with faculty morale?
- How does an identity rooted in the past Vatican II now get performed in the *kairos* of today?
- How do we envision communal alternatives of shared temporality to ensure spiritual and psychological health?
- What are the limits of the contemplative call to “stay in the present moment?”
- Social media seems to accelerate the experience of time, making students resistant to the slower pace of learning. How do we challenge this phenomenon?
- Perhaps we need to move beyond eschatology to apocalypse, that is, a deep sense of rupture, a break with the present for the sake of a genuinely and radically new hope.



# SEEKING SOCIAL SALVATION IN A WORLD MADE FRICTIONLESS: COMMUNION, EXTRACTIVISM AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The convention theme of “social salvation” draws our attention to how Christian notions of salvation, like the Jewish traditions from which they emerged, demand more than individual escape from the morass of historical and material existence. They insist, in the words of John the Baptist, that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”<sup>1</sup> This sense that salvation is bound to flesh and history is expressed powerfully in the opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anguish of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the followers of Christ.... That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with humankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.<sup>2</sup>

The church’s obligation to embrace the world in its suffering and fallenness is linked with important theological notions such as communion, encounter and solidarity. These are always moral and spiritual challenges. In this paper, I will explore how the material dynamisms of contemporary civilization, rooted in patterns established by Western colonialism, render communion, encounter and solidarity particularly difficult by making it all-too-easy to neither see nor attend to the anguish of human and non-human others. I will describe this problem in terms of a “frictionlessness,” in which human, ecological and biological differences are engaged and then overcome in extractive processes. Frictionlessness contributes to injustice by freeing protagonists from engagement with one another and, thus, from moral

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:6. For a constructive theology of flesh that encompasses human, animal, vegetal and lythic, see Scott McDaniel, “Of Mountain Flesh: Space, Religion, and the Creatureliness of Appalachia” (PhD thesis, University of Dayton, 2018), [http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=dayton1524776446663574](http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=dayton1524776446663574).

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), §1, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). Translation modified by author.

reckoning and reconciliation. I pursue this analysis not to absolve indifference, but to bring into focus a dynamism that encourages indifference so that we might better resist it.

After setting the scene with Henri de Lubac's *Catholicism*, this paper offers four vignettes of contemporary frictionlessness. It then turns to theologies, histories and anthropologies of extraction and colonialism to consider extractivism and the overcoming of friction as a fundamental form of the sin of our world. With this framing of the problem, it takes up the question of salvation. Seeking to deepen attentiveness to the density of relationships that extraction destroys, it turns to Pope Francis's notions of synodality and integral ecology. It concludes with a brief engagement with the "New Materialism" in order to augment integral ecology's limited attention to horizontal relationships among creatures.

## **2. SALVATION ON THE BATTLEFIELD, A PLACE OF NO FRICTION, AND THE SILENCE OF THE LAND**

Henri de Lubac was an influential voice in theological grappling with social salvation. The term appears repeatedly throughout his 1938 book *Catholicism*.<sup>3</sup> De Lubac opened the book with a challenging epigraph from Jean Giono's 1936 *Les vraies richesses*. After characterizing Christian joy as personal and individual, "In his blessedness [the Christian] passes through the battlefields with a rose in his hand," Giono replies, "My joy will not be lasting unless it is the joy of all. I will not pass through the battlefield with a rose in my hand."<sup>4</sup> De Lubac aimed to show that Christian salvation was essentially social; that it did not understand salvation in a way that would abandon suffering humankind on the battlefield. Indeed, there are passages in the book that are clear precursors to those lines from *Gaudium et Spes*, such as his praise of Mechtilde of Magdeberg as an exemplar of catholicity who took "on the fear and the hopes, the sorrows and the joys of the whole of humanity."<sup>5</sup>

### *Glimpses of the Battlefield*

We do indeed live on a battlefield. I offer four glimpses from my partial awareness with the goal of discerning the material challenge of frictionlessness to *Gaudium et Spes*'s call for communion and solidarity.

The first glimpse dates to life before kindergarten. I grew up on the Northside of Pittsburgh. My earliest political memory is being taken by my mother down the street from our home because there was "something she wanted to see." Pittsburgh is a hilly, terraced city. We walked to the end of our block and looked out along the main street below to Perry High School a few blocks away. My mother wouldn't let me look for long. What I remember was a roiling mass of heads filling the street in front of the school and the roar of the crowd; an ugly roar in a minor key. This was an anti-bussing

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<sup>3</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: The Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1980), 61, 120, 123, 156, 166.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Giono, *Les vraies richesses* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1936), 20, 26; cited in *Catholicism*, 13. (De Lubac cites page numbers from a different edition, but does not provide publication data.)

<sup>5</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 244-245.

riot, part of the northern white working class's resistance to the legal victories of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>6</sup> Legal and political wrangling about school desegregation would continue for three decades, as white flight accelerated to the suburbs.

A second glimpse concerns another crisis that was unfolding at the same time. Pittsburgh's steel industry, which itself had only recently desegregated its union seniority system, would, within a year of that event, begin its collapse under competition from what we would come to call globalization. As a child I didn't distinguish the working class from the middle class. I thought they meant the same thing. Steel workers drove luxury cars, owned boats and had hunting cabins. That was all gone by the time I was in high school. A way of life was destroyed: By 1983, 133,000 manufacturing jobs had been lost. Pittsburgh's unemployment rate hit 17 percent. Some surrounding towns were as high as 27 percent—worse than during the Great Depression.<sup>7</sup>

There is much to be said about both of these conflicts. Here I want to focus on one of their shared characteristics: how their outcomes were driven by a lack of social and economic friction. My aim here is not to suggest reductionistically that all of these struggles are driven by one dynamic, but to unearth a factor that runs through them all and frustrates our attempts to address them.

The riot was a violent reaction to an attempt to advance racial justice. School desegregation, however, was not defeated in the streets. Although resistance took place in courtrooms and school board meetings, above all, refusal was enacted in real estate offices through the market freedom of white buyers. My family fled the neighborhood where my parents had first dated, a home they had painstakingly remodeled together after they married and a parish where my grandfather had built the convent in which my grade school teachers, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden lived. These astoundingly deep connections could not hold us. They were swamped by racial animus and fear. We fled a community with deep ties for an uprooted existence in what were then the exurbs.

As the collapse of the steel industry unfolded, there was a common video trope on the evening news: the bemused faces of union steelworkers gathered around garbage-can fires at picket lines that were painfully futile against globalization and deindustrialization. You can't picket that. The world had changed and they had no tools to engage it.

I grew up in a no-place that couldn't define itself, because it could neither acknowledge these battlefields nor imagine what to do about them. The Catholic church overwhelmingly dwelt then and dwells still, in the same unacknowledged territory. This is not to say there weren't homilies about racial or economic injustice,

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<sup>6</sup> This was likely 1972 when "24,000 of the city's 70,000 school students vacated the schools" during a "citywide school boycott," Joe W. Trotter and Jared N. Day, *Race and Renaissance: African Americans in Pittsburgh since World War II* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 130. See also William Dodge Rutherford, "The 'Unraveling': Resistance to Desegregation in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, 1971-1998" (honors thesis, Department of History, Tufts University, 2014), <https://dl.tufts.edu/concern/pdfs/9306t910k>.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Toland, "In desperate 1983, there was nowhere for Pittsburgh's economy to go but up," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 23, 2012, <https://www.post-gazette.com/business/businessnews/2012/12/23/In-desperate-1983-there-was-nowhere-for-Pittsburgh-s-economy-to-go-but-up/stories/201212230258>.

but more troublingly, that they had little impact. The US Bishops' pastorals "Brothers and Sisters to Us" and "Economic Justice for All," while not perfect, spoke to the moment with force yet had little traction. I fear that necessary theological criticism of the content of such letters can implicitly presume agency is ready to hand if only properly employed. Behind the church's failure on these issues lurked real powerlessness. "Economic Justice for All," widely regarded as a highpoint in episcopal engagement, was drafted in a way that facilitated a broad civic conversation. It offered a profound critique of the US economy and proposed principles for a more just order, but found little traction as the ratchets of globalization and deindustrialization transformed economic life for good.

In the 1980s, the Central American crisis loomed large in Catholic and secular media. This was a fundamental moral challenge to US citizens whose government had both destabilized the region and funded and trained its repressive counter-insurgencies. The Latin American church provided stunning witnesses to the Gospel. That context, where Christians faced death and yet were still willing to engage in loving solidarity, landed as both an inspiration and a temptation in my context: an inspiration from those who witnessed to the gospel in those terrifying conflicts; a temptation to escape from the intractable morass of the cold wars of race and class in the US rustbelt.

That powerful context provided little guidance for understanding my own. In the United States, the National Guard had indeed been mobilized in Pittsburgh and hundreds of other cities in the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968. During the '70s and '80s, however, unlike Central America, no elite national guard brigades threatened violence in our streets, yet racial segregation and economic disenfranchisement continued with unrelenting effectiveness. (Police shootings of Black citizens did not become a dominant pattern in Pittsburgh until the 1990s.<sup>8</sup>)

This violence worked instead through silent, invisible and obdurate material structures: neighborhood boundaries, urban redevelopment, highway construction, property values, collapsing tax bases, corporate ownership and foreign exchange rates. I lived on a battlefield against which resistance seemed not so much futile, as impossible to imagine.

Consider a third, more-recent, event: The place was an unremarkable suburban box store during a weekday after work rush a decade ago. To one side of the door about fifty people gathered in a circle, holding candles. It was a memorial for John Crawford III, held days after police shot the twenty-two-year-old Black man to death in the store for holding a BB gun that had been displayed unboxed on a shelf.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Johnson, "MLK riots: 40 years later, turmoil on the Hill stirs memories," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, April 2, 2008, <https://www.post-gazette.com/life/lifestyle/2008/04/02/MLK-riots-40-years-later-turmoil-on-the-Hill-stirs-memories/stories/200804020183>.

A timeline of police brutality in Pittsburgh documents ongoing violence against Black citizens from the founding of the Police Department in 1857 through the present, but police shootings did not become a dominant pattern of violence until quite late. Jody DiPerna and Elaine Frantz, "Historical Context: Violence Occurring Against Black Pittsburghers Today Has Been Happening for More than a Century-and-a-Half," *Pittsburgh Institute for Nonprofit Journalism*, June 19, 2022, <https://pinjnews.org/historical-context-violence-occurring-against-black-pittsburghers-today-has-been-happening-for-more-than-a-century-and-a-half/>.

What stands out in my memory about the protest, was the space it occupied, or more to the point, did not. Gathering near the main store entrance, organizers were careful to not disrupt the flow of traffic or customers entering the store. As members of the gathering spoke, sang, prayed, and conducted a libation ritual, people walked right by. The vast majority seemed to have no idea what the group was doing: displaying no interest, resentment or even awkwardness. The assembly was free to gather and utter, but unable to engage or mark space. It just as well might have been held in social media. The physical space was frictionless: permitting neither encounter nor confrontation.

Let's return to Giono's battlefield to consider a final aspect. Although we can see how that powerful quote made it onto one of de Lubac's famous note cards, Giono's concerns were not primarily social. Giono might be described as a pantheistic agrarian, *Les vraies richesses* was a critique of urban civilization's destruction of the earth and consequently, humankind.<sup>9</sup> The battlefield he described was about ecology as much as society. He points us to the ecological and material underpinnings of the social.

Giono's French context differs from ours. Although Gaul was colonized by the Romans, it was not emptied. All of the events I've described transpired on ground taken from Indigenous peoples who were driven from the land through invasion, disease and murder. Many of the land's other plant and animal inhabitants were expelled through similar dynamics. The CTSA is meeting in Baltimore this year. If you have the chance to visit Inner Harbor, note the ambient recordings of once-Indigenous species now reduced to soundscapes for tourist space. Their homes eliminated like those of the evicted human inhabitants—from the Piscataway and Susquehannock peoples to those more recently dislocated by redevelopment.

I hold a deed to the land I live on, a fact that locates and implicates me in colonial space. At the time of its original sale under the terms of the Congressional Land Ordinance of 1785, it had been inhabited by the Myaamia, Shawnee and other peoples. That sale was ten years before it was formally ceded in the Treaty of Greenville in 1795.

Occasionally, I do research in a very small stand of uncut forest that, somewhat symbolically, is located just a few miles north of the site of the Greenville treaty's signing and its cession line. The place offers a glimpse of the land before conquest. Its fifteen acres are dense with diverse understory plants and fungi. It is small, no bigger than a woodlot, but it still has a voice that whispers what once sang in the boreal woodlands across this continent.

I met a puppy on my first visit to the forest. He brought a ball into the woods and dropped it at my feet. Having been socialized into this ancient game by generations of his relatives, I knew the rules. I threw it and he brought it back instantly. After a couple of rounds, I explained that I had work to do and headed off. He dropped the ball and accompanied me for more than an hour, sharing in every task. If I looked at a tree, he would look at it with me. Sometimes taking the other side—just so we'd have the whole thing covered. When I bent to look at something, he'd focus with me. Together we considered understory plants, mushrooms, aquatic life in a vernal pool, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Piquet, "A l'heure de la COP 26, pourquoi il faut relire 'Les Vraies Richesses' de Jean Giono," *Marianne*, December 12, 2021, <https://www.marianne.net/culture/litterature/a-lheure-de-la-cop-26-pourquoi-il-faut-relire-les-vraies-richesses-de-jean-giono>.

terrifying rhizomorphs of *Armillaria mellea* fungus: hungry tendrils, shiny like a black widow's leg, relentlessly searching underground for trees to penetrate and consume. *Armillaria* are the largest living creatures on the planet, often stretching through miles of forest. The one living in these woods is systematically consuming and killing all of the ancient oak trees there.

The puppy was an Australian cattle dog—his enthusiasm and hard work are typical of his breed. In the 1820s, British settler George Hall bred them in the then Colony of New South Wales from Highland Collies and Australian Dingoes, dogs that had been domesticated by many of Australia's Aboriginal peoples. These brought the skills of silence and heel nipping to the breed.<sup>10</sup> Hall's Heelers, as they were called, were bred to drive small herds of cattle to market through the difficult Australian terrain; an agricultural process that devastated those ecosystems and accelerated the expulsion of the Aboriginal peoples who had inhabited the land for at least forty thousand years. So, this dog who lives next to one of the last fragments of the pre-colonial ecosystem in the Midwest, bears in his DNA a parallel history of colonization, and deeper still of human and canine cooperation stretching back to the early millennia of the Holocene for his line, and at least five to ten times longer for our two species. We've been working and playing together for a very long time.

Contrast those woods with the land to which I hold title. This Spring, after twelve generations of settler ownership, the small strip of woods between my house and the neighbor behind saw only a single native wildflower—a Virginia bluebell. The rest is a panoply of invasive species: several types of ivy and other ground cover, escaped pot herbs, lesser celandine and bush honeysuckle. The latter produces chemicals that attack underground fungi and the roots of competitors, rendering the soil thin and lifeless.

The land has been emptied, reducing its ecological community to silence. There is nothing left to provide friction against our plans. Norman Wirzba quotes Isaiah 5:8, You "who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land."<sup>11</sup>

Consider the common features of these vignettes. Each injustice was facilitated to some degree by frictionlessness: the ability of white residents to flee a neighborhood, frustrating attempts to build an integrated community; the ability of capital to be extracted, moved and redeployed, rendering the communities from which it was extracted without recourse as their physical spaces and bodies no longer mattered; a community gathered to mourn and protest an innocent young Black man's death unable to effectively impact others' experiences of the very place where he had been killed only days earlier; a landscape so emptied of its ecological communities and the human communities who knew them that there is little left to engage.

A battlefield indeed, but one where it seems difficult to do anything but pass through with a rose, or more to the point, an ineffective protest sign in hand. What might it mean to seek salvation in this socially, economically and ecologically frictionless space? In order to address that question, we turn to a consideration of the origins and nature of this frictionlessness.

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<sup>10</sup> "Australian Cattle Dog," *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, updated June, 19 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_Cattle\\_Dog](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Cattle_Dog) .

<sup>11</sup> Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 143.

### 3. THE SIN OF OUR WORLD, THE 500-YEAR PROJECT, AND THE TWO-STEP OF FRICTION AND EXTRACTIVISM

In the Fraction Rite, we echo John the Baptist, praying "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Have mercy on us." What is the sin of our world? In the *City of God*, Augustine offered an account of the *Libido dominandi* that was both a description of the universal sin of the world and a contextual description of the fundamental vice of the Roman Empire. Our civilization is quite different from the Roman Empire. Might we develop a contextual description of the sin of our world?

#### A. Castillo: *The 500 Year Project*

Daniel Castillo has offered a comprehensive account of the forces that create the context I've sketched. Synthesizing the work of Enrique Dussel and numerous other scholars, he outlines a "500-year project" that extends from European colonization of the western hemisphere through modernity and neo-liberal globalization, to the Anthropocene.

If we read this as an account of the sin of our world, Castillo provides a helpful distinction. He describes it, not simply as a "system of domination," but one whose most fundamental, orienting dynamism is "plunder."<sup>12</sup>

Macarena Gómez-Barris, provides his definition of plunder: "an economic system that engages in thefts, borrowing, and forced removals, violently reorganizing social life as well as the land by thieving resources from Indigenous and Afro-descendent territories."<sup>13</sup> Race is a fundamental part of this system. Castillo cites Achille Mbembe: "To produce blackness is to produce a social link of subjection and a body of extraction...a body from which great effort is made to extract maximum profit."<sup>14</sup>

This account of colonial plunder is mapped in the geography of center and periphery. Castillo cites Eduardo Galeano's poetic words, "Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything, from the discovery until our times, has always been transmuted into European—or later—United States capital, and has thus accumulated in distant centers of power."<sup>15</sup>

Castillo's project focuses on this center/periphery exploitation. Colonized lands and peoples provide "ghost acres" that feed colonizing nations. They provide the raw materials and energy that fuel their industrial production. The "false and superficial" political ecology of neoliberal globalization "obfuscates" these exploitative relationships.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 142.

<sup>13</sup> Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), xvii, cited in Castillo, *Ecological Theology*, 147.

<sup>14</sup> Castillo, *Ecological Theology*, 156, citing Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 12; cited in Castillo, *Ecological Theology*, 149-50.

<sup>16</sup> Castillo, *Ecological Theology*, 154, 166-70.

Castillo insightfully reveals the colonial roots of the context sketched above and offers a way of considering the dominant character of the sin of our world. Colonial plunder is both the historical foundation and ongoing fuel for our civilization.

But there are aspects of our context that this account does not address. It is premised on the militaristic models of colonialism that dominated what became Latin America. In *Indigenous Continent*, Pekka Hämäläinen contrasts Spanish and Portuguese colonization of Central and South America with the French and Dutch colonization of North America. The former involved conquest of hierarchical empires and the mass enslavement of Indigenous populations for mining and large-scale plantation farming. In short: genocidal plunder. The Spanish were much less successful in the more egalitarian societies of the Southwest of North America. In the Northeast, the French and Dutch were interested in building trading empires more than occupying land and the no-less-destructive colonization of what became North America proceeded by different means.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, British colonialism, which became the dominant form in North America, was, in addition to trade, focused on colonization and engaged in genocidal war from the start (e.g., King Philip’s War in 1675). It also practiced the systematic enslavement of African and Indigenous North American peoples from the beginning and would eventually incorporate enslavement into large plantation agriculture.

I make the distinction between the early phases of the colonization of South and North America as a step toward refining our understanding of colonialism’s contemporary legacy, not to suggest that the colonization of North America was somehow morally better than the South. Both were genocidal.

### ***B. Tsing: Friction***

To understand the difference and its significance for our context, I turn to anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. In a book that provides the key concept that I’m employing in this essay, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Tsing offers an ethnography of the “sticky materiality” upon which the dreams of global capitalist connection depend. She describes “friction” in terms of the “duality” at the heart of all universals. “Friction” gives universals “purchase...allowing them to spread as frameworks for the practice of power” but this necessary imbrication in the local prevents them “from being everywhere the same.”<sup>18</sup> These frictions are not transparent to the market process. They cannot be characterized as mutual negotiation of interest or optimization of outcomes because they can involve fundamental misunderstandings and mutual incomprehension. Friction is, nonetheless, a form of engagement across difference.

Tsing offers an example of friction with an account of the commodity chain that links coal mined in Kalimantan, Indonesia with power plants and steel mills in India. Its ability to function as a commodity lies not in “a vague and transcendent ‘coalness,’” but in “a step-by-step negotiation of the possibilities at hand—for digging, sorting,

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<sup>17</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America* (New York: Norton Liveright, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1, 8-10.



transport and so on." Coal the commodity is made in the friction with which "the lump of coal rubs up against other participants in the chain."<sup>19</sup>

Tsing's account centers on a Singaporean coal export manager whom she portrays as an impresario of friction: deftly coordinating mining engineers, truck drivers, barges, coal graders, conveyor belt operators and stevedores with cajoling, bribes and at one point, an impromptu purchase of a passing bargeful of melons—a gift that shaved two days off of the loading time for a cargo ship. The ship itself is commanded by Indian officers and crewed by Indonesians. Communicating only through gestures and pantomime because neither speaks the others' language, they complete the many tasks required to transport coal across the Indian Ocean.<sup>20</sup>

Friction, as theorized by Tsing, is not about resistance, rather it is what binds the links of commodity chains together. In this sense, commodity chains are a negotiation, a connection to people and place. Friction is how abstract market forces get connected to and through local cultures, societies and ecologies.

Tsing offers a less desolate account of friction in the main study of the book: an ethnography of the strange alliances in a successful Indonesian ecological movement that united Dayak Indigenous forest dwellers, bourgeois urban nature enthusiasts, and international NGOs. The alliance was not characterized by consensus or even mutual understanding, but chains of friction that nonetheless successfully established a Dayak community-managed forest that halted commercial logging.<sup>21</sup>

Tsing's account of friction has earned wide acclaim as a seminal work in global ethnography. I respect the value of her main insight but what sticks with me is a less remarked material counter-point in her account which suggests that friction, like a ratchet, works primarily in one direction: with the flow of extraction.

In contrast to the charismatic impresario of friction, Tsing offers an account of an unremarkable, silent, muddy logging road that nonetheless enacts profound material changes in the forest through which it is cut. It disrupts community geographies by separating villages with the newly dangerous territory surrounding the road. It opens forest interiors to extraction. It enables wildcat loggers to enter. Village heads are bribed for permission to cut timber. Forest dwellers begin to reimagine the forest in terms of the cash each tree might bring. There is a rush to sell trees off quickly as deforestation grows at the hands of larger gangs who respond to attempts to resist or to even bargain with violence. Forest dwellers may have a fleeting say in negotiating the despoiling of their lands, but once the road arrives, they do not have the power of refusal.<sup>22</sup>

Friction imbricates global capital; it does not resist it. As the logging road opens the forest to extraction, the friction of Indigenous communities and the landscapes they inhabit are gradually eroded. This material, spatial dynamic is common in forests around the world, whether South East Asia, Africa, or the Amazon.<sup>23</sup> The lesson I take

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<sup>19</sup> Tsing, *Friction*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Tsing, *Friction*, 52-54.

<sup>21</sup> Tsing, *Friction*, 245-247.

<sup>22</sup> Tsing, *Friction*, 27-50.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, this NASA presentation of Landsat satellite data from 1975 to 2012, showing the impact of logging roads in Rondonia Brazil: Aries Keck, "Fishbone Forest," Scientific Visualization Studio, NASA, August 16, 2012, <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/11061/>.

from Tsing is that extraction begins in, but gradually overcomes friction's engagement with difference.

Tsing helps us understand the colonization of North America, which proceeded through different dynamisms from Latin America. French and Dutch colonists offered manufactured trade goods in exchange for animal pelts which were needed in enormous quantities for felting for European headwear. Indigenous peoples were enthusiastic participants in this trade. It motivated both intensive diplomatic efforts and armed conflict between tribes and colonial nations. This was a cooperative extractive undertaking of mind-boggling scale. As the land was emptied of fur bearing animals, there was increasing conflict over access to trapping lands, which deepened conflict among Indigenous nations.<sup>24</sup> Like Tsing's logging roads, trade centers became centers for influxes of outsiders, in this case, settler colonists, who brought both destructive domesticated animals and disease. French and Dutch models of trade gave way to the onslaught of English settler populations. What began in friction, ended in expulsion and genocide.

Tsing's notion of friction adds a key insight to our understanding of extraction. While the outcome is often the same, it is not adequately described as plunder. It is not always practiced initially as violent expropriation, but as a confusing two-step: extraction is pursued in the friction of negotiated cooperative exchange. In North America, trade began with mutual interest. But as other factors intervened (disease, declining animal stocks, European imperial conflict, settler colonist population pressures), consent and cooperation collapsed while the flow of resources continued. What begins in friction, ends in expulsion and extraction. This two-step of friction and extraction is a pattern that repeats itself time and again.

### ***C. Arboleda: The Entire World as a Site of Extraction***

The 500-year project continues to develop through the refining of extractivism. Martín Arboleda explores its development in *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism*. Arboleda's analysis shows how extraction becomes both a freestanding dynamic, no longer confined to the plunder of the peripheries, and increasingly unbound from human frictions.

Building upon Achille Mbembe's observation of the decline of Europe as the "center of gravity of the world," Arboleda argues that the circuits of extraction have moved from the Atlantic to the Pacific, "destabilizing...categories of core/periphery and even of global North/global South." Technological innovations have transformed the mine from a specific site of extraction into a "a dense network of territorial infrastructures and special technologies vastly dispersed across space...that...wholly blends into the circulatory system of capital which now transverses the entire geography of the earth."<sup>25</sup>

Arboleda illustrates these transformations with an account of how the extraction of copper in the Andean Plateau minimizes human labor: automated mining trucks deliver ore to automated smelters and the resulting copper cathodes are shipped across

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<sup>24</sup> Hämäläinen, *Indigenous Continent*; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Martín Arboleda, *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2020), 4-5.

the Pacific to Chinese “dark factories” that produce wire with almost no human labor.<sup>26</sup> Without labor, extraction is increasingly freed of human friction. This helps us understand that friction is not simply an obstacle, but the possibility of human political involvement in these processes.

Arboleda argues that this automation of extraction and production coincides with the fragmentation and exploitation of labor around the planet.

Millions upon millions of indigenous and *campesino* communities have lost their livelihoods in Latin America as infrastructures of extraction expand aggressively and destructively across the region’s erstwhile countryside. Many have been proletarianized or forced to migrate to *favelas*, *villas miseria*, *comunas* and *campamentos*, among some of the modalities of shantytowns in which Latin American cities have become ever more ensnared. However, is the plight of these peasants substantially different from that of the millions of Chinese migrant workers who have had to leave their families to work in the overcrowded, fractured and polluted manufacturing cities of the *hukou* system? Or that of subcontracted workers in the logistics warehouses of the United States, whose children go to bed on empty stomachs most nights?<sup>27</sup>

The extractive dynamic of our civilization has taken on a life of its own: enveloping what were once colonizing centers while continuing its exploitative work on the peripheries. Equally importantly for understanding our context, however, friction is a transitional state. What begins in friction ends in extraction—everywhere. It is not simply that all obstacles are eventually defeated, but that any system or community is engaged, absorbed and liquidated to extract value.

#### **D. Zuboff: Digital Extraction**

How are we absorbed into the systems we create? Shoshona Zuboff describes the business model of the internet giants that dominate our lives as one of mining “human experience as free raw material” for commercial extraction. Whereas previous forms of “industrial capitalism transformed nature’s raw materials into commodities...surveillance capitalism lays its claims to the stuff of human nature for a new commodity invention. Now it is human nature that is scraped, torn, and taken for another century’s market project.”<sup>28</sup>

Digital media companies extract data to build the behavioral models that fuel their main product: advertising (although that is too old-fashioned a term to describe the sophisticated forms of manipulation they offer). They are therefore eager to host any form of human interaction and mediate any form of expression.

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<sup>26</sup> Arboleda, *Planetary Mine*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Arboleda, *Planetary Mine*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 8, 94.

Big Other [as Zuboff calls it] does not care what we think, feel, or do as long as its millions, billions, and trillions of sensate, actuating, computational eyes and ears can observe, render, datify, and instrumentalize the vast reservoirs of behavioral surplus that are generated in the galactic uproar of connection and communication.<sup>29</sup>

This business model is based upon a fundamental dishonesty. Products are marketed as free services—messaging, email, word processing, social media—but are designed as tools to extract behavioral data.

Zuboff's preferred term for the object of extraction is human "experience." There is value, however, in thinking about the social institutions and structures they liquidate in order to access that experience. The power of this system of digital extraction is particularly evident in its impact on older forms of mediation. The internet giants have picked apart the business model of local papers: using once-paid classified ads as free content to make money at scale off of a handful of paid topics and "freeing" information once locked in local newsprint and selling ads on it—again at low margins on enormous scale. They extract the value from the journalism produced by other firms and communities.

I start with print media because that crisis has played out over decades now. All along we had conversations about how the internet could allow newspapers to reach new audiences and provide new forms of content, etc. The two-step dynamic of engaging friction and liquidating extraction has bankrupted local papers across the nation, left major national papers dependent on the largess of billionaires, ended journalism as a sustainable career for more than a small elite, and left countless communities relying on Facebook and national cable networks for news. That stark outcome is beyond dispute.

The same dynamic is at play with countless other communities and institutions. Consider the debates about the impact of dating and hookup apps. These bring a broader, more refined marketplace to human relationships, reifying and fetishizing the choice of partner, and lifting this more purely transactional exchange between individuals from the places and communities in which previous generations learned to form relationships. Similar dynamics are at work in adolescent spaces, as interest in driving declines because both the place of the car and the physical places where adolescents once gathered are replaced by social media spaces.

We can see how the same two-step of friction and extraction takes place in these digital spaces. In both cases, serious arguments can and have been made about how these digital options allow marginalized persons to associate more freely, easily and safely. And, given the astounding inadequacies of legacy institutions' communal and social practices (think of the churches and universities we know), they promise attractive alternatives.

But what began as promised enhancements to extant places and communities, have, in a short time, come to replace them almost entirely. In the process, those seeking relationships and social engagement have been rendered isolated individuals, accepting the attenuated forms of relationship these networks allow, alone in the interface of the given app without the broader social support of the imperfect human

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<sup>29</sup> Zuboff, *Surveillance Capitalism*, 377.

communities of physical places. Social media extract the value of sociality itself. What begins in friction, ends in extraction, as complex social institutions are removed like mining overburden to get to the ore of monitorable human interaction.

Note that print media is one of the elements of classic civil society on which we have come to rely for reform in the church and note their fate in digital media. Churches turning to digital media with their business model of liquidating communities has led and will lead, to the further deregulation and heterogenization of religion as much as communal reform.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that Zuboff is offering a critique of a particular form of digital mediation—what technology critical theorist Andrew Feenberg would call a “technical code.” There are non-extractive forms (as opposed to *uses*) of digital mediation, as evident in Agnes Brazal’s discussion of the “vTaiwan” platform which employs the “Pol.is” algorithm that was designed to build consensus or Katherine Schmidt’s argument about the value of Zoom in liturgies (Zoom remains a paid service).<sup>31</sup>

As digital media increasingly becomes the dominant form of socialization and the fundamental institution of civil society, they have a profound influence on identity. Identity as we still value it, was forged in the struggle for political recognition in the modern era of nation states.<sup>32</sup> That expanded into a fight for inclusion in citizenship by marginalized and minoritized communities, often those who were colonized, struggling for rights in the settler nations that occupy their lands. In this context, identity was and remains fundamentally political; part of a struggle for self-determination, participation and political and economic rights. When identity is translated into social media space, those social, material and political connections are in danger of getting sheared off. In that construction of relationship, identities are reconstructed as performative and elective.

To connect but one dot, Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* in 1990, twenty years before Instagram existed and social media platforms became the infrastructure of adolescent socialization and identity. Butler’s discussion of performativity likely appears as common sense among generations native to these spaces, but the political outcome is likely quite different than those Butler articulated in 1990. These spaces tend to dematerialize and depoliticize identity by reducing its practice to symbolic representation in the forms allowed (images, video and brief text), all ruthlessly sorted by algorithms to preference those that maximize time on platform. Identity in these

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<sup>30</sup> See Vincent J. Miller, “Media Constructions of Space, the Disciplining of Religious Traditions and the Hidden Threat of the Post-Secular,” in *At the Limits of the Secular: Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William Barbieri (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 162-198.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Agnes Brazal, “Synodality and the New Media,” *Theological Studies* 84, no. 1 (2023), 95-109, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639221150888>; Katherine Schmidt, “Let there be streams of Mass” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 23, 2024, <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/guest-voices/let-there-be-streams-mass>; Katherine Schmidt, *Virtual Communion: Theology of the Internet and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Lexington Books, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Jason Blakely, “Where Identity Politics Actually Comes From,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 3, 2023, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/where-identity-politics-actually-comes-from>.

deracinated spaces, is the fulfillment of the extractive process: a consumer self with little awareness of the material exploitation and extraction upon which they rely and a self that is largely insulated from friction with others save through that encountered via elective choice.<sup>33</sup>

### ***E. Summary: The Interplay Friction and Extraction***

We can summarize the two-step of friction and extraction as a pattern in which sources of friction, such as cultural, ecological and geochemical relationships, are attended to only instrumentally. They are explored, embraced, negotiated, or tolerated in order to obtain some desired good or outcome. They are not, however, valued in themselves and thus we fail to ponder them (or the incompleteness of our understanding of them) in a way that might give us pause in enacting our plans.

I do not share the Augustinian analysis, common in theology, that these external realities emerge primarily from disordered desires. Nor do I share the dominant culturalist assumptions in the contemporary academy that sees discourse and narrative as the primary drivers of politics. There is formation in all directions. Extractivism is a mutually reinforcing interplay of disposition, culture and material structure. Dispositions lead to actions and to the construction of cultures and structures. Structures, in turn, form culture and individual dispositions.

It is essential to see how the extractivist project transforms the world materially. To paraphrase Eve Tuck and Wayne Yan, “colonization is not a metaphor.”<sup>34</sup> Colonization may manifest in hierarchical discursive polarities that silence Indigenous and other peripheral voices but these are part of a material project to usurp and control land, ecologies and bodies.

Colonialism’s material project has ground down and destroyed the geographical, ecological and human differences that friction engages. I want to exercise caution here, because terra nullius is a fundamental part of the settler imaginary as a pretense for conquest. It was, however, also its outcome as peoples and ecologies were driven from the land. We can’t allow this history of destruction to justify ignoring the living presence and demands of Indigenous people, but we also have to face colonialism’s genocidal and ecological legacies as the material baseline of the world in which we currently dwell. The emptier the world, the less friction.

The dominant structures of our world enact extraction at a planetary scale upon this emptied baseline: a global neoliberal market system built upon the legacy power imbalances of racialized colonialism facilitates the resource flows that undergird the technological, biological and social systems that sustain much of the human

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<sup>33</sup> References to the spatial location and construction of performance are not common in *Gender Trouble*, nor are they central to Butler’s argument. We can consider how the reconfiguration of what she terms the “mundane social audience” by social media has consequences for her notion of performativity through their reference to “exterior space” in this passage: “Gender ought not be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.” (Emphasis original), Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140-141.

<sup>34</sup> Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.

population. These structures are taxing planetary biophysical systems, upon which all life depends, to the point of collapse. 35 If European colonialism was an attempt to cheat the metabolic constraints of living in its own territory by plundering other societies, its end game in the Anthropocene brings the hard lesson that limits cannot be ignored in the long run.

Note this definition can be applied to a range of realities. It can apply to the church in its mission to be the “sacrament of the unity of humankind in God” (to paraphrase *Lumen gentium*). Think of the many ways in which the church falls short—speaking of deep communion but failing in the work to achieve it. To mention but two examples of recent scholarship: Jennifer Scheper Hughes chronicles how the desire for “incorporation” did not halt the rapid collapse of missionary *cura corporalis* in the face of the overwhelming death in the epidemic of 1576 and could not countenance the Indigenous ecclesial creations that emerged from it and Susan Reynolds’s analysis of communion ecclesiology’s inability to adequately deal with difference and power in the concrete life of a multicultural parish.<sup>36</sup> Unless the hard work of friction is sustained, it collapses into extraction.

This is the cultural space in which theology currently works. We need to come to terms with its frictionlessness. I worry that our spatial imaginations are clouded by nostalgic assumptions about social space still holding people together and thus, we read all failures to connect as a moral choice. We live in a world that may no longer resemble the phenomenological space of the Road to Jericho. Disruptive, demanding bodily encounters across difference are not impossible, but are rendered much less likely. We have to contend with this material construction of space.

Likewise, our theological speech lands in a vast, clamorous arena of choice. Both civil society and ecclesial structures of elite opinion formation have been utterly remade in a world that gives platform access to everyone. I long for a world in which clear, warranted argument and compelling witness wins the day, but we live in one where each sentence has to earn its attention. Innocent suffering, difficult and demanding truths, and nuanced distinctions are at a disadvantage in a world of neuropsychologically informed content algorithms.

With this understanding of the origins and nature of frictionlessness, we can now turn to our driving question: How might we seek salvation “linked with humankind and its history by the deepest of bonds” in such a frictionless space?

#### 4. SALVATION IN A FRICTIONLESS WORLD

For a paper on salvation, this has focused quite a lot on sin. I have explored extractivism as an account of the underlying form of the sin of our world that ignores and erodes the friction of human and ecological relationships. Here Tony Alonso’s insistence that grace continues to work even in contexts that seek to coopt it and with

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<sup>35</sup> Katherine Richardson, et al., “Earth beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries,” *Science Advances* 9, no. 37 (2023): eadh2458, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458>.

<sup>36</sup> Jennifer Scheper Hughes, *The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas* (New York: NYU Press, 2023); Susan Bigelow Reynolds, *People Get Ready: Ritual, Solidarity, and Lived Ecclesiology in Catholic Roxbury* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2023.)

which we are complicit is an essential warning and guide.<sup>37</sup> Salvation, to be salvation, must be intimate with fallenness. We can name eschatological endpoints and virtuous ideals—communion, encounter, solidarity— but the work of salvation is done in their tension with the sin of our world.

By naming and analyzing the sin, we can begin to identify the path of its undoing. This is not to claim that we save ourselves, but that diagnosis is essential to our cooperation with God’s gracious salvation. Friction can be thought of as a premoral element of social physics that holds us together and makes our decisions about encounter and transgressive solidarity possible. To be a bit literal in using the metaphor from physics, the “coefficient of friction” is lower in the civilization we have built. Forces sufficient to once hold us together for encounter no longer bind us. When the coefficient of friction is low, more “normal force” is required to establish the same force of friction. How can we push harder to stay together?

### ***A. An Ecclesial Response***

As I said above, we err by attributing the frictionlessness of our culture to individual failures to embrace the challenge of encounter. Steven Battin describes the historical work of salvation as a “mode of existence” through which “God acts to bring about right relatedness” in order “to effect unity among all things.”<sup>38</sup> Battin’s notion of a “mode of existence” highlights the collective, ecclesial nature of this problem and our response to it.

Ecclesially, we need to respond to a world in which attention to the thickness of relationships and encounter is difficult to sustain. This means cultivating attentiveness to difference, listening to the voices that are easily missed, embracing the “awkwardness,” inefficiencies and entanglements of communal, intercommunal and ecological processes.<sup>39</sup> We need to ask: Who is not being heard? What is not being attended to? Who is missing from our unity? This doesn’t mean there are no legitimate grounds for exclusion, but in a world that empties, sorts and separates, this must be a deep and omnipresent concern. Socially and ecologically, who is excluded from the common good? Human societies are always imperfect, but we must be extra mindful of such failures in a civilization that is premised upon such exclusions.

The church as a human community with a planetary scope is positioned to practice community in a way that transgresses colonial divides and brings humans and the

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<sup>37</sup> “Through created material elements and through the work of the hands, structures, and systems of the world as it is and not merely as God or we wish it to be, God accepts and transforms what we have done and what we have failed to do with them.” (Emphasis original.) Antonio Eduardo Alonso, *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 123.

<sup>38</sup> Steven J. Battin, *Intercommunal Ecclesiology: The Church, Salvation, and Intergroup Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2022), 128, 143.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the importance of awkwardness as affect, see Tamalone Eijnden, “The Politics and Poetics of Commoning: Reclaiming Commoning Work as Desirable in Fiction and Practice” (Lecture, Reclaiming the Commons, Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment Conference, Portland, OR, July 11, 2023), developing insights from Lauren Berlant, “The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times\*,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34 no. (2016): 393–419, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989>.



biological communities in which they participate into deeper communication and communion.

Pope Francis' push for a synodal church, a "church which listens" has enormous potential in this regard.<sup>40</sup> The Synod for the Amazon was exemplary in this regard. It attended not only to a local church, but also to the entire human, ecological and geological community of that place.<sup>41</sup> I have argued elsewhere that synodality in this sense can provide a way of broadening the church's mission as a sacrament of unity beyond the church itself.<sup>42</sup> This, of course, remains a profoundly unrealized potential for which obstacles must be overcome and constructive work must be done.<sup>43</sup> It is a work the church has been entrusted to offer the world even if its scandalous failures hinder its success and reception.

### ***B. Integral Ecology as Attending to the Density of Relationships***

How might the church work to listen to relationships and seek encounter in a world that renders it more difficult? *Laudato Si's* notion of integral ecology provides a useful model. Although it has a clear ethical component, here I will focus on how its ontological, epistemological and affective dimensions provide resources for reestablishing friction and resisting extractivism.

Francis offers a theocentric ontology in which all beings reflect the relationality of their triune creator:

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<sup>40</sup> Francis, "Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops" (Vatican City, October 17, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).

<sup>41</sup> See Vincent J. Miller, "Resource Extraction and the Call for Solidarity: The Networks We Have and the Network the Church is Called to Be," in *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining: Integral Peace, Development, and Ecology*, ed. Caesar Montevicchio and Gerard Powers (New York: Routledge, 2022), 202–20; Vincent J. Miller, "We're all tied to the Amazon through globalization. Can the synod help us listen to its cry?," *America Magazine*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/02/19/were-all-tied-amazon-through-globalization-can-synod-help-us-listen-its-cry>; and Vincent J. Miller, "Pope affirms Catholic Church's duty to indigenous Amazonians hurt by climate change," *The Conversation*, (2019), <https://theconversation.com/pope-affirms-catholic-churchs-duty-to-indigenous-amazonians-hurt-by-climate-change-125123>.

<sup>42</sup> Vincent J. Miller, "Synodality and the Sacramental Mission of the Church: The Struggle for Communion in a World Divided by Colonialism and Neoliberal Globalization," *Theological Studies* 83, no. 1 (March 2022): 8–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639221076556>.

<sup>43</sup> See Peter De Mey, "Synodality as a Key Component of the Pontificate of Pope Francis: The Difficult Way from Theory to Practice," in *Changing the Church: Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice, and Life*, ed. Mark D. Chapman and Vladimir Latinovic (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2021), 323–31; Massimo Faggioli, "From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis's 'Listening Primacy,'" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (2020): 352–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140020916034>; Bradford Hinze, "Dreams of Synodality, Specters of Constraint," *Louvain Studies* 43, no. 3 (2020): 297–312, <https://doi.org/10.2143/LS.43.3.3288709>; Amanda C. Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2019): 370–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919836225>.

The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships.<sup>44</sup>

*Laudato Si'* also offers epistemology as a site of transformation.<sup>45</sup> Citing Bonaventure, it ascribes our failure to perceive these relationships to finitude and sin. We could readily contemplate these traces of trinitarian communion “if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile.”<sup>46</sup>

This partial gaze is embodied in the technocratic paradigm, which “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.” *Laudato Si'* extols, in contrast, a “gaze of serene attentiveness” that can broaden the scientific gaze.<sup>47</sup>

The word “gaze” is central to the epistemological project of integral ecology, but Francis’s use of it is also suffused with the language of affect. There are nearly fifty invocations of affect and feeling in *Laudato Si'*, significantly more than references to ethics, morals or epistemology. This is particularly evident in his discussion of St. Francis:

Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. ... For to him each and every creature was united to him by bonds of affection. ... If we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.<sup>48</sup>

These aspects of *Laudato Si'* offer much to awaken awareness of the destructiveness of extractivism and to cultivate dispositions that can challenge its ignorance of the density of relationships. Both seeing and feeling are modalities that open us up to the rest of creation, drawing us out of indifference and coercive dominion and into a trinitarian mysticism of creation that attunes us to each creature’s value as a manifestation of God’s goodness and a partner in our eschatological pilgrimage.

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<sup>44</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), §240, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (hereafter cited as *LS*).

<sup>45</sup> Vincent J. Miller, “Integral Ecology: Francis’s Spiritual and Moral Vision of Interconnectedness,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si': Everything is Connected*, ed. Vincent J. Miller (Bloomsbury, 2017), 11-28.

<sup>46</sup> *LS*, §239.

<sup>47</sup> *LS*, §222, n. 141.

<sup>48</sup> *LS*, §11.

Laudato Si' repeatedly insists that "everything is connected" and links social and ecological concerns. It synthesizes Catholicism's resources for attending to the density of relationships, and thus, resisting extractivism's overcoming of friction.

### C. Supplements from the "New Materialism"

*Laudato Si'*'s theocentric focus powerfully conveys both the value of the rest of creation independent of human use and respect for the density of ecological relationships. It does not, however, provide sufficient guidance for engaging creaturely difference on the horizontal level. Sibling language is all for the good, but how, actually, are we to imagine and practice of communion with limestone, a body of water, an insect or a forest? *Laudato Si'* teaches clearly that all creatures communicate the divine goodness, but it is less successful in conveying what we have to learn from them about themselves.<sup>49</sup>

I will conclude by seeking a supplement to integral ecology from a different metaphysical approach—the so-called "New Materialism"—a discourse that builds upon insights from Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour among many others.<sup>50</sup> In a seminal text for the movement, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett argues for a "vital" materialism that broadens agency beyond humans. She speaks of "*Thing-Power*: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle."<sup>51</sup> She elaborates this idea using Bruno Latour's notion of an "actant," which he defined as something, human or not, "that acts or to which is granted activity by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general."<sup>52</sup> In the wake of a global event that resulted from some interaction between an RNA virus, a bat and a large proportion of the human species, it is hard to deny the analytical value of this perspective.

Bennett seeks to broaden anthropocentrism into "a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations."<sup>53</sup> Bennett's goals go beyond ontological accuracy, however. She frames her project as one of transforming affect: broadening our attachments to things and transforming epistemology to draw "human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and

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<sup>49</sup> LS §86.

<sup>50</sup> The resonances I propose here should not eclipse the profound metaphysical tensions between Christian theology and the New Materialism. The most germane here is that these authors would hesitate to embrace the eschatological and teleological assumptions of Christian salvation. New materialism tends toward what Althusser described as "aleatory materialism," a tradition focused on the chance conjunction of atoms that he traced to Epicurus. See Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>52</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 9 quoting Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369-81.

<sup>53</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 99.

nonhumans.”<sup>54</sup> In this way, her project parallels the epistemological and affective moves of *Laudato Si’*.

The New Materialism does more than resonate with integral ecology, however, it helps deepen it. This is evident in Bennett’s description of vital materialism’s “political goal” as “not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members.”<sup>55</sup> This focus on communication between human and nonhuman actants can provide the tools to broaden cherished theological notions of communion, encounter, solidarity and the common good beyond the human, in a way that is more than an inspiring metaphor, but actually guides engagement and practice.<sup>56</sup>

The insights of the New Materialism can transform how we imagine our moral predicament. We are certainly destroying the beauty and order of God’s creation, but we are also refusing the joy and terror of relationship with our sibling human beings and creatures. Thus, repentance can be refigured: from restoration of an abstract, third person, ecological order, much of which is forever gone, to a loving, intimate, frightening and risky re-engagement with our fellow creatures to find new forms of flourishing together. Haraway speaks of “learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.”<sup>57</sup> Remember that puppy. Our shared history is marked by violence and coercion but also by the joy of being together.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To conclude on the topic of salvation: Francis’s assertion that “no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together”<sup>58</sup> is fruitfully read alongside Haraway’s injunction that “to be one is to become with many.”<sup>59</sup> The question of social salvation

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<sup>54</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> Latour’s proposal for a “parliament of things” is a crucial contribution in this regard. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), §32, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).

<sup>59</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4. Haraway’s use of “contact zones” in this book is cited in *Laudate Deum*. Haraway has spoken of how being “cursed and blessed with sacramental consciousness” from their Catholic formation as a child has influenced their thought, enabling them to see the “Irreducible semioticity of materiality and vice versa.” See Donna Haraway, “Cyborgs, Dogs and Companion Species,” European Graduate School Video Lectures (2000), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxHIKMI70>, 3 min, 50 secs. For their critical reflections on being quoted in *Laudate Deum*, see Aleja Hertzler-Mccain, “Feminist scholar Donna Haraway reacts to inclusion in Pope Francis’ climate letter,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 18, 2023, <https://www.ncronline.org/earthbeat/justice/feminist-scholar-donna-haraway-reacts-inclusion-pope-francis-climate-letter>.

draws our attention to our entanglements and challenges us to engage them more deeply, seeking justice and healing, rather than seeking escape from them.

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In the eighth chapter of the Book of Amos, there is an odd ending to a stereotypical series of prophetic visions of destruction: a locust swarm, a rain of fire and a plumb bob. After being shown the first two visions, Amos, in good prophetic form, intercedes: "O Lord God, cease, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" And the Lord relents, "This shall not be." The final vision is often overlooked. Perhaps because it breaks the form. Perhaps because of its disturbing strangeness—stranger even than a plumb bob. The Lord shows Amos a basket of succulent ripe fruit, which twists into dead bodies lying in the street, and a final word: "silence." The prophet himself is reduced to silence. After this vision, there is neither intercession nor divine relenting.<sup>60</sup>

We face a silence of our own making and we are not small. Without presuming equal guilt and complicity for all, our cutting, burning, draining, plowing and mining have driven countless species to extinction—silencing their voices in the song of creation. Settler nations have enslaved, expelled and murdered Indigenous peoples who lived and flourished, imperfectly, but far better than us, in these inter-species communities and silenced countless languages, each a human echo of and response to the songs of their landscapes.

So much silence.

Perhaps at this moment, we can manage what Amos could not: To cry out, "Oh, Lord God, no! Not this silence;" and beg the grace and the love to open our ears to hear and our eyes to see; to become partners in the broken creation that desperately, enthusiastically wants to flourish with us in the shalom for which we were all made and into which God never ceases to draw us.

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<sup>60</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, "Of Fruit and Corpses and Wordplay Visions: Picturing Amos 8.1–3," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25, no. 92 (2001), 5-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920102509202>.



**A RESPONSE TO VINCENT J. MILLER’S “SEEKING  
SOCIAL SALVATION IN A WORLD MADE  
FRICTIONLESS: COMMUNION, EXTRACTIVISM  
AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY”**

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**HAUNTED BY FRICTIONLESSNESS:  
A THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION  
MARKED BY FRICTION**

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While reading Vince’s work and sitting with it for the past month, I have found myself haunted by it. The idea of “salvation on the battleground, a place of no friction,” keeps returning to me, asking the question of what exactly is friction?

Friction.

That very word says so much and so little. In this response, I would like to tug on the string of friction, and enter into some of the ways that friction can illuminate or disrupt our theological imaginations. Guided by a feminist methodology, I will look to a few specific contexts.

**PART 1: FRICTION AND PLACE**

We are gathering this week in Baltimore. Baltimore is a city which bears the marks of racism, both historical and contemporary expressions. This week, in particular, the overwhelming sounds of military jets in apparent acts of celebration fill our ears, as thousands of onlookers fill the harbor for Fleet Week. What is friction in a place like Baltimore?

I think of the water surrounding us. I am haunted by the way the water was turned into a site of unbelievable friction on the morning of March 26, 2024 when the Dali freighter crashed into the Francis Scott Key bridge.

Yes, this is literal friction, a crash of two entities—a ship and a bridge—that are intimately connected yet should never touch in such a way as they did on that early morning. This literal connection first and foremost resulted in the loss of lives of six men working in construction on the bridge—Carlos Hernández, Miguel Luna, Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandoval, Jose Mynor Lopez, Dorlian Castillo Cabrera, Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes—as well as the slowing down of the shipment economy, revealing

once again the global impact of local tragedies. This horrible incident may have commanded international attention for a few hours, yet the response is still ongoing. Fifty thousand tons of debris filled the Patapsco River, an ecological impact that will extend for generations to come.

Vince reminds us that we must hold friction in tension with extraction, a “confusing two-step.” Extraction takes new meaning when looking at the ways that steel from the ship and bridge were intertwined, extracted only through a series of controlled explosions on May 13, 2024.

Remaining on board during these explosions were twenty-one crew members, who could not leave the Dali due to a complex entanglement of maritime laws and immigration systems. These twenty-one men from India and Sri Lanka remained on the ship, unable to set foot on dry land, and forced to stay at the scene of trauma and destruction, bound in close proximity to the explosions—explosions that were intended to free them—but only further revealing the remnant of extraction even when immediate pressure is relieved. Yes, steel was extracted, but so too was any semblance of solidarity or honoring the dignity of these men.

This month, a final section of the bridge wreckage was removed, and just this past Monday, June 10, the shipping channel was reopened entirely. This week, the Baltimore Harbor returned to a more frictionless flow of water, enabling the friction of international trade and awaiting the construction of a new bridge, likely to be built and maintained by immigrants who will risk their lives.

An economic analysis might look at the impact on global trade due to this catastrophe, and surely there were many. I reach beyond this material analysis alone. How might a theological project, a consideration of social salvation, respond to friction and extraction understood in this setting? How does our discussion of social salvation attend to the realities that the lives lost in this bridge crash were the lives of immigrants, relegated to jobs that the privileged deem too risky? Vince’s plenary address calls us to think of how friction can hold us in relationship and where frictionlessness incorrectly absolves us from responsibility.

## **PART 2: THE FALSE PROMISE OF FRICTIONLESSNESS**

If the Francis Scott Key bridge is an account of friction, I would like to look now at frictionlessness. I continue to be haunted by the images that Vince shared: of an anti-bussing riot, of a memorial for John Crawford III outside of a store, with customers going in and out, undisturbed in their shopping.

An excess of friction can be destructive, to be sure, but an absence of friction can characterize a world in which we view others as means to an end, merely a step in a supply chain. Pure frictionlessness is a myth. Our preference for a lack of friction still causes friction; it displaces friction to a different area, often felt more by those who are historically and intentionally marginalized. Yet frictionless can be a helpful framework, especially theologically, for it looks to where and how relationships, tensions, stresses, and solidarity are displaced, minimized, or transformed.

To me, frictionlessness is illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I remember during 2020, being isolated in my home with a newborn baby, perplexed by the ever-growing numbers of deaths. Communities, homes, families, churches, webs of



relationships forever altered. And the magnitude of this loss kept haunting me. How would we collectively mourn this massive loss of life?

The answer? *We didn't.*

As a society, there was no collective mourning. Any attempts were isolated moments or co-opted by a polarized political system. On the eve of President Biden's 2021 inauguration, the soon-to-be First and Second Families held a vigil on the empty Washington Mall by lighting four hundred lights in honor of the 400,000 deaths in the United States at that point.<sup>1</sup> This was a moving experience for me, but watching four people hold a vigil on my television hardly amounted to collective mourning. It was a poignant moment, but poignant moments consumed on televisions exemplifies frictionlessness, minimizing the thickness of relationships in favor of extraction.

The frictionlessness with which the COVID pandemic was addressed rang even more pronounced to me during the class of 2024's university commencement activities at Georgetown University. As I sat in my academic regalia on a stage while literally rubbing shoulders with people I just met in the humid DC air—a far cry from the social distancing of the past several years—I was struck by how this global health pandemic was discussed. Speakers mourned their missed high school proms and graduation ceremonies four years earlier. They recounted their first year of studies on Zoom, often occurring from homes across the country. What was missing was a collective mourning. Again, we failed to look at the friction, preferring instead the distance of frictionlessness. But whether we admit this or not, the realities of lives lost or permanently altered continue to impact us, perhaps in a way that hardens us more than anything else. What can we say about social salvation when the absence of rites of passage are mourned more than the lives lost?

Our collective preference for frictionlessness continues with the untold suffering in Gaza. Our academic and ecclesial systems prefer business as usual, undisturbed action that is not impacted by the horrors across the world, to say nothing of the violence in our local communities.

We need only look at college campuses and students' 2024 springtime activism to glimpse what happens when people or systems that are thought to be frictionless choose friction instead, when we do not attend to "the thickness of relationships and encounter," to use Vince's phrase.

Now, frictionlessness seems to be a far cry from the police response to student occupation of campuses, which images of police in riot gear storming buildings at Columbia University depict.<sup>2</sup> Yet I think that frictionlessness can be a framework for how many of our systems prefer a certain type of relationship or exchange, and resort to extremes, such as violence, when those relationships take different forms or present a type of friction that feels undesirable to those in power.

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<sup>1</sup> Alana Wise, "'We Must Remember': Biden, Harris Memorialize COVID-19 Victims," *NPR*, January 19, 2021, sec. Biden Transition Updates, <https://www.npr.org/sections/biden-transition-updates/2021/01/19/958548751/we-must-remember-biden-harris-memorialize-covid-19-victims>.

<sup>2</sup> Eryn Davis et al., "Police Clear Building at Columbia and Arrest Dozens of Protesters," *The New York Times*, April 30, 2024, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/05/01/nyregion/columbia-university-protests>.

During Georgetown University's commencement events, I attended a ceremony for Catholic student leaders. One by one, Catholic students were called up to take a picture with the university president and director of campus ministry. This proceeded in a business-as-usual-format, with graduates and proud families politely applauding in an orderly fashion. A standard frictionless affair, complete with mimosas. That is, until Harper Cartwright was called up. Harper, respectfully, read the following statement:

I cannot sit here and celebrate our Catholic faith without feeling like that faith forces us to be horrified and confront what is unfolding in Palestine. We should be even more horrified that our tuition dollars are funding the bombs and tanks they have used to kill 15,000 children, to kill hospital patients, to kill students like us.... St Teresa of Avila says "Christ has no hands now but yours." And Georgetown's hands are dirty.

In the midst of a ceremony that felt frictionless, this graduate chose friction; she chose relationship.

The image of frictionlessness permeates our church, our universities, our lives; yet none of these things are truly frictionless. In fact, if we peel back even the tiniest of layers, we can see that where we presumed frictionlessness, friction reigns. Perhaps it is displaced, absolving a primary relationship in favor of a marginalized one. Yet displaced consequences are still felt, and our theology must attend to this reality.

### **PART 3: A THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION OF FRICTION**

Over the past month, I have been haunted by Vince's account of frictionlessness. Nothing is ever truly frictionless, but this imagery captures the ways that we turn relationships into a means to an end, relegating people and places into raw materials to aid in our consumption.

As I have been haunted by frictionlessness, I am reminded of a different kind of haunting. One of my favorite accounts of haunting and theology comes from Jessica Coblentz, who wrote,

Sometimes, I imagine feminist scholar Mary Daly as a banshee who haunts the halls of the Boston College theology department where I study. Her groans echo in the classrooms where I took my first doctoral seminars; during my first semester of doctoral studies, I was the only woman in half of my systematics classes. She hovers in the corners of offices where well-meaning professors warned me that my interest in gender and sexuality could ostracize me on the job market.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jessica Coblentz, "Ghosts in the Office: The Ecclesiological and Soteriological Implications of Stereotype Threat among Women in Catholic Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 1 (2017): 127.

This haunting is not a negative occurrence. Haunting can help make present that which is actively silenced or marginalized. Coblenz continues, concluding:

In my daydreams, Mary Daly is my Angelous Novus, my angel of history. Amid a whirlwind of well-meaning anecdotes about Catholic women’s progress in theology, she wails. Her dismay about the ongoing perils of patriarchy is a comforting presence among the other ghosts that haunt us: the demons that hover over our keyboards and follow us to class; the specters who whisper while we speak from podiums; those that fill our heads as we read and clasp our throats when our voices quiver.<sup>4</sup>

Who and what are we allowing ourselves to be haunted by? How will we let this impact our theological project? How will our theological imaginations be stretched, impacted, reoriented, or haunted by those we are in relationship with, or those whom we turn into a frictionless wasteland?

As Vince asked us, “Who is missing from our unity?” And, I would add, why are they missing, and what are we willing—or not willing—to do to upend the system toward their inclusion? What practices and theological approaches might deepen our unity to be a true unity? And how—crucially—might unity be approached not through a lens of colonialism, settler mentality, and extraction?

A unity that is marked by white supremacy culture,<sup>5</sup> patriarchy, or ableism, is not a true unity. Shallow expressions of such a unity harm the church. I fear that our ecclesial preferences for the “normal,” for the frictionless, for the white, male, ableist standard masquerading as neutral<sup>6</sup> has relegated unity in our ecclesial imagination to a shallow trope.

In a church where ordination is limited by gender, despite subpar theological grounding; where parishes are segregated and the hierarchy is silent on issues of racism; where disabled people are looked to as infantile inspiration, based on deeply flawed redemptive suffering and ableist rhetoric;<sup>7</sup> where laws are being passed across the country that limit the freedoms of transgender people, yet our churches fail to respond, these questions are not abstract.

In a world where it is easier to feign frictionlessness, who are we going to allow ourselves to be haunted by? What demands will they make on us? And crucially—are we willing to listen and respond?

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<sup>4</sup> Coblenz, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I am referencing Tema Okun’s explanation of the system of white supremacy culture, as outlined at Tema Okun, “White Supremacy Culture,” WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE, accessed May 29, 2024, <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>.

<sup>6</sup> For an in depth examination of the need to turn the theological subject, as well as the history of a specific type of subject masquerading as neutral, see: M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, second edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller examination of ableism and justice in the church, see Amy Kenny, *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2022).



**Presidential Address**  
**“HEARTS OF FLESH”:**  
**STRUCTURAL SIN AND SOCIAL SALVATION**

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Our convention’s theme calls us to counter privatized conceptions of salvation, since we are redeemed as a people.<sup>1</sup> Today violent forms of nationalism, radical individualism, and meritocratic myths threaten the “ever wider we” God envisions.<sup>2</sup> In the face of this structural evil, salvation in Christ reunites us with God and one another. The whole person and the entire human race are involved in the salvific economy of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> Early in his papacy, discussing the social nature of salvation, Pope Francis described how God enters the dynamic of our “complex web of relationships,” for no one is saved alone.<sup>4</sup> It is his understanding of structural sin, which ensnares us through this same web and which we are called to resist and dismantle, that focuses my reflections this morning. I begin by highlighting the “multivalent” character of Francis’s account of structural sin, including his attention to apathy as a key feature that strengthens the durability of structural forms of injustice. Next, I address ways in which our theological discourse is not always well poised to address apathy, nor the subtle, deceptive, and diffuse operations of structural sin more broadly. Finally I suggest ways in which we might broaden a theological response to Francis’s multivalent invitation, as we prepare hearts of stone to be replaced by hearts of flesh.

**POPE FRANCIS’S MULTIVALENT STRUCTURAL SIN**

Throughout his papacy, Francis has employed social sin in ways distinct from his predecessors, explicitly connecting structural harms with abetting attitudes and favoring prophetic denunciation<sup>5</sup> over bounded culpability. In its broadest sense, social

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Shaun Slusarski for his research assistance and Laurie Cassidy, Conor Kelly, and Mark Potter for feedback on an earlier version of this draft.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, “Towards an Ever Wider ‘We,’” Message for 107th World Day of Migrants (September 27, 2021), [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210503\\_world-migrants-day-2021.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20210503_world-migrants-day-2021.html).

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 2006), §52, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America*, September 30, 2013, 20, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Massaro, *Mercy in Action: The Social Teachings of Pope Francis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 31.

sin encompasses the unjust structures, distorted consciousness, and collective actions that facilitate dehumanization. It signals how sin pervades our whole being, analogous to the situation of original sin, with a “complex fabric of unjust social structures and many individual sins reinforcing each other.”<sup>6</sup> Theological literature today treats many manifestations of social sin,<sup>7</sup> even as interpreters have differed on its precise scope; some limit it to the effects or embodiment of personal sin, others promote an expansive sense of all sin as primarily social, with personal sins as mere manifestations of social sin.<sup>8</sup>

Biblical scholarship on sin in John and Paul has long understood sin more as a condition than as an act or transgression. In his Gospel, John uses the term “the world” to describe “that hard-hearted state of existence within which one becomes enmeshed upon entrance into life.”<sup>9</sup> Whereas some biblical texts depict sin “as an individual phenomenon,” the tendencies of the prophets and Jesus “to castigate whole groups,” of the gospel narratives to frame the crucifixion “as a result of political and religious, collective...structural forces” rather than individual betrayals alone, and the judgment of nations rather than individuals—to the surprise of the “sheep” and “goats” alike—challenge the confinement of sin to the knowing, willing individual alone.<sup>10</sup> The social situation of original sin essentially constitutes a state that facilitates individual sinfulness.<sup>11</sup> Yet until recent decades, the Catholic moral tradition has neglected, if not resisted, a social understanding of sin, due in part to an individualistic, act-oriented approach in traditional moral theology.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond biblical images for sin, certain theological depictions of sin signal contexts out of which they were devised or the preoccupations of those employing them: rebellion, infidelity, impurity, error, idolatry, violation, estrangement.<sup>13</sup> “For

<sup>6</sup> Piet Schoonenberg, *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), cited in Peter J. Henriot, “The Concept of Social Sin,” *Catholic Mind* 71 (October 1973): 51.

<sup>7</sup> For recent examples, see, e.g., Joseph Loïc Mben, “Using the Institutional Model to Overcome Social Sin,” *Kanien* 8, no. 2 (2020): 45-71; Megan K. McCabe, “A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (2018): 635-657.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of this range of understandings, see Conor Kelly, “The Nature and Operation of Structural Sin: Insights from Theology and Moral Psychology,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2019): 293-327; and Mark O’Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist Press 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth R. Himes, “Human Failing: The Meanings and Metaphors of Sin,” in *Moral Theology: New Directions and Fundamental Issues; Festschrift for James P. Hannigan*, ed. James Keating (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Kilby, “Sin and Suffering Revisited: A Conceptual Exploration,” in *The Human in a Dehumanizing World: Re-Examining Theological Anthropology and Its Implications*, ed. Jessica Coblenz and Daniel P. Horan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Peter J. Henriot, “Social Sin: The Recovery of a Christian Tradition,” in *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, ed. James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead (New York: Seabury, 1980), 132.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., James F. Keenan, *History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Continuum 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph H. McKenna, “The Possibility of Social Sin,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 1994): 125.

Augustine, the root sin was pride. For Luther, it was unbelief. For Calvin, it was disobedience."<sup>14</sup> For Walter Rauschenbusch, witnessing firsthand the effects of the industrial revolution on workers in Hell's Kitchen and finding the dominant individual piety inadequate to responding to social injustices, the primary sin was selfishness, and he began to conceive of social sins "lodged in institutions and customs and absorbed by individuals."<sup>15</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez's congregants living in Lima amid institutionalized poverty "were not well served by the notions of sin" he had studied in Leuven and Lyons, which emphasized anxious individual life choices among ample options, "sexual indiscretion, and a temptation toward an absolutized self."<sup>16</sup> Gutiérrez came to understand that sin occurs not only "within some intimate sanctuary of the heart," but moves into interpersonal relationships, fueling oppression and social conflict.<sup>17</sup> In Ignacio Ellacuría's terms, sinful political, economic, and cultural powers reflect unfolding histories of injustice and hard-heartedness with crucifying effects.<sup>18</sup> Related elevation of social sin and institutional conscientization at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1978) no doubt shaped the formation of Jorge Bergoglio, as well.<sup>19</sup>

Not unlike individualistic notions of salvation, individualistic conceptions of sin have served to narrow the scope of concern. In the Catholic tradition, the use of moral manuals (from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries) focused attention on legalistically determining precisely which acts are sinful and to what degree, with confessors' "sin-grids" underestimating both the maturity of the lay conscience and its degree of sinfulness alike.<sup>20</sup> Figures like these from the social gospel movement and Latin American liberation theology—together with political theologians in Europe—were instrumental in "deprivatizing" the gospel message. In the US context, Reinhold Niebuhr's attention to collective egotism—and feminist and liberationist contributions—similarly illuminated how institutions, cultural ideas, and social practices facilitate and perpetuate sin. At the same time, many have hesitated to

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<sup>14</sup> Derek R. Nelson, *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 78.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 47, 60-1, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Nelson, *Sin*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert B. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 147.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel P. Castillo, "Reconfiguring Ignacio Ellacuría's Symbolic Conception of 'the Crucified People': Jesus, the Suffering Servant, and Abel," *Theological Studies* 84, no. 1 (2023): 13, drawing on Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 196 and Michael E. Lee, "Historical Crucifixion: A Liberationist Response to Deep Incarnation," *Theological Studies* 81, no. 4 (2020): 892–912, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563920985816>.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Massaro also notes the link between Francis's Argentine roots and structural framing of injustice. Massaro, *Mercy in Action*, 31–32.

<sup>20</sup> James F. Keenan, "Raising Expectations on Sin," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 166-67; Charles E. Curran, "Responding to Contemporary Crises: Resources from the Tradition," in *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers from CTEWC 2018*, ed. Kristin E. Heyer, James F. Keenan and Andrea Vicini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 136.

relinquish a voluntaristic conception of sin wherein we sin only when we make “competent,” willful choices to do so.<sup>21</sup>

Even the term “social sin” has been criticized as theologically suspect or more rhetorical rather than real, given that in “unwitting accommodation to structural evil...knowledge and freedom seem *not* to be met”<sup>22</sup>—or given the concern that only persons can sin. Yet as Francis’s emphases on affect and indifference signal, we cooperate in collective evil in ways marked by ignorance, ambiguity, and passivity, obscuring personal culpability on the one hand, yet concretizing universal original sin, on the other. “Social sin” may be more evocative than precise, yet it remains biblically resonant, and colloquial uses of “structure” often denote institutional sin or unjust policies alone. Hence some pair structural sin with cultural sin (or its ideological dimensions) to designate these differences. In its internalized, subjective, unconsciously replicating forms, collective sin surpasses commonsense understandings of “structure.” Yet if by “structural,” following insights from partner disciplines engaged herein like critical realist sociology, we mean institutions, cultures, and *habitus*, then “structural sin” well captures the multivalence embraced by Francis’s formal writings, homilies, and gestures.

Whereas the incorporation of “social sin,” and then “structural sin,” into the encyclical tradition preceded his papacy, Francis significantly advances his predecessors’ awareness of the reality in terms of its scope and function. Pope John Paul II elaborated the meaning of social sin over his corpus yet consistently sought to circumscribe it theologically, due to a concern that social sin risks diminishing individual accountability; he insisted that the category may be understood as sin only analogously, since structures cannot sin or accrue guilt. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* John Paul reiterates how “structures of sin” are linked to individuals’ acts, making them difficult to remove.<sup>23</sup> In *Evangelium Vitae* he refers to the “moral conscience of society” that “encourages the ‘culture of death,’ creating and consolidating actual ‘structures of sin’ which go against life.”<sup>24</sup> Even as John Paul was “aware of the unconscious, nonvoluntary, quasi-automatic dimension of social sin,” he emphasized personal responsibility in his uses.<sup>25</sup>

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI briefly refers to the presence of original sin in social structures in treating sinful effects evident in the economy.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere he raises concerns that secular culture tends to eliminate the sense of sin, in terms of his

<sup>21</sup> Jesse Couenhoven, “What Sin Is: A Differential Analysis,” *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (2009): 568, citing Marilyn McCord Adams, “Sin as Uncleanliness,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 2.

<sup>22</sup> McKenna, “The Possibility of Social Sin,” 132.

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), §36, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html).

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995), §24, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html).

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Baum, “Structures of Sin,” in *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical On Social Concern*, ed. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 115.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), §34, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html).



concern with its "dictatorship of relativism,"<sup>27</sup> yet submits that original sin "can be evermore expressed as personal sins which can become structures of sin."<sup>28</sup> Whereas he envisioned structure as more malleable than his predecessor, Benedict "emphasized the personal moral agency involved in creating and sustaining vicious structures," rather than a mutually influencing dynamic.<sup>29</sup> If these earlier magisterial understandings of structural sin remained primarily personal or interpersonal, Francis has been more disposed to a "transpersonal" sense of sin that understands collective sin as greater than the sum of individual sins.<sup>30</sup>

Nonvoluntary dimensions of social sin, which largely reflect the impact of CELAM (the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council or *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño*) at Medellín, may also be understood in terms of scotosis,<sup>31</sup> suggestive of the ways we are susceptible to a captivating environment that prevents us from seeing rightly.<sup>32</sup> Beyond his attention to institutional arrangements forces shaping poverty and inequality, Francis regularly interrogates these subjective dimensions of sin that harden resistance to the common good. His incorporation of insights from liberation theology on nonvoluntary dimensions of sin point to his concern for the forces facilitating pervasive rights violations and callous indifference.<sup>33</sup> His predecessors' theological circumscription of the category to underscore individual responsibility—a "univalent" model—constrains its value for uncovering these subtle social dynamics that impact sensitivity to injustice.<sup>34</sup> Francis's contributions remain

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Homily of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger" (April 18, 2005), [https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo\\_pontifice\\_20050418\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo_pontifice_20050418_en.html).

<sup>28</sup> Benedict XVI, "Benediction to Participants of Italian Catholic Action" (October 11, 2012), [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121011\\_fiaccolata.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121011_fiaccolata.html).

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021) 44.

<sup>30</sup> As Kenneth Himes describes this sense, "we live in sin as a people, and our collective sin is more than the sum of individual sins." Himes, "Human Failing," 158.

<sup>31</sup> See O'Keefe for an overview of several scholars' discussion of this dimension of social sin as "knowing ignorance," including Bernard Lonergan's understanding of "scotosis" as an unconscious blocking of understanding and Bernard Häring's identification of sin as *skotos*. O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying*, 36. Resources in the Christian tradition like Augustine's *libido dominandi*, Thomas Aquinas' relation of the passions to the will have long signaled the depth and nonrational reach of sin, yet the same dynamics perhaps diminish pastoral attention to scotosis and thereby shrink the scope of agents' wrongdoing.

<sup>32</sup> See also Himes, "Human Failing," 159.

<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed account of John Paul II's and Latin American theologians' approaches to social sin (including a development of the brief indications of nonvoluntary elements of John Paul II's account) see Kristin Heyer, "Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2010): 410–36.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II's treatment of the impact of imperialistic ideologies in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* or the dramatic conflict between a "culture of life" and a "culture of death" in *Evangelium Vitae* remains in tension with his significant emphasis on personal responsibility and structural rather than ideological dimensions of social sin. Conor Kelly has convincingly suggested that Francis's contributions draw the magisterial and liberationist trajectories closer together in recognizing the "emergence of social structures as 'entirely new realities' that can

more reflective of liberationist tendencies without abandoning earlier magisterial uses, attending to damaging forces and choices alike.

Whereas Francis is less likely to use “structural sin” language than his predecessors, he regularly highlights the influence of collective forms of injustice and the affections that magnify their effects. His approach to these pervasive temptations to build a culture of walls “in the heart” and “on the land” employs structural analyses but also elevates attitudes intensifying the harms these walls wreak, signaling a development in the use of structural sin. From *Evangelii Gaudium* to *Fratelli Tutti* and apostolic exhortations, addresses, and homilies in between, Francis underscores pervasive cultures and habits that conceal as they harm. Warning that the “economy of exclusion and inequality...kills,”<sup>35</sup> he repeatedly challenges not only the reductive market ethos dominating a range of policies, but also its desensitizing effects. He connects this logic of exclusion based on materialism to perceptions and treatment of those on the margins as disposable.<sup>36</sup> In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis refers to the “evil crystalized in unjust social structures,”<sup>37</sup> and implies structures exceed the accumulated actions of individual agents.<sup>38</sup> From Lampedusa to Lesbos he has lamented exploitative trade and migration policies along with the xenophobic attitudes that push and pull migrants like “pawns on a chessboard.”<sup>39</sup> *Laudato Si’* not only decries deficient regulatory norms but also our formation by disvalues (the virus of consumerism, a “cheerful recklessness”<sup>40</sup>) that prevent us from even hearing the cry of the earth or the cry of the poor. Francis returns in *Laudate Deum* to the function of a technocratic paradigm in abetting our intergenerational climate debt<sup>41</sup> and continues to summon ecological conversion from operative mindsets that inhibit integral ecology and moral growth alike. Finally his analyses of poverty and inequality in *Fratelli Tutti* also exhibit this multivalent sense, attending to structural causes of economic injustice as well as ideological threats to social instincts, whether self-absorption fueling hardened

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and do have influence in their own right,” even while acknowledging that “there is still a tendency in liberation theology to stress the causal force of structures of sin and a countervailing tendency in magisterial texts to stress the personal roots of structural sin. Kelly, “Nature and Operation of Structural Sin,” 298.

<sup>35</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), §53, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) (hereafter cited as *EG*).

<sup>36</sup> Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, “‘A Church without Boundaries’: A New Ecclesial Identity Emerging from a Mission of Welcome; Reflections on the Social Magisterium of Pope Francis as Related to Migration,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 14, no. 1 (2017): 51, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jcathsoc20171415>.

<sup>37</sup> *EG*, §59.

<sup>38</sup> Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice*, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Francis, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014)” (August 5, 2013), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130805\\_world-migrants-day.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html).

<sup>40</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si’* (May 24, 2015), §22, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>41</sup> Edward Tverdek, O.F.M., “More Than a Sequel,” in “Meeting the Moment: Two Readings of *Laudate Deum*” *Commonweal* (February 2024): 21; see Francis, *Laudate Deum* (October 4, 2023), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html).

insulation<sup>42</sup> or the dogma of neoliberal faith.<sup>43</sup> Francis’s multivalent approach brings together what we feel (heart) with what we think (head) in addressing and responding to structural sin.

This method characterizes his approach to certain injustices marking the church’s practices as well.<sup>44</sup> His decentralizing internal reforms target harmful mindsets, whether “triumphalism, clericalism [or] infantilizing the laity.”<sup>45</sup> As Bradford Hinze notes, his focus on “pathologies of power associated with corporate corruption,” “the pathos of curial centralization,” and the “distinctive approach to knowledge and power” of ideological elites highlights how such patterns can be transmitted through ritual rubrics, bureaucratic policies, and spiritual disciplines, rather than via deliberate individual acts alone.<sup>46</sup> He frames “the cancer of clericalism” as a sin of arrogant entitlement.<sup>47</sup> Here in Baltimore the structural sins of abuse and its coverup led the archdiocese to file for bankruptcy last September, and many have rightly questioned whether the pope has fully appreciated the structural dimensions of ecclesial factors continuing to abet abuse.<sup>48</sup> On the whole, Francis broadens an understanding of the operations of social sin in church and world alike, shining light on opaque forces at work in ways that “exceed the domain of intentional subjects” or even conventional structural analyses alone.<sup>49</sup> This invites attention to not only “the effects of social forms but their very logic” and how they constitute persons as subjects, including as a medium for harmful outcomes.<sup>50</sup>

### *Collective Indifference in the Global North*

A multivalent approach, then, moves beyond univalent models that reduce all structural sin to the effects of sinful individuals on the one hand, or that understand all sin as essentially social, on the other.<sup>51</sup> Francis’s approach also underscores how indifference and a sense of invulnerability facilitate injustice in ways captured by neither political and economic considerations alone nor purely cognitive accounts of culpability. *Fratelli tutti* targets roots of nonvoluntary indifference—cynicism, narcissism, entitlement—elaborating how a culture of consumerist comfort abetted by

<sup>42</sup> *FT*, §89.

<sup>43</sup> *FT*, §168.

<sup>44</sup> Bradford E. Hinze, “The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis and the Future of the Church in Africa,” *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2, no. 1 (2017): 20.

<sup>45</sup> Hinze, “The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis,” 19.

<sup>46</sup> Hinze, “The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis,” 20.

<sup>47</sup> Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 25.

<sup>48</sup> For an analysis of structural and cultural factors abetting clergy sexual abuse, see Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul J. Schutz, *Beyond ‘Bad Apples’: Understanding Clergy perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem & Cultivating Strategies for Change* (Santa Clara, CA: Ignatian Center, 2022), <https://www.scu.edu/media/ignatian-center/bannan/Beyond-Bad-Apples-8-2-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Hinze, “Ecclesiology of Pope Francis,” 22.

<sup>50</sup> Ryan Darr, “Social Sin and Social Wrongs: Moral Responsibility in a Structurally Disordered World,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 23.

<sup>51</sup> For an overview of this range of understandings, see Mark O’Keefe, *What Are They Saying about Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

social media distractions incubates false ideologies that isolate and manipulate consciences<sup>52</sup>. (Paul Lakeland warned us of the dehumanizing operations of surveillance capitalism along similar lines five years ago;<sup>53</sup> Vincent Miller’s plenary this year does so in terms of extractivism.)<sup>54</sup> Revisiting the theme of globalized indifference, which Francis frames as the opposite of God’s compassion, he regularly reflects on the many ways we are tempted, like the priest and Levite, “to pass at a safe distance,” whether we “retreat inwards, ignore others, or [remain] indifferent to their plight.”<sup>55</sup> Last September in Marseille, he forcefully decried the “fanaticism of indifference” that “bloodies the Mediterranean.”<sup>56</sup> The Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Fridolin Besungu Ambongo, O.F.M. Cap., frames climate change as an “example of structural sin facilitated by callous indifference and selfish greed,” devastating the lives of the poor and the planet.<sup>57</sup> Francis has preached on apathy as not only “habitual sin” but as a pervasive fog, a poisonous sickness, and an addictive drug, warning that “if you taste it often enough, you come to like it.”<sup>58</sup>

The heart is often evoked as an analog to conscience across the Hebrew Bible, whether it is judged by God, is the instrument through which one recognizes her guilt, or whose examination empowers an agent to pursue the good.<sup>59</sup> Addressing his fellow exiled Judeans, Ezekiel indicates that YHWH will remove people’s stony hearts altogether: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you[.] ... I will give you a heart of flesh,” (Ez 36:26-27 NRSVue, used throughout). Whereas the transformation in Ezekiel occurs in the context of YHWH’s vindication and reestablishment as sovereign, there remains a personal, pastoral concern for the moral life and a social framing of conversion and restoration: “I will give them one heart[.] ... They shall be my people and I will be their God” (Ez 11:19-21). The one heart and

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<sup>52</sup> Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), §45, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) (hereafter cited as *FT*).

<sup>53</sup> Paul Lakeland, “Crisis and Engagement: The Role of the Servant Theologian,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 74 (2019): 71-81. Lakeland draws upon Kathryn Tanner’s work on the all-encompassing pretense of finance capitalism and the diminishment of agency wrought by neoliberalism more broadly.

<sup>54</sup> In this volume, see Vincent J. Miller, “Seeking Salvation in a World Made Frictionless: Communion, Extractivism and Integral Ecology,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 78 (2024): 31-51.

<sup>55</sup> *FT*, §73.

<sup>56</sup> Francis, “Moment of reflection with religious leaders near the memorial dedicated to sailors and migrants lost at sea,” (Marseille, September 22, 2023), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/september/documents/20230922-marsiglia-leaderreligiosi.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Agnes Aineah, “Climate Change is “structural sin”, Bishops in Africa Say, Demand World Leaders’ Action,” Association for Catholic Information in Africa (Nairobi, 17 October, 2022), <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/6870/climate-change-is-structural-sin-bishops-in-africa-say-demand-world-leaders-action>.

<sup>58</sup> Francis, Homily, Morning Mass in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae (Rome, March 24, 2020), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20200324\\_mai-lamentarsi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200324_mai-lamentarsi.html).

<sup>59</sup> James F. Keenan, *The Moral Life: Eight Lectures* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023), 64.

covenant formula indicate that these matters of the heart take place in a communal context. YHWH summons a people-wide transformation, and because the new heart is the shared heart of the covenantal community, indifference and structural sin are affronts to God’s love.<sup>60</sup> Matthew’s Jesus elevates the interiorization of righteousness in light of this prophetic focus on the disposition of one’s heart (Mt 5:21-45; 25:31-46).<sup>61</sup> Francis’s preaching on various iterations of hardheartedness across both testaments anchors his concerns about the dangers of indifference. A month before he was elected to papacy, preaching on Ash Wednesday, Francis urged, “Rend your hearts, so that through that crack we can really look at ourselves. Rend your hearts, open your hearts, because only in a broken and open heart can the merciful love of God enter, who loves and heals us.”<sup>62</sup>

He has sustained attention to the need to break open our hearts in the face of idolatrous temptations, fearful insecurities, and hardening life experiences.<sup>63</sup> His examples of spiritual necrosis, religious narcissism, and ideological closure in related meditations connect a concern for multivalent structural sin with the stony hearts that secure its grip.<sup>64</sup> He links such imagery to the need for the Holy Spirit to soften hardened hearts and make them “[d]ocile to the freedom of love.”<sup>65</sup> In Ciudad Juárez preaching on Jonah, for example, he commended tears at injustice that can “soften the heart”: “the tears that purify our gaze and enable us to see the cycle of sin into which very often we have sunk[.] ...[T]ears that can sensitize...our attitude hardened and especially dormant in the face of another’s suffering.”<sup>66</sup> Biblical witness and preaching on hearts of stone invite a focus on the function of indifference rather than on merely missing the mark (*hamartia*).

For a North American guild, it is worth noting how a culture of meritocracy helps facilitate what some have called our “ironic structural vice,” given how a liberal individualist ethos that touts industriousness paradoxically “enshrines sloth as a structural vice...while ostensibly striving to undermine it as a personal one,” resisting

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<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to Andrew Davis for his insights on this passage and its implications. We find this formulation in Jeremiah and Hebrews, as well.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey S. Siker, *Sin in in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-16.

<sup>62</sup> Jorge Bergoglio, “Lenten Message for Buenos Aires” (dated February 13, 2013; source publication date March 14, 2013), <https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-bergoglio-s-lenten-message-for-buenos-aires/>.

<sup>63</sup> Francis, “Morning meditation in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae: Hardened Hearts” (January 9, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2015/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20150109\\_hardened-hearts.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2015/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20150109_hardened-hearts.html).

<sup>64</sup> Francis, “Hardened hearts.” On his references to spiritual necrosis, see Francis, “Pastoral Visit to the Roman Parish,” (April 6, 2014), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140406\\_omelia-parrocchia-san-gregorio-magno.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140406_omelia-parrocchia-san-gregorio-magno.html); on the risk of ideologically hardened hearts, see Francis, “Morning meditation in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae: Open Our Hearts to Compassion” (February 18, 2020), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20200218\\_open-ourhearts-tocompassion.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200218_open-ourhearts-tocompassion.html).

<sup>65</sup> Francis, “Hardened hearts.”

<sup>66</sup> Francis, “Homily on the Apostolic Journey of his Holiness to Mexico” (February 17, 2016), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160217\\_omelia-messico-ciudad-jaurez.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160217_omelia-messico-ciudad-jaurez.html).

the demands of love and the common good.<sup>67</sup> For “belief in our self-sufficiency [precisely] enables us to remain oblivious to the presence and cold-hearted to the struggles of those on whom we actually depend,” such that sloth is opposed to charity and is a denial of our interdependence.<sup>68</sup> Stony hearts of indifference make it easy for the reader of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to perceive his “sin of indifference” and judge his lack of awareness “vincible ignorance,” even as this remained hidden to the rich man and his brothers.<sup>69</sup> Hence the opacity of structural sin paves the way toward both indifference to suffering and “obliviousness to our capacity and obligation to address it.”<sup>70</sup> In a “post-truth” era the self-deception resulting from echo chambers, the attention economy, or other forms cultivated ignorance further feed this dynamic. In the US context, it is also worth recalling the disproportionate influence of our collective apathy, not unlike how our economic and military policies issue harmful intended and unintended consequences across the globe.

Structures of sin impose themselves in more durable ways because of this indifference to injustice.<sup>71</sup> Consider the juxtaposition of White grievance animated by “anticipatory loss” with Black grief over tangible suffering and existential threats.<sup>72</sup> If apathy couples indifference with a failure to be moved by others’ concerns<sup>73</sup> and habituates sloth, thereby further insulating us from that which could dispel our indifference, a multivalent lens better elucidates the cyclical interplay of the intellect, will, and affections. At the same time, existing theological discourse is not always well primed to call out or respond to apathy, given its continuing focus on complicity, causation, and action rather than inaction. Structural sin remains a deeply rooted problem that surpasses these dimensions, however, so how might we broaden the sources we rely on in response to this multivalent invitation? Engagement with interdisciplinary partners and ecumenical theological sources can bolster Catholic theological accounts of structural sin as well as suggest models of responsibility that better respond to this insulating cycle. I suggest next how a reflexivity-*habitus* hybrid,

<sup>67</sup> Christopher D. Jones and Conor M. Kelly, “Sloth: America’s Ironic Structural Vice,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 123.

<sup>68</sup> Lindsay M. Marcellus, “Perfecting Ecological Relationality: Acknowledging Sin and the Cardinal Virtue of Humility” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2022) 228, 233.

<sup>69</sup> Marcellus, “Perfecting Ecological Relationality,” 273.

<sup>70</sup> Marcellus, “Perfecting Ecological Relationality,” 274. Julie Hanlon Rubio also indicates how habits of false activity or “mindless busyness” feed the structural vice of sloth, see Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Sloth,” in *Naming Our Sins: How Recognizing the Seven Deadly Vices can Renew the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, ed. Jana Bennett and David Cloutier (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 92. As Alex Mikulich puts it, “The poison of segregation means that we become morally and spiritually insensitive to the plight of the disinherited.” Alex Mikulich, *Unlearning White Supremacy: A Spirituality for Racial Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 39.

<sup>71</sup> Mathias Nebel, “The Signs of the Times and Sinful Structures: An Interpretation in Light of the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar,” in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 109.

<sup>72</sup> Juliet Hooker, *Black Grief, White Grievance: The Politics of Loss* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 21-2.

<sup>73</sup> McKenna, “The Possibility of Social Sin,” 130.

Augustinian insights, and moral luck can complement the valuable work underway by those incorporating tools from critical realist sociology in structural sin analysis.

### STRUCTURAL SIN: PROSPECTS FOR THEOLOGICAL EXPANSION

The more subtle ways in which we benefit from and replicate injustice, making us complicit in structural sin, are not captured in approaches that reduce collective behaviors to personal sins in order to locate responsibility with discrete individuals.<sup>74</sup> Whereas on the whole developments from act-centered to person-centered morality and attention to the dynamic and socially situated character of human life hold promise for bringing together a concern for “sin and sins” in a complex landscape of reflexivity and interdependence,<sup>75</sup> theological analyses too often isolate rather than integrate inter/subjective and objective dimensions of structural sin—risking a different univalence.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, valuable summons to encounter, conversion, and solidarity as antidotes to indifference can remain vague and fail to infuse methodological foci. Hence we turn to the possibilities and limits of several new developments in order to hone theological responses to the indifference and oblivion besetting us and multivalent model of structural sin inviting us. Recent theological applications of critical realism have been concerned to respond to the errors of determinism, specifying structures’ nondeterministic, causal impact on agency—a valuable impulse I applaud following last year’s convention theme on freedom! Incorporating attention to Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus* and more Augustinian strands can help us attend equally to temptations in the other direction, however—temptations to assume we can pull up our bootstraps and make our own fate—so as not to underestimate the pervasive pull of sin.

#### *Critical Realist Sociology*

Over a century ago, W.E.B. DuBois pioneered structural analyses of social inequality, articulating Black persons’ agency amid the economic and cultural forces of racism, challenging dominant sociological approaches of his day, and reshaping the

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<sup>74</sup> See Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion: An Ethnography of Grace, Sin, and Intellectual Disabilities* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 126, citing John Paul II, “Reconciliatio et Paenitentia,” (December 2, 1984), §16, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html), and Kilby, “Sin and Suffering Revisited.”

<sup>75</sup> See Darlene Weaver, *The Acting Person and the Christian Moral Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011) and Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion*.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Daly’s framing of structural virtue and vice helps integrate the formative effects of structure and culture on agency within a virtue framework. Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice*. Drawing on the work of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki addresses preconscious dynamics in terms of modes of “intersubjectivity” that provide the structures of individual consciousness and value systems, and the internalized norms of idealized values perpetuated by social institutions set up to maintain privilege or profit. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 126.

field in emancipatory directions.<sup>77</sup> Theological scholarship drawing on recent work in critical realist sociology has convincingly indicated its value for specifying the relationship between structures, culture, and agency amid the complex, stratified dynamics that mark structural sin.<sup>78</sup> Such work indicates the ways structures and cultural ideas impact agency in significant ways, but are not utterly determinative.<sup>79</sup> It provides a differentiated understanding of how agents are embedded in larger social systems that emerge from the activity of individuals, and how their “free choices are shaped by the restrictions, opportunities, and incentives they face within [those] social structure[s].”<sup>80</sup> Hence structures and culture generate enticements that make sinful complicity more likely and virtuous choices more rare, while keeping freedom intact, including agents’ ability to transform sinful structures and culture. Daniel Finn’s work has pioneered theological applications of critical realism, with other colleagues’ work specifying implications in areas of virtue,<sup>81</sup> social ethics,<sup>82</sup> including structural sin

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<sup>77</sup> He indicated the causal dimensions of slavery and colonialism in the development of capitalism underplayed by Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, for example, and through his empirical work, prefigured concepts such as health disparities, structural injustice and intersectionality. See, e.g., W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899); Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. DuBois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020) and Daniel K. Finn, “What is a Sinful Social Structure?” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 136-64.

<sup>79</sup> Finn, *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture*, 32-3.

<sup>80</sup> David Cloutier, “Critical Realism and Climate Change” in *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 63.

<sup>81</sup> Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice*.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel K. Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy: How Buying Here Causes Injustice There* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Conor M. Kelly, “Systemic Racism as Cultural and Structural Sin: Distinctive Contributions from Catholic Social Thought,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20, no. 1 (2023): 143-165; Conor M. Kelly, *Racism & Structural Sin: Confronting Injustice with the Eyes of Faith* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2023); Matthew A. Shadle, *Interrupting Capitalism: Catholic Social Thought and the Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); David Cloutier, “Cavanaugh and Grimes on Structural Evils of Violence and Race: Overcoming Conflicts in Contemporary Social Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 59-78; Sara Bernard-Hoverstad, “From Religions Cosmology to Environmental Praxis: Empowering Agency for Sustainable Social Change” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2023); Emma McDonald Kennedy, “Forming Agents, Forming Families: Moral Agency in the Context of Procreation” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2023) (at intersection of social ethics and sexual ethics).



itself,<sup>83</sup> and ecclesial reform,<sup>84</sup> such as seminary education and the parish structural matrix.

By helping agents to understand where they are amid social positions, critical realism clarifies how that positioning influences them to adopt certain ideas and "provides both perils and possibilities for their agency."<sup>85</sup> The field's central figure, philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar, took aim at long dominant empiricism and argued instead that there are "ontologically real" things we can learn about beyond what can be perceived by our five senses.<sup>86</sup> Beyond expanding the domains of reality from the empirical to include broader, encompassing realities of the "actual" and the "real," another key contribution of critical realism of interest to structural sin is the significance of emergence. Critical realists and their proponents often point to the example of water to illustrate how emergence "occurs when two or more 'lower level' elements combine to form a 'higher level' element that has different characteristics. For whereas water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen and 'emerges' from them, water's characteristics are quite different from either. Water puts out a fire, while hydrogen and oxygen feed it."<sup>87</sup> Hence the capacity of water to extinguish fire is an "emergent" property, or one "that is not possessed by the parts individually and would not be possessed by the full set of parts in the absence of the structuring set of relations between them."<sup>88</sup>

In a similar manner, social structures emerge from the interaction of individual persons, their building blocks the preexisting relations between social relations; social structures exert downward "causal impact" on persons' restrictions, enablements, and incentives.<sup>89</sup> Structures emerge from and are sustained by the actions of individuals, yet because reality is stratified, they have an independent existence and operate at a

<sup>83</sup> Finn, "Sinful Social Structure;" Kelly, "The Nature and Operation of Structural Sin;" and Theodora Hawksley, "How Critical Realism Can Help Catholic Social Teaching," in *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 9-18.

<sup>84</sup> See Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Chimera of a 'Deinstitutionalized Church': Social Structure Analysis as a Path to Institutional Church Reform," *Theological Studies* 83, no. 2 (2022): 219-244; David Cloutier, "Holy Agents, Holy Structures: Thinking through Transformation in the Education of Priests," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 26, nos. 1 and 2 (2019) 1-10; Edward P. Hahnenberg, "Discerning Disciples: Lay Agency Sixty Years After Vatican II" (symposium paper, Vatican II: Legacy & Limits, Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA, November 30, 2023), forthcoming in related collected volume.

<sup>85</sup> David Cloutier, "Sociological Self-Knowledge, Critical Realism, and Christian Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2021): 165.

<sup>86</sup> Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 147. For an overview of these empiricist critiques and the reality of the transfactual see 147-9, where Finn draws upon Roy Bhaskar's *Realist Theory of Social Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 149; See also, Christian Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 25-42.

<sup>88</sup> Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17, as cited in Finn, "What is a Sinful Structure," 150.

<sup>89</sup> Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 151; Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65-92.

“higher” level than those individuals or groups—sometimes with causal consequences at odds with founders’ original intentions.<sup>90</sup> In Christian Smith’s words, social structures are “durable systems of patterned human social relations.”<sup>91</sup> A critical realist approach avoids errors of individualism and collectivism, making it amenable to use by Christian theologians.<sup>92</sup>

Critical realist insights on emergence help explain how the cumulative effects of agents’ discrete actions generate and sustain unjust structures and cultures “with broader, more harmful effects than a simple summation of the contributing behaviors would predict,” given that once such “systems are in place, actions *within* them may be ethically irreproachable individually and yet devastating cumulatively.”<sup>93</sup> (Fictional moral philosopher Chidi Anagonye and his friends learned this the hard way en route to the *Good Place!*) Most theological applications of critical realism help analyze these more complex operations of structural sin in terms of agents’ role-related engagement with mutually constituting structures and cultures.

The interplay of role-related incentives, reinforcing systems, and relational dynamics among structures are evident in the opioid epidemic’s rampant spread and brutal toll, for example, which reaches far beyond the opportunistic maneuvers of one family, corrupt actions of doctors, or negligence of government officials. More than a conspiracy of individual sinful agents, the Purdue Pharma case “demonstrates how a business...or a system...or law, can be set up in such a way that even good-willed individuals become enmeshed in carrying out evil beyond their intentions” and how an entire ecosystem can facilitate structural sin, from securing favorable reports, to manipulating claims and public relations contacts, to reinforcing sales incentives.<sup>94</sup> Critical realist tools reveal how Oxycontin use is more complex than individuals’ harmful choices, but also more multilayered than generic greed alone.<sup>95</sup>

The interdependence of structure and culture also illuminates the way racist cultures and structural opportunities work in tandem to abet a disproportionate use of lethal force by police.<sup>96</sup> As Kelly Brown Douglas puts it, “law enforcement officers do not need to be corrupt or overtly racist to see Black bodies through a lens of threat,

<sup>90</sup> Finn, “What is a Sinful Structure?,” 151,

<sup>91</sup> Smith, *What is a Person*, 322. Smith’s extensive account of social structures incorporates not only the presuppositions and role-related dimensions outlined here, and those emphasized by ethicists employing critical realism like normalizing sanctions (costs/rewards) and encouragement of passive acquiescence, but their historic dynamism, incorporation of bodily practices, culturally significant mental categories, normative beliefs and motives. His account treats structure and culture together, whereas other critical realists’ accounts, like Margaret Archer’s, separate the two out. Herein I treat structure and culture as separate but related.

<sup>92</sup> Finn, “Sinful Social Structure,” 145-7.

<sup>93</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, “Facing Forward: Feminist Analysis of Care and Agency on a Global Scale,” *Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity & Christian Ethics*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 174. Emphasis in original.

<sup>94</sup> Trevin Wax, “What OxyContin Reveals About Structural Sin,” *The Gospel Coalition*, January 11, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/purdue-pharma-and-pervasiveness-of-sin/>.

<sup>95</sup> See Patrick Radden Keefe, *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty* (New York: Doubleday, 2021).

<sup>96</sup> Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy*, 125.

fear, and criminality. The police are a part of the same public that is 'socialized' into an anti-Black narrative."<sup>97</sup> Here in Baltimore, we remember Freddie Gray. Conor Kelly employs critical realist tools to illuminate how "stand your ground" laws institutionalize a cultural norm of suspicion of Black bodies in predominantly White spaces ("the law's enablements function as a racist structure that reinforces the value of a racist culture") and why technological approaches to counteracting the use of excessive force (like the use of body cameras) fail to address structural forces and cultural assumptions interacting. Such a framework can also help transform sinful cultures, as structural reforms can challenge the sufficiency of cultural values, prompting their adaptation.<sup>98</sup>

Hence attention to how cultures and structures generate restrictions and opportunities to shift understandings and preferences proves valuable to investigations into structural sin and social transformation alike.<sup>99</sup> Moreover critical realism helps elucidate how so many typically acquiesce to restrictions faced within social structures or incentives offered by dominant culture, making us susceptible to "going along" with dominant moral mindsets. As durable social structures encourage status-quo cooperation in these ways, they strengthen a "drag effect" calcifying indifference, in particular.<sup>100</sup> Yet its tools may be better suited to analyzing particular institutional arrangements or harmful ideals that incentivize and constrain than pervasive, prereflective ways in which agents are conditioned. If for example, White supremacy is the water and not the shark,<sup>101</sup> so to speak, and structural sin's subjective effects surpass objective accounts of causality, a multivalent account invites us to capture and counter this more expansive dynamic, as well. Critical realist sociologist Dave Elder-Vass proposes a "hybrid" account, joining Margaret Archer's reflexivity model, emphasizing agents' deliberate choices among tradeoffs and influences, with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, that gives a more central role to conditioning. The hybrid helps capture both objective operations of external structures and culture and more subjective operations of internalized "structuring structures."<sup>102</sup> For diffuse dimensions of sin can become lost amid too exclusive a focus on role-related activity or personal culpability alone.

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<sup>97</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 51.

<sup>98</sup> Conor Kelly, "Systemic Racism as Cultural and Structural Sin: Distinctive Contributions from Catholic Social Thought," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20:1 (2023): 156, 161, 163.

<sup>99</sup> Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> Some theologians frame such patterns in terms of "indirect voluntary ignorance." James Keenan argues that this is the price we pay for our own cheap grace, allowing us to go along without raising questions. Keenan, *The Moral Life*, 108.

<sup>101</sup> Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre, "How to Explain White Supremacy to a White Supremacist," in Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre, *A Love Song, A Death Rattle, A Battle Cry* (Minneapolis, MN: Button Poetry, 2018): 36. See also Alex Mikulich, "White Complicity in US Hyper-Incarceration," in *The Scandal of White Complicity: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance*, ed. Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy, and Margaret Pfeil (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 63.

<sup>102</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 108-9, 113-14. For Bourdieu on "structured and structuring structures" see Pierre Bourdieu, *Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. M. Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [Originally published by

### *Habitus Hybrid*

Even given the high value of this theoretical work on the structural and cultural forces “enstructured agents” navigate, critical realist pioneers like Archer have been criticized for neglecting the role of social structures in shaping agents as social mechanisms get internalized.<sup>103</sup> Some have critiqued dominant structural sin language in a similar vein, countering that sin structures agents in their very interiority, and that we remain “responsible for its distortions” in ways not captured by overly objectivist accounts.<sup>104</sup> For example, Brian Hamilton finds dominant approaches overlook how structural sin shapes agents from within, in ways that exceed constraints on and enablements of action or appeals to culture.<sup>105</sup> Given the nonvoluntary dimensions of

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Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, (1987)] 170). It is “structured” by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is “structuring” in that one’s *habitus* helps to shape one’s present and future practices. It is a “structure” in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This “structure” comprises a system of dispositions which generate “perceptions, appreciations and practice.” See Karl Maton, “Habitus,” in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* ed. Michael Grenfell (London/New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 51; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

<sup>103</sup> See, e.g., Ana Caetano, “Defining Personal Reflexivity: A Critical Reading of Archer’s Approach,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 18, no. 1 (2015): 60-75. I am grateful to Emma McDonald Kennedy whose own related work brought this to my attention. Though Archer does at points imply internalization (double morphogenesis, e.g.) it is not her emphasis; see Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 247-293.

<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., Brian Hamilton, “It’s in You: Structural Sin and Personal Responsibility Revisited,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 3 (2021): 361. James Keenan has amplified such critiques in James F. Keenan, “Recognizing Collectives as Moral Agents,” *Theological Studies* 85, no. 1 (2024): 96-123 and James F. Keenan, *The Moral Life*, 58-60. For example, concerned that John Paul II and his interpreters wrongly understand structural sin as something only external to agents, Hamilton turns to Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler to emphasize these “structural distortions of my agency that I did not consciously choose.” Hamilton, “It’s in You,” 361, 372-3. He elaborates, “culture is still something out there...and it is misleading to draw clean distinctions between structure and culture by assigning to one the objective and the other the subjective aspects of society or by assigning to one the material and the other the ideal aspects of society.” Therefore, in his view, critical realism misunderstands the relationship of structures to agents’ moral life. Brian Hamilton, “It’s in You,” 370n38. Brianne Jacobs also draws on Butler’s work to illuminate nonvoluntary participation in social sin; see Brianne Jacobs, “Moral Accountability and Nonvoluntary Participation in Social Sin,” in *Judith Butler and die Theologie*, ed. Bernhard Grümme and Gunda Werner (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2020), 189-200. Other feminists and theologians (and feminist theologians) along with some critical realists worry that poststructuralist accounts like Butler’s risk excluding the possibilities of agents transforming cultures. In terms of the former case, see Jennifer Beste, “The Limits of Poststructuralism for Feminist Theology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 1 (2006): 5-19; on the latter see Margaret Archer, *Structure, Agency, and the Internal Conversation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 348.

<sup>105</sup> Brian Hamilton, “It’s in You,” 372-3. He elaborates, “culture is still something out there...and it is misleading to draw clean distinctions between structure and culture by assigning to one the objective and the other the subjective aspects of society or by assigning to one the

sin that liberation theologians emphasize and Pope Francis develops, Elder-Vass's hybrid better captures this internalized element of unconscious agential distortions that malform from within,<sup>106</sup> on the one hand, and allows for responsibility-taking and resistance, on the other hand. This synthesis brings together "reflexive deliberations and the consequent choices of identity and projects that individuals make," via Archer's work, with "the possibility of acting without such deliberations"—via Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" produced by the "structures constitutive of a particular type of environment."<sup>107</sup> Like most theological applications of critical realism, Archer stresses the externality of social forces on the outcomes of agents' plans rather than on subjectivity itself.<sup>108</sup> Such analysis helpfully develops reflexivity as it theorizes the acquisition of personal and social identity, yet "neglects the role of *habitus*" in terms of the effects of structures channeled through an agent's dispositions.<sup>109</sup> Even as Archer admits that "we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosing,"<sup>110</sup> she rejects the implication that such social positions determine our subjectivity or behavior—critical, in particular, of "social hydraulics," or the view that "no recourse need be made to any aspect of human subjectivity in order to explain social action,"<sup>111</sup> as well as the (general ontological error of) conflation of agency and structure and the "internalization of externality."<sup>112</sup>

For Bourdieu's part, his emphasis on *habitus* has been criticized for its apparent denial of conscious, deliberative decision making, risking *habitus* becoming no more than a "conveyor belt" for the socially-determined human behavior.<sup>113</sup> The dynamics

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material and the other the ideal aspects of society." Therefore, in his view critical realism misunderstands the relationship of structures to agents' moral lives. Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 370n38.

<sup>106</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984): 170 and Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 365. I am less concerned with critical realism as a flawed starting point than is Hamilton, yet share some of his assessments of its limits, interest in highlighting how the outer social and inner self shape each other, and appreciation for the value of Bourdieu in that vein.

<sup>107</sup> Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 88; Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures and the Habitus," in *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, ed. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 332 as cited in Ebenezer Akeseh, "Racial Habitus, Resurrection and Moral Imagination," *Journal of Moral Theology* 11, no. 1 (2022): 38.

<sup>108</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 112.

<sup>109</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 111.

<sup>110</sup> Margaret Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>111</sup> Margaret Archer, *Making Our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>112</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 104-105. For Elder-Vass' explication of a literal vs. metaphorical sense of this internalization in this disagreement, see 105-107.

<sup>113</sup> Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures*, 100-101; he refers to eleven such critics there and notes that Bourdieu tends to overstate his case against conscious decision making in ways that give the impression he finds it marginal or insignificant; he does seem to

of structural sin and conversion demand that theologians take seriously both the powerful factors that shape agency and human freedom amid even those pervasive, sinful structures, cultures, and imaginaries; Elder-Vass argues that most actions “are co-determined by *both* our habitus and our reflexive deliberations...two complementary moments of one and the same process.”<sup>114</sup> For our dispositions may be significantly and unconsciously impacted by social factors, and yet we are never merely at their mercy.<sup>115</sup> Bourdieu’s earlier work on the socially conditioned dispositions and schemes of perception of *habitus* had a cognitive focus, whereas his later work incorporated embodied dimensions, as well.<sup>116</sup>

Hence from Archer, Elder-Vass’s synthesis takes “her ontological insistence on the distinct existence of uniquely human causal powers and her theoretical insistence on the need to take account of conscious reflexive deliberation in the explanation of human action.” Yet he modifies it to allow for the role acquired dispositions that are impacted by social context play in the causation of agents’ behavior. From Bourdieu, Elder-Vass’s synthesis adopts this operation of *habitus* and “recognition that our socially influenced beliefs contribute to the reproduction of social structure.”<sup>117</sup> Yet Elder-Vass modifies such emphases to clarify that “social structures are not literally internalized by individuals, but only metaphorically, through the influence they have on our subjectivity,” given agents are sometimes able to critically evaluate dispositions “in the light of our experience, our reasoning capacities and our value commitments.”<sup>118</sup>

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accept the role of conscious deliberation but finds it secondary to the logic of the *habitus* (101-102).

<sup>114</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 108.

<sup>115</sup> At the points of decision making and in translating our dispositions into behaviors and practices, we may be highly reflexive in some cases but not others (or different agents from the same social group over different points in history may exhibit different degrees of reflexivity). Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 109-112.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel F. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2005), 129; Maton, “Habitus,” 57.

<sup>117</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 113.

<sup>118</sup> Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 113. Elder-Vass forges this synthesis by analyzing the “process of interaction between an emergent mental layer invoked in the process of decision making and the underling neural layer that translates our dispositions into actual behaviour explains how dispositions can in fact produce practices, while leaving space for conscious decision making in the very same process,” (109). He indicates “how the interplay of our social context with our biological powers to form and store dispositions and to translate them into behaviour plays a fundamental role in the causation of our behaviour. Our reasons, our dispositions and our beliefs are all emergent properties of the human being as a whole, but they are emergent from a biological base, and social causes play a central part in their morphogenetic and morphostatic histories,” (114). As he notes, “our actions are caused by the dispositions stored in our neural networks as a result of past decisions and experiences maps closely onto Bourdieu’s claim that our practices are caused non-consciously by our habitus...[together with/allow for] a decision-making...mechanism by which the reflexive deliberation emphasized by Archer can enter into the same process of action determination as the habitus,” (108-9). Among critical realists, Archer separates out culture from structure, Christian Smith combines the two and his

Our predispositions and expectations, our sense of what is "reasonable," and the embodied experiences of our histories are conditioned by our *habitus*, both reflecting and producing our self-understanding.<sup>119</sup> Even as agents' choices depend on the positions they occupy in a particular social field, Bourdieu's account probes "which of these choices are visible to us and which we do not see as possible are the result of our past journey" that has shaped our vision.<sup>120</sup> Bourdieu's *habitus* has informed the framing by scholars, including theologians, of a "racial habitus" that is likewise produced by subconscious social conditioning and reproduces social practices (and therefore structures).<sup>121</sup> They employ the term "White habitus" to describe "a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates white tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions,"<sup>122</sup> and to consequently raise doubts about the adequacy of intellectual appeals to conversion and solidarity alone.<sup>123</sup> Womanist reflections on the distorting effects of imagination call attention to how perception and embodied dispositions are shaped by White *habitus*.<sup>124</sup> Decolonial scholarship on

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understanding of cognitive beliefs still differs from nonvoluntary/epistemic bondage highlighted here, and for Douglas Porpora, culture still entails intentionality; the hybrid of Archer and Bourdieu presented by Elder-Vass hence best captures both the reflexive and the nonvoluntary dimensions of structural sin.

<sup>119</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56; Karl Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (London/New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 51, 52, 58; Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>120</sup> Karl Maton, "Habitus," 52. For a "postcolonial critical realism" ontological framework that highlights the invisible, power-laden operations of coloniality in related ways, see Meghan Tinsley, "Toward a Postcolonial Critical Realism," *Critical Sociology* 48, no. 2 (2022): 235-250.

<sup>121</sup> Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures*, 99, citing Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 58-9. See e.g. work by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Shawn Copeland, Diana Hayes, Delores Williams, Bryan Massingale, J. Cameron Carter, Willie James Jennings, Ebenezer Akessseh, Antipas L. Harris, Joe Feagin, Laurie Cassidy, Alex Mikulich, Karen Teel, Maureen O'Connell, Katie Walker Grimes, and Michael Jaycox.

<sup>122</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Marica* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013) 152 as cited in Akessseh, "Racial Habitus, Resurrection and Moral Imagination," 29.

<sup>123</sup> See, e.g., Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010); Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010); Mikulich, "White Complicity in US Hyper-Incarceration;" Maureen O'Connell, "After White Supremacy the Viability of Virtue Ethics" *Journal of Moral Theology* 3, no. 1 (2014): 83-104; Michael Jaycox, "Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness: A Tale of Two Performances," *Horizons* 44, no. 2 (2017): 306-341; Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiracism as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 238; Akessseh, "Racial Habitus, Resurrection and Moral Imagination"; Therese Lysaught and Cory D. Mitchell, "Vicious Trauma: Race, Bodies and the Confounding of Virtue Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 42, no. 1 (2022): 75-100.

<sup>124</sup> See, e.g., Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope*.

embodied knowledge,<sup>125</sup> and recent work on the vulnerability of rationality,<sup>126</sup> fragility of virtue,<sup>127</sup> and moral intuitionism<sup>128</sup> similarly address distorted capacities of perception and sympathies.<sup>129</sup> Christina McRorie has underscored the sinful nature of this “epistemic bondage”: not only the “the invisible and affective damage that a sinful culture does to those with privilege,” but also “the feedback loop through which injustice generates the very embodied sensibilities by which it is ultimately sustained.”<sup>130</sup> Hence as structural sin impacts agents’ choices in role-related relationships (police violence) influenced by dominant cultures (suspicion of Black bodies) and the unconscious formation by a White racial frame (Bryan Massingale’s “soul sickness”<sup>131</sup>), a hybrid of reflexivity and *habitus* allows for a more capacious theoretical elaboration of Francis’s multivalent approach.

Even as the social roles we occupy often channel our agency, *habitus* captures the pre-reflective operations of social structures, the way they are insinuated into our actual experience of moral agency in the world:<sup>132</sup> for example, our reaping and bequeathing intergenerational economic privilege without questioning inherited narratives of desert, or making ourselves small in response to our internalized scripts, whether about our “nobodiness” or our being “too much.” The concealed care work that sustains most economic roles makes it difficult to recognize other subtly formative influences of our social worlds.<sup>133</sup> For some agents must seek the upright in more crooked rooms than others, such that structures and cultures may not fully account for constraints.<sup>134</sup> KC

<sup>125</sup> See, e.g., Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lamm Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967) and Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). For a related analysis of how such approaches challenge dominant modern epistemologies, see Alex Mikulich, “Catholic Social Teaching: Toward a Decolonial Praxis,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, Special Issue 1 (2024): 194-219.

<sup>126</sup> Christina G. McRorie, “Moral Reasoning in ‘the World,’” *Theological Studies* 82, no. 2 (2021): 213-237.

<sup>127</sup> Kate Ward, “Virtue and Human Fragility,” *Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020): 150-68.

<sup>128</sup> Elizabeth Sweeny Block, “Moral Intuition, Social Sin, and Moral Vision: Attending to the Unconscious Dimensions of Morality and Igniting the Moral Imagination,” *Religions* 12, no. 292 (2021): 1-15.

<sup>129</sup> Christina G. McRorie, “Moral Reasoning in ‘the World,’” 217.

<sup>130</sup> McRorie, “Moral Reasoning in ‘the World,’” 221, 225.

<sup>131</sup> See Bryan Massingale, “Toward a Spirituality for Racial Justice: The Transformation of Consciousness and the ‘Souls of White Folks,’” in *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 325-346.

<sup>132</sup> I am grateful to Brian Hamilton for framing our shared interest in this way in an email exchange.

<sup>133</sup> See Christine Firer Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors: Women, Work, and the Global Economy*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015); Kristin Heyer, “Enfleshing the Work of Social Production: Gender, Race and Agency,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, Special Issue 1 (April 2023): 82-107, <https://doi.org/10.55476/001c.75195>.

<sup>134</sup> Melissa Harris Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 29, drawing on H. A. Wilkins et al., “Field-Dependent and Field-Independent Cognitive Styles and Their Educational Implications,” *Review*



Choi describes the disciplining power of White racism that configures Asian Americans' self-understanding, agency, and aspirations in this vein, not only via the model minority myth, but also subtle "sycophantic gestures, beguiling camaraderie, or even a kind of magnanimous paternalism."<sup>135</sup> Documentation status can become a controlling trait like a lead weight, with stigma and fear management reinforcing legal exclusion.<sup>136</sup> In terms of *habitus* and apathy, collective forgetting about Native American genocide and chattel slavery is itself an "epistemic practice of the white racial frame," as Laurie Cassidy puts it.<sup>137</sup> Daniel Pilario's work, grounded in his Filipino context during the Marcos regime, notes how religious practices encompass both intentional and unconscious values, as well.<sup>138</sup> If "part of what social structures structure" is our very interiority—our bodies, perception, understanding—then "our *habitus* is integral to the structure."<sup>139</sup> Yet the Christian conviction that we are not beholden to subjective sinful patterns, that sin prevails but grace abounds, commends the pairing of *habitus* with reflexivity.

This hybrid as applied to structural sin functions to bridge the emphases of Francis's predecessors' focus on individual responsibility (reflexivity) with his liberationist influences (*habitus*).<sup>140</sup> A multivalent method turns theology's attention to the ways structural sin is aided by its hiddenness that resists discovery, thereby enlisting agents "in its silent conspiracy" in ways other than conscious support.<sup>141</sup> Elder-Vass's hybrid helps map the causal yet nondeterministic role not only structures and cultures but dispositions and perception play in the dynamics of structural sin, conversion, and agency. Francis's persistent attention to the link between structures of injustice and affective dimensions of conversion are reflective of his Ignatian influences, as well.<sup>142</sup> Even as his approach implicitly attends to the relationship of structure, culture, and *habitus*, the interrelated ways in which patriarchal structures, gender essentialism, separate spheres ideology, asymmetrical power dynamics, and

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*of Education Research* 47, no. 1 (1977): 1-64. In her book, where she elaborates this metaphor, Harris-Perry offers the lived experiences of African American women with an emphasis on their internal worlds as impacted by/impacting their political realities to understand democratic citizenship in the United States (20-21).

<sup>135</sup> Kijoo Choi, *Disciplined by Race: Theological Ethics and the Problem of Asian American Identity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019) xix, 19-20, 34, 100, 148.

<sup>136</sup> Roberto Gonzalez, "Learning to Be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and Shifting Legal Contexts in the Transition to Adulthood," *American Sociological Review* 26.4 (2011) 602-619, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312241141119>.

<sup>137</sup> See Laurie Cassidy, "Who Do you Say That I Am?" in George Yancy and Bill Bywater, eds., *In Sheep's Clothing: The Idolatry of White Christian Nationalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2024) 128 and Cassidy, "Starting with the Land Under our Feet," in *What is Constructive Theology?: Histories, Methodologies, and Perspectives*, ed. Marion Grau & Jason Wyman (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 167-190.

<sup>138</sup> Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis*, 454-481.

<sup>139</sup> Hamilton, "It's in You," 372-73.

<sup>140</sup> Conor Kelly has argued Francis has brought these two strands closer together, see "The Nature and Operation of Structural Sin," 296-99.

<sup>141</sup> McKenna, "The Possibility of Social Sin," 130.

<sup>142</sup> For an assessment of the impact of his Ignatian spirituality on his moral vision, see Conor M. Kelly and Kristin E. Heyer, eds., *The Moral Vision of Pope Francis: The Distinctive Contribution of the First Jesuit Pope* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2024).

internalized misogyny reinforce ecclesial exclusion indicate but one “growing edge” in need of this hybrid analysis toward social conversion.

### *Augustinian Strand*

Not unlike the “ecumenical” origins of social sin emerging from the social gospel movement and Medellín, this hybrid account attends both to sin and sins, to intergenerational malformation and reflexivity. For the subjective dimension of sin highlighted by *habitus* reflects the Pauline understanding of sin as a state of the heart or way of being as well as an Augustinian doctrine of original sin that similarly emphasizes this sense of inherited status.<sup>143</sup> Understanding inherited beliefs and unchosen loves as involuntarily internalized yet “undemocratically” distributed offers another avenue for responding theologically to a multivalent model of structural sin. Considering ourselves responsible for sinful beliefs and actions even when they flow from preconscious habituation further expands an understanding of structural sin in ways informed by work in Augustinian ethics.<sup>144</sup> Whether considering acts contrary to divine law or right reason, Catholic tradition has often focused on sins, with Protestant ethics generally emphasizing sin, a broken relationship with God.<sup>145</sup> Attention to Augustinian ethics can complement the implicitly Thomistic appropriations of critical realism in productive ways that do justice to our finitude and freedom. Thomistic categories map readily onto most theological applications of critical realism, whether elements of virtue ethics,<sup>146</sup> trust in reason and optimism about humans’ ability to transform unjust structures, or the assumption of a hierarchy of goods. Augustinian emphases can complement these in this spirit of hybridity. They turn our attention to how we are constructed by God, others, unchosen desires, and the power of sin,<sup>147</sup> rather than our self-made dimensions through deliberate, virtuous actions. As Lisa Sowle Cahill notes, the Genesis 3 account of the Fall “only reinforces the impression that moral evil and responsibility originate prior to human choices.”<sup>148</sup> Such emphases suggest that clean lines of intentionality or even complex conceptions of causality fail to capture all of the ways in which we are involved in structural sin.

Jesse Couenhoven’s account of Augustinian compatibilism addresses our responsibilities for qualities in ourselves over which we lack control, concluding that

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<sup>143</sup> Couenhoven, “What Sin Is,” 581.

<sup>144</sup> As one example, Couenhoven discusses how “persons imbibe sexism as one of the plausibility structures of the communities in which they are reared; sexist stances are often ignorant, unchosen... nevertheless, even persons who find, do their dismay, that their hearts have been constructed as sexist by persons and powers whose teachings they have involuntarily internalized should be held deeply responsible and blameworthy for the evil beliefs and actions that flow from them. ... If my beliefs and loves are false, twisted, and unjust, that reflects poorly on me, and it is incumbent on me to repent of and seek forgiveness for the movements of my heart.” Couenhoven, “What Sin Is,” 581.

<sup>145</sup> James F. Childress, “Sin(s),” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 585.

<sup>146</sup> Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice*.

<sup>147</sup> Couenhoven, “What Sin Is,” 578.

<sup>148</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56.

"it is possible to be responsible without being free."<sup>149</sup> Whereas his work primarily addresses the function of original sin rather than structural sin, its "suggestion that we can be culpable for involuntary and inherited evils" weakens "the distinction between individual and social sin" and offers insight into responsibility in the face of unbidden histories, inheritances, and influences of sin—and the identity-forming powers of grace.<sup>150</sup> His virtue ethical theory of responsibility mediates "between overly high and overly low estimations of our agency—recognizing our lack of control while affirming our status as responsible agents."<sup>151</sup> Augustine's primary metaphors of sin—stain, infection, wound—similarly caution that virtuous acting (or even striving) is not entirely up to the willing of agents (or reflexive, role-related activity) alone.<sup>152</sup> Recent findings in the social sciences confirm the significant influence of subconscious processes, as well. In ways analogous to original sin, then, subjective dimensions of structural sin can lead us to find ourselves "overtaken by sin in ways that we do not choose and yet perpetuate."<sup>153</sup> Unlike the universal inheritance of original sin, we perpetuate internalized xenophobia, ableism, or White supremacy to distinct degrees based on our inheritances, formation, embodied practices, cultural contexts and more. Couenhoven uses the example of Augustine's own sexism to suggest that failures in moral perception and judgment deem it an inherited, involuntary sin for which he should be held accountable, not merely nonnegligent ignorance.<sup>154</sup>

How we act on or resist evil beliefs of course remains relevant, and the responsibility of those who do not choose their beliefs, emotions, or actions is relatively diminished (blameworthiness for evil beliefs is increased by bad faith, violating one's conscience, or avoiding one's epistemic duties, moreover).<sup>155</sup> Responsibility for structural sin nevertheless surpasses conscious, deliberate manifestations of these inheritances. Our internal actions (motivations, beliefs, states of mind), our orientations, and our loves from which we live willingly (even if in a weakly voluntary manner) confer responsibility, as well, on this view.<sup>156</sup> Amid structural sins of apathy and passive reproduction of injustice, this approach orients the moral life to what we notice and attend to,<sup>157</sup> like theologians working in recognition urge. Hence a more Thomistic approach focusing on causality, habituation through role-related practices, and reason-responsive agency is valuable for understanding certain operations of structural sin, yet it benefits from Augustinian emphases on our need for conversion in the face of deeply seated motivations, orientations, and loves.<sup>158</sup> As Ezekiel reminds

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<sup>149</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>150</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 8.

<sup>151</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 9.

<sup>152</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 96.

<sup>153</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 206-7.

<sup>155</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 206.

<sup>156</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 84, 92.

<sup>157</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 205.

<sup>158</sup> For Aquinas' own understandings of *habitus* as "a disposition whereby someone is disposed, well or ill," as "that whereby something is done when necessary," and as "that whereby we act when we will," see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* trans. Fathers of the English

us, we require God's healing initiative to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. In Jesus' fulfillment of this prophetic word, this new heart of flesh was unleashed in our world, given to us in the new life of baptism, transforming us into new creatures sensitized by the power of the Spirit and invited into resurrection life.<sup>159</sup> I grant that this Augustinian strand may pose soteriological questions for Catholic applications, but it can caution against social Pelagianism and intellectual determinism in generative ways.

Finally, womanist and feminist insights on moral luck further illuminate the constitutive power of structural vices and blur lines between control and causality. Katie Geneva Cannon's groundbreaking methodological critiques unmask the effects of social power on agency, exposing how prevailing frameworks and ideals take for granted freedom amid a wide range of choices, even as they implicitly condone structural sins.<sup>160</sup> The virtues she identifies that constrained agents exhibit "to prevail against the odds with moral integrity" in light of inherited, intersectional complexes are reflective of a liberating *habitus*-reflexivity model.<sup>161</sup> Lisa Tessman underscores how ordinary vices of domination that allow the privileged who exercise them to be "happy" or apparently "flourish" appearing to be acceptable or even good (injustice, cruelty, greed), are facilitated by the meta-vice of "indifference to (preventable and unjust) suffering of certain others."<sup>162</sup> Hence if one's only fault is complacency toward advantaging structures, moral deficiency arises via the consequent vices of domination.<sup>163</sup> Structural features like residential segregation or the privatization of shared goods not only "burden the agency" of the many, but also isolate the few from even noticing problems that disadvantaged people face; "[t]he freedom from noticing the suffering that [our] own advantages depend on enables indifference."<sup>164</sup> We hear echoes in philosophical literature on moral luck of the anesthetizing effects of indifference Francis decries. Kate Ward's related theological work on how wealth and inequality function as moral luck to hinder virtue pursuit illustrates how inequality

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Dominican Province, 1st Complete American Ed., 3 Vol. (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1947) I-II, 49.2-3; for related secondary analysis by Brian Patrick Green, "*Habitus* in the Roman Catholic Tradition: Context and Challenges," in *Habits in Mind: Integrating Theology, Philosophy, and the Cognitive Science of Virtue, Emotion, and Character Formation*, ed. Gregory R. Peterson, James Van Slyke, Michael Spezio, and Kevin Reimer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 41-57; Ezra Sullivan, *Habits and Holiness: Ethics, Theology, and Biopsychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021).

<sup>159</sup> Gregory Polan, "Preaching at the Easter Vigil: The Paschal Mystery in the Old Testament Texts," *Liturgical Ministry* 13 (2024): 152-159.

<sup>160</sup> Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 60-1; Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 2.

<sup>161</sup> Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 58, 61.

<sup>162</sup> Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 77.

<sup>163</sup> Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 54-5.

<sup>164</sup> Tessman, *Burdened Virtues* 77-8. For her discussion of how agents experiencing oppression can be prevented from developing some of the (standard) virtues in morally damaging ways and how such agents exercise "burdened virtues," see her chapters 1, 2 and 4.

"shapes us morally as we live within it."<sup>165</sup> Hence moral luck helps nuance and evaluate "how value differences ingrained in structures can affect people within the same society in different ways related to their social positioning."<sup>166</sup> Like Augustinian emphases, it also alerts us to ways in which the degree of "moral blame or credit we receive often depends on factors beyond our control."<sup>167</sup>

### CONVERSION AND RESPONSIBILITY

What does this troubling of the waters and widening of the streams feeding our understanding of structural sin demand in response, then, from theology today? What might we conclude about conversion and responsibility, particularly in the light of social salvation? Critical realism provides helpful tools for understanding how structures work and therefore can be transformed,<sup>168</sup> and work in social movements and collective agency charts promising paths of resistance to structural sin.<sup>169</sup> Here I supplement those with several suggestions in light of my focus on *habitus* and apathy: first, shift methodological foci from parsing complicity toward taking responsibility; second, allow disorientation(s) to tenderize our hearts; and third, center the protagonism of those marginalized.

One of the reasons emphases on common sinfulness and mercy strike some as threatening is the lure of quests for unambiguous innocence as identity markers. As Darlene Weaver lamented last year, in the US Catholic context a preoccupation with preventing cooperation with intrinsic evil and scandal too often encourages passive responsibility.<sup>170</sup> Cooperation with evil helps account for responsibility in an increasingly complex world, yet emphases on avoiding complicity with evil risk bypassing attention to what clouds discernment or dulls conscience altogether, including indifference. The cooperation with evil category also tends to treat evil as

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<sup>165</sup> Kate Ward, *Wealth, Virtue and Moral Luck: Christian Ethics in an Age of Inequality* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 4. As she and others have noted, womanists have long written about the constitutive power of moral luck and how external and internalized forms of oppression shape moral selves.

<sup>166</sup> Ward, *Wealth, Virtue and Moral Luck*, 88-89.

<sup>167</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, "Facing Forward," 184-5.

<sup>168</sup> See, e.g., Christian Smith, *What is a Person*, 365-379

<sup>169</sup> See Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Social Movements as Carriers of CST: The Challenges of Gender Justice," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20, no. 1 (2023): 99-121, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jcathsoc20232016>; Kevin Ahern, *Structures of Grace: Catholic Organizations Serving the Global Common Good* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015); James F. Keenan, "Recognizing Collectives as Moral Agents," *Theological Studies* 85, no. 1 (2024): 96-123, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639231224032>.

<sup>170</sup> Darlene Weaver, "Freedom in a Morally Diverse World," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 77 (2023): 25. M. Cathleen Kaveny has written about the "emerging prophetic" meaning of intrinsically evil acts contesting efforts that coopt its technical meaning for rhetorical purposes: M. Cathleen Kaveny, *Law's Virtues: Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity in American Society* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012). Julie Hanlon Rubio's work has looked to connect cooperation with evil with attentiveness to social sin and "cooperation with good;" see Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Moral Cooperation with Evil and Social Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 103-122.

external rather than probing how structural sin malforms the individual from within.<sup>171</sup> Not unlike the “tyranny” of meritocratic cultural narratives<sup>172</sup> and individualistic salvation accounts—ones in which we take control of our lives, overcome challenges through cognitive skill, obedience, and acquisition of stable virtues, and then get what we deserve—fail to tell the whole (true) story. Narrow emphases on autonomy and causality can restrict responsibility for sin to questions of culpability,<sup>173</sup> which fails to account for the depth and reach of sin or hold accountable those ensnared in its hidden contributing dynamics. As Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon cautions, “[i]t may be that all the options available have a social impact that contributes to unjust structures beyond what the individual in question might intend, or consent to,” problematizing questions of direct and indirect culpability for those effects.<sup>174</sup> Given the uncertainty and scale marking many moral challenges today, dominant moral and pastoral models can thus miss key concerns and unwittingly reinforce vices of domination. Hence accounts primarily attentive to causality (or complicity) similarly risk other univalent models of structural sin and responsibility.

Understanding responsibility in ways that surpass complicity alone can help shift accountability questions from calculating causation and guilt to taking personal and collective responsibility for social transformation of injustices that include unintentional harms.<sup>175</sup> Forward-facing accounts from feminist philosophy show promise in this vein.<sup>176</sup> For instance, Cristina Traina adapts feminist work in moral and epistemic luck on “moral action within large systems, acknowledging systems’ momentum but holding individuals responsible for benefitting unjustly from them, for acting with integrity within them, and for changing them.”<sup>177</sup> Iris Marion Young’s social connection model interrogates the background conditions conventional ascriptions of blame or fault deem “normal”, without rejecting a liability model of responsibility where applicable.<sup>178</sup> Susan Wolf’s “deep responsibility” exceeds blameworthiness to address how persons can be deeply responsible for involuntary sin,

<sup>171</sup> Brian Hamilton, “It’s in You,” 365, 369.

<sup>172</sup> Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What’s Become of the Common Good?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux) 2020.

<sup>173</sup> Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion*, 127 drawing on Weaver, *The Acting Person and the Christian Moral Life*, 116-118.

<sup>174</sup> Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion*, 127.

<sup>175</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, “Facing Forward,” 175, 193.

<sup>176</sup> Claudia Card differentiates “forward-looking” from “backward-looking” accounts of responsibility, broadening responsibility beyond analyzing causality with the former category. See Claudia Card, *Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

<sup>177</sup> Traina, “Facing Forward,” 178. Traina draws on philosophers like Tessman, Claudia Card, Susan Wendell and Heidi Graswick in this vein. Kate Jackson-Meyer takes up Card’s work on responsibility in this vein in Kate Jackson-Meyer, *Tragic Dilemmas in Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022), 116-17. Again, Cannon’s work is a significant precursor here, developing virtues those to live within oppressive contexts with integrity, such as courage, unctuousness, grace, and dignity; see Canon, *Katie’s Canon*, 61.

<sup>178</sup> Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 1 (2006):102-130; Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

sins of ignorance, and social sin.<sup>179</sup> A multivalent model cautions against thinking about responsibility as "all or nothing."<sup>180</sup> It draws attention to the impossible choices that inevitably arise and thus the risk we run in becoming "distracted by our desire for moral purity" in the face of responsibilities only intensified by hyperagency.<sup>181</sup>

Second, I suggest that the very "resolvism"<sup>182</sup> marking ethical models similarly obstructs conversion, and ordinary disorientations might instead burst our "soap bubbles" of indifference.<sup>183</sup> Reigning paradigms that presume control and idealize decisive action emphasize our intentionality and efficacy, yet if we are responsible for our subconscious *habitus* as well, such models obscure our lack of control and even deter us from the experiences that could soften our stony self-righteousness. Philosopher Ami Harbin's work on the moral and political value of "disorientations" illuminates their "tenderizing" and awareness-generating effects. She argues that "even when these kinds of awareness don't help us resolve how to act, they generate epistemic humility, resistant identification, and collaborative action," all morally beneficial capacities, particularly given privileged contexts that foster vicious oblivion.<sup>184</sup> She delineates how "disorientations" produced by trauma, queerness, and migration help question harmful norms, detect vulnerabilities, and generate solidarity,<sup>185</sup> shifting habits and expectations in ways that "more accurately reflect and better respond to conditions of unpredictability, vulnerability, and interdependence."<sup>186</sup> She also addresses how the effects of disorientations caused by facing illness or grief can extend beyond the realm of life in which they occur. We saw at the convention liturgy how parables can be similarly disorienting, subverting expectations in ways that provoke new awareness. I would add, more personally, that parenting has provided ample practice in "openness to the unbidden,"<sup>187</sup> and that the unexpected gifts of my

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<sup>179</sup> Susan Wolf, "Responsibility, Moral and Otherwise," *Inquiry* 58, no. 2 (2015): 127-142. For uses of Wolf's concept in Augustinian ethics see Couenhoven, "What Sin Is," 575 and Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 14.

<sup>180</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 129

<sup>181</sup> Traina, "Facing Forward," 189. For a recent analysis of navigating such choices see Jackson-Meyer, *Tragic Dilemmas in Christian Ethics*.

<sup>182</sup> Philosopher Ami Harbin coins "resolvism" for this preoccupation of philosophical ethics and moral psychology to indicate how "an overemphasis on moral resolve eclipses other aspects of moral motivation," in Ami Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

<sup>183</sup> Francis, "Homily at 'Arena' Sports Camp" (Lampedusa, July 8, 2013), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130708\\_omelia-lampedusa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html).

<sup>184</sup> Ami Harbin, "Response to Commentaries on *Disorientation and Moral Life*," *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2018) 1-2. See also Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life*, 25-31, 119-124

<sup>185</sup> Even as some unjust structures and cultures demand resolute actions of resistance and transformation, Harbin notes that irresolute actions may be called for, offering examples of both/and actions, doubling back actions, and building without blueprints. See *Disorientation and Moral Life*, 125-152.

<sup>186</sup> Harbin, "Response to Commentaries," 1-2.

<sup>187</sup> William May's comments to the President's Council on Bioethics, October 17, 2002, available at <https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/transcripts/oct02/oct17full.html>, as

own fracturing experiences have brought into relief the promise of untidy models of agency and graces of disorientation. So where our paradigms remain marked by a cause-and-control model, they divert attention away from these nonlinear, dislodging, reorienting processes that can generate concern for the larger community. Dominant models instead risk despair and apathy on the one hand, or circumscription of precise accountability that turns us inward, on the other. Refusals of the type of disorientations Harbin traces—defensiveness, scapegoating—impede recognition, responsibility, and repair.<sup>188</sup>

Addressing us in 2013, James Keenan connected his own experiences of health-related “disorientation” to an increased awareness of the fragility of life, productive destabilization, and an affective union in solidarity with those who live in precarity.<sup>189</sup> His more recent work similarly underscores grief as a precondition for the moral life,<sup>190</sup> an experience that offers a passageway to recognition as it did for the disciples encountering Jesus in the Upper Room.<sup>191</sup> The moral life does not aim at precarity as an end in itself, nor does solidarity consist merely in affective union without a collective dismantling of structural sin, as M. Shawn Copeland cautions.<sup>192</sup> Yet Ezekiel’s heart of flesh and Francis’s revolution of tenderness remind us that “where we are precarious and vulnerable, the Spirit finds her home.”<sup>193</sup> Those writing at intersections of theology and spirituality or aesthetics similarly help us counteract “idols of invulnerability.”<sup>194</sup> Welcoming disorientations can help us leave our comfort zones, connecting our own frailty to God’s mercy that leavens cramped notions of

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referenced in Michael J. Sandel *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2009), 45.

<sup>188</sup> Harbin, 42-53. Christine Firer Hinze likens a martyr’s posture of vulnerable witness to an “unclenched life-orientation ready to bear the ‘weight of reality’ and the ‘sufferings due to solidarity’” amid “risky struggles to incarnate an inclusive common good” in a similar vein. Christine Firer Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through: Ethics, Solidarity, and the Saints,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 66 (2011): 59.

<sup>189</sup> James F. Keenan, “Impasse and Solidarity in Theological Ethics,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 64 (2013): 47-60.

<sup>190</sup> See, e.g., Keenan, *The Moral Life*, 1.

<sup>191</sup> Keenan, *The Moral Life*, 4.

<sup>192</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 92-95.

<sup>193</sup> Keenan, *The Moral Life*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> In his presidential address Roberto Goizueta indicated how apathy and avoidant apathy and avoidant attitudes toward those made vulnerable reflect idolatry of invulnerability and “pathological fear of our own [human] fragility,” Roberto Goizueta, “Presidential Address: The Crucified and Risen Christ: From Calvary to Galilee,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 60 (2005): 64-5. Laurie Cassidy and her collaborators invite attention to how the *Spiritual Exercises* might help readers disidentify with the racism entrenched in our national imaginary and even spiritual practices. Laurie Cassidy, ed., *Praying for Freedom: Racism and Ignatian Spirituality in America* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2024). J. Matthew Ashley similarly draws fruitful connections in this vein in J. Matthew Ashley, *Renewing Theology: Ignatian Spirituality and Karl Rahner, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Pope Francis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).



justice.<sup>195</sup> If sinful agency is “encrypted in socialization processes that encourage individuals in unreflective obedience to the ‘ordinary’ and ‘expected,’”<sup>196</sup> the new perspectives, creativity, and moral maturity often invited by disorientations offer welcome antidotes. As attention to the grip of *habitus* and the power of the Spirit alike indicate, the “transfiguration of affectivity” remains crucial for authentic, lasting social change.<sup>197</sup> The stakes remain high for countering the fear and anger fueling structural sins like White Christian nationalism today.

Despite Francis’s admirable calls to encounter at various peripheries (sometimes at the service of softening disorientations), episodic practices can be reconfirming rather than reconfiguring. Social conversion instead demands centering the protagonism of those marginalized. Decolonial theological scholarship and praxis prod the church and theological academy to move beyond unidirectional or instrumentalized engagement of voices and contributions from those on the underside of structural violence, as Susan Abraham’s, Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier’s, and Carlos Mendoza Álvarez’s plenaries in this volume indicate.<sup>198</sup> Roberto Goizueta writes of an “aesthetic, affective praxis of friendship” as the foundation of “an authentic option for poor persons in their historical concreteness” in this regard.<sup>199</sup> Too often patronizing or exclusionary assumptions mark ecclesial approaches, only reinforcing “centers” and “margins.” Further work in theology is needed to foreground voices and concerns deemed “contextual,” including (and especially) when they contest “traditional” assumptions. For example, evolving understandings of how autistic persons exercise empathy challenge standard accounts of formation and of the virtuous life itself.<sup>200</sup> Immigrant rights movements that center those displaced contest not only structural dehumanization but also charity-based models. Catholic institutions undertaking reparations for their involvement in slavery that put the voices of descendants front and center similarly pave another way. Syllabi, exam lists, and gatekeeping mechanisms that remain exclusively Western shape emerging scholars’ methods and engagement with the world church. Just as the Synod invokes the protagonism of the

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<sup>195</sup> Francis, “Pope Francis: God is Not Frightened by our Sins,” *America* (January 19, 2022), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/01/19/pope-francis-tenderness-mercy-st-joseph-242226>.

<sup>196</sup> Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics*, 41, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt.

<sup>197</sup> Laurie Cassidy, “Contemplative Prayer and the Impasse of White Supremacy,” in *Desire, Darkness and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impass*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 114-15.

<sup>198</sup> In this volume, see, Susan Abraham with an integrated response from Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, “Saving (Catholic) Higher Education: Critical Pedagogies of Hope and Resilience,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 78 (2024): 15-30; and Carlos Mendoza Álvarez, “Social Salvation as Re-existence: The Resistance of Survivors, Theological Imagination, and the *Potentia* of Sacramentality,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 78 (2024): 1-14.

<sup>199</sup> Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 195.

<sup>200</sup> Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, “‘Misfitting’ and Friendship in the Virtuous Life: Neurodiversity and Moral Formation,” *Journal of Disability & Religion* 27, no. 4 (2023): 2.

Holy Spirit and each baptized person,<sup>201</sup> and an “outgoing theology” to correspond to an “outgoing Church,”<sup>202</sup> may we with relative power consider our hidden woundedness, rather than assume oil is ours to pour on others’ wounds, and labor together toward empowering, lasting healing. For if we are saved as a people, our web of relationships must be marked by mutuality, living “our faith in reference to others,” as Jon Sobrino puts it, “bestowing it on them and receiving it from them again.”<sup>203</sup> Entrenched in multivalent structural sin as we are, may we welcome tenderizing dislocations that prime us for a divine “heart transplant.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Synod of Bishops, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission: Preparatory Document” (September 7, 2021), <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-preparatory-document.html>.

<sup>202</sup> Jonathan Liedl, “Pope Francis calls for ‘paradigm shift’ in theology for world of today,” *Catholic News Agency*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255887/pope-francis-calls-for-paradigm-shift-in-theology-for-world-of-today>.

<sup>203</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 100.

<sup>204</sup> John Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 25, 32. Day indicates how the heart is seen as the seat of idolatry, and thus there is the need for a divine “heart transplant.”



BALTIMORE AND THE BLACK CATHOLIC  
EXPERIENCE – INVITED SESSION

Topic: “Black Catholic Baltimore”  
 Convener: Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Xavier University of Louisiana  
 Moderator: Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Xavier University of Louisiana  
 Presenters: Therese Wilson Favors, editor, *What We Have Seen and Heard: Essays and Stories of Black Catholics in Baltimore*  
 Ralph E. Moore, St. Ann Church, Baltimore  
 Michael G. Middleton, SB7 Coalition, Inc., Baltimore

President-Elect Nancy Pineda-Madrid hopes to establish a CTSA practice of intentionally engaging with the people of God who live in the various cities where the society’s conventions are held. The 78<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention was held in Baltimore, Maryland, an old Catholic city, established as a diocese in 1789, and made an archdiocese in 1808. The transatlantic slave trade and the US system of enslavement gave the local Catholic church extraordinary and dehumanizing power over the Black residents—free and enslaved. Aftereffects of America’s original social sin have persisted in the lives of Black Americans through Jim Crow regulation, the civil rights movements, until today.

The CTSA 2024 convention theme, “Social Salvation,” was the lens through which a panel of Baltimoreans, Black Catholic leaders, discussed the contemporary situation of the Black Catholic community in Baltimore, providing CTSA members theological insight into the ongoing struggle of the Black faithful in their local neighborhoods, the US Catholic Church and society at-large as well as collective resources of Black culture and faith that affirm the gifts of salvation in the Blackness of God.

The Renaissance Hotel, situated in touristy Baltimore Harborplace, provided a windowed backdrop against which the panelists spoke. Looking over their shoulders, session attendees could see the waters of the Maryland port where, during the transatlantic and domestic slave trade, captured Africans were unloaded like cargo and sold into US slavery. Therese Wilson Favors, former director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries, former coordinator of elementary catechesis for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and past director of the National Black Catholic Congress, introduced an unnamed Catholic negro servant who arrived on a ship associated with the 1634 founding of the state of Maryland. In her historical overview, Favors recalled the presence of Black Catholics—enslaved and free—who staffed the early settlements of local priests, religious, and lay people, were counted among the faithful at worship services in Catholic parishes, and whose sacramental initiations are in the registers of the Baltimore cathedrals. She lifted up Mother Mary Lange and the Oblate Sisters of Providence whose ministries contributed mightily to the growth of the faith in Baltimore and its surroundings. Favors described the spirit of self-determination among the Black faithful that, in the late 1800s, brought about the establishment of Black Catholic parishes in Baltimore and its first Black priestly vocations, concluding that the Black Catholic Church of Baltimore, through each era, has held on in the midst

of cultural, political, and religious shifts to evangelize and form disciples who combatted the sin of racism in church and society.

Ralph E. Moore, Jr., a community organizer and social justice advocate, picked up on Therese Favors' discussion of Black Catholic Baltimore by focusing on Venerable Mother Mary Lange (1784-1882) and the international campaign for her canonization. He extolled the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first congregation of Black women in the United States who, in the twenty-first century, remain faithful in consecrated life to the education and welfare of all God's children. Moore emphasized Mother Lange's courage to defy the law of her time to do God's will. He reported on the efforts of the Baltimore St. Ann faith community to catechize and pray in support of the causes of Mother Mary Lange, Pierre Toussaint, Henriette Delille, Augustus Tolton, Julia Greeley, and Thea Bowman, the first African American candidates for Catholic sainthood. Attendees were urged to participate in a 2024 All Saints Day activity organized by St. Ann parish to bring global attention to these Black Catholic campaigns.

The final panelist, Michael G. Middleton, has extensive legal expertise that he currently employs as Executive Director of a non-profit corporation serving the needs of low-income communities of South Baltimore. In that capacity, he gives the Archdiocese of Baltimore credit for its charity partnerships with local community development programs that address poverty—housing, healthcare, and job creation needs. As a long-time parishioner and youth minister in a northwest Baltimore parish, however, Middleton expressed dismay and disappointment in the archdiocese's virtual divestment of urban Catholic communities through its "Seek the City to Come" proposal, announced in April 2024, which will drastically decrease the number of struggling Black Catholic parishes in the Baltimore area. Follow-up questions and comments from attendees expressed similar frustrations with similar states of affairs in Black Catholic centers across the country. With Favors and Moore, Middleton drew direct connections between the twenty-first century situation of the Baltimore Black Catholic community with the church's enduring inability to evangelize with credibility, its historical abuse and neglect of Black Catholics, and the ramifications of the church's sexual abuse allegations. At the same time, the panelists attest to the persistent faith and hope of African American Catholics in the Church, their love for the Body of Christ, the source of salvation for all.

KATHLEEN DORSEY BELLOW  
*Xavier University of Louisiana*  
*New Orleans, Louisiana*

CONTEMPLATING CREATION, RESURRECTING TIME: SYMPOSIUM OF  
 BRIAN D. ROBINETTE'S *THE DIFFERENCE NOTHING MAKES* AND JOHN E.  
 THIEL'S *NOW AND FOREVER* – INVITED SESSION

- Topic: Contemplating Creation, Resurrecting Time: Symposium of Brian D. Robinette's *The Difference Nothing Makes* and John E. Thiel's *Now and Forever*
- Convener: Brian D. Robinette, Boston College
- Moderator: Chelsea J. King, Sacred Heart University
- Presenters: Andrew Prevot, Georgetown University  
 Jennifer Newsome Martin, University of Notre Dame
- Respondents: Brian D. Robinette, Boston College  
 John E. Thiel, Fairfield University

This panel invited engagement with two recent book publications that explore the relationship between creation and eschatology: Brian D. Robinette's *The Difference Nothing Makes: Creation, Christ, Contemplation* (2023) and John E. Thiel's *Now and Forever: A Theological Aesthetics of Time* (2023). Both books offer constructive proposals concerning the interpersonal and social dimensions of eschatological fulfillment. Both books also share interest in the role of contemplation and aesthetics in theological reflection. Andrew Prevot and Jennifer Newsome Martin served as the two main presenters on the panel, with Robinette and Thiel offering brief responses before opening the session to general discussion.

Prevot's paper offered a concise summary of both books for the benefit of those attending. Focusing first on Thiel's proposals for rethinking time in view of eschatological fulfillment, Prevot noted that such an effort builds upon trends from *nouvelle theologie* to overcome the *duplex ordo* of neo-scholastic theology. With emphasis on the plenitude of resurrected life, a compelling portrait of human existence is provided by highlighting the continuity of our present relationships and moral actions with the life to come, which should be viewed in dynamic, not static, terms.

Shifting to Robinette's book, Prevot noted that while ostensibly the opposite of Thiel's focus, themes of protology and nothingness associated with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* turn out to be complementary by virtue of their emphasis on creation's gratuity, the inviolable dignity of creatures, and the trustworthiness of the creator God who summons creation out of love's fullness. Prevot also highlighted Robinette's focus on contemplation throughout the text, which bears practical, as well as aesthetic, significance for the way it releases human desire and imagination from acquisitiveness and rivalry.

By way of constructive engagement, Prevot noted that both books explore at length the noncompetitive nature of the God-creation relation. He proceeded to raise perspectives and questions regarding ways we might best understand the human role in God's creative activity, particularly in view of artificial intelligence, ecological degradation, and economic scarcity.

Jennifer Newsome Martin's paper opened with evocations from the Psalms, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Charles Péguy to emphasize the precious fragility of creatureliness explored by both Thiel and Robinette. The latter's focus on the

metaphysical poverty of creatures, and the former's focus on the finite temporality of creaturely life, turn out to be complementary in their portraits of the God-creation relation, which at once points to an abyssal difference, or ontological distinction, as well as our intimate relation with God for creaturely existence.

Martin's further engagement with Robinette drew out the theme of contemplation for the way its kenotic attitude of "letting be" means to relax human beings into their ontological dependence in trust while also eliciting compassion for fellow creatures who share such dependence. Her further engagement with Thiel focused on the aesthetic dimensions of his proposals, which emphasizes the future fulfillment of our present lives, i.e., virtue formation, diverse relationships, and eschatological hopes.

Pivoting to constructive questions, Martin posed two sets. The first concerned the authors' views of suffering and death, and how we can ever say that they are a part of divine providence. The second concerned the question whether we can say that God hopes with us.

Thiel responded first by highlighting points of convergence with Robinette's book, particularly the non-competitive relation of God and creation. Noting differences in method, he posed a question to Robinette about the degree of his apophaticism. Thiel then entertained Prevot's reflection on human creativity, indicating his agreement that much of it shares in a tragic condition in need of redemption and hope. In response to Martin, Thiel reiterated his conviction that theodicies are intellectually and pastorally problematic and elaborated some examples by way of support. He then indicated that attributing hope to God risks (problematically) a process metaphysics of God.

Robinette responded by affirming Thiel's overall proposal regarding the inclusion of temporality in eschatological blessedness. Observations on different, though complementary, approaches in method and style were then offered. Turning to Prevot's question, Robinette emphasized the contemplative character of human creativity, which, when authentic, has more to do with nongrasping and fortuity than with instrumental control and prediction. In response to Martin, Robinette expounded upon the question about suffering and death, suggesting that evolutionary processes require theologians to cautiously acknowledge their creative role in the emergence of life as we know it.

The subsequent general conversation was wide-ranging and explored such topics as theodicy, apophysis, theological method, and the doctrinal history of *creatio ex nihilo*.

BRIAN D. ROBINETTE  
*Boston College*  
*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

JOURNEYING TOGETHER: SYNODALITY AND THE PATH  
TOWARDS SOCIAL SALVATION – INVITED SESSION

Topic: Journeying Together: Synodality and the Path toward Social Salvation  
 Convener: Kevin Ahern, Manhattan University  
 Moderator: C. Vanessa White, Catholic Theological Union  
 Presenters: Maria Cimperman, R.S.C.J., Catholic Theological Union  
 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University

The unfolding process of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, or the Synod on Synodality (2021-2024), offers an unprecedented opportunity for theologians to rethink their engagement in the church and society. Aware that several CTSA members participated in the Roman meetings of the Synod in 2023, this special invited session convened two of the synod participants (Maria Cimperman and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator) to share insights with peers in the Society. Our session also benefited from the presence of Catherine Clifford (St. Paul University, Ottawa) who briefly shared her experiences at the synod and invited society members to her paper later in the conference, presented in the Synodality Interest Group.

C. Vanesa White graciously read a brief paper from Cimperman, who was in Rome for the drafting of the synod's *Instrumentum Laboris*. Her paper illuminated some lessons from the first session of the synod and focused on participation and co-responsibility as the most important fruits of the synod so far. Orobator's presentation addressed some of the pitfalls and opportunities of this "experiment in ecclesiology." "How," he asked, "do we actually journey together as a reconciled community?"

Following the two presentations, the participants split into six small groups. Dr. Ahern introduced the conversations in the spirit method and facilitated three rounds of listening on the following questions:

- How, in your experience, does synodality relate to social salvation and the sinful divisions and inequalities wounding society?
- What is the role or vocation of the theologian in this unfolding process as we approach the second (2024) session of the synod?

After the third round of discussing what they heard, groups reported several areas of convergence around three broad themes:

*Hopes:* All the groups expressed hopes for the synodal process and acknowledged the role of the Holy Spirit. For one group, this is a moment of "corporate hopefulness." And yet, many reported not knowing exactly how theologians could or should be engaged. On the one hand, participants recognized the potential contributions that theologians could offer. Mention was made of helping to educate church leaders on theological concepts, or translating to the wider public what is happening. "Thinking with the church," in the words of one report, "still means thinking." Others reported feeling under-utilized as resources for the local church. One report stated that "we do



not yet have a sense of how synodality and theology work together.” The long-standing “lack of trust and relationships with” the local church was lamented as an obstacle.

On the other hand, some groups expressed concerns that getting involved might lead scholars to dominate discussions and overshadow the voices of non-academics. To this point, one report emphasized the need for theologians to “deepen their listening skills.”

*Risks:* Several groups reported disappointments in the process and anxieties about the outcome. One report described the local synodal phase as a “mixed experience.” Several worried about what would happen if the outcomes of the process did not lead to concrete changes. Another report pointed to the local reality of parish closings in Baltimore not reflecting this new style. Concerns for the polarized political reality were raised by two groups with one concerned that people approach synodality with a framework of “winners and losers.”

*Opportunities:* Overall, groups identified three opportunity pathways for theologians to develop synodality in their vocation. First, several reports mentioned the challenge of engaging students, including “unchurched students” in the process. Two groups spoke of the need to better listen to the students in the classroom and for faculty to model synodality.

Second, several groups called for greater connection to the local church as reflected in one group report: Theologians are called, as one report stated, to be “rooted in local communities. . . . This includes valuing lived experience, listening to the faithful, talking in a language accessible to the faithful, perhaps simply getting to know the people in one’s own parish more deeply, etc. Synodal theologians need to connect the academy and the church.”

Third, groups pointed to the possibility of synodality shaping the future work of CTSA as summarized by one of the reports: “I’ve been coming to CTSA for 30 years—this is the most substantive dialogue that I’ve had in those 30 years. . . . We still operate under a model of an expert; we listen to someone at the front of the room. We could do this [synodal process] after every plenary session.”

In the end, participants expressed gratitude for all those working in this historic process, particularly the CTSA members with leadership roles in the Roman meetings.

KEVIN AHERN  
*Manhattan University*  
*Bronx, New York*

KEEPING FAITH WITH OUR INTERRELIGIOUS  
PARTNERS IN A TIME OF WAR – INVITED SESSION

Topic: Keeping Faith with Our Interreligious Partners in a Time of War  
 Convener: Elena Procario-Foley, Iona University  
 Moderator: Elena Procario-Foley, Iona University  
 Presenters: Heather Miller Rubens, Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish  
 Studies  
 W.G.B.M. Pim Valkenberg, Catholic University of America  
 Philip Cunningham, Saint Joseph's University

In response to an invitation from President-Elect Nancy Pineda-Madrid to create a session that addressed the Israel– Hamas War, Elena Procario-Foley recruited a panel of Catholics specializing in interreligious dialogue to determine the best approach for such a complex and potentially painful session. Two stages of planning ensued. The first task involved several rounds of consultation to yield a topic that fell within the group's competence. Then the group entered into a series of Zoom meetings, deciding that the session should be a workshop so that everyone who attended could learn from each other, knowing there are no easy answers.

The workshop included five parts: Introduction, Reflective Interlude I, Keeping Faith panel discussion, Reflective Interlude II, and Engaging Participant Dialogue. The introduction attempted to set a tone for the gathering, beginning with an explanation of the process and a frank admission that none of the panelists came lightly to the topic. Everyone was invited to pray together the words of Ruth Duck's hymn, *Healing River of the Spirit*. After the prayer, the panelists offered self-introductions explaining the context of their work, the limits of their expertise, and how the Israel– Hamas War affected them as well as their work. As executive director of the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies in Baltimore (ICJS), Miller Rubens explained that she was able to continue programming throughout the conflict while striving to be a trusted convener of people who hold radically different positions. Valkenberg described his situation at Catholic University. Focused on Catholic– Muslim dialogue, he teaches a class on the Abrahamic traditions and he reported that this year was a true journey with his Jewish and Muslim students. He observed that there is less and less common ground and he cannot assume anything in the classroom, but conversation in the classroom remains important. Cunningham reaffirmed that there is a value in just speaking with each other even when there is a fear that one might offend another. His work is focused in Jewish– Catholic dialogue as the co-director of the Institute for Jewish– Catholic Relations at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, which also continued to offer programs of dialogue.

After hearing the panelists locate their work within the context of the conflict, participants were invited to spend time doing the same by writing responses to prompts concerning their work, interreligious partners, and possible blind spots surrounding the conflict.

Panelists then engaged in thirty minutes of conversation emphasizing a variety of points about dialogue in times of conflict. Dialogue is not about agreement but about improving the quality of our disagreements. Dialogue is about changing oneself and

not the mind of the other. Dialogue is listening to the fears and anxieties of one's dialogue partner. Catholics do not face the existential threats that their Jewish and Muslim dialogue partners face. Dialogue depends on the strength of existing relationships and the war has demonstrated that some of those relationships were not strong enough; some dialogues failed and will need to be rebuilt, particularly Catholic–Muslim dialogues according to one panelist.

The final forty-five minutes were dedicated to the participants. Attendees were asked to share their written reflections with a partner for ten minutes. Open plenary discussion followed as demonstrated by these representative remarks: The work of reconciliation has to pay attention to race, economics, and the assumption that Jews are all white. Restorative Justice Circles have been successful in classroom settings and Restorative Justice can play a role in stopping mass atrocity. Keeping local relationships going is essential. A just war expert lamented the immense complexity. Catholics in the dialogue must keep faith with fellow Christians in the Holy Land and draw on Catholic social teaching because the conflict is a fundamental moral issue, not an interreligious issue. Humanity is being denied at West Bank checkpoints. The Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023 were immoral, but that does not grant an open pass to retribution.

The dialogue was respectful, including a wide range of sometimes opposing ideas and opinions. Panelists offered concluding words, thanking those gathered for their vulnerable participation. Panelists emphasized that dialogue must lead to self-criticism and that *Nostra Aetate* cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, interreligious friendship cannot be short-circuited to personal relationships. The need is for what Pope Francis calls social friendship. A caution was offered that the conflict has multiple sides, not “two.” The sins of racism, misogyny, Islamophobia, and antisemitism must be dismantled simultaneously if we are to seek a social salvation.

ELENA PROCARIO-FOLEY  
*Iona University*  
*New Rochelle, New York*

DECOLONIZING SOCIAL SALVATION: SHAMANIC AND SPIRIT-BASED  
PRACTICES FOR COMMUNAL HEALING – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Decolonizing Social Salvation  
 Convener: Shannon M. McAlister, Fordham University  
 Moderator: M. Katie Mahowski Mylroie, Boston College  
 Presenters: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education  
 Shannon M. McAlister, Fordham University  
 Respondent: Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

This session challenged the colonially imposed demonization and pathologization of experiences of spirits or extraordinary phenomena, promoting a reevaluation of Indigenous beliefs and amplifying Indigenous and decolonizing practices for communal well-being. Two presentations were followed by a formal response and then robust conversation between attendees and panelists.

Cristina Lledo Gomez presented a paper entitled “‘Believing in the Spirits is not ‘woo woo’: Christian and Philippine Indigenous Anitist Belief.” She described contemporary Philippine anitist belief in spirits and spirit-based healing practices as coexisting in tension with Christian beliefs and a scientific worldview in the lives of Filipino/as. Contemporary Filipino/as believe in the spirits of God as a father, Jesus, and the saints—and also in ancestor spirits, the calm spirit that sits with someone who patiently weaves cloth by hand, and elemental spirits in nature, e.g., in rivers or trees. Filipino/as rely upon Indigenous, spirit-based healing practices but also tend to view spirits as evil, reflecting historical demonization by Christian missionaries. Gomez argued that anitist beliefs and Christian beliefs should be put into a deeper, more appreciative dialogue with one another. She drew on biblical scholarship, Greco-Roman Christianity, the history of Christianity in Ireland, and medieval beliefs and practices to argue that there is precedent for a positive evaluation of anitist belief in spirits and of the healing work of the *babaylan* (“healer/sage”). She also acknowledged the need for a “discernment of spirits” and a careful assessment of the intentions of any individual *babaylan*.

Shannon McAlister offered a presentation on “Spiritual Direction and Social Well-Being: A Decolonizing Theology.” She argued that the contemporary practice of “spiritual direction,” as a non-directive listening ministry, can provide a supportive environment for exploring spiritual experiences and beliefs that have been pathologized in settings dominated by the materialist philosophy of the European Enlightenment to the exclusion of other worldviews. In *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran contended that Indigenous ways of knowing and healing should not be criticized in the name of so-called scientific objectivity, and they called for a new diagnostic system respectful of Indigenous perspectives. McAlister argued that internationally deployed diagnostic manuals have exhibited internal tension by encouraging respect for cultural and religious expressions, while simultaneously pathologizing—on the basis of *a priori* materialist philosophical assumptions—the actual phenomena subscribed to and valued within those cultures

and religions. In contrast, experienced spiritual directors such as psychiatrist Gerald May allow space for exploring spiritual experiences and extraordinary phenomena characteristic of both Indigenous spirit-based healing practices and also Christian mystical traditions. Instead of pathologizing such phenomena, they determine when a referral to a mental health professional is needed on the basis of other criteria, e.g., functionality. This can support a decolonizing movement that resists the pathologization of experiences valued in Indigenous settings.

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator offered a response, highlighting three main themes to consider when examining the topic of this session more broadly. First, he pointed toward historical context, noting that historical conflict is the background for epistemological violence toward Indigenous beliefs and practices. Academics can either promote this epistemological violence or approach Indigenous beliefs and practices with intellectual humility. Second, he pointed toward inculturation, observing that the two foregoing papers “propose a model of inculturation.” Relationality is key in Indigenous cultures and religiosity; this resonates with Pope Francis’s view that “‘Everything is connected’ and ‘No one is saved alone’” (*Laudate Deum*, § 19). This is relevant to both social salvation and ecological wellbeing. Third, from an Indigenous perspective, he highlighted the importance of self-criticism for scholars working from that point of view. He cautioned against replacing Western hubris with a romanticization of Indigenous beliefs and practices: there can be deficiencies in Indigenous beliefs and practices, such as those that demean women; and some human experiences termed “spiritual” may include pathological traits that can be responded to with various resources. Indigenous beliefs and practices should be carefully assessed by different means, including Ignatian discernment.

The subsequent conversation between attendees and panelists touched on such topics as the need for discernment; the past and present incorporation of Indigenous elements into Filipino/a Christianity; the need for further inculturation in regard to belief in spirits; the role of a therapist’s culture in the evaluation of reported spiritual experiences; the influence of fundamentalist religious culture on spiritual experience and mental health; cognitive dissonance felt by Indigenous persons studying scientific methods in academia; and scientific studies that support Indigenous perspectives on traditional healing and nonlocal interpersonal relationality.

SHANNON M. MCALISTER  
*Fordham University*  
*New York, New York*

DISSENT AS A MEANS OF SALVATION? SOTERIOLOGICAL  
DIMENSIONS OF DISSENT – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Dissent as a Means of Salvation? Soteriological Dimensions of Dissent  
 Convener: Travis LaCouter, KU Leuven  
 Moderator: Elizabeth Pyne, Mercyhurst University  
 Presenters: Ryszard Bobrowicz, KU Leuven  
               Travis LaCouter, KU Leuven  
               Ryan McAleer, KU Leuven

This selected session sought to respond to the conference theme of “Social Salvation” by drawing on work being done at KU Leuven as part of the “Dissenting Church” research project. The panelists considered dissent’s relationship to salvation from historical, empirical, and philosophical perspectives. The panel featured three papers and a robust question and answer portion.

Ryszard Bobrowicz’s paper, “Truth or Obedience? Dissent as a Conflict Between Individual and Communal Soteriology,” examined three cases of medieval dissent (St. Francis of Assisi, Jan Hus, and Martin Luther) and the institutional responses to them. Bobrowicz argued that these episodes were not just conflicts over power, but over competing conceptions of salvation, with the dissenters understanding salvation from an “individual perspective” and the hierarchy viewing salvation as a “collective responsibility” (albeit one held in trust by the magisterium). Dissent threatens those in power by calling into question their role as the authors of “legible” categories of salvation. The three cases also highlight different possible outcomes to dissent: St. Francis’s dissent, while radical, still sought to remain loyal to magisterial authority and so was eventually domesticated by the church; Hus rejected both magisterial and secular authority, appealing directly to Christ and divine law, and was ultimately destroyed (he was burned at the stake in 1415); but in the case of Luther, dissent created permanent disruption in the form of Protestant schism, in large part because he enjoyed the ongoing support and protection of secular authorities while publicly and powerfully rejecting magisterial authority. This latter case is “extremely important in the contemporary context,” Bobrowicz claimed, because many contemporary Catholic dissenters “align themselves with the broader society” and “its legal/moral framework(s).” Avoiding future schism will require balancing the magisterium’s “collective responsibility” with the voices of individual dissenters.

Travis LaCouter’s paper, “When Doctrine Wounds: Dissent as Response to Feelings of Ontological Disjunction,” developed the Foucauldian concept of “ontological harmony” in light of church teaching on sexuality and gender. For Michel Foucault, “ontological harmony” consists of a reasonably coherent alignment between *bios* and *logos*, that is, between one’s life and the account one is able to give of one’s life. The church, however, presents an account of the human person that many experience as alienating and disjunctive with their lived experience, thus giving rise to ontological disjunction. LaCouter demonstrated this through three case studies drawn from original interviews (namely, an out gay priest, a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, and a young trans Catholic). In each of these cases, the individual felt a serious misalignment of *bios* and *logos* such that their lives were rendered more or less

unintelligible to themselves by nature of their participation in the community's shared (theological) discourse. In each case, this disjunction produced some form of dissent. LaCouter suggested that dissent in each of these cases can be best understood as a "mechanism of ontological harmonization," rather than as epistemic resistance to doctrinal pronouncements, or as evidence of "moral relativism."

Ryan McAleer presented a paper, "Unity as Violence: Prioritising Dissent as an Ethical-Dialogical Approach to Truth," that drew on the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas in order to critique a "totalizing discourse" in philosophy and theology. The quest for "truth" can suppress otherness when it is understood to be process of assimilation, correlation, and absolute comprehension. Philosophy in this sense becomes "egology." McAleer suggested that the church's discourse often bears these marks: "Truth" and "unity" are deployed as neutral terms that facilitate a synthesis of all propositions and counterpropositions within a single "all-embracing narrative." The axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* betrays an ecclesial egology that cannot reckon with difference—indeed, one in which difference is seen as a threat to "truth" itself. McAleer pointed out "recent developments in magisterial teaching" that mitigate against this danger, including Pope Francis's emphasis on synodality and his frequent invocation of the image of the "polyhedron." But a "much more radical" form of dialogue is required on Levinasian grounds, one that accepts the "absolute distance" between parties as the basis for an infinite "surplus" of meaning between them. That scripture often locates God in and through this surplus of meaning should be soteriologically probative for the church. With regards to the phenomenon of dissent, McAleer suggested that it can help to reveal the impossibility of the church's "relentless effort to master everything," and can in this way create opportunities for genuine ecclesial "listening."

Following the papers, Elizabeth Pyne facilitated a wide-ranging question-and-answer portion. Among the issues raised were the following: how best to motivate dialogue in a church marked by deep polarization; the need for "ecclesial discernment" in order to distinguish productive and unproductive forms of dissent; the purpose of doctrine; whether or not shifting cultural conditions affect our understanding of dissent; and the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology.

TRAVIS LACOUTER  
*KU Leuven*  
*Leuven, Belgium*

THE EUCHARISTIC REVIVAL AND  
SOCIAL SALVATION – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: The Eucharistic Revival and Social Salvation  
 Convener: Brian P. Flanagan, New Ways Ministry  
 Moderator: Grace Agolia, Boston College  
 Presenters: Lucas Briola, Saint Vincent College  
 Brian P. Flanagan, New Ways Ministry  
 Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University

This session addressed the ongoing Eucharistic Revival in North America, leading to a spirited discussion of the actual or potential role of Eucharistic piety in relation to social salvation, and the particular presences and absences of Christ in the Eucharist proposed in the revival and other practices.

Lucas Briola's paper, entitled "Deepening the Eucharistic Revival, Deepening Social Salvation: Eucharistic Processions in Rural Communities," lifted up rural Eucharistic processions as a particularly rich locus for reflection on social salvation that includes care for creation. Briola first outlined three reasons for careful attention to these practices: the location of rural communities at the margins and peripheries of the church, where Pope Francis has directed our attention; the materiality, and particularly agricultural materiality, of rural life; and the embodied social and public character of processions as a form of Eucharistic piety. Briola drew upon the work William T. Cavanaugh on Eucharistic processions as actions in which Christ goes out from the church and returns to the church, and upon the motto of the Catholic Rural Life Conference in the United States, "Christ to the Country, the Country to Christ," in order to outline how these processions bring Christ out to the country, and then bring that rural country into deeper relationship with Christ. For the former, Briola argued that processions reveal and display the "doxological potential of all creation," showing the potential of all created reality, especially material rural ecologies, to become Eucharistic. Briola then explored how attention to rural material reality helps unveil the alienating and technocratic relation that characterize our food supply chains, suggesting that rural Eucharistic processions provide one way of contributing to an idea of social salvation that includes all of material creation.

In remarks entitled "The Eucharist, the Church, and Real Presence," Brian Flanagan investigated how the rhetoric, marketing materials, and proposed program of both the Indianapolis Eucharistic Revival and the associated National Eucharistic Pilgrimages constructed and revealed an understanding of the relationship between the fourfold Eucharistic presences of Christ taught by the Second Vatican Council, namely in the Eucharistic species, in the Word of God preached, in the presider, and in the assembly of the faithful. Rather than an initial assessment of the Eucharistic revival as only promoting the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species to the neglect of the other three presences, Flanagan's paper argued that the Revival instead more interestingly placed those presences in a hierarchy of relations to the Eucharistic species. If, as taught in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Christ is supremely present in the Eucharistic species, the imagery and rhetoric of the Eucharistic revival place the presence of Christ in the clergy next, followed by the presence of Christ in the gathered



assembly, and without more than cursory attention to the presence of Christ in the Word. Such an ordering, Flanagan suggested, leads towards a vision of the Eucharist as the particular responsibility and purview of the clergy in ways that reflect a pre-conciliar clericalist theology rooted in the sacrament of ordination rather than a theology of the people of God rooted in the sacrament of baptism.

Elyse Raby's presentation, "Contested Bodies: 'Gender Ideology' and the Eucharistic Revival," explored the connections between the Eucharistic revival and the condemnations by US bishops of so-called "gender ideology." She argued that attention to discussions of Eucharistic bodies and presences in relation to the revival parallel discussions of individual, sexed and gendered human bodies in revealing ways. Her paper first outlined the official USCCB understanding of Christ's Eucharistic presence in the Eucharistic species, particularly focusing on its nature as a "gift" of real presence to be welcomed or rejected. Next, drawing upon over forty policy statements about gender and sexuality issued by US dioceses in recent years, Raby noted the structurally similar recurring language of "gift" and response in discussions of sexual and gender identities and in the potential of bodies to express a deep interior reality. Analyzing these two rhetorical structures in tandem, she argued, suggests that US bishops' concerns about non-binary identity, trans identity, and any sorts of medical or social transitioning are not rooted only in theological anthropology, but are linked with the questions of gift and response, interiority and expression, at the heart of the bishops' Eucharistic theology. Raby then concluded with a constructive proposal rooted in the same recognition of the potentiality of bodies as gift and sacrament, but in a form that would allow for both a more nuanced theology attentive to the mysterious complexity of Eucharistic presence as well as a more nuanced theology of gendered and sexed embodiment open to the mysterious complexity of human bodies.

BRIAN P. FLANAGAN  
*New Ways Ministry*  
*Mt. Rainier, Maryland*

*LAUDATE DEUM* AND THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC TEACHING ON  
ECOLOGY – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: *Laudate Deum* and the Future of Catholic Teaching on Ecology  
 Conveners: Daniel P. Scheid, Duquesne University  
 Moderator: Daniel Castillo, Loyola University Maryland  
 Presenters: Sara Bernard-Hoverstad, Gonzaga University  
 Meghan Clark, St. John’s University  
 Daniel Scheid, Duquesne University

This selected session discussed Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Laudate Deum* (Praise God), directed to all people of good will to inspire action to address the climate crisis. The exhortation was released just nine years following the promulgation of his encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si’*.

Meghan Clark began the panel with her paper, “*Laudate Deum* within Francis’s Social Magisterium.” Clark outlined the key issues that frame Francis’s social magisterium, which explain the exasperated tone of *Laudate Deum*, highlighting inequality, the ecological crisis, and the fractured vision of a global common good. For Francis, the inequality of our global economic system, rooted in lingering theories of “trickle down” approaches to growth, indicates that the economy is sick. The economy impoverishes the poor and threatens the health of the planet and our ability to pursue the global common good. Next, Clark discussed the position of the United States, arguing that the US is rarely the primary focus of papal social teaching, but in this case, it is. For example, trickle-down economics has its origin and greatest strength in American economic policies. In addition, the US is the only site for climate denialism, while also remaining one of the world’s greatest emitters. On the positive side, *Laudate Deum* approvingly cites the US Bishops, and Francis praises human ingenuity as vital to addressing climate change, a message that resonates with American culture.

Sara Bernard-Hoverstad’s paper, “*Laudate Deum* and the Vatican’s Global Climate Action,” situated *Laudate Deum* in the context of the Vatican’s various political efforts to address climate change. Bernard-Hoverstad argued that Pope Francis uses pragmatic action and diplomacy to bolster the moral message of his environmental contributions to Catholic social teaching. For example, the release of *Laudato Si’* in 2015 was timed six months prior to the Paris climate meeting and meant to help influence discussions. While it was addressed to all people of good will, Francis clearly intended to sway political leaders, as evidenced by his giving a copy of *Laudato Si’* to President Donald Trump in 2017. In 2022, the Vatican city state joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which required them to create a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), a climate action plan to meet emissions standards and prepare for climate impacts. The Vatican was able to join COP 27 in Egypt in 2022 and help coordinate with other Catholic NGOs. Finally, *Laudate Deum* was issued just prior to COP 28 in Dubai, and Pope Francis had intended to appear there in person. *Laudate Deum*’s focus on the failure of international politics and its emphasis on the need for structural solutions and decisive action remain a Vatican priority.

Daniel Scheid's paper, "*Laudate Deum* and Hearing the Cry of Indigenous and Nonhuman Creation," examined Pope Francis's focus on two communities vital to understanding integral ecology: the poor, and in particular indigenous communities, and nonhuman creation. *Laudate Deum* reiterates and extends the critique of the technocratic paradigm articulated in *Laudato Si'*, and Scheid drew on Francis's post-Synodal Amazonian document, *Querida Amazonia*, to amplify how the plight of the poor and of nonhuman creation represent the greatest rebuttal of the technocratic paradigm. Francis centers concern on the poor, for example by juxtaposing the blame placed on the poor having too many children with consumption by the rich as the true cause of ecological harm. The technocratic paradigm inculcates the illusion of limitless progress and economic gain, and in the Amazon for example, this mindset views the indigenous as usurpers or obstacles to be eliminated. Similarly, nonhuman creation is not simply a background for humans or a thing for our unbridled use, and we should feel its destruction as a physical ailment. Following *Querida Amazonia*, the interdependent communion of creation experiences an attack or abuse on nonhumans and ecosystems as an attack on all communities: humans, the Creator, and future generations. To defend the Earth is to defend humanity because we are water.

A robust discussion with a plethora of questions followed, for example inquiring into the degree of the US Catholic Bishops' commitment to the message of *Laudato Si'*; how the theological message of *Laudato Si'* might finally move into greater action at the parish and diocesan levels; and how dialogue with indigenous could pose both opportunities but also challenges to greater coordinated climate action.

Many thanks to Daniel Castillo for convening the session, and to the many who came and asked questions.

DANIEL P. SCHEID  
*Duquesne University*  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

## THE MORAL THEOLOGY OF POPE FRANCIS – SELECTED SESSION

- Topic: The Moral Theology of Pope Francis: An Invitation to Enact Social Salvation
- Convener: Conor M. Kelly, Marquette University
- Moderator: Daniel DiLeo, Creighton University
- Panelists: M.T. Dávila, Merrimack College  
Laurie Johnston, Emmanuel College  
Andrea Vicini, S.J., Boston College

The session began with an overview of the context that led to the papers. This session asked three contributors to a new edited volume on *The Moral Vision of Pope Francis: Expanding the US Reception of the First Jesuit Pope* (Georgetown University Press, 2024) to articulate the impact of Francis’s implicit approach to moral theology for the guild, with a special emphasis on moving from the particular to the universal, and how his moral vision provides an invitation to enact social salvation.

In the first paper, “New Sources and a Stronger Pastoral Impact: Moral Theology in Light of Francis’s Social Ethics,” M.T. Dávila developed observations from her chapter on the preferential option for the poor in Francis’s thought and identified encounter, listening, and dreaming as three key movements in Francis’s moral vision. First, encounter, invites genuine engagement with others, especially the marginalized, to help Christians realize what the call to love one’s neighbor demands in practice. Listening, in the synodal model, provides a way to transcend polarization and seek mutual understanding in pursuit of shared solutions to human crises. Dreaming, by asking everyone to imagine what a more hope-filled future can look like, inspires action that will make the social salvation God has promised a reality for all. In each case, Dávila stressed that Francis’s hopes for encounter, listening, and dreaming have still fallen short, particularly in a US context, due to an incomplete reception. This critical analysis provided the basis for the final portion of Dávila’s paper, which explored ambiguities and limitations in Francis’s own use of encounter, listening, and dreaming, as exemplified by his recent comments on the prospect of women deacons and his repeated use of a homophobic slur, resulting in Dávila’s call for a renewed commitment to working for the good of the church across contemporary society.

With the second paper, “From Where? For Whom? Tradition and Moral Theology in Light of Francis’s Ethics of War and Peace,” Laurie Johnston challenged the tendency to forefront the ethics of war and to treat peace as an afterthought by analyzing Francis’s contributions to the magisterial promotion of “positive peace.” Explaining that Francis champions peace with the image of a polyhedron (and providing her own visual aid!), Johnston noted that this shape contrasts with a sphere—in which a smooth surface is defined by all the points that are exactly the same distance from the center—to accentuate difference through the “sharp edges” connecting the facets. The implication for Francis’s ethics of peace and war is that uniformity is not the ideal resolution of conflict, but that tolerance of genuine difference makes peace a “continuing adventure” of journeying with those who may disagree. Johnston illustrated how Francis’s comments on war can be interpreted through this vision for peace, with nonviolent resistance emerging as a way to challenge injustice not simply

by avoiding conflict, but sometimes by accentuating it for the right reasons. Like Dávila, Johnston explored ambiguities in Francis's ethics, noting that he rejects the viability of a "just war" in today's context while simultaneously drawing on the just war criteria in certain circumstances. Additionally, Johnston highlighted how the pursuit of peace through nonviolent means can have limitations in practice, creating a productive tension for Catholic moral theology's efforts to explore contemporary challenges in constant conversation with the broader tradition.

Andrea Vicini, S.J., offered the final paper, "Broader Concerns and a Deeper Christological Focus: Moral Theology in Light of Francis's Bioethics," using recurring themes in Francis's comments on bioethics to explicate a threefold method underlying Francis's approach to moral problems. First, Francis emphasizes a spiritual relationship with Christ, who is shown in the Incarnation to be intimately connected to our deepest human concerns, yielding a bioethics that seeks new ways to address human needs. Second, Francis stresses discernment as a process for navigating ambiguity without denying complexity, generating a bioethics that is driven less by single issue concerns and more attentive to the overarching problems facing moral agents and their communities. Finally, Francis constantly attends to the experiences of the people, with a special emphasis on the marginalized, to forefront issues like the global impact of COVID-19 and the effects of the climate crisis. These issues are crucially important for those on the peripheries even as they are sometimes hidden from the privileged. With this analysis, Vicini gave a clear sense of Francis's priorities not just for bioethics but also for theological ethics more broadly.

The session concluded with a robust discussion among the panelists and attendees, exploring the continuities and discontinuities between Francis's approach and that of his predecessors along with potential reasons for Francis's most distinctive emphases.

CONOR KELLY  
*Marquette University*  
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

SANCTIFYING SOCIAL STRUCTURES: INTERDISCIPLINARY RESOURCES  
FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Sanctifying Social Structures: Interdisciplinary Resources for Catholic Theology  
 Convener: Vincent Birch, University of Saint Francis (Indiana)  
 Moderator: Nicholas Hayes-Mota, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: David Cloutier, The Catholic University of America  
 Christina McRorie, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry  
 Vincent Birch, University of Saint Francis

In light of the convention theme, “Social Salvation,” David Cloutier, Christina McRorie, and Vincent Birch proposed this session in order to investigate both the ways in which social structures can contribute to personal holiness and how social structures might be transformed in and through the holiness of the persons inhabiting them.

In a paper entitled “Social Structures, Alienation, and Self-Gift,” David Cloutier sought to overcome the tendency to interpret the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity competitively by outlining how they can be situated as complementary principles ordered toward the fulfillment of the human person as a social being. Cloutier began by observing that Catholic social teaching presents the human person as ordered toward self-gift and that this ordering, because it is meant to be fulfilled in the various social dimensions of human life, can provide a foundation for social ethics. With continued attention to Catholic social teaching as well as to the thought of Luigi Taparelli, Cloutier argued that the principle of subsidiarity, rightly conceived, is concerned with the realization of goods proper to particular social bodies such that the human persons comprising them give of themselves to each other in manners appropriate to those social bodies. Cloutier concluded by arguing that critical realist sociology, with the tools it offers for irreducibly relating persons, social structures, and systems, is helpful for spelling out how particular groups can seek their goods (according to the principle of subsidiarity) in a manner that is conducive to the attainment of goods by other groups (according to the principle of solidarity), under the aspect of the human ordering toward self-gift.

McRorie’s paper, “Some Implications of the Claim that Social Contexts Can Sanctify,” was concerned with both the theological presuppositions and consequences of the idea that sanctification may be mediated through human social formation. McRorie began by noting that accepting this idea depends on an understanding of human freedom as consisting in being oriented toward the good rather than in autonomous choice; otherwise, social formation constitutes a threat to human agency. Furthermore, the claim that social structures can sanctify, McRorie argued, entails that grace leaves a discernible impact on the character of human persons (since social structures do) and that sanctification can occur unconsciously (since much social formation does). She noted that although socially mediated sanctification is in a sense the flipside of the concept of social sin, it comes with a particular challenge: the implication that human beings are subject to “spiritual moral luck,” given the wide variability in the degree to which social contexts encourage good character and thus aid sanctification. After acknowledging the difficulties this prospect generates,

McRorie proposed that it also gives rise to the imperative that Christians strive to shape social structures to make it easier for all to be holy.

Birch's paper was entitled, "Divinized via Social Construction?: A Semiotic Analysis of the Relation between Social Construction and Holiness in Revelation and its Reception." The central question he sought to address was how revelation can contribute to human deification if it partly consists of social constructions (inclusive of social structures, semiotically conceived). He began by drawing on the semiotic thought of John of St. Thomas, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Deely in order to define social constructions as entities consisting of socially founded relations of reason that shape human perception, knowledge, and action. Birch then attended to various social constructions incorporated into God's public revelation and concluded that while God did employ social constructions in divine revelation, God also transfigured those constructions, stripping them of the ideological content they possess as human social constructions, in founding them as sign-vehicles bearing a relation to God's inner mystery. In concluding, Birch employed semiotics to gesture toward how the reception of divine revelation, including the social constructions employed in it, can, first, effect the deification of the human person by bringing about the invisible divine missions in the person, and, second, transform the social structures the person inhabits by virtue of the reconstitution of his or her perception, knowledge, and action by the Word.

The session saved time for discussion until the conclusion of all three papers. This allowed for rich interaction between ideas in the papers precipitated by questions on nature and grace, on when social structures might need to be destroyed rather than transformed, and on the relation between the capacity of human agents for free choice and the fact that they are subject to the influence of social context.

VINCENT BIRCH  
*University of Saint Francis  
Fort Wayne, Indiana*

## ANTHROPOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Eric Daryl Meyer, Carroll College  
 Moderator: Tiffany Hartnell-Howden, Boston College  
 Presenters: Valentina Nilo, Boston College  
 Timothy Perron, Fordham University  
 Madeline Jarrett, Boston College

The Anthropology Topic Session called for papers related to the conference theme of “Social Salvation” in the context of ecological, political, and cultural challenges. Three scholars were invited to speak in this year’s session.

Valentina Nilo’s paper, entitled “The Victim’s Resistance as Salvation: A Decolonial Approach to the Reality of Imprisoned Women in Latin America,” brought the resources of decolonial analysis to bear on the artistic expressions of women incarcerated in Mexico and Chile, whom Nilo has come to know personally. Nilo argued that these women’s artistic expression—especially poetry—should be seen as a form of resistance to oppression that makes present the interiority, hope, and social connections of women who are otherwise isolated and alienated from society. Expressions of hope and resistance should be seen within the context of an extractive war waged on women and women’s bodies to constrain and control them. Building community through artistic expression is a praxis of hope that maintains agency in contexts of oppression. And while this resistance does not effect the much-needed transformation of the carceral system as it is driven by capitalist forces, it nevertheless holds open the possibility of another way of life, a step toward building a transformed and transformative community.

Timothy Perron gave a presentation entitled “Human Ecology as an Approach to Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Vatican Documents.” Perron’s presentation examined the magisterial discussion of ethical questions surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality through the category of “human ecology,” first appearing in *Centesimus Annus* in 1991. While Vatican texts employ the concept of human ecology in order to support ethical positions on sex, gender, and sexuality that are grounded in a compulsory, complementary gender/sex binary essentialism, Perron argues that the appeal to the category of “ecology” necessarily opens a door onto greater flexibility in these positions. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Perron argues that ecology always attends to the broad patterns in relationships among organisms as they respond to their ever-changing contexts. An evolutionary view of biology, build in to ecology, requires attention to the way that the patterns of relationships change over time—and is ill-suited to articulation of unchanging and hardened laws. While Perron did not specify the particular shifts that greater flexibility around matters of sex, gender, and sexuality might take within Vatican texts, he believes that “human ecology” invites new possibilities, possibilities that have been largely closed off by reliance on assertions of an abstract binary essentialism.

In a presentation entitled, “Risking Resurrection: Agency, Phenomenology, and the Feminist Ethic of Risk,” Madeline Jarrett argued for an approach to structural and cultural patterns rooted in an ethic of empowerment and risk rather than control,



certainty, and accomplishment. Jarrett drew on the work of Emmanuel Falque, who offers a phenomenological account of resurrected subjectivity where joy is the primary modality of resurrection, not as the eradication of suffering but as its transformation, the presence of eternity within the now. She combined Falque's work with the thought of Sharon Welch, who offers a feminist ethic of risk, which can be contrasted with an ethic of control. The power of the resurrection, Jarrett argues, may best be seen along the lines of an ethic of risk: the empowerment of people and communities struggling in the midst of injustice to respond with hope and the embodiment of goodness, even if their struggles do not decisively transform unjust systems. An ethic of risk encourages mutual empowerment and avoids pitfalls such as domination (grasping control), sacrifice (subordinating others), and resignation (giving up)—which makes it a good model for the work of God in and through the resurrection.

Lively discussion followed the three presentations with several audience members (and the presenters themselves) drawing substantial links between the papers.

ERIC DARYL MEYER  
*Carroll College*  
*Helena, Montana*

## BIOETHICS/HEALTHCARE – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium  
 Moderator: Marc Rugani, St. Anselm College  
 Presenters: Emily Reimer-Barry, University of San Diego  
 Michael Jaycox, Seattle University

This session considered the conference theme of social salvation in light of healthcare and bioethics. The two presenters in attendance gave excellent papers, which were followed by the moderator reading the abstract of Nicholas Kockler's paper, "Generating Insights from Catholic Social Teaching: Ethical Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence in Health Care" in order to bring into the conversation Kockler's insights about artificial intelligence (AI) even though he was unable to attend the meeting. This was followed by a discussion with the presenters through thoughtful questions and comments from the audience.

Emily Reimer-Barry's paper asked the provocative question posed in her paper's title, "Can an Institution Have a Conscience? Sticky Questions in Catholic Health Care." She contextualized the importance of her inquiry with two starting points: 1) the urgency of addressing the question evidenced by case studies that Reimer-Barry used to illustrate how the imposition of Catholic hospitals' institutional consciences in their current form has put patients and medical professionals in harmful situations, and 2) an acknowledgement that historically the Catholic moral tradition has supported the notion of an individual conscience, but not an institutional conscience. However, as Reimer-Barry argued, like individuals, institutions rely on conscience as a moral science that identifies values, discovers goods, and makes judgments for action; it is necessary to acknowledge this in order to ensure that institutional consciences are formed well. Reimer-Barry argued that, *contra* traditional claims, there already exist notions of institutional consciences in Catholic spaces. For example, she argued that this is seen in women religious who engage in communal discernment modeling mutual decision-making through free, genuine discernment. And institutional conscience is presumed, according to Reimer-Barry, in the USCCB's appeals to religious freedom. However, in those cases, she worries the bishops have erred towards an "ecclesiastical fundamentalism," borrowing a phrase from Anne E. Patrick, conflating magisterial teaching and institutional conscience by moving from church teaching to moral declaration without embracing a true model of communal discernment that incorporates the diverse views within the church. To correct for this, Reimer-Barry proposes revising the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (ERDs), among other responses.

Attendees asked Reimer-Barry thoughtful questions around the challenges and opportunities of making her vision a reality, including how to navigate diverse and divergent views on the role of the bishops, what it means to be a corporate representative, and how communal moral discernment might already be occurring in grassroot groups.

Michael Jaycox's paper, "Autonomy and Medical Racism: Rebalancing Bioethics in a Secularizing Society," sought to open pathways for dialogue between secular and

theological bioethics. He began with case studies from clinical bioethics and public health during the COVID-19 pandemic that show how the principalist approach of secular bioethics and its overreliance on autonomy (and utilitarianism) did not protect the vulnerable and marginalized, thus exposing secular bioethics' life-threatening failings. Jaycox challenged stories about the history of bioethics that ignore the role of secularity and whiteness in shaping today's bioethics. Jaycox persuasively argued, using an array of thinkers, that secular bioethics must reckon with its history and shortcomings, from its reliance on Enlightenment colonialism to its relationship with the scientific method's racist history to its use of the category of religion to other. While secular bioethics has championed autonomy, Jaycox showed how this concept was developed with reference to White men and still excludes many today. Jaycox argued that religious bioethics can help to rebalance secular bioethics' focus on autonomy by drawing in the radical commitment to human dignity called for in the preferential option for the poor. Dialogue will not necessarily be easy, for Jaycox showed that religious bioethics no longer has a toehold in these conversations, evidenced by a bioethics journal that has publicly refused to engage with religious arguments. Thus, Jaycox argued that this discourse should be thought of akin to interreligious dialogue. The preferential option for the poor, understood not as a principle but as praxis, will invite parties into mutual conversation that interrupts the system with an anti-history that makes space for religious contributions and upholds the voices of the marginalized.

Jaycox was asked questions about how religious and secular bioethics interact in which he elucidated his position that he is hopeful for dialogue between religious and secular bioethics because he does not view the secular and religious to be at odds since we encounter the divine through the secular. He agreed with critiques of the racist and colonial history of religious bioethics that must also be contended with and he engaged in an exchange about whether autonomy is a secularized theological idea.

KATE JACKSON-MEYER  
*Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts*

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT – TOPIC SESSION

Convener: William George, Dominican University  
 Moderator: Katherine Tarrant, University of Virginia  
 Presenters: Marcus Mescher, Xavier University  
 Simeiqi He, Independent Scholar  
 Thomas Massaro, S.J., Fordham University

Focusing on the convention theme of “Social Salvation,” this session featured three presentations followed by insightful questions or comments, either in the brief time allotted after each presentation or during the general discussion.

Marcus Mescher’s paper, “‘No One is Saved Alone’: Evaluating Pope Francis’s Vision of Social Holiness,” examined Francis’s claims of social salvation in light of some of his most familiar phrases (e.g., “culture of encounter,” the church as “field hospital,” and “social poets” who are “sowers of change”). Although language of “liberation” is seldom employed in the canon of CST, Mescher argued that the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez can more explicitly connect social duties, social sanctification, and social salvation. The paper drew on three examples—Francis’s attention to shame, indifference, and polarization—to assess his efforts to translate CST from principles to practice.

With reference to shame, one attendee noted Pope Francis’s shift in addressing people with disabilities from *Amoris Laetitia* to the synodal documents, more explicitly honoring in the latter the subjectivity and inherent dignity of people with disabilities. A question leading to a brief but lively discussion dealt with the presenter’s allusion to Gutiérrez’s work on friendship, wondering if the church’s presentation of solidarity as “social charity” or “social friendship” over-inflates what we can expect of these relationships (“Is friendship stretched too thin?”). Returning to the issue of shame, a third participant wondered about “social shame” or how “every social interaction risks shame,” and the implications for Pope Francis’s call to build a “culture of encounter.” Mescher’s responses confirmed the legitimacy of turning to Gutiérrez to elucidate and evaluate Francis’s vision of social holiness.

In her presentation, “Social Salvation as Universal Love: From Teilhard, Berry to Francis and Beyond,” Simeiqi He argued that from Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* there emerges a vision in which social salvation is akin to universal love. The presentation then traced Francis’s universal horizon to Thomas Berry’s cosmological ethics and to Teilhard de Chardin’s notion of *sola caritas* (love alone), and He highlighted ways in which their thought may be traced back to Eastern traditions. With a focus on Teilhard’s work in China and Berry’s study of Chinese religions, He stressed the formative significance of the Chinese tradition for the conception of the universal horizon. Thus, the actualization of Francis’s vision requires a deeper appreciation of the Chinese tradition and its insights into the anthropocosmic reality.

Session attendees asked whether Daoism had any impact on Berry and Teilhard, whether Teilhard’s interpretation of Confucianism was accurate, and whether it is appropriate to regard Confucianism as *yang* and Daoism as *yin*. He gave fitting responses to each question, while cautioning against the tendency to essentialize

Chinese religions. She stressed that the Chinese tradition is not static, but a living tradition open to transformation through diverse encounters. Moreover, He expressed the need and her desire to advance the Chinese presence in Catholic thought.

In “Imagining Social Salvation: The Potential Contribution of Utopian Thought,” Thomas Massaro argued that the tradition of utopian thought, of which he cited numerous examples, should not be dismissed by Catholic social teaching. Indeed, utopianism makes a valuable, even irreplaceable contribution to prospects for the very types of social, political and economic reform supported by Catholic social thought. Without surrendering the eschatological reservation of Christian orthodoxy, utopian dreams are capable of shaping our vision of social salvation by challenging the oppressive status quo of neoliberalism and vast inequality. Utopian imaginings of fairness in social participation and economic distribution possess the power to generate constructive regulative norms of human behavior and social institutions.

The paper provoked further questions, to which Massaro gave helpful responses, regarding the value and usefulness of utopian visions in Catholic social teaching and social ethics in general. The relationship between utopian thought and Christian realism was a fruitful topic of discussion, as was speculation regarding the extent and duration of any system of social justice aspiring to perfection in the course of human history. The motif of eschatological reservation featured prominently in the exchanges, as did the role of the imagination in the writings of several popes (Paul VI, John Paul II, and Francis). While yet further questions remained, the likelihood that those in attendance would dismiss the importance of utopian thought for Catholic social thought was surely diminished.

In a manner deeply appreciative yet critical of the Catholic social tradition and its representatives, such as Pope Francis, and within the limits of a single convention session, presenters together with those in attendance advanced what John Courtney Murray called the “growing end” of Catholic social thought and teaching.

WILLIAM P. GEORGE  
*Dominican University*  
*River Forest, Illinois*

## CATHOLICITY AND MISSION – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Antonio D. Sison, C.P.P.S., Catholic Theological Union  
 Moderator: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education  
 Presenters: Wilson Angelo Espiritu, Ateneo de Manila University  
 Leo Guardado, Fordham University  
 James Adeoye, Duquesne University

The three presenters in the Catholicity and Mission topic session delivered relevant and engaging papers that meaningfully resonate with our chosen trajectory:

In view of an inclusive, intercultural understanding of Catholicity and Mission, and in solidarity with those who struggle to find a fuller humanity amid the multiform asymmetries in the global Church, the theme of “social salvation” necessarily belongs to contextual theologies where salvation and the liberative quest for human flourishing are mutually inclusive.

For his paper, “Popular Piety and Social Salvation: Lived Soteriology in the Grassroots,” Wilson Angelo Espiritu explored the impassioned popular devotion or *panata* (Tagalog) to Manila’s Black Nazarene and how this is moored in the quest for collective well-being; potentially, this lays down a bridge toward sociopolitical praxis. He spoke of the marriage and human and divine agency within the performative faith of the *panata* as a liberative pathway toward social salvation.

In his presentation, “Social Healing and Salvation in New York City,” Leo Guardado offered an incisive diagnosis of the “incurable violence” wrought by the ecclesiastical exclusion of Latin American Catholic practices rooted in Indigenous cultural wisdom. This forces people to live out their faith in a split-level Catholicism: one in the authorized space of the official church; the other, sublimated in an “unwelcome” space outside the boundaries of what is deemed as authentic salvific expressions. He appealed to Pope Francis’ prophetic-liberating call for the church to be a “field hospital,” a site for the exorcising of present-day analogues of the demonic “legion” (from the synoptic gospel pericopes) and a pathway toward healing for festering social, colonial wounds.

James Adeoye’s presentation, “‘Missionary Spirituality’ in the Light of *Redemptoris Missio*: A Theological Appraisal for a Pluralistic World,” emphasized that an overriding concern for personal salvation in Catholic spirituality falls short of the vision of a missionary church that is responsive to the pluralistic realities of the twenty-first century. Drawing from *Redemptoris Missio* as a critical principle, he reiterated the wisdom of Saint Pope John Paul II who called for witnesses of Christ to be his image-bearers by way of Christic-Orthopathy—“an interior transformation of the human agent of mission into heralds of Christ’s compassion, love, and empathy”—in both intra- and inter-human relationships.

From questions posed by attendees, a lively and thoughtful discussion followed the presentations. Notable questions revolved around the points of “inclusiveness” and

“retrieval” of both biblical and Indigenous wisdom, and how these figure in contextual, inculturated understanding of social salvation, and also in view of the “multiple temporalities” spoken of in the keynote discussions. A fitting epilogue came from Leo Guardado, who spoke dialectically of the need for the church to determine boundaries yet remain cognizant of, and attuned to, the pneumatological movements of a God who is Triune, who cannot be hedged-in by decisions and “management” by human institutions.

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## CHRIST – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Christology and Social Salvation  
 Convener: Mary Kate Holman, Fairfield University  
 Moderator: Eugene R. Schlesinger, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Ligita Ryliškytė, S.J.E., Boston College  
 Michael Lee, Fordham University  
 Paul Schutz, Santa Clara University

This session consisted of three papers, each approximately twenty minutes long, that explored the convention theme of Social Salvation in connection to Christology, and especially notions and practices of solidarity. The presentations were followed by a lively and substantive question and answer period.

Ligita Ryliškytė, S.J.E., began our session with her paper, “In Solidum Obligari: Without Kenotic Solidarity, No Social Salvation.” Ryliškytė’s paper was developed largely in conversation with the solidaristic practice, rooted in the mystical body of Christ, articulated by M. Shawn Copeland. Ryliškytė traced the emergence of the term “solidarity” in the nineteenth century and its appropriation by the papal magisterium of Leo XII in *Rerum Novarum*. She then turned towards an account of kenosis, a term she noted is not used by Copeland, though its meaning is rather prevalent in her rooting of solidarity in the self-giving love of the Son by the Father to the world for the world’s salvation. The paper challenged Christians to consider the way in which a Christic solidarity at once stands with the victims of the violence of oppression *and* refuses to let go of the victimizers, even while insisting upon their conversion.

Michael Lee’s paper, “Crucified People as Judge: Agency for a Social Salvation,” developed Ignacio Ellacuría’s notion of the crucified people, in light of critiques leveled against this particular notion and also theologies of redemptive violence more generally, by such figures as Delores Williams or Daniel Castillo. Drawing from James H. Cone, Lee noted that certain types of suffering (e.g., Martin Luther King’s, which involved his agency) are easier to account for theologically than others (e.g., Emmett Till’s, where he was deprived of meaningful agency). By articulating Ellacuría’s position in light of the influence of Karl Rahner’s Theology of Symbol, Lee opened a pathway for appropriating the notion while also refusing any valorization of the suffering of the crucified people or endorsing their surrogacy. Christ effects salvation by expressing (symbolizing) it, rather than by suffering, *per se*. The eschatological dimension of the eschatological parable of Matthew 25 helps to preserve us from voyeuristic relationships to suffering, or from underwriting such suffering as a redemptive necessity, and instead helps us to understand that Christ’s agenda is not the crucifixion of the crucified people, but rather their resurrection and the doing of justice.

Finally, Paul Schutz offered his paper, “Love of Christ, Heart of Creation: Salvation as Socioecological Flourishing,” which drew connections between the incarnation, ecological theology, and an evolutionary view of the world. In conversation with Karl Rahner’s evolutionary vision, which posits the hypostatic union as the ultimate overcoming of the matter-spirit binary, and the goal of the cosmos’s emergent history, Schutz articulated an account of “deep incarnation” in which the flesh assumed by the Word is not just humanity but the cosmos itself, issuing finally



in a cosmic divinization. Meanwhile, the works of Ignacio Ellacuría build upon this Rahnerian frame, while moving far more insistently into the realm of praxis. We are called not just to contemplate such realities, but to attend to the death-dealing structures of life, transforming them in light of the reign of God. Schutz noted that the ecological crisis provides a new context for such theological methods and commitments. The cry of the earth is now to be heard as the cry of the poor, and Christians must recognize the love of Christ as the heart of creation, and act accordingly.

The questions that followed in the discussion time were fairly evenly distributed among the participants, and covered a range of issues. The themes of recognition and relationship were prevalent. Several participants pushed the presenters further on critiques of redemptive suffering and any notions of necessity tied to unjust suffering (even the “historical necessity” posited by Ignacio Ellacuría). The limits of forgiveness and the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation—the latter of which depends upon the wrongdoer’s conversion—also received considerable attention.

EUGENE R. SCHLESINGER  
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*Santa Clara, California*

## CHURCH/ECUMENISM – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Kathryn Reinhard, Christ Church Bronxville (*in absentia*)  
 Moderator: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Daniel Minch, Ruhr University of Bochum  
 Meg Stapleton Smith, Fordham University

This session was comprised of two papers, with a short question-and-answer period after each and a longer discussion after both papers. Daniel Minch's paper, entitled "The Persistent Problem of Institutional Ecclesiology: Absolutist Theopolitics as a Stumbling Block for Social Salvation" was read by Christopher Cimorelli (National Institute for Newman Studies and Duquesne University) because Daniel was unable to travel to the convention. Meg Stapleton Smith's paper was entitled "Queer Soteriology: The Effects of *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Church." There were approximately ten CTSA members in attendance.

Minch argued that the image of Christ the King in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (especially as explicated in Leo XIII's *Annum Sacrum* and Pius XI's *Ubi Arcano* and *Quas Primas*, which created the new liturgical feast of Christ the King) arose more directly from absolutist concepts of governance that are intimately connected to theopolitical monarchy and the church as a "total institution." The image of Christ the King was, therefore, less meant to deconstruct totalitarian fascism and actually served to ground a kind of Catholic totalitarianism, including both exclusivist and imperialist claims about salvation. He argued further that, although Vatican II and contemporary theology has a plurality of ecclesiologies, the "applied ecclesiology" of the church in canon law remains essentially preconciliar and in line with the vision of Pius XI. It assumes an unequal society in which the laity are dependent upon, and must be saved by, a benevolent clergy, and it restricts the Spirit's sanctifying work to ecclesial borders. Thus, the practical application of such a totalitarian Christology hinders social salvation by confining it to the visible church, while also fostering soteriological and theopolitical individualism and neglecting this-worldly aspects of the gospel message.

Meg Stapleton Smith's paper followed. She began by examining the development of the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, and teachings on the necessity of the church for salvation more broadly, in Cyprian and the Fourth Lateran Council, in the twentieth century (e.g., Leonard Feeney and *Lumen Gentium*), and briefly in the Francis papacy. Stapleton Smith noted a double bind for LGBTQ+ persons: on the one hand, the refusal to sacrifice their own will and sexuality is to "prevent [their own] salvation" (USCCB, *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 12).<sup>1</sup> Yet to "willfully separate" from the Catholic Church is to sacrifice their own salvation as well. For many LGBTQ people, the option is to abandon the church, abandon its vision of salvation, or both. In response, Stapleton Smith offered a queer soteriology that

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (October 1, 1986), § 12, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19861001\\_homosexual-persons\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html).

redefines as “the path of well-being, wholeness, redemption and liberation, toward feeling safe in the here/now and ultimately with God in the hereafter. ... Willfully leaving the church is thus a matter of searching for that well-being, wholeness, and indeed yearning to find salvation outside of the church.” Ultimately, the flourishing of LGBTQ+ persons requires not only a reexamination of sexual ethics but doctrines of salvation as well. Indeed, the question arises—is salvation for LGBTQ Catholics possible *within* the church? (*Intra ecclesiam nulla salus?*)

ELYSE RABY  
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*Santa Clara, California*

## COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Stephanie M. Wong, Villanova University  
 Moderator: Julius-Kei Kato, University of Toronto  
 Presenters: M. Katie Mahowski Mylroie, Boston College  
 Andrew Massena, Loras College  
 Bede Benjamin Bidlack, Saint Anselm College

This Comparative Theology session considered “social salvation” through Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Daoist perspectives on eschatological questions of temporal destiny. The panel stressed that human social and contemplative activities have soteriological effect, changing the timing of the cosmos’s unfolding.

The session began with interwoven presentations by Katie Mylroie and Andrew Massena reflecting on parables from the Christian Gospel of Matthew. Mylroie situated the reflection in the work of Nancy Pineda-Madrid, who has argued that, although suffering is not itself salvific, salvation must be understood in relation to the historical and concrete sufferings of the poor and marginalized. Mylroie highlighted two parables from the Christian New Testament—the tenants (Mt 21:33-46) and the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-46)—that treat socio-religious conduct as having soteriological significance.

Andrew Massena first exegeted these parables alongside Jewish Rabbinic texts, aiming to demonstrate that the messiah’s arrival depends not on the messiah’s initiative but upon communal action. He surveyed scholarly literature on Matthew 25:32 (“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”) to note three interpretations: (1) the classical view, interpreting τὰ ἔθνη (ta ethnē) as Christians judged for how they treat fellow Christians in need; (2) the universalist interpretation of τὰ ἔθνη as all individuals, each judged for how they treat the poor; and (3) the exclusivist reading in which the τὰ ἔθνη are “all pagans,” judged individually for how they treat Christ’s people. However, in Massena’s analysis of rabbinic texts on the messiah, we see that the coming of the messiah is contingent on whether the nations live out Torah. For instance, the Bavli Sanhedrin 96b-99a debates whether the messiah’s coming is dependent on God’s timing or Israel’s righteousness, taking the position that it is on Israel to prove itself ready and worthy. In Sanhedrin 98b, the messiah is depicted as a “leper scholar” tying and untying bandages, waiting for the day that Israel returns to the Torah. These rabbinic passages suggest that salvation is not a *deus ex machina* nor a matter of individual conviction; rather, it is a question of whether and when the collective nation follows Torah so that the messiah might come.

Katie Mylroie then considered the parables through the lens of Hindu Advaita nondualist philosophy to stress the relational dynamics between Christian life and salvation. She drew upon the Hindu scholar Anantand Rambachan’s effort in *A Hindu Theology of Liberation* to recover world-affirming aspects of Advaita, like the ontological unity of all life with divine reality or brahman. In Rambachan’s reading of the tradition, the world is not unreal but is the intentional creativity of brahman. Therefore, *moksha* relates closely to Hindu ideals of caring for our common home like

lokosangraha. Mylroie applied these Hindu intuitions to Christian ethical reflection. She concluded with a call to see our responses to the vulnerable (our exacerbation or alleviation of the sufferings of the hungry, thirsty, naked, lonely, sick, and imprisoned) as part of our relationship with the divine.

Bede Bidlack then presented “Toward a Welcome Eschaton: Thinking Through Universal Salvation as Renewal.” He opened by noting a current cultural zeitgeist of despair especially in religious and scholarly reflection on the ecological crisis. Acknowledging this, he offered the perspective of the medieval Daoist mystic Xiao Yingsou—whose spiritual practice aimed to hasten the universe towards its restoration, not its destruction.

The presentation centered on a diagram and text, the Scripture of Salvation (Duren jing) from the Daoist Numinous Treasure school of fourth century China. Daoist mystics would not only bathe, fast, and seek to live morally upright lives; but they would also chant the Scripture of Salvation and—in the recommendations of Xiao Yingso—engage in a typic of meditation called internal alchemy meant to harmonize the person with the Dao. In Xiaos’ commentary, this is not just a transformation of one’s own body-person, but also a means of speeding up time to bring the universe and all beings more quickly to renewal. Bidlack noted how this reflects more general ancient Chinese conceptions of human cosmographical influence (for instance, the notion that the ruler holds together and re-creates the cosmos through his embodied observance of calendrical days, movement throughout the kingdom, and arrangement of the palace). Medieval Daoists embraced time manipulation as an integral component of Daoist internal alchemy. Bidlack then explained Xiao’s Diagram of the Firing Times, the Great Reversion of the Mirror of the Mind—a circular diagram indicating yin-yang states through eight trigrams, the phases of the moon through twenty-eight dots, and times of alchemical heating and cooling through one hundred dots—meant to aid the practitioner in drawing all beings back to the Dao.

Bidlack concluded by noting how Christians share with Daoist the vision of time as moving forward and encouraged Christians to recover a sense of hope for the future. For the Christian, the end will no doubt be a profound change as the world as we know it gives way to the new heaven and new earth, but it should not be reason to fear or despair.

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## CREATION/ESCHATOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Elizabeth Groppe, University of Dayton  
 Moderator: Daniel Scheid, Duquesne University  
 Presenters: Christopher Hadley, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Kathleen McNutt, Marquette University  
 Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, Seton Hall University

The 2024 Creation/Eschatology session featured three papers that each spoke in a distinct way to the convention theme of social salvation from protological and eschatological perspectives.

Christopher Hadley opened the session with a reflection on “Doxological Contrition, Theosis, and Apokatastasis.” Drawing from Khaled Anatolios’ *Deification Through the Cross*, Hadley described our human sinfulness as a state of disglorification of God. The indispensable first step of return to the vocation to glorify God is contrition, which the sinless Christ enacts out of love on our behalf with lamentation. The Spirit of the risen Christ enables us to undergo a *metanoia* that is a participation in Christ’s doxological contrition and that attends in a particular way to those who suffer innocently. Hadley emphasized that the gift of Christ’s Spirit is cosmic in character, encompassing not only all humanity but all creation, which is groaning for redemption (Romans 8:18-25). Integrating the work of theologians including St. Irenaeus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Bryan Massingale, James Cone, Pope Francis, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and John Thiel, Hadley articulated a social soteriology in which humans act in Christ to restore broken relationships through the gift of the Holy Spirit who desires to “love hell empty.” Hadley concluded with the words of a Byzantine hymn. In eschatological hope of cosmic *apokatastasis*, we can proclaim with hearts, bodies, voices, and deeds: “Behold: through the Cross, joy has come to the world.”

Kathleen McNutt’s “Deep Deification: Ecotheology and Theosis” opened with an account of Niels Gregersen’s theology of “deep incarnation” and its amplification by Elizabeth Johnson. Reflecting on John 1:14 and the theology of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregersen affirms that the flesh that the Word of God assumes includes not only human nature but all the animal, plant, and soil life from which human *sarx* is inextricable. Deep incarnation therefore implies a deep materiality and deep sociality that encompasses all the suffering of the created realm. Johnson contributes to Gregersen’s work a theology of deep resurrection, deep ministry, and deep ethics. McNutt proposed a correlative theology of “deep deification.” She developed this proposal with reflection on St. Maximus the Confessor’s commentary on an Epiphany sermon of Gregory of Nazianzus. The human vocation, according to Maximus, is to mediate the natural fissures of the universe (i.e. the divisions of the intelligible and sensible; heaven and earth; paradise and the inhabited world; male and female; and the created and uncreated.) In our sinfulness, humans have failed our responsibility as mediators. This vocation is restored in Christ, in whom our role of mediating divisions can be renewed through acts of asceticism, virtue, contemplation, concord, and peaceful friendship. The graced mediation of the ontological division of the created and

uncreated is deification. Deep deification, McNutt emphasized, like deep incarnation, includes all of the cosmos in diverse ways appropriate to the distinct character of each creature. This profoundly social soteriology accentuates our responsibility for one another and all creatures and “the graced and present work of knitting back together an unraveling world.”

Axel Marc Oaks Takacs’s “Who Saves Whom? Nishnaabeg Grounded Normativity and *Creatio ex Nihilo* for a Practice of Deep Reciprocity” concluded the session. Takacs invited reflection on a comparison of the culturally dominant White Euro-descended Christian (mis)reading of the Genesis creation accounts with a narrative of human origins shared by many of the Indigenous peoples of the Northeastern Woodlands and Great Lakes regions. Whereas the historically dominant interpretation of Genesis places humankind in a position of separation and domination over animals, plants, and land with a vocation to subdue them, the indigenous narrative “Skywoman Falling” emphasizes humanity’s dependence on other creatures and our need to learn from their wisdom. Today, Catholic social teaching and eco-theology correct historic misreadings of Genesis. And yet, Takacs noted, even these approaches continue to place humanity at the center of creation in ways that can easily reinforce Christian cultural presumptions of hierarchal relationships among creatures. Drawing from Indigenous wisdom as well as the work of St. Bonaventure and Thomas Gallus, Takacs proposed that an etymological understanding of *hier-arche* as sacred (*hieros*) source (*arche*) framed by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* could counter anthropocentrism and remind us that every creature has its source not in us but in the love of God. Or, he queried, is the word “hierarchy” so permeated by its misuse that it is not salvageable in our context? A rich and lively conversation followed this and each of the paper presentations.

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## FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY/METHOD – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: T. Derrick Witherington, Loyola University Chicago  
 Moderator: Jack Pappas, Fordham University  
 Presenter: Sara Hulse Kirby, DeSales University  
 Christopher Cimorelli, National Institute for Newman Studies  
 Joseph Ogbonnaya, Marquette University

This session explored the conference theme of “Social Salvation” from a variety of fundamental theological angles. Our first paper, by Sara Hulse Kirby, was entitled “The Social Aspects of Dogma: Henri de Lubac’s Catholicism in Trinitarian Perspective.” Kirby maintained, along with Joseph Ratzinger, that the understanding of the Trinity as unity-in-distinction is the hermeneutical key to understanding de Lubac’s conception of the church. The paper first generally introduced the context of Catholicism’s composition, then drew attention to the principle of unity-in-distinction de Lubac derives from the Trinitarian distinctions, and finally showed that this principle is the hermeneutical key to de Lubac’s vision of the church. This vision of the church, Kirby observed, corresponds to what social movements of de Lubac’s day (such as Marxism) were trying to achieve but failed to do, namely, establish a healthy and workable balance between collective unity and individual freedom. Catholicism is in its very essence “social” insofar as its self-understanding is grounded in the Trinitarian relations which maintain and express a unity in essence with a diversity of expression. The questions and discussion following Kirby’s paper centered on the distinctive operations of the persons of the Trinity in de Lubac’s oeuvre as well as how de Lubac’s understanding of the church serves as a corrective to contemporary forms of populism.

Our second presenter, Christopher Cimorelli, presented a paper entitled “The Fate of Original Sin in an Age of Social and Ecological Awareness.” When faced with scientific understandings of human origins, Cimorelli argued, before any meaningful discussion of “social salvation” can occur, it is first necessary to articulate a contextually plausible understanding of original sin which avoids either fideism or dismissing this concept altogether. After first introducing the scientific theories which problematize the classical doctrine of original sin and then reminding us of the history of this doctrine, Cimorelli analyzed constructive theological attempts (e.g. Elizabeth Johnson and Loren Haarsma) to find a model of salvation from sin as a “social-ecological” reality, thereby incorporating the insights of scientific theories while also safeguarding the essence of the doctrine of original sin and salvation. This presentation prompted a lively discussion with questions centering on the nature of the church’s initial rejection of the theories of evolution, contemporary expressions of fideism, and how developments in the understanding of sexuality could challenge and/or enhance the church’s understanding of original sin.

Our final paper was presented by Joseph Ogbonnaya and was entitled “Dei Verbum and Contextual Reading of the Bible in Africa.” Ogbonnaya’s paper first introduced early expressions of African biblical hermeneutics (e.g., Origen and Augustine) before then articulating the ecclesiological foundations of biblical



interpretation extrapolated from *Dei Verbum*. These foundations, Ogbonnaya noted, also encourage the development of contextual biblical hermeneutics. For this reason, Ogbonnaya argued that Western theologians trying to understand a contextual reading of the Bible from Africa, need not only to rely on formal-methodological approaches, but also the way the Bible is read and encountered by ordinary Africans. This would serve to further the work of decolonizing the way the Bible is understood in an African context, which continues to rely too heavily on methodological tools imported from the West. This would also enable the Bible to come alive for African Christians in a more existentially meaningful way, which would assist the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in retaining members who are attracted to evangelical churches, which focus on individual believers' experience of the Bible while simultaneously preaching various forms of the "prosperity Gospel." The discussion of Ogbonnaya's paper centered on the role of evangelical churches in promulgating the "prosperity Gospel" and to what extent the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches were aware of and responsive to this issue.

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*Chicago, Illinois*

## HISTORICAL THEOLOGY I – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Robert Trent Pomplun, University of Notre Dame  
 Moderator: Joshua R. Brown, Mount St. Mary's University  
 Presenters: Elissa Cutter, Georgian Court University  
 Andrew Gertner Belfield, St. Bonaventure University

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 her paper, "Salvation and the Port-Royal Community: A Feminist Historical-Theological Reconstruction of the Theology of Mother Angélique Arnauld," Elissa Cutter spoke about the social aspects of salvation found in the writings of Mother Angélique Arnauld (1581-1661). Cutter showed that, for Mother Angélique, the common life of the convent was the locus of where salvation occurred, at least for her audience. Cutter presented her recovery of Mother Angélique as an example of "an explicitly feminist historical-theological methodology" seeking to recover women as historical sources of theological reflection.

Andrew G. Belfield discussed the theme of social salvation found in the early Franciscan tradition in his paper, "'Worthy Acts of Penance' in Early Franciscan Soteriology." Belfield discussed the way that the authors of the *Summa Halensis* (traditionally attributed to Alexander of Hales) reworked St. Anselm's theory of satisfaction around the concept of penitence. These authors understood Christ's contrition at human sin to be the key to satisfaction, and thus salvation is found by imitating and participating in Christ's contrition. This gave central importance to the performance of "worthy acts of penance" that cannot be ultimately done without one's neighbors.

The session was attended by around fifteen people including the presenters and administrative team. The discussion that followed was wide-ranging and very dialogical, which prompted both speakers to clarify points and speak to further research on their respective topics. Among the questions and insights raised, Elissa Cutter was asked how Mother Angélique's emphasis on the virtue of humility ran contrary to important claims of founding feminist theologians that humility is a masculine trait. Cutter admitted it is uncertain how modern feminist theologians today might adapt figures like Mother Angélique into their own projects, but underscored the importance of recovering their voices nonetheless. Belfield entertained several questions on the relationship between the authors of the *Summa Halensis* and other scholastic figures and representatives of the mystical theological tradition such as Julian of Norwich.

Overall, this session sparked a lively conversation and was a wonderful experience for all participants.

JOSHUA R. BROWN  
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 Emmitsburg, Maryland

## HISTORICAL THEOLOGY II – TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Joshua R. Brown, Mount St. Mary's University  
Moderator: Rita George-Tvrtkovic, Benedictine University  
Presenters: John Zaleski, Loyola University Maryland  
Robert Trent Pomplun, University of Notre Dame  
Respondent: Mara Brecht, Loyola University Chicago

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

John Zaleski offered the first paper, entitled “How Long I Forever? Medieval Christian and Islamic Reflections on Universal Salvation.” Zaleski’s paper focused on a comparison of Solomon of Basra’s *The Book of the Bee* alongside writings from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim. Zaleski emphasized that both authors combine theological and grammatical rationale for questioning the notion of “eternal” (*aionios* in Greek) in notions of “eternal punishment.” Zaleski showed how each author in their different contexts used similar strategies and shared similar underlying commitments leading them to attempt to reframe traditional ideas in Christianity and Islam about the fate of the damned.

R. Trent Pomplun delivered his paper on “Debates about Universal Salvation in Catholic Theology from Newman to Tyrrell.” In this paper, Pomplun traced the Roman Catholic contributions to debates about universal salvation held in nineteenth century English theology. The paper traced these English debates from St. John Henry Newman’s responses to Frederic Denison Maruice and Edward Hayes Plumptre through George Tyrrell’s “A Perverted Devotion” and his attack on scholasticism in that essay. Pomplun showed how, on the one hand, this nineteenth century debate inherited much background from the scholastic period, and that these figures were already discussing questions raised even in recent debates on hell and universalism.

The session included a response from a systematic perspective, offered by Mara Brecht. Brecht structured her response by first contrasting the historical projects of the papers with theologies of religious pluralism since Vatican II. She noted that the focus on time and the mystery of time after death was much more central in the figures discussed in the paper than in contemporary (or more recent) theologies, which tend to speculate about the scope of salvation. This led Brecht to critique more recent theologies of religious pluralism. The main critique she offered was that theologies of religious pluralism actually assume a kind of colonialist and racializing substructure such that Christian ideas about universalism are mixed up with race and whiteness, which an historical and comparative method might help assuage. Finally, Brecht concluded by observing the prominence of love and mercy in the two papers.

The session was attended by around nineteen people including the presenters and administrative team. Overall, this session was well-received, and the committee is excited to keep options open for historical-comparative collaboration in the future.

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## LITURGY/SACRAMENTS – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Xavier M. Montecel, Saint Mary's University (San Antonio, TX)  
 Moderator: LaRyssa Herrington, University of Notre Dame  
 Presenters: Megan Effron, University of Notre Dame  
 Susan Reynolds, Emory University  
 Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, University of the Incarnate Word

In order to explore the convention theme of “Social Salvation,” the Liturgy/Sacraments topic session featured three papers.

Megan Effron's paper, titled “Women Preaching in the Spirit: A Dialogue Between Catholics and Pentecostals,” offered an analysis of Pentecostal theology pertinent to women's preaching and articulated three reasons to affirm the practice that might serve Catholic reflection on the matter. First, the outpouring of the Spirit on all people. In the Pentecostal tradition, noted Effron, Spirit baptism is the only credential for public ministry. Effron situated this claim in a historical context, specifically in light of the Azusa Street Revival of the early twentieth century, which modeled at times a “prophetic inclusivism” and endorsement of women's preaching and leadership. She pointed also to the importance for Catholics of revisiting pertinent passages in the Acts of the Apostles. Second, eschatology. In Pentecostal theology, said Effron, a decisive focus on the Second Coming of Christ provides an “authorizing hermeneutic” that relativizes gender differences in approaching the question of women's ministry. Eschatological urgency motivates inclusive and egalitarian practices. Effron warns that early Pentecostalism is not an ideal standard to return to. This tradition was and is still marked by obvious sexism and a sense of women's inferiority. However, the tendency toward egalitarianism where an eschatological sensibility is heightened is worthy of bringing into dialogue with Catholic eucharistic practice. Third, the manifestation of charisms or gifts of the Spirit. Charismatic ecclesiology, observed Effron, embraces a wide range of spiritual gifts, and Pentecostal worship includes charismatic speech acts. Such acts, whose truth is verified by the inspired community, create space for authoritative speaking on the part of women. Effron proposed an emphasis in Catholic theology on this link between charisms and ministry and suggested that Catholics might incorporate something like charismatic testimony into their worship.

Susan Reynolds's paper, titled “The Sacrament of Reconciliation Under the Gaze of the Surveillance State: An Accidental Study of Confession on the US–Mexico Border,” narrated the author's own experience doing field work in South Texas and offered a reflection on two stories of confession. In these stories, a small migrant boy experiences a moment of dignity and privacy during confession in an otherwise invasive and exploitative space, and a young woman with a baby is also enriched by the practice of confession. Reynolds asked what the seal of confession might mean to migrants deprived of the dignity of privacy, living under surveillance. She pointed to the way in which the seal of confession can supersede or circumvent the coercive power of the state, which historically has facilitated ecclesial violence and provided impunity for abusers. In the border context, confession implies a form of resistance to state violence. Reynolds admitted to being caught off guard by this “accidental” theological

finding. She detailed the ways in which migrants at the border are deprived of the dignity of privacy by a complex international surveillance apparatus, which exploits cell phones and digital media to harvest information from migrants—turning their bodies and movements into consumable data. In this setting, argued Reynolds, confession becomes a “fugitive sacrament,” a way to “steal grace” and to claim the right of the individual to honest self-disclosure and confidential speech. She called for deeper attention to privacy, surveillance, and the gaze of the state in sacramental and liturgical theology.

Jakob Karl Rinderknecht’s paper, titled “On Baptism into a Sacramental (and therefore Not-Final) Church,” offers an analysis of what it means to describe the church as sacramental given our present ecclesial context and in light of divergent ecclesiological models. Rinderknecht began by referencing the observation from Susan Wood that baptism is the sacrament of unity but also a sacrament of division, since we are baptized into divided and sinful churches. What then can it mean to speak of the church as sacrament? Rinderknecht approached the issue by examining two distinct models of church. First, he described the “institutional deposit” model which, looking backward, relies on the notion that the church has been founded by Christ and lives on as a perfect society or institution whose role it is to dispense grace as an “almost measurable quantum” through the sacraments for the salvation of souls. In this church, baptism is a mark of personal entrance in a perfect society and sacraments in general are means of grace that apply the benefits of Christ’s passion to citizens awaiting the coming kingdom. There is in this model a hard distinction between “church” and “not church,” a strictly limited acknowledgement of Protestants as full members of the church, and great difficulty articulating the possibility of a sinful church. Second, Rinderknecht described the *viator* model of Lumen Gentium, or the model of the church “on the way” which, looking not only backward but also forward, grounds the sacramental identity of the church in the promise of its eschatological fulfillment. The church functions in a real, though imperfect, way as the sacrament of Christ’s body and coming reign. Baptism is the beginning of one’s participation in a communal pilgrimage, which Rinderknecht associates fruitfully with the synodal process, emphasizing the importance of discernment, openness to reform, and hope.

Discussion of the papers during this year’s topic session was particularly rich and included voices from different theological sub-disciplines and generations. Themes discussed included the limitations of validity in contemporary sacramental theology, the meaning of communal discernment in light of Ignatian and Benedictine resources, the possibility of healing through confession not only from personal sin but also from the wounds of systemic violence or social sin, the state of Catholic pneumatology, and the broadness of sacramental theology looking to the past and to the future.

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## MORAL THEOLOGY I – TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Kate Ward, Marquette University  
 Moderator: Jens Mueller, Notre Dame of Maryland University  
 Presenters: Kathleen Bonnette, Georgetown University  
 Melicia Antonio, University of Notre Dame

This session consisted of two papers. After each paper, the author took questions about her individual paper. To conclude, those gathered discussed the papers in conversation with each other.

In her paper, “‘Saved Together?’ Questioning Social Soteriology in Light of Systemic Oppression,” Kathleen Bonnette reimagined what it means to be “saved together” the in view of systemic oppressions within the ecclesiastical Church. In instances like Pope Alexander VI’s *Inter Caetera*, the oppression of Indigenous children in Catholic schools, and the contemporary marginalization of the LGBTQ+ community Bonnette identified a common problematic social structure. Bonnette contended that a hierarchical structure rooted in a dualism facilitates these instances of oppression. In her analysis, Bonnette rooted this problematic structure in a misunderstanding of the “kingdom of God” that opposes the social soteriology Jesus describes. To purify our understanding of the kingdom of God, Bonnette proposed a “kin-dom imagination.” A kin-dom imagination rooted in the eternal love of God revealed in the incarnate Christ uniquely emphasizes relationality or interconnected wholeness and humility. The ethical standard in a kin-dom imagination rejects domination and prioritizes the health and flourishing of every body in this interrelated community of life, to foster a social order that is an embodiment of God’s love.

Melicia Antonio considered what lessons a pluralist, democratic society could learn from the end of the Franco–Catholic alliance in her paper titled “Replacing Coercion with a Renewed Moral Authority: Lessons from the Spanish Experience.” Antonio focused her analysis on the leadership and moral authority of Cardinal Tarracón. Emerging from a church–state alliance to a democracy, the Spanish bishops needed to reconsider how they exercised moral authority. Having lost their persuasion in Spanish culture, Tarracón led the bishops to prioritize unity among various groups of Catholics through dialogue that restored trust and accommodated diversity. Tarracón himself modeled this shift in his rejection of authoritarian style governing for proposals and invitations. As Antonio stated, this leadership “opened new paths”: it encouraged the ecclesial responsibility of the laity, independence from political power, and dialogue as a means of evangelization. From the Spanish experience, Antonio concluded effective and virtuous moral authority require audacious prudence. In a post-liberal world, Tarracón provides as model for this audacious prudence that resists both integralism and authoritarianism.

The question-and-answer period gave rise to a generative discussion comparing the two papers and relating both to the conference theme. To Bonnette, conference participants explored where Bonnette located the authority of God, how to advocate for systemic care for others, and the relationship of hierarchy and dualism. To Antonio, conference participants asked about the limitations of considering historical examples to glean wisdom in the present moment and if moral authority without force is possible.

Given the interplay of these papers, the discussion that ensued was generative. Those gathered discussed the relationship between the Church and society and drew conclusions based on the repudiation of the doctrine of discovery and democratization of Spain. From the discussion, the panelists vindicated the importance of kin-dom imagination and audacious prudence in exercising various forms of moral leadership and authority but especially in the context of the Church-society relationship.

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## MORAL THEOLOGY II – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: David Kwon, Seattle University  
 Moderator: Cathy Melesky Dante, Marquette University  
 Presenters: Bridget Burke Ravizza, St. Norbert College  
 R. Zachary Karanovich, Mount Mary University

This session of the Moral Theology Topic Session featured two papers provocatively questioning theological understandings of salvation as social in light of exclusionary sinful social practices.

Bridget Burke Ravizza’s paper, “Salvation and the Sacrament of Same-Sex Marriage,” drew on research conducted for her recent book, *The Sacrament of Same-Sex Marriage: An Inclusive Vision for the Catholic Church* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2024.) Building on earlier research on heterosexual married couples conducted with colleague Julie Donovan Massey, Burke Ravizza conducted interviews with twenty-two same-sex couples with meaningful relationships to the Catholic tradition. Responding to the conference theme of social salvation, her paper highlighted “how couples are sacraments *to one another* as well as to their families and communities, as their love overflows in life-giving ways.” She found an image of social salvation in an interviewee’s desire for “wholeness in families,” which the interviewee believed would be a positive outcome of sacramental equality, the recognition of same-sex relationships as sacramental within the Catholic Church. Burke Ravizza joins a host of Catholic and Protestant theologians in calling for such sacramental equality.

A corollary point of Burke Ravizza’s paper was the pastoral, ecclesial and theological necessity of listening to people’s stories. Building on the work of feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker, Burke Ravizza named “epistemic injustice” and “testimonial injustice” as harms done to those whose stories and knowledge are discredited due to bias against aspects of their identity. Such refusal to hear and know also harms the communities who deny such testimony, an insight Burke Ravizza underlined by noting Pope Francis’s stress on dialogue and the synodal process. Hearing the beauty of God’s love as known and experienced in same-sex relationships also means listening to the pain that is caused by magisterial condemnation of such relationships and by the appropriation of this condemnation at the level of parishes and families.

R. Zachary Karanovich’s paper, “Universal Salvation and the Victims of History: Considering Justice, Reconciliation and Forgiveness from the Margins,” wrestled with the problem of hoping for universal salvation while honestly facing the great sinfulness of humanity: “How does one hope for the salvation of those who deny their humanity, assault their dignity, murder their loved ones, or seek the extinction of their community?” Karanovich engaged David Bentley Hart as the representative of the universalist view. For Hart, divine justice always seeks reconciliation and can never strive toward eternal punishment as a goal. The paper’s next section turned to Black theology, where the experience of suffering under unjust social structures led to a realized eschatology which focuses on envisioning God’s justice in history. Karanovich focused on the thought of James Cone, who was not a universalist because



he saw the opportunity for salvation as coming through our work for liberation—or not—in the here and now: God’s justice is “exclusionary justice.”

Karanovich found opportunities to build bridges across the apparent chasm between Hart and Cone, noting that Cone remains open to an eschatology quite different to the present. Furthermore, in not explicitly engaging social structures and the way they may limit agency and therefore complicity, “Cone left room” for a more nuanced understanding of guilt and, Karanovich suggests, damnation. Karanovich concluded with an insight from Nancy Pineda-Madrid, illuminating how the legitimacy of any hope for universal salvation in a world rife with oppression must be paired with an equal commitment to work for social salvation in the here and now. For Karanovich, “social salvation is the bridge” that connects both impulses as both oppressors and the victims of history realize their liberation, their access to God’s salvific desire, is bound up with that of others.

A robust and appreciative discussion followed both papers. Colleagues witnessed to the beauty of the sacramental love present within their own same-sex marriages. These same colleagues and others who spoke on behalf of loved ones affirmed pain related to magisterial dismissal of such relationships. Another frequent theme in engagement with Burke Ravizza’s paper was lessons to be drawn for different-sex relationships, both related to exclusionary experiences (e.g. divorce) or positive experiences of sacramental love. Engagements with Karanovich’s paper included discussion of hell envisioned as purgatory and application to Israel’s attacks on Gaza.

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## PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation and Narrative  
 Convener: Ish Ruiz, Pacific School of Religion  
 Moderator: William A. Clarke, S.J., College of the Holy Cross  
 Presenters: Brett Hoover, Loyola-Marymount University  
 Benjamin Durham, College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University  
 (Minnesota)  
 John Allen, Duquesne University

In response to a call for papers, the three selected proposals addressed the topic of Social Salvation by focusing on the concept of narrative.

Brett Hoover from Loyola Marymount University presented a paper titled “Stories that Don’t Save: Cultural Narratives of Migration as Operative Soteriologies.” In it, he recounted his interactions with various stories of migration during a student service trip. The stories guided his reflection on which forms of stories form a healthy and unhealthy soteriology. Hoover contrasted the soteriology’s told by the members of migrant communities with those espoused by certain anti-immigrant political rhetoric in the US. The latter “host” communities’ narratives discursively create a reality for migrants whereby their search for a better life automatically stratifies society, placing them as inferior to the host community. While immigrant communities may sometimes be aware of the racist and hegemonic environment into which they are venturing, and still embark on the journey out of need for survival, they nonetheless represent a potential toward liberatory soteriology through narratives grounded in solidarity and community. Hoover encourages theologians to analyze and promote such community-based soteriologies while critically examining and avoiding soteriologies that “don’t save.”

Benjamin Durham of the College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University, in his paper titled “Country Heaven: Toward a Rural Aesthetic of Salvation,” offered a theological analysis of the “rural aesthetics” of rural communities in the US, especially in light of right-wing voting patterns presumably influenced by Christian theology. Durham offered an extensive account of his ethnographic research, conducted over two summers in rural Minnesota, to argue that the Christian liturgy has created a transformational response to a rural aesthetic that has yielded a positive sense of solidarity and community among neighbors while slowly disentangling and criticizing some of the problematic racist, heteronormative, patriarchal, and xenophobic hegemony often seen in these rural communities. In the liturgy of rural America, Durham sees the potential for a culturally transformative impact on the rural culture of the US. The result is a narrative account of social salvation that can fuel Christian hope and correct some of the social sins that hinder the flourishing of rural America.

John Allen of Duquesne University presented a paper, titled “Narrating the Sacred: ‘Thin Places’ of Recovery Spirituality and Ethics,” where he described the power of narrative in the journey of addiction recovery. Allen discussed the transformation that occurs in “thin places” (that is, locations where the “higher power” appears closer, clearer, or more accessible to us in the natural world) where the telling and re-telling of one’s recovery journey (particularly through the fifth step of making a fearless moral

inventory of one's life) constitutes a particular identity that speaks to personal salvation. He argues that theologians could pay close attention to the interplay of place and mysticism in the narrative-ridden journey of addiction recovery to learn how such narrative-based approaches can produce liberatory realities for people through an ethical and theological lens. Such an incarnational approach yields new realities and teaches us important lessons.

The ensuing discussion critically examined the role of narrative, aesthetics, and control in the process of social salvation. One participant compared the process of narrative in Hoover's account of migrant narrations to the narrative process in the quest for asylum. She noted that the forced repetition refugees go through as they request asylum reinforces the damaging soteriology whereby one needs to justify their need for "a better life" and repeatedly relive the trauma of their previous community. Another participant reflected on the articulation of aesthetic narratives by pointing out that the challenge to our construction of "beauty" is not the construction of "ugly" but rather the "glamour" that points out to what "ugly" lacks. Finally, another line of questioning discussed how the narrative process that exists in many 12 step communities is restrictive, repetitive, and constraining – and therefore potentially hurtful – to some folks in recovery and that there needs to be more nuance to how we examine and harness the wisdom of this narrative-based approach to flourishing.

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## SPIRITUALITY – TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: Migrant Spirituality and Social Salvation  
 Convener: Axel M. Oaks Takacs, Seton Hall University  
 Moderator: Michael Rubbelke, Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary  
 Presenters: Rafael Luévano, Chapman University  
 Dorris Van Gaal, Calvert Hall College High School  
 Respondent: Leo Guardado, Fordham University

The Spirituality Topic Session featured two papers and a response on the theme of migrant spirituality in the context of the convention theme, “Social Salvation.”

Rafael Luévano presented a contemplative reflection on the migrant caravans journeying from south of the US border to North America. In his “Hope and the Migrant Spiritual Pilgrimage: Accompanied by a Photographic Hymn of Praise to Migrants,” Luévano provided recent history and data regarding the caravans. For the last twenty years, Luévano has been interviewing and photo-documenting migrants who have made the journey north to the US–Mexico border and beyond. In reflecting on his conversations theologically, he notes the power of hope, the “manifestation of the middle theological virtue,” as the animating and communal force driving and sustaining migrants in their journeys. In migrant spirituality, hope is at once a driving force to live, the immediacy to act, a call from God, a communal experience and expression, and the interior transformation of “constant becoming.” This hope is framed through the religious practice of pilgrimage. His presentation was accompanied by stunning photos he has collected over the last two decades.

Dorris Van Gaal explored the role storytelling plays in spiritual development through the lens of first-generation African migrants to the US. Her paper, “A Call to Social Transformation: A Reflection on Spiritual Storytelling among African Migrants to the USA,” drew from her first-hand interviews with African migrants. To develop the latent spirituality within both the stories and the migrant experiences, she analyzed them through John of the Cross’ poem, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, along with his auto-commentary. Her presentation explored the transformation of faith and identity that took place between the departure and arrival of migrants. In applying the Carmelite friar’s mystical theology to the first-hand migrant stories, Van Gaal described the spiritual import of vulnerability, spiritual humility, and God’s transformative agency that was the undercurrent of the migrant stories. In brief, their “vulner-ability” (capable of being “wounded,” from *vulnus*) becomes “cope-ability.” Their faith, hope, and love enables them to journey through spiritual descent (departure) to spiritual ascent (ongoing arrival and settlement). Van Gaal then shared various stories that demonstrate not only this spiritual framing but also how storytelling transforms and sustains migrants and their communities by giving meaning to their otherwise harrowing experiences. This was all related to social salvation: when we become aware of the “spiritual capital” we possess, we are given the “freedom of spirit” not merely to survive and cope, but to flourish and boldly call and work for social transformation, a “subversive element of social salvation.”

Leo Guardado responded both through his professional expertise in mystical theology and spirituality and through his personal experience as a migrant. Noting that

mystical theologies conceptualize God as ineffable mystery toward which wayfarers perpetually journey (drawing on the case of Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*), there is no stable end to one's spiritual growth. This is reflected in the constant becoming of migrants's journeys. Even when migration is forced, one is compelled through an agential desire for freedom. While many migrants may be fleeing a lack of freedom (Egypt), they do not skip directly to the promised land but must survive, through God and the community, many hardships (the wilderness). This presents the paradox of spiritual journeys: hope is the surrender of the self to God and to the sustaining community when you recognize you are no longer in control of the journey. Like Gregory of Nyssa, you are always progressing and never arriving. The goal therefore is not attaining absolute stability—in God, in society, in community—but becoming “a friend of God.”

The discussions and questions at the end of each paper and then at the end Guardado's response were intellectually and affectively stimulating. Numerous members of the audience had either experienced forced migration themselves or had worked with migrant communities—in addition to being scholars of spiritualities and mystical theologies. For example, one noted the power of lament in social transformation, connecting it with how James Cone speaks of African American spirituals and the Blues. Another queried the liturgical setting of the storytelling. Finally, one drew from their own experience of forced migration to note how the desire to survive prompts a surrender to faith, which sustains the migrant in the worst situations.

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## THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Kevin Vaughan, The College of St. Scholastica  
 Moderator: Megan Loumagne Ulishney, Boston College  
 Presenters: Robert G. Elliot, Providence College  
 Joyce Ann Konigsburg, DePaul University  
 Jordan Joseph Wales, Hillsdale College

This session was comprised of three twenty-minute paper presentations, each of which was followed by its own question and answer period.

In his paper, “Evolutionary Anthropology, Self-Legislation, and Original Sin,” Robert G. Elliot offered an evolutionarily-informed account of the Catholic doctrine of original sin rooted in developmental and comparative psychology. Elliot argued that the possibility for human sinfulness—both as a species and as individuals—depends on the prior emergence of a dynamic capacity for reflection on matters of fact, truth, and value. Drawing especially on the work of Michael Tomasello, Elliot further explicated how this capacity is itself dependent on multiple prior emergences for shared intentionality, joint attention, joint agency, etc. In this light, sin emerges not from a prior state of paradisaical perfection, but rather from an eminently social human community constituted by an admixture of objective goods and evils but which is not itself capable of sin until the subsequent emergence of reflexivity. As such, the meaning of “the Fall” must refer not primarily to an historical event, but rather to humanity’s falling short either of God’s original intentions for human perfection, or of our own emergent capacity for justice, or both. In response to a question regarding how this new understanding stands in relation to the Council of Trent’s definitive teaching on original sin, Elliot argued that we must understand the transmission of original sin not only in genetic and generative terms according to the sexual act, but also in propagative terms through the socialization of children in whom the capacity for reflection is still forming.

In her paper, “Artificial General Intelligence: Proponent or Opponent of Social Salvation?” Joyce Ann Konigsburg distinguished between artificial narrow intelligence (ANI), artificial general intelligence (AGI), and the yet-unrealized possibility of a technological singularity in the form of artificial super intelligence (ASI). Then, she raised a broad range of questions concerning, not only the potential of AI as a tool to aid humans in cooperating with the work of social salvation, but also to generate a genuinely new frontier of human encounter with alterity. Citing a range of contemporary philosophers, theologians, and psychologists, Konigsburg argued that our relational understanding of human persons and of our creation in the image of the Trinitarian God requires us to be open to the possibility of new relationships with these new forms of intelligence. In the question-and-answer period, John Slattery raised a question about how we ought to address the tendency of contemporary AI to not only reproduce but even intensify the various forms of bias present in its creators and in the forms of data which they consume through their “learning” process. Stephen Okey suggested that one fruitful approach to some of these questions might be to distinguish

the different meanings of personhood in relation to human beings and various forms of artificial intelligence, which provided a helpful segue into the final paper.

Jordan Joseph Wales's paper, entitled "Social Salvation Among Apparent Persons: Can We Live Our Personhood while Owning Sociable AI?" challenged the assignation of personhood to AI and considered how human encounters with the apparent personhood of AI might shape our own interpersonal subjectivity with other humans. In the first section, Wales explained how the neural networks of contemporary AI are continuously retuned in order to meet the desires and expectations of its users. As such, AI represents merely an appearance of subjectivity rather than a genuine instance of conscious and free intelligence. In the second section, he then charted the developmental history of the term "person" across Greek drama, philosophy, and Christian theology. Contrary to the rich meaning of personhood in relation both to human and divine persons that entails the capacity for self-gift and other-receiving, Wales argued that the attribution of personhood to AI reverts back to the earlier, narrower sense of *dramatis persona* / *prosopon* and thus is closer to the modern behaviorist reduction of human psychology and subjectivity than to a fully realized (theological) understanding of person. In the third section, Wales warned that, because AI presents the outward appearance of personhood but is created merely to fulfill human desires, human encounters with AI can train us to use other people and to recognize only their instrumental value. Then, in the final section, he suggested how human encounters with AI might be more helpfully framed by both (1) a recognition of their usefulness specifically as tools for achieving concrete human goods and (2) a conscious and prayerful habituation of a "second empathetic moment" in which our spontaneous sense of real encounter with the apparent personhood of an AI is then redirected towards all the unknown and invisible persons who have been obscured by the technology.

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ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION  
(JOINT SESSION WITH THE LATINX THEOLOGY CONSULTATION  
AND THE BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY CONSULTATION)

Topic: Reclaiming our Roots  
 Convener: Stephanie M. Wong, Villanova University  
 Moderator: Craig A. Ford, Jr., St. Norbert College  
 Presenters: Cecilia Titizano, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 David de la Fuente, Fordham University  
 LaRyssa Herrington, University of Notre Dame

This joint panel, entitled “Reclaiming our Roots,” examined how under-recognized communities can draw upon the lived religious experience and wisdom of their peoples, especially when the retrieval of that heritage is complicated by cultural-linguistic translation and fraught with the fracturing of memory itself in histories of oppression and dispossession.

First, Cecilia Titizano explored how Quechua/Aymara relational epistemologies challenge Catholic Social Thought. Unlike Catholic moral theology, which assumes that humans alone bear God’s image, Andean peoples view all things as alive and aware through the same *Ajayu* or spirit. Aymara and Quechua scholars emphasize holistic cognitive and embodied relationality, where living well means attuning to sacred wisdom sustaining and creating *Pacha* (all that is). This cosmology impacts epistemology, where knowledge is best understood as a mode of thinking-feeling or *sentipien*. Ethnographers, inspired by Peruvian anthropologist Guillermo Salas Carreno, seek a worldview that transcends Western metaphysics and scientific methods, recognizing all things’ interconnected existence. For Titizano, the Andean moral cosmos sees *Pacha* as the first enfleshment of the Trine God, revealing multiplicity and relationality.

Second, David de la Fuente presented “Saving Kapwa: Investigating Decolonial Pneumatology Among Filipino-American Catholic Charismatics.” He grounded his reflection in his experience of the Filipino Catholic Charismatic community *Bukas Loob sa Diyos* (Open to the Spirit of God; BLD) in Newark. For members of the BLD network, charismatic Catholicism 1) offers a way of being proud, rather than ashamed, of Filipino identity in the wake of Spanish and American colonialism, and 2) makes legible decolonial healing as a social salvation in the Spirit. In explaining this, de la Fuente highlighted the Filipino indigenous value of *kapwa*, which refers to a shared inner-self or intersubjectivity. Charismatic communities can facilitate this re-embrace of the Filipino self, forging a “sacred self” that intensifies a sense of both spiritual healing and pride in being Filipino. Finally, de la Fuente addressed how healing can serve a liberative role especially in communities scarred deeply by colonial exploitation and damaged self-image. For example, in BDL, there is a distinct focus on “renewing families.” Filipino American charismatics define family widely—not parsing some relatives as close and blood-related versus others as distant or lesser-related. While this is often couched in a conservative theological vision, De La Fuente argued that this restoration of Filipino kinship practices functions as a decolonial resistance to Western colonial conceptions of the family unit.



Lastly, LaRyssa Herrington presented her dissertation research on Marian popular piety in the Africana diaspora. She argued that the existential rupture of forced diaspora and enslavement necessitated the creation of Black religion and identity. As Fred Moten and others have pointed out, traditional forms of representation in written language and historiography have failed to capture this rupture, and scholars must attend to the performative character of African diaspora lived religion. As an example of Africana Marian popular piety, Herrington relayed a narrative of the 1739 Stono Rebellion in South Carolina, an account given by the great-great-grandson of the uprising's leader, Cato. The narrative weaved in and out of memory, demonstrating the dynamics of what Johann Baptist Metz calls "corporate memory" and exemplifying how marginal movements performatively communicate dangerous memories to interrupt the complacency of the mainstream.

During the question-and-answer period, the audience expressed appreciation for this panel interrogating the challenges of "reclaiming our roots" when the roots may be torn asunder, inaccessible, or re-planted. Bryan Massingale asked whether M. Shawn Copeland's discussions of solidarity might be useful in Herrington's work, and how the Filipino American psychologist community might regard the charismatic Catholicism discussed by David De La Fuente. Andrew Prevot asked the entire panel, especially Cecilia Titizano, about language and translation, since in all three cases the research involved decisions about whether and how to translate indigenous terms in the modern English-speaking academy. The panelists were thoughtful and articulate in engaging all these questions.

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*Villanova, Pennsylvania*

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR – CONSULTATION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Charles A. Gillespie, Sacred Heart University (Connecticut)  
 Moderator: Catherine Yanko, Catholic University of America  
 Presenters: Brian Bajzek, Molloy University  
 Henry Shea, S.J., Boston College  
 Kristen Drahos, Baylor University

The organizing team took the theme “social salvation” as an invitation to scholarly collaboration in Balthasar’s expansive style. The Consultation very successfully experimented in connecting the Balthasar Breakfast to the paper session. At breakfast, we read and discussed a scene from Shakespeare in light of Balthasar’s ideas on drama, guilt, salvation, and the task of theology. In the session, papers opened further conversation between Balthasar, the social, and those gathered thanks to Catherine Yanko’s astute work as moderator.

Brian Bajzek opened the panel with a paper titled “Form, Face, and Otherness: Cruciform Church as ‘Event of Intersubjectivity’.” Bajzek pointed attention toward those whom the church renders “other” and the pain of religious pronouncements about their identity. Bajzek continued the fruitful scholarly dialogue between the thought of Balthasar and Bernard Lonergan. The paper focused particularly on Joseph Komonchak’s critique of Balthasar’s ecclesiology as one that marks the church a suprapersonal entity removed and aloof from the lives of sinful human beings. Komonchak suggests an alternative articulation: church as “event of intersubjectivity.” For Bajzek, Balthasar’s writings on *Gestalt*, Christ, the cross, and even the church present nuanced approaches to intersubjectivity. Drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Lonergan, Bajzek demonstrated harmonies between Balthasar’s understanding of human intersubjectivity with and in Christ and the church’s need to cooperate with and conform to the drama of Christ’s mission. “Each encounter with the face of the other leads me to recognize that avoiding help of the other makes me complicit in their pain.” Balthasar’s ecclesiology, in Bajzek’s view, thus calls for a cruciform church as an ongoing event of intersubjectivity.

Henry Shea continued the panel with a paper titled “Balthasar, Social Salvation, and Vatican II.” Looking at Balthasar’s commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes*, Shea highlighted one of Balthasar’s chief concerns: the ways in which the distinction between the church and the world increasingly blur after the council. Mass culture may also become destructive of the person. Across writings, Balthasar worries, at times apocalyptically, about Christians adapting and adopting “worldly” strategies and political powers, especially in *Gaudium et Spes*. For Balthasar, too much focus on social issues risks a secular messianism rather than longing for the liberation that can come only by and through Christ; everything else, including work for greater political and economic freedom, must be and is entirely relative. Shea’s paper crafted an elegant analysis of some of the tensions within Balthasar’s treatment of *Gaudium et Spes* and Balthasar’s wider thought. Just as there is no pure nature apart from grace, there can be no human nature apart from sociality. Shea remains concerned that “Balthasar never enables the ‘self-denying and obedient attitude’ of kenotic love to be rendered social

such that it may grow within and transform the broadly socioeconomic and political aspects of life.” Aiming to play the gadfly and push Balthasar’s thought in new directions, the paper uplifted St. Oscar Romero who was martyred in the midst of a celebration of the Eucharist and shortly after reading a selection from *Gaudium et Spes*.

In the session’s final paper, Kristen Drahos pointed attention towards two literary engagements with “The (Im)Possibility of Social Salvation in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Gabriel García Márquez.” Drahos looked to Balthasar’s work on the Spanish baroque drama of Calderón de la Barca in the first volume of *Theo-Drama*, particularly Calderón’s *Life is a Dream*, and the twentieth-century novel *Autumn of the Patriarch* by Gabriel García Márquez. Both works of fiction call into question the reality of social worlds and ask to what end is social salvation. Drahos disclosed the baroque vision of social salvation in Calderón where transcendent goodness only emerges in the action of the play. Márquez offers a vivid contrast in the horror of dictatorship by a general that never, really, dies in a world where reality is subject to the general’s command. Both Márquez and Calderón reject tragic dramatic trajectories and both suggest the importance of love in drama’s unfolding. Drahos offered these contrasting images of social salvation as an opening for Balthasar’s theological commentary, expanding his use of forgiveness as a dramatic baroque form of love to address social concerns raised by Márquez. Literature maintains a flexibility for eschatological thinking that informs not only social living but also theological creativity.

The session included ample time for conversation about the papers and whether to consider Balthasar a pessimist, the precise nature of “the social,” Balthasar’s contexts, the intelligibility of the historical Christ-form, and the fact that, for Balthasar, salvation is missional. A final word praises the panelists’ forbearance during interruptions caused by military flyovers. Mostly a nuisance, the jets did produce moments of laughter when phrases like “inbreaking reality within our world” or “transforming fire of God” were punctuated by an overwhelming roar. As one panelist said, “I feel like Elijah.”

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BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION  
(JOINT SESSION WITH THE ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGY  
CONSULTATION AND LATINX THEOLOGY CONSULTATION)

Topic: Sound, Spirituality, and Social Salvation  
 Convener: Craig A. Ford, Jr., St. Norbert College  
 Moderator: Stephanie M. Wong, Villanova University  
 Presenters: Min-Ah Cho, Georgetown University  
 Rufus Burnett, Jr., Fordham University  
 Antonio Eduardo Alonso, Emory University

Hosting a joint consultation with the Latinx Theology Consultation and the Asian and Asian American Theology Consultation, the Black Catholic Theology Consultation's session featured three papers, one drawn from each of the participating consultations, all focusing on the relevance of sound in conceiving of social salvation.

The first paper, titled "Embracing Silence: Sharing Struggles and Fostering Transformation for Women of Color," was presented by Min-Ah Cho. Exploring the theological dimensions of silence for racial and linguistic minorities, Cho argued for a reevaluation of silence—not construed, as might typically be the case, as a sign of acquiescence, but rather as a way of providing space for fostering new contemplative connections with one another within the context of resisting oppression. Cho distinguished several forms of silence for the purpose, including "defiant silence" (silence in order to protect agency) and "loud silence" (silence that comes out of the unspeakable depths of suffering). Together, Cho argued, these forms of silence and others constitute pathways of solidarity on the road to social salvation by creating space for mutual recognition, for curiosity, for the appreciation for differences, for the willingness to embrace ambiguity, and for the ability to be attentive to suffering without intention to react or instruct.

Rufus Burnett Jr., presented the second paper, "Blues Notes on Flesh: A Blues Reading of Afro-Christian Soteriological Imaginings of Flesh." Drawing inspiration from a story involving a mother (Mary Johnson) and her son (Little Robert) in which the mother's spirit is drawn heavenward from the unlikely source of her son's blues-playing "devil's instrument," Burnett invites us to reimagine the theological significance of the blues within the Black experience. As an artform, the blues commemorated the secular dimensions of life that chronicled the "failure of Black people to live out the dimensions of their emancipation," precisely because of their continued vulnerability to racism—both structural and otherwise—despite the end of slavery. Constituted therefore as a "blues people," Black people have historically been denied the opportunity to know God "in the flesh." Nevertheless, Burnett argues, the blues demonstrate the possibility of alternative flourishing "in the flesh." Just as the blues note in a musical key is "technically wrong, but sonically pleasing," Black existence in the United States exists as a counterhegemonic epistemic force possessing the potential to incarnate hope in an oppressive world where the flourishing of a Blues people is also discursively ruled out.

The last paper, "*Mi Luz y mi Salvación: Singing as Salvific Practice in Latine Communities*," presented by Antonio Alonso focused on the *corito* as a privileged

source of theology for Latine Catholics. Originally embraced by Pentecostal communities as a way to return popular music to sacred significance, the *corito* was later celebrated in Latine Catholic communities as a way to implement the reform of the Second Vatican Council. By the 1970s they began to gain widespread use in Roman Catholic worship. Theologically, *coritos* reflect the social nature of salvation by being communal affirmations of the entire human lifespan, encompassing celebrations from birth to death. They are therefore deeply incarnational and relational. The artform itself also invites collaboration and participation, making *coritos* malleable to ritual action as well. Lastly their widespread use in liturgy provides evidence of a common core of spiritual resources by which different Latine communities fight against ongoing oppression in the wider world.

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*De Pere, Wisconsin*

## CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM – CONSULTATION

Topic: Antisemitism, Supersessionism, and Anti-Black Racism  
Convener: Andrew Massena, Loras College  
Moderator: Carol Ann Martinelli, Independent Scholar  
Presenters: Magda Teter, Fordham University  
Respondent: Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary

With the recent rise of antisemitism and anti-black racism, this year's Christianity and Judaism Consultation focused on the connection between these two phenomena.

Magda Teter, in a presentation titled "Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism," argued that antisemitism and anti-Black racism derive from the same source: late antique Christian supersessionism. Teter began by observing that the Catholic Church, during and after Vatican II, dealt with antisemitism and racism as separate issues. This has been a major oversight, Teter argued. For Teter, there exists strikingly similar attitudes toward Jews and Black Americans, despite drastically different historical experiences. Teter provided numerous examples, some of which include age-old views that both Jews and Black Americans are cursed by God, that both are made inferior by God, and that both would wield dangerous power if given the opportunity. These parallel attitudes are not coincidental, Teter argued, but indicative of a common origin in Christian supersessionism.

Teter then argued that the study of racism focuses on power and politics, while the study of antisemitism only focuses on theology. Regarding the latter, Teter argued, this is a mistake that needs correction. Teter traced the roots of supersessionism to Paul, who contrasted Judaism with Christianity, depicting the former as inferior. Augustine reinterpreted Paul in a new political context, where Christianity was no longer a nascent religion, but the religion of the Roman Empire. Soon, Jews were singled out in the Empire with specific legislation, placing them in a subordinate position. The subjugation of Jews through law continued into the medieval period and onward. For example, Pope Innocent III in 1205 stated that Jews were consigned to perpetual servitude, because they crucified Christ.

As for anti-Black racism, Teter pinpointed its genesis to the colonial period. By the eighteenth century, Africa was racialized as black, and Europe was depicted as a triumphant queen. This posture of white (Christian) supremacy, Teter argued, derived from Christian supersessionism, the church's long-held sense of superiority over Jews and Judaism. Europe and the United States deliberated over whether their understanding of equality should include Jews and Black Americans, respectively. As soon as both groups were granted citizenship, there was major backlash, as both groups were seen as perpetually inferior. Teter was clear that Jewish and Black experiences of subjugation were never equivalent, but that the way Christians thought about Jews theologically, beginning in the New Testament period, created a habit of thinking that influenced the way white people thought about non-westerners during and after the colonial period.

Mary Boys offered a response to Teter's presentation, stating that Teter's work is painfully pertinent to our present situation and a stringent assessment of supersessionism. Boys asked whether supersessionism is essential to Christian identity.

To answer this, she traced the evolution of Jesus' movement, from a small band of Jewish followers in the 30's, to a movement that debated the inclusion of Gentiles in the 60's, to a community dominated by Gentiles in the second century. During the second and third centuries, followers of Jesus wrestled with how to define their Christian identity apart from Judaism. The question was extremely complex, as their founder was a Jew and their tradition largely derived from Judaism. Boys stated that the answers the church inherited are of the literary elite, who argued that the Jews crucified Jesus, the Jews misunderstood the prophets, and the Law was abolished. These views gave birth to theological antisemitism in the fourth century.

Supersessionism provided Christians a way to distinguish themselves from Judaism. Considering Christianity's circumstances in late antiquity, Boys proposed, the logic of supersessionism makes sense. It perhaps was impossible for Christians at the time to find a better way of nuancing their identity apart from Judaism. The result, however, has led to a number of problems, including what Teter identified in her presentation. The 2015 document "The Gifts and Call of God are Irrevocable" suggests supersessionism has died, but Boys argued it is still alive and well, and that Catholics have not fully recognized how much it has invaded Catholic thinking. There is still much work to be done. Boys asked how we can explain our differences without denigrating others. Finally, Boys noted that one of the Catholic Church's emphases has been that it possesses the one true faith. Because church authorities were so eager to articulate correct belief, this effort gave way to a sense of superiority. This, Boys believed, does not overturn Teter's argument, but adds another layer.

After Boys' response, Teter reemphasized that Christian theologians over the last sixty years, who have grappled with antisemitism and supersessionism, have left out issues of power in their analyses. If we recognize that such issues are embedded in Christian antisemitism and supersessionism, it will help us see why the domination of non-white people and enslavement happens.

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LATINX THEOLOGY– CONSULTATION  
(JOINT SESSION WITH THE BLACK CATHOLIC  
THEOLOGY CONSULTATION AND THE ASIAN AND  
ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGY CONSULTATION)

Topic: Social Salvation and Institutional Hospitality  
 Convener: Ish Ruiz, Pacific School of Religion  
 Moderator: Stephanie Wong, Villanova University  
 Presenters: Jaisy Joseph, Villanova University  
 SimonMary Asease Aihokai, University of Portland  
 Jeremy V. Cruz, Saint John’s University (New York)

This year, the Latinx Theology Consultation joined the Asian/Asian American Consultation and the Black Catholic Theology Consultation to produce a joint call for proposals in order to explore the topic of Social Salvation by drawing from the traditions and wisdoms of our respective groups. In response to our call to proposals, we received an excellent paper from Jaisy Joseph from Villanova University on the topic of “interstitial” epistemology and the church that drew from the wisdom of these three groups. To further conversations on how the church can take better advantage of the “liminal” space Joseph alludes to, we invited SimonMary Asease Aihokai from the University of Portland to offer a paper on institutional hospitality. Since the joint consultation team only received one paper from the Latinx tradition and assigned that paper to another session (out of the three joint sessions), we searched for a theologian for this session who could tie in the concepts of an interstitial Church and institutional hospitality to welcome those marginalized at/by CTSA and were fortunate to have Jeremy Cruz from Saint John’s University respond to Aihokai and Joseph from this vantage point.

Jaisy Joseph’s paper, titled “Church as Leaven and Pilgrim: Interstitial Epistemologies for an Interstitial Church,” addresses the historical and cultural amnesia faced by US Catholics who forget what it felt to be “the other” prior to President Kennedy’s election. In response, she synthesizes three key perspectives from various racial/ethical traditions represented in our joint consultation: Jung Young Lee’s conception of the divided self and the split consciousness, Virgilio Elizondo’s theology of *mestizaje*, and W. E. B. Dubois’s idea of double consciousness—along with various other prominent interlocutors such as Roberto Goizueta and M. Shawn Copeland. In her synthesis, Joseph describes how a liminal space of hurt and split consciousness, while painful, contains the potential for healing. Justice and inclusivity—or the notion of “kin-dom”—according to Joseph, are not predicated upon superficial platitudes of inclusivity but rather a willingness to engage and enter this interstitial wound that straddles past and present. This produces what she refers to as a mystical political orthopraxis that effects such healing and represents the hopeful promise of resurrection/salvation.

SimonMary Asease Aihokay’s paper, titled “‘Who Do You Say that I Am?’: Making a Case for Existential Inclusiveness at the Crossroads of Liberation, Institutionality, and Hospitality,” proposed a vision for unconditional hospitality that challenges notions of empire. Aihokai develops this anticolonial theology by



constructing an eschatological notion of forgiveness. This eschaton is currently present as history develops but also contains vestiges of futurity. Forgiveness, from an eschatological standpoint, upends Empire because the latter relies on the reciprocation of violence or evil to operate. Citing Levinas, Aihokai proposes a challenge to oppression through a surplus of social grace. Considering the institutional nature of our society and the constant “otherization” of those we subjectively construct as “other,” such social grace is best embodied in the concept of unconditional hospitality—which Aihokai contrasts from the conditional hospitality of *familia* where people can only enjoy a sense of “belonging” if they adhere to the rules. For Aihokai, true challenge to the empire of exclusion requires an adoption of forgiveness and a synthesis of forgiveness with unconditional hospitality where the other, though they may offend or hurt us, continues to receive an offer of welcome. This creates a transcultural reality for society that transgresses the talk of empire and creates a sense of belonging in our shared spaces.

In response to the papers, Jeremy Cruz raised several important critiques to Joseph about the use of *mestizaje* and the eschatological vision of this “interstitial” church in light of the historical violence that yielded *mestizaje* and other forms of double consciousness. Joseph acknowledged the troubled past but argued that the concept, as an epistemological avenue, responds to the contemporary realities of the marginalized and continues to offer potential for salvation. In response to Aihokai, Cruz encouraged him to provide concrete examples of how this unconditional hospitality—which Aihokai did—and challenged Aihokai to better define his vision by grounding it in the field of either eschatology or ethics: the former presents a futuristic vision while the latter prescribes a set of principles to guide personal and socio-political action. After several attendees similarly raised questions about the desirability and applicability of such an unconditional hospitality, Aihokai clarified that the hospitality of which he dreams is semi-permeable and will have some pragmatic considerations on the journey toward unconditionality. Finally, Cruz asked some important reflective questions about welcome at CTSA. Our time concluded with a business meeting for the Latinx Theology Consultation.

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## LONERGAN – CONSULTATION

Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Jennifer Sanders, Saint Louis University  
 Moderator: Cecille Medina-Maldonado, Marquette University  
 Presenters: Zane Chu, Saint Mary's College of California  
 David Rohrer Budiash, *Review for Religious*  
 Giadio De Biasio, Lonergan Institute, Boston College

This session was comprised of three papers, approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes each. The session concluded with a long group conversation, lasting roughly thirty minutes.

In his paper, “‘By a More Difficult Good’: The Social and Practical Significance of the Law of the Cross,” Zane Chu challenged the language of Bernard Lonergan’s “Law of the Cross” in light of a controversial comment made in response to the Canadian Residential Schools crisis. Chu takes issue with the terms “converting” or “transforming” such evils into good because these terms can make light of the suffering and evil. In order to suggest more pastorally sensitive language and the social implications of the language we use about evil and suffering, Chu put Lonergan’s *The Redemption* in dialogue with Paul Ricœur’s reflections on evil. Ricœur argues that there is no solution to evil on the level of thought, and that instead, we must nourish lament. This dialogue between Lonergan and Ricœur helped Chu suggest the language of “good in spite of evil.” Chu concluded his presentation by addressing the connection between religious conversion and the Law of the Cross. Ultimately, Chu argued that rather than phrase “transform evil into good,” a response more sensitive to those who have suffered grave evil and more capable of advancing social salvation would be “resisting/overcoming evil” and “good in spite of evil.” According to Chu, the latter formulations more properly emphasize what it is at the heart of the Law of the Cross, namely the doing of good in response to evil.

In his paper, “Three Contemporary Challenges to the Ecclesial Good of Order,” David Rohrer Budiash argued that Lonergan introduced a new idea into ecclesiology, namely, “the good of order,” which includes the importance of interpersonal relations as constitutive of any human good of order. According to Rohrer Budiash, “Lonergan succinctly referred to the church as a ‘good of order’ whose proper functional purpose is to achieve a flow of people into heaven.” After considering the development of Lonergan’s thought on “the good of order,” Rohrer Budiash put Lonergan’s thought in dialogue with *Lumen Gentium* and the idea that the church is both holy and in need of being purified. He then used the good of order as a heuristic to examine three challenges the church faces: the clergy sexual abuse crisis, institutional trust deficits, and polarization. He noted how each problem presents an issue within the social salvific structure (i.e., an issue in the ecclesial good of order), focusing on how each issue uniquely disrupts this order. In response to these disruptions of order, Rohrer Budiash argues that power is not enough to solve the issues. Rather, what is needed is redemptive suffering—the kind Lonergan has in mind in the Law of the Cross.

In his paper, “Salvation of Man, Salvation of Cosmos: Soteriological Comparison between Bernard Lonergan and Elizabeth Johnson,” Giadio De Biasio brought together

Elizabeth Johnson's *Creation and the Cross* and Bernard Lonergan's *The Redemption* in order to examine the question of how non-human creatures are connected to the salvation of the human race. That is, he examined the question of the salvation of the entire cosmos. De Biasio explained that in her book, Johnson is responding to contemporary ecological sensibilities and recovering Bonaventure's perspective. Therein, she presents a salvation for non-human creation, accusing the Anselmian model of "anthropocentric amartiocentrism." De Biasio then presented Lonergan's soteriology, which included an evaluation of Johnson's presentation of Anselm. Lonergan's model assumes the redemption of anthropic sin (original, personal, and social) through the same crucified and given "flesh" of the Incarnate Word. De Biasio was concerned to determine which of these two theologians best respects the ecclesial nexus *mysterium*, in light of the theological relationships between: creation and "new creation," sin and redemption, anthropological salvation and cosmic salvation. While De Biasio found fault with Johnson's reading of Anselm and the absence of a discussion of original sin, he found that her change in terminology from "human nature" to "human species" was an important contribution to thinking through the connection between the salvation of humanity and of the cosmos.

The questions that emerged in the conversation following the three papers were fruitful and encouraged the presenters to push their thought further. For example, Cynthia Crysdale suggested in response to Chu and De Biasio's papers that a major problem is a false understand of "cause" in the emergence of good from evil and in emergent probability, respectively. Given that each paper focused on the Law of the Cross, Cecille Medina-Maldonado asked each presenter to reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Bill Loewe asked De Biasio whether he thought the relationship between Johnson and Lonergan was dialectical or genetic. Jonathan Heaps asked Rohrer Budiash what the role of a theologian in particular should be with respect to healing the good of ecclesial order.

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## KARL RAHNER SOCIETY – CONSULTATION

- Topic: Social Salvation  
 Convener: Mary Beth Yount, Neumann University  
 Moderator: David Dault, Loyola University Chicago  
 Presenters: Daniel P. Horan, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)  
 Michael Rubbelke, St. John's School of Theology  
 Andrew Vink, Marymount University

The first paper “The Cosmic Significance of the Incarnation: Karl Rahner’s Supralapsarian Christology as Social Salvation,” by Daniel Horan. He engaged with conversations about Karl Rahner’s claim in *Sacramentum Mundi* that soteriology and Christology are more united than typically noted in the handbooks of theology, as the Incarnation has cosmic significance. Horan pointed toward Rahner’s distinctive supralapsarian approach to the Incarnation of the Word and the need for further development of the implications this Christological emphasis have for understanding not just individual salvation, but corporate or social salvation, including the whole of creation—human *and* nonhuman. Horan built on the work of theologians including Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson on “deep incarnation” and “deep resurrection” to note the loving and contingent creation of the cosmos into which the divine self could fully enter through the Incarnation. Rahner’s supralapsarian Christology gestures toward a form of “social salvation” understood in a more cosmic and capacious sense.

Participants observed that the paper is two Rahnerian projects—supralapsarianism and revisiting Rahner’s corpus through theologies of creation (addressing the overly anthropocentric bias). Discussion ensued about the separation between the human and the rest of creation and the emerging knowledge of eco-degradation navigated within an anthropocentric framework. Horan noted the “the ecological devastation that we are experiencing” as “a gap in Rahner’s thinking” while emphasizing that the more-than-human world needs to be seen in ways that are beyond our own experience.

Michael Rubbelke’s paper, “Integrating Fragmented History: Social Salvation in Rahner’s Theology of Purgatory and Indulgences,” examined Rahner’s emphasis on human nature and grace made victorious in the paschal mystery. For Rahner, salvation involves reintegrating what sin has disintegrated, and purgatory heals and shapes a person’s whole identity to reflect their fundamental “yes” to God. Such a process involves indulgences, the healed freedom of other people through ecclesially-recognized acts of intercession. Rubbelke explored Rahner’s pre-Vatican II position on purgatory and indulgences as involving postmortem integration of the person using “very little material,” framing this “material” in social and relational terms—especially with a view to the victims of sin—and how that may illuminate social salvation and integration today. Rahner invites us to imagine purgatory and the temporal punishment of sin in terms of his notion that every free action forms an “incarnation” of the human being’s fundamental free decision to accept or reject God’s self-offer in grace.

Rubbelke’s exploration of the social and relational dimensions of sin included noting the effects of sin in the world and the need for a deeply social view of salvation. Sin effects and affects sociality, the human being, human relationships, and the world around human beings. The temporal punishments for sin—their consequences and enduring influence—require healing. For Rahner, these consequences must be endured

in love to integrate the person's whole reality into the decision to accept God's self-offer in grace. If this process of integration is not fully completed in this life, it must be completed after death in purgatory.

Fellow scholars discussed what Rahner might say about forgiveness and reconciliation that happens after deaths from brutalization, such as torture or other violence (the outworking and harm from the effects of sin). Rubbelke responded that Rahner's later writings talk about the resurrection as an almost parallel reality. We can imagine the afterlife as an extension or continuation of what we do here on this earth; Rahner does not believe that is possible, but *we* can.

The third paper, Andrew Vink's "Historical Soteriology as Social Salvation: A Synthesis of Rahnerian and Ellacurían Themes," considered Ignacio Ellacuría's contribution to soteriological thought in relation to social suffering. Vink asserted that Rahner's theological ideas are foundational to Ellacuría's soteriological project. Ellacuría, a twentieth century Latin American liberation theologian, develops Rahner's ideas by placing them within the concrete reality of the suffering of Latin America. A student of Rahner's at Innsbruck from 1958-1962, Ellacuría was intellectually formed by the excitement of his teacher in the lead up to Vatican II. This impact can be seen in the development of Ellacuría's historical soteriology, which serves as his articulation of social salvation. Vink connected several of Rahner's points to relevant elements of Ellacuría's texts regarding historical soteriology. The synthesis of these two thinkers provided a richer understanding of social salvation made concrete by the realities of Ellacuría's experiences in El Salvador. Vink reminded us that theologians need to be conscious of both historicity and change, that the questions we ask and our frameworks of understanding develop over time. Social salvation needs to be considered in the context of anthropocentric questions because human beings are social creatures and must be understood in this way. A failure to engage the historical moment makes us lose touch with the concrete needs of our age.

Ellacuría's historical soteriology is theoretical (referring to salvation as it is presented in revelation, emphasizing its historical character), practical (seeking where and how the saving action of Jesus was carried out in order to continue it in history), and lived/experienced (examples of focusing on the concrete problems facing the poor in Latin America, such as moving from the tension between propheticism and utopia to concrete concerns about the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty).

A lively discussion ensued, addressing the differences between Rahner's and Ellacuría's view of death (which is historically necessary in Ellacuría's work and necessarily connected to resurrection). Vink pointed out that Ellacuría watched people dying and saw a bishop shot, so the space in which we have the debates can vary and we need to acknowledge that. A question about nothingness led to Vink expounding on the theology of creation that Ellacuría, who was martyred at age 58, might have held if he had time to write about that. The emphasis was on the implications of Ellacuría's historical openness and view of historical necessity. Vink's presentation, while synthesizing Rahnerian themes made manifest in Ellacuría's writings on historical soteriology, offered a contribution to the conversation regarding social salvation.

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## SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – CONSULTATION

Topic: The Power and Theology of Abuse  
 Convener: Julia Feder, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)  
 Moderator: Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)  
 Presenters: Karen Peterson-Iyer, Santa Clara University  
 Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, Loyola Marymount University  
 Christine Hinze, Fordham University

Last year's consultation session on "Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church" highlighted sexual abuse as abuse of power. As a prerequisite to adequate theological reflection on abuse, analysis of structural power gradients which encourage violent abuse, enable cover-ups, and stand in the way of meaningful reparations is needed. In this year's session, three theologians provided succinct, theologically informed analyses of power from different directions.

Karen Peterson-Iyer's paper, titled "Theorizing Sexual Violence," argued that all sexual desire is shaped by systems of power, and these systems of power are often characterized by inequality, exploitation, and other forms of social violence. Therefore, sexual violence must be theologically situated within the context of sexual hierarchies and other forms of violence. Our social structures and practices are conditioned by cultures of rape that define women as objects of sexual desire. Our personal and collective agency is compromised when we fail to acknowledge the power dynamics that configure our culture(s). Rape culture is both social sin and structural injustice. Clergy sexual abuse and its coverup is enabled by individual, cultural, and structural power gradients, including the logic of coloniality.

Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier's paper, titled "Coloniality, Power, and Sexual Abuse," began with an analysis of the case of former Jesuit and faculty member at Loyola Marymount University, Stephen Sauer, who was convicted in 2023 of drugging and assaulting over a dozen men in New Orleans. LMU released a notification to the university community as part of a weekly e-newsletter, denied any Society responsibility for Sauer's crimes, and rebuffed faculty calls for increased transparency, investigation, and institutional response. Tiemeier argued that Catholic sexual abuse is enabled by ongoing colonial logics. Drawing on French political scientist Françoise Vergès' notion of colonial family romance, Tiemeier claimed that Catholic colonial family romance portrays the "Mother Church" as adopting its members while insisting upon lay members' perennial childhood and permanent debt to their adopted parent. Lay people—and, in particular, women, children, queer people, and people of color—are perennial children whose sex and sexuality must be regulated for their own good. The logic of family romance ignores sexual violence, when it occurs, in order to protect clergy and to maintain the fiction of the romance. Sauer's case illustrates the employment of a Catholic colonial family romance insofar as the LMU administration insists that the university is a family, the students should be protected from scandalizing information, and students and lay faculty/staff are indebted to the administration and the Jesuits for their well-being.

Christine Hinze's paper was titled "The (Ab)uses of Power in the Catholic Church: Where Do We Go From Here?" Drawing on religious historian John C. Seitz's research

on two post-Vatican II Chicago Jesuit abusers, John Powell and Donald McGuire, Hinze argues that Catholic priesthood wields power which can create opportunities for embodied connection with the holy, but also dangerous forms of silence and secret-keeping. Hinze advocated for right practices of power and authority to target, resist, and change vicious individual behaviors, and vicious cultural and structural patterns. “Operative social norms,” as identified by social psychologists and employed by grassroots social-justice movements, are capable of wielding productive forms of power to effect practical, ethical transformation.

In the audience discussion that followed, participants spoke about whether and how the church’s capacity to listen to survivors of sexual abuse is conditioned by power gradients. All three panelists discussed ways in which male ecclesial authorities may find it difficult to listen to survivors’ pain, particularly because—as Hinze noted—under patriarchy, men and boys are isolated from genuine modes of human connection. But, clerical uncomfotability does not mitigate the need for ecclesial accountability. Several lay participants noted experiences of working as faculty members alongside of ordained faculty or university administrators. Though universities often use the language of partnership between lay and ordained faculty/staff, lay theologians did not experience these relationships as egalitarian. Additionally, panelists commented on the degree to which knowledge of sexual violence functions as a means of social control for children in the same way that it does for adult women. Tiemeier remarked that, in colonial contexts, sexual violence of children has often functioned analogously—e.g., in Indigenous residential schools, children often know that sexual violence can serve as a means of punishment and control—but this is not always the case. Hinze noted that, while it is imperative that clerical authorities take responsibility for clerical sexual abuse, positive social norms such as—“if you see something, say something”—can be employed by lay people within Catholic ecclesial structures to encourage healthy boundaries without needing to wait for formal action by ordained clergy.

JULIA FEDER  
*Saint Mary’s College*  
*Notre Dame, Indiana*

## THOMAS AQUINAS – CONSULTATION

Convener: David Elliot, Catholic University of America  
 Moderator: Gregory LaNave, Dominican House of Studies  
 Presenters: Frederick Bauerschmidt, Loyola University Maryland  
 Monica Marcelli-Chu, Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University  
 Matthew Dugandzic, St. Mary's Seminary and University

Frederick Bauerschmidt addressed the conference theme of social salvation in a paper titled “Eucharist and Social Salvation in Thomas Aquinas.” Theologians such as Henri de Lubac and Marie-Louis Chauvet insisted on the connection of the Eucharist with ecclesiology partly in opposition to what was deemed an exclusive emphasis on transubstantiation typical of medieval theology, which led to a focus on the salvation of the individual. Bauerschmidt’s question was whether Aquinas can rightly be charged with ignoring the social/communal aspect of the sacraments, especially in light of the fact that he regards the Eucharist as being “completed” in the real presence of Christ, not in the reception of the Eucharist by the congregation. Bauerschmidt suggested that the medieval experience of liturgy and the sacraments presupposed a communal identity; it is our own age of individualism and isolation that insists on talking about community. The discussion that followed focused on whether this reading of Aquinas effectively responds to Chauvet’s critique. It was noted, among other things, that human community should not be regarded as an end in itself.

Monica Marcelli-Chu explored Aquinas’s category of “living with” as a way to approach an integral ecology in her paper, “Living with All Things: Navigating an Anthropocentric and Universal Common Good in Aquinas.” Aquinas takes from Augustine the distinction of “enjoying” the divine persons and “using” lower creatures and adds the category of “living with” rational spirits. Marcelli-Chu argued that this category affects our understanding of lower creatures as well. While one does not love nonrational creatures with charity, one does love them *out of* charity. All creation “waits for the revelation of the glory of the children of God.” Human beings are to “use” lower creation, but this involves recognizing the purpose of all things, the common good that is the ordering of the passing world toward glory; thus, “living with” describes the way in which we relate to all of creation as we move toward the glory to come. The discussion raised questions about how this delineation of a qualified anthropocentrism and the universal common good encompasses angels, or creatures of a rational nature who are not able to use reason.

Matthew Dugandzic raised the question of how we are to identify whether a particular sin involves grave or light matter in his paper, “On Light Matter in the Sin of Lying.” While much recent moral theology focuses on happiness and the virtues, there is less attention given to identifying clearly the difference between mortal and venial sins in terms of their matter, even though this is a crucial part of teaching moral theology. Insight on this point can be gained by a reading of the much-maligned commentatorial and manualist traditions. Some sins always involve grave matter, other always involve light matter, and others still, such as lying and theft, can admit of light or grave matter. Explanations for the distinctions differ: for example, one can see that murder always involves grave matter because, unlike theft, it does not admit of degrees;



certain actions are also classified as involving grave matter because, if generally admitted, they would cause grave harm to society (e.g., breaking the seal of confession); lying on the other hand can be grave or light depending on the harm that would accrue to society if it were generally permitted; and violations of justice that do not really violate another person's rights (e.g., failing to express gratitude) is intrinsically a light matter. The discussion highlighted the value of this retrieval of the manualist tradition, and explored the precise distinction between grave and light matter in terms of the social ramifications of particular sins.

GREGORY LANAVE  
*Dominican House of Studies*  
*Washington, District of Columbia*

## WOMEN'S CONSULTATION ON CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Women and Social Salvation
- Conveners: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education  
Margaret Mary Moore, Theology & Life Institute
- Secretary: Vacancy
- Treasurer: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium
- Award
- Convener: Julia Feder, Saint Mary's College
- Steering
- Committee: Rosemary Carbine, Whittier College  
Nichole Flores, University of Virginia  
Jessica Coblenz, Saint Mary's College  
Mary Jo Iozzo, Boston College  
Elissa Cutter, Georgian Court University  
Annie Selak, Georgetown University
- Moderator: Margaret Mary Moore, Theology & Life Institute
- Presenters: Phyllis Zagano, Hofstra University  
Taylor Ott, KU Leuven  
Joy Ann McDougall, Candler School of Theology

This panel explored the conference theme of social salvation in regard to women, particularly within the Catholic Church or from a Catholic theological perspective. The first paper, presented by Phyllis Zagano, was entitled "Deliverance, Women, Church, World." It examined Catholic Church structures and policies connected to the obstruction of women from Catholic diaconal ministry, which Zagano argued endangered the salvation of women in the church and ultimately in the world, because of the influence of religion on people's thinking and behavior. Zagano argued that despite the increasing placement of women in leadership roles in the Catholic Church, they also remain oppressed because of the underlying and persistent belief in their inability to image Christ. By denying women's diaconal ministry, she argued the church continues to demonstrate women's inequality with men which in turn has detrimental implications for women such as the denial of their full employment rights and benefits.

The second paper, presented by Taylor Ott, was entitled "It Was the Husband: Social Salvation and Our Fascination with True Crime." Ott led the audience into the fascinating world of true crime media and its popularity among women. She posited that true crime was a culturally and anthropologically significant site for feminist theological work considering the conference theme of social salvation, but also its inverse concept, social sin. For, according to Ott, true crime "implicates the social sins of misogyny, racism, homophobia, the prison industrial complex, dehumanizing paradigms, and economic disparity." She also argued they implicated "salvific themes of secure and safe connection." Further, the telling of stories of dead persons adds an eschatological dimension to their lives; the people live on even if their death was via brutal circumstances. However some stories of women continue to be told while others

are disregarded—revealing the silencing of certain women and particular stories, when they do not fit within the societal imagination of who is worth saving.

The final paper, presented by Joy Ann McDougall, was entitled “Rising with Mary: Vocation as Conversion to the Future.” McDougall reimagined vocation as a “conversion towards the future”. She used Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the risen Christ in John 20 to suggest how women might also rise with Christ by rising with Mary Magdalene on that life-altering day. She drew on a variety of theological work such as from Shawn Copeland, Elizabeth Johnson, Teresa Okure, and Delores Williams to reinterpret Mary Magdalene’s story as an archetype for feminist conversion. This conversion involved a “shedding of past preoccupations, a gifting of friendship with God, and a summons to share the Gospel with others.” McDougall concluded her paper with suggested images of a “Rising with Mary Magdalene” which entailed a life of flourishing wherein women participated in their social responsibility by participating in global women’s movements. In many ways, McDougall suggests a stance for women that gives them agency rather than hopelessness and continual victimization in a patriarchal church and society. At the same time, Mary Magdalene’s story of questioned credibility among the disciples of Jesus again highlights the ongoing obstacle for women as they seek agency and hope for their sex within the Catholic Church.

The subsequent conversation among attendees and panelists initially noted how the papers seemed unconnected and at the same time, were connected, by their highlighting of the common theme of the inability of church and society to take seriously women’s voices. It seems a given today that women’s voices need to be heard (even though in some spaces they are still silenced or marginalized). The greater challenge, particularly for the Catholic Church, and in light of its undertaking the synodal process from 2021 to 2024, is to take seriously women’s voices and respond to those voices in a way that is meaningful and positively impactful to them, rather than just simply listening. It was highlighted that the Madeleva Lecture delivered this year by Natalia Imperatori-Lee spoke incisively and serendipitously on this issue.

The session moved on to the presentation of the Ann O’Hara Graff Award. This year’s recipient was Lisa Sowle Cahill. In the acceptance of her award, Cahill aptly pointed to the conference theme by paying attention to the various communities which made it possible for her and us as theologians to do the work that we do. She encouraged the audience not to lose hope, particularly as feminist theologians because feminist theology has come a long way since she began her own theological journey. On this last point, Cahill provided the comparison between the state of CTSA when she first joined and the beginnings of WCCT due to the work of a few women theologians including herself, and the state of CTSA and WCCT now with its thriving numbers and the expansion of the varieties of feminist theological work. Christine Firer Hinze, Meghan Clark, and Susan Ross provided insight into Cahill as a long-time friend, colleague, teacher, author, inspiration, and mentor. Over fifty people were in attendance.

CRISTINA LLEDO GOMEZ  
*BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education*  
Sydney, Australia

CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY –  
INTEREST GROUP

Topic: The Social Role of the Catholic University  
 Conveners: Edward P. Hahnenberg, John Carroll University  
 Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University  
 Moderator: Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University  
 Presenters: Jonathan Heaps, Seton Hall University  
 Christopher Vogt, St. John's University  
 Jaisy Joseph, Villanova University

The third and final year of the interest group continued to explore how theology can inform responses to the challenges facing higher education. Following past sessions on ecclesiology and theological anthropology, this year's panel offered diverse perspectives on the social role of the Catholic university today.

Jonathan Heaps' paper, "*Servus Servorum: A Lonerganian Theory of Theology in the University and the University in Society*," drew on Bernard Lonergan's scale of values to describe the university as a social infrastructure that supports a community's cultural superstructure "according to its operative ideal of science for the sake of a more meaningful and worthwhile way of life." In its attempt to cultivate a meaningful life, the university is hampered by a change in the "operative ideal of science" that occurred in the shift from the medieval to the modern university. The rise of the empirical ideal, through advances in the natural sciences, has not been met by comparable advances in what Lonergan called the "science of the human." Thanks to lingering uncertainty about how such a science should proceed, technological and economic possibilities have been allowed to set the program unchecked. With the criteria of credibility for humanistic and moral beliefs muddled, the modern university is "ever more conceived as existing for the sake of technology and economy and not as sublating them for a higher end." Rather than resolve this conundrum, Heaps suggested that theology might function as a "servant of the servants" of knowledge within the modern university by illuminating for scholars the conditions under which they sustain faith in their intellectual enterprises, perseverance in their research, and hope for future fruits of their labors.

In "Building Communities of Encounter for the Common Good," Christopher Vogt brought together Pope Francis' theology of encounter and the Catholic commitment to the common good in order to offer guiding insights for articulating the mission of Catholic higher education today. Vogt placed these themes within a larger vision of the Catholic university as rooted in the search for truth. The Catholic commitment to truth—a truth rooted in reality and accessible (though imperfectly) to us—is neither naïve nor monolithic. Nor is it realized in universal agreement on eternal verities. Rather, a Catholic university demands a commitment "to seeking truth and to recognizing that we need to be in conversation with each other to correct our misperceptions and expand our knowing." As one dimension of this larger mission, Vogt cited *Fratelli Tutti* to highlight Pope Francis' call for a culture of solidarity. This culture recognizes the importance of cultural and ethical differences, seeks the common good, and makes room for disagreement and ongoing dialogue. Catholic higher

education must play a role in bringing about this social and political vision concretely through: a core curriculum that pursues questions of meaning, purpose, and the common good; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts that emphasize access for the racially, ethnically, and economically marginalized; and training for students, faculty, and staff in the skills of dialogue characteristic of the “processes of encounter” called for by Pope Francis.

Jaisy Joseph’s “Catholic Higher Education Sixty Years After King’s *I Have a Dream Speech*: Black Dignity and the *Telos* of Catholic University” lifted up the words and actions of Black Catholics working for racial justice in Catholic higher education over three historical eras. Employing Vincent Lloyd’s concept of “Black dignity” as a lens, Joseph focused on dignity not as an *achievement*, but as *achieved* in the very process of the struggle against domination. For the first of the three eras surveyed, the era of civil rights (1954-80), Joseph noted how Black Catholic sisters seeking degrees were the first to desegregate US Catholic colleges; how Black students Paul Ramsey and Arthur McFarland confronted discrimination at Notre Dame; and how Black Catholic priests organized in the aftermath of King’s assassination. During the era of multiculturalism (1980-2012), Catholic universities followed broader societal attempts to contain and control the struggle for justice by “managing diversity.” The stories of Tia Noelle Pratt and Maureen O’Connell growing up in Philadelphia highlighted the paternalistic “missionary sensibility” of the time. With the killing of Trayvon Martin, multiculturalism gave way to the era of #BlackLivesMatters (2012-present). This period has been marked by both conscientization, captured in the public protest of Bishop Mark Seitz, and backlash, seen in the rise in hate crimes on Catholic college campuses. Joseph ended her overview by (1) underscoring the notion of dignity as a way of engaging the world; and (2) calling non-Black Catholics to an examination of conscience that would expose how the idolatry of White supremacy replaces trust in God with the false promise of White safety and security.

Discussion ranged from the contested nature of truth to the challenge of forming lay faculty, staff, and administrators in the originating charisms of their institutions.

EDWARD P. HAHNENBERG  
*John Carroll University*  
*University Heights, Ohio*

## DECOLONIZING CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – INTEREST GROUP

Convener: Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, Wake Forest University  
 Moderator: Bradford Hinze, Fordham University  
 Presenter: Heber Brown III, Black Church Food Security Network  
 Respondents: Chanelle Robinson, Boston College  
 Rufus Burnett, Jr., Fordham University

In this third and final year of the Decolonizing Catholic Theology Interest Group, our work together coalesced around the role of land and food in decolonizing ecclesial praxis and theological reflection. Prior to the start of the convention, our administrative team and respondents, along with nearly two dozen CTSA members, all met with our presenter, Rev. Dr. Heber Brown, who is Executive Director of the Black Church Food Security Network (BCFSN). Our group gathered with Brown in the community garden behind one of the BCFSN's member churches and learned from him about the network's philosophy and strategy, which starts with food access but aims more holistically for agency and autonomy in Black communities. In the spirit of decolonial dialogue, our interest group's session opened with two CTSA members' responses to our site visit with Brown and to the work of the BCFSN more broadly. Brown then offered his own remarks in response to our respondents. This unconventional format allowed for a more robust experience of mutuality and collaborative reflection that grew organically from our group's pre-conference encounter with Brown and the BCFSN.

Dr. Chanelle Robinson was first to offer her remarks, opening with Lucille Clifton's poem, "cutting greens," which calls to mind, through the preparation of collards and kale, "the bond of live things everywhere." From this starting point in the poetics of Black Atlantic cuisine, Robinson placed the realities of food apartheid and the work of the BCFSN in conversation with Catholic social thought, integral ecology, and ecowomanism to offer a compelling vision of Eucharistic theology with social and ecological implications. Robinson analyzed the foundations of food apartheid in colonialism, white supremacy, and racism, and drew on Pope Francis's articulation of the "technocratic paradigm" to further understand the technologies of control that produce the contested geographies of the plantation economy and the structurally racist nature of local and global food systems. She also traced the roots of the BCFSN back to the legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer, drew on Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick to highlight the creation of Black life in relation to the land, and emphasized the ways in which BCFSN exemplifies the principle of subsidiarity in its work to build power, create alternative food systems, and embody alternative Black geographies. Robinson's remarks culminated in a vision of Eucharistic life that centers the marginalized and oppressed, seeks solidarity in the face of oppression, and thus subverts the anti-Eucharistic scandal of food apartheid. Like the sacramental vision of making collard greens presented in Lucille Clifton's poem, BCFSN's alternative way of living with the land is an embodiment of Eucharistic work that heals, unites, and vivifies the "bond of live things everywhere."

Dr. Rufus Burnett, Jr. followed Dr. Robinson's reflections with a response to BCFSN that also rooted the organization's work in the legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer

and her theopolitical turn to the land. Gesturing to the need for a regenerative Indigeneity that washes those who are baptized “Black as soil,” Burnett’s response to the work of BCFSN followed the pattern of three improvisational riffs. First, Burnett related the work of BCFSN to the pain and trauma of the plantation economy, noting that the organization not only makes strategic plans to seek racial justice, it also makes space for black communities to sit in circles together to deal with the trauma and violence of how enslaved Africans and their descendants have been forced to relate to the land. Burnett returned once again to Fannie Lou Hamer as an exemplar of the Black agrarian imagination and Black autonomy in her commitment to the role of land and cooperative ownership in the total goal of freedom. At the same time, Burnett drew on Sylvia Wynter’s article, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” to offer a decolonial analysis of the BCFSN’s activity of baptism into the soil through not only access to the land, but through de-linking from the colonial imaginary of the plantation and its afterlife, as well as re-linking to a positive reorientation to the claims that the earth has on humanity. Finally, Burnett concluded with a riff on the Black Church as a complicated yet promising site of this decolonial praxis, in which the BCFSN is a way of being people of God that, in song and moan, signals a reimagined relationship to the divine in the world.

Rev. Dr. Heber Brown opened his response to Robinson and Burnett with a powerful acknowledgement of both the deep ancestral connections that Black communities have with the land and the witness of the natural world to an authority higher than white supremacy. He responded to Robinson’s Eucharistic theology from the perspective of the Protestant communion tradition, noting how Robinson’s invocation of the Eucharist challenges him and the BCFSN to think differently about the elements of communion in relationship to Black farmers, how the elements were produced, and how Black churches might enter into deeper relationships with farmers and land stewards to create a “sanctified supply chain.” Brown’s response to Burnett deepened all three speakers’ invocation of ancestral traditions, Fannie Lou Hamer, and the myriad of other Black communities on the great family tree of Black agrarianism who inspire the BCFSN to walk in the same way of freedom on and with the land. Brown concluded with a question and a song: what is next for this interest group, what will we do to stand in solidarity, make trouble together, support one another and “plant [our] feet on higher ground?”

Our session ended with a robust discussion of how this question of what to do next is connected with the experiences of international communities and solidarities in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Rwanda, and beyond. One participant drew our reflections together with the recognition that this is not a question of what the church is doing to “bless” farmers, but how we can all live into the blessing that the soil bestows on all of us.

ELIZABETH O’DONNELL GANDOLFO  
*Wake Forest University School of Divinity  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina*

## DISABILITY THEOLOGY – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: The Present: How do we envision and measure progress?  
 Conveners: Miguel J. Romero, Saint Louis University  
 Mary Jo Iozzio, Boston College  
 Moderator: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium  
 Presenters: Anne Masters, Archdiocese of Newark  
 Mari Rapela Heidt, University of Dayton  
 Mary Jo Iozzio, Boston College

This second interest group session of three began with a welcome to fifteen attendees, overview of the group’s purpose, and work thus far. Stephanie Edwards opened and chaired the session, examining the status of people with disability today (last year considered the past, next year the future). We strive for disability consciousness, holistic understanding, and better appreciation of an intersectional reality, transcending binary conceptions that deem persons “other.” The presentations recognized progress in understandings of disability as intersectional with an inventory of inclusion in Catholic theology and the study of religion. Disability Studies/Disability Theology recognizes the complicated lives of People with Disabilities in a world that no longer assumes hegemonic normativity in spite of hegemony’s persistence.

The session included three papers and a lively question-and-answer period. Megan Hopkins was scheduled but unable to attend for health reasons.

In “Disability, Freedom, and the Growing End of Human Dignity: Challenges of Co-Responsibility for Social Salvation,” Anne Masters, Director of Pastoral Ministry with Persons with Disabilities, Archdiocese of Newark, presented on “rupture” exposed in the meta-narratives of normalcy. These narratives invariably dismiss experiences of disability as part of the human condition; the cult of normalcy denies the experiences of people who have been marginalized on account of their race, gender, and disability, including their intersectional identities and experiences of oppression in social, ecclesial, and political arenas. Masters refers to Pope Francis’s advocacy for people with disability and his explicit recognition of their dignity when, at the April 2024 conference on “Disability and the Human Condition,” he taught “Persons with disabilities are fully human subjects, with rights and duties ... and everyone has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally” (Merlo, “Pope Francis advocates for Inclusion,” *Vatican News*, April 11, 2024). The church’s social teaching is clear: active co-responsibility points immediately to access and inclusion in the commons and the church. As *Dignitatis Infinita* affirms: “every effort should be made to encourage the inclusion and active participation of those who are affected by frailty or disability in the life of society and of the Church.”<sup>1</sup> This affirmation points to a common theological anthropology for all and an inclusive way to be church.

In “Profit and Loss: Disability and the Minimum Wage,” Mari Rapela Heidt exposed the scandalously low wages that workers with disabilities earn legally under today’s Federal Minimum Wage standard of \$7.25 per hour. However, “Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act authorizes employers ... to pay subminimum wages –

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<sup>1</sup> Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitatis Infinita* (March 25, 2024), § 53, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/04/08/240408c.html>.



wages [that are] less than the Federal Minimum wage—to workers who have disabilities for their work.”<sup>2</sup> Rapela Heidt noted that these rules were established in the 1938, when non-disabled workers were guaranteed a minimum wage of \$0.25 per hour, workers with disabilities earned less than \$0.07 per hour. Today some workers with disabilities are paid less than the \$0.25 of the 1938 nondisabled workers! New Hampshire led the way in 2015 to remedy this injustice; today sixteen states have abolished this subminimum wage for people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

In “Disability’s Span of the Humanities and the Sciences,” Mary Jo Iozzio offered a review of recent work in Disability. Today, disability justice movements can be found across the globe. Arguably, the movement started in England before the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (1975), the US *Americans with Disabilities Act* (1990), and the WHO *International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health* (2001). With a fully embraced liberation theology, we are far from the Medical and Religious models of disability. Iozzio offered five texts: William C. Gaventa’s *Disability and Spirituality* (Baylor University Press, 2018), Erin Raffety’s *From Inclusion to Justice* (Baylor University Press, 2022), Devan Stahl’s *Disability’s Challenge to Theology* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), Julia Watts Belser’s *Loving Our Own Bones* (Beacon Press, 2023), and Lisa D. Powell’s *The Disabled God Revisited* (Bloomsbury, 2023). With more than thirty years of Disability Theology engaging multiple disciplines from the humanities to engineering, we are poised to break the once narrow concern of a few for the many. “Nothing about Us Without Us’ reminds us—in the CTSA, in our church, and in our communities—to envision mainstreaming in place of the marginalized past.

MARY JO IOZZIO  
*Boston College*  
*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, “Fact Sheet #39: The Employment of Workers with Disabilities at Subminimum Wages,” rev. July 2008, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/39-14c-subminimum-wage>.

<sup>3</sup> “Subminimum Wage: Which States abolished the subminimum wage,” *Marca*, Lifestyle, December 2, 2023, <https://www.marca.com/en/lifestyle/us-news/personal-finance/2023/02/12/63e8aa0d268e3ebf7a8b45cc.html>.

## PUBLIC THEOLOGY – INTEREST GROUP

- Topic: Envisioning and Enacting a Multifaith, Multiracial, Multicultural Democracy
- Convener: Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College
- Moderator: David DeCosse, Santa Clara University
- Presenters: Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Xavier University  
Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College  
Jennifer Owens-Jofré, Loyola Marymount University

This session was the second of the three-year plan for the Interest Group in Public Theology, an initiative begun in the hope of fostering Catholic theological reflection and praxis in response to these challenging political times. In the first year, the Interest Group session at the convention focused on freedom. At the 2025 convention, the focus of the Group will be on voting. This year the theme of the session was “Envisioning and Enacting a Multifaith, Multiracial, Multicultural Democracy.” Political theorists like Danielle Allen have persuasively argued that the great convulsion running through the United States reflects the emergence—and the fierce resistance to such emergence—of a democratic society in which no one ethnic or religious or cultural group is in control of the levers of political power.

The Interest Group says that public theology “offers critical theological perspectives on public life...and constructively imagines and concretizes more just alternative visions of the common good.” Thus, the approach to public theology here includes attentiveness to a wide range of communities in which public theology is done and to a wide range of practices by which theological insight is deepened and social change is made. Three excellent papers reflected this spacious, praxis-based approach to public theology.

Kathleen Dorsey Bellow in her paper, “Full, Conscious, and Active Participation: In Liturgy and Life,” reflected on the connections between participation in the liturgy and the Black Catholic experience of public life. In the background were hard facts: the historic and ongoing efforts in the United States to suppress the African American vote and the rise of a casual, pervasive racism in U.S. political culture. For Dorsey Bellow, the Catholic liturgy coming from the Second Vatican Council offers a vision of community that stands in sharp contrast to the racist-infused conflict coursing through US political society. Moreover, the conciliar call for “full, conscious, and active participation” of all in the liturgy poses a challenge to the exclusion of the fullness of Black Catholic life from the liturgy and offers an analogue for how Catholic public theology might imagine Black Catholic inclusion in public life. Crucial for Dorsey Bellow’s thinking is the noted 1989 speech to the Catholic bishops of the US in which Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., said: “What does it mean to be Black and Catholic? It means that I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn’t frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself; my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become.”

In her presentation—“Nevertheless We Persist: A Feminist Public Theology”—Rosemary P. Carbine continued an exploration of public theology in the key of praxis. Based on her book (Orbis Books, 2023) of the same name as her presentation,

Carbine's talk called out the way that usual models of public theology "perpetuate exclusionary ideologies and dehumanizing practices." By contrast, she drew on feminist and womanist theologies of "ekklesial work" that focus less on introducing "religious claims into a multireligious public square in a widely intelligible way... and instead [pivot] more around how diverse praxis of religio-political participation signifies and realizes a more just vision of common life." In Carbine's vision, public theology plays a mediating role insofar as it informs and emerges from the rhetorical, symbolic, and prophetic praxis of women in social movements and community organizations. "Political efficacy—the power to motivate and begin to effect meaningful political change—arises" from such practices, Carbine says.

In her paper, "A Public Theology from the Ground," Jennifer Owens-Jofré focused on the powerful witness of women at Dolores Mission Parish in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. First, Owens-Jofré said, public theology in such a context starts from *lo cotidiano* or the daily lived experience of the hopes and injustices that mark the world of the Mexican and Salvadoran immigrant parish. Second, this public theology "from the ground engages faith as a public act with a political imperative to help in building... the *kin-dom of God*." Third, a public theology from the ground involves "faith in witness to an eschatological future that is safer, more just, and more equitable than what we see in our own time and place." And, finally, a public theology from the ground "contributes to public debate of issues, making the core beliefs of the faith accessible and articulating them with a critical edge."

Some twenty persons attended the session. A robust discussion followed the presentations.

DAVID DECOSSE  
*Santa Clara University*  
*Santa Clara, California*

INNOVATIVE THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO INTEGRATING  
PEACEBUILDING AND NONVIOLENCE – INTEREST GROUP

Convener: Eli McCarthy, Georgetown University  
 Moderator: Leo Guardado, Fordham University  
 Presenters: Ki Joo (KC) Choi, Princeton Theological Seminary  
 Tina Astorga, University of Portland  
 Byron Wratee, Loyola University Maryland

Ki Joo (KC) Choi presented a paper titled “Racialization: ‘Self-Gift’ and Cultural Violence.” The paper adjudicated two claims that Pope Francis makes about the practice of encounter, specifically, its inner logic of self-gift, in *Fratelli Tutti*. The first claim underscores self-gift (or kenosis) as the antidote to interpersonal and intercommunal enmity. The second claim, perhaps deviating from or at least complicating somewhat the first claim, underscores the identarian impediments to the practice of self-gift. Choi argued for the veracity and thus priority of Francis’s second claim in light of Asian immigrant discourse on civic recognition (i.e., visibility and belonging). This discourse illustrates how self-gift can be easily overlooked as a contributing factor to ingroup bias and exclusion: first, as constituting the “performance” that is befitting of (problematic) forms of belonging and, second, as making us susceptible to an uncritical allegiance, embrace, or validation of such forms of belonging. Consequently, if we want self-gift to do the kind of moral work that we want it to do, that is, narrow divides between persons and communities, and to build a culture of nonviolence, then self-gift must be practiced subsequent to an epistemological conversion, namely, the unsettling if not dislodging of our identities, and perhaps replacing them with new, more liberating ones. Such conversion will require, in part, asking why we are invested in the kind of identities we have or that we desire: What are the socio-economic realities that incentivize us to long for and hold onto particular identities? Without making this epistemic commitment first (or without this prior epistemic conversion), any practice that we think is crucial to peacebuilding (such as self-gift, encounter, or accompaniment), will likely end up being counterproductive.

Tina Astorga presented a paper titled “Interfacing Filipino ‘Lakas Tawa’ Power of Laughter and Lament as Two Pathways of Resistance.” Examples drawn from the 1986 Filipino revolution were interfaced with lament based on the Book of Lamentations and with parallel examples from W.E. Burghardt Du Bois’s “A Litany at Atlanta.” Astorga argued that “lakas tawa” and lament are two ways of being and doing in the face of suffering and death, and that both are intrinsically woven into the tapestry of one human reality.

When Filipino “lakas tawa” and lament are interfaced, there are three aspects that run across both: paradox, self-transcendence, and subversion. Laughter draws from the song and celebration of faith and religion, while lament draws from its sorrow, grief, and mourning. In both God is experienced. In laughter, God is experienced as one who stuns with playful incongruities to free the spirit from gravity and to lighten its load. In lament God is experienced as hope, amid ruins, fragile and fleeting, yet abiding and faithful. But where they diverge and converge, they have the power to create

communities, for when people laugh together, they are deeply connected as human beings, and when they cry together, they bear each other's pain and burden. Laughter and lament have the power to subvert oppressive systems and the potential to transform them. Mourning, grieving, and cursing, lament speaks truth to divine and human power assailing the ears of God with its relentless protest and calling to question all structures of oppression. Refusing to settle for things as they are, lament is iconoclastic of anything that stands in the way of justice. Convergent and divergent, laughter and lament offer two ways of approaching life—two ways of being human.

Byron Wratee presented a paper titled "Just Peace and Just Survival: An Exploration of Howard Thurman's Nonviolent Theological Anthropology." Wratee discussed how Thurman, a mystic and theologian, unpacked Jesus' nonviolent virtues of courage and love. He also identified three types of conversion and how nonviolence requires all of these. In regard to mysticism, he explained how nonviolence draws us into an interfaith spirituality, way of being, and a particular spiritual way of Black communities. Peacebuilding, civil disobedience, and survival were all named as key nonviolent tactics.

The presentation examined the dialectic and creative tension of survival and just peace ethics in the context of anti-Black violence. As victims of violence and activists for nonviolent peacebuilding in the United States, Black Christians offer an approach to peacebuilding that relies deeply on the nonviolent theology and ethics of Howard Thurman. For Thurman, Jesus offered a survival technique to disinherited Black communities. Wratee argued for a more nuanced approach that integrates the themes of just peace and survival.

During the presentations, military fighter jets hovered over the hotel, making it nearly impossible to listen to the panelists. The triggering experience was a visceral reminder of the need and urgency of nonviolence in all forms, and of the cultural ways in which violence becomes mass entertainment.

ELI MCCARTHY  
*Georgetown University*  
*Washington, District of Columbia*

LEO GUARDADO  
*Fordham University*  
*New York, New York*

THE ENDURING GIFT AND THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE OF  
JOHANN BAPTIST METZ – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Johann Baptist Metz: Political Salvation beyond the Soteriological Spell?  
 Convener: Kevin F. Burke, S.J., Regis University  
 Moderator: Kevin F. Burke, S.J., Regis University  
 Presenters: J. Matthew Ashley, University of Notre Dame  
 Julia Prinz, V.D.M.F., Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara  
 University  
 Respondent: Kevin F. Burke, S.J., Regis University

At the time of his death on December 2, 2019, Johann Baptist Metz stood among the most important post-conciliar theologians in the world. Coming of age as a young man during the Second World War, and mentored by Karl Rahner as a philosopher and theologian, Metz helped forge a “new political theology” after the Second Vatican Council in dialogue with the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School and emerging Latin American liberation theologies. Today his provocative thinking is a productive dialogue partner with, among others, Black, Latine, feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, comparative, decolonial, and eco-theologies. His mystical-political hermeneutic and way of doing theology is thus indispensable. The presenters in this inaugural session of the Metz Interest Group chose to focus their reflections on the 2024 Convention theme, “Social Salvation.”

Matthew Ashley entitled his remarks “Do We Miss Johann Baptist Metz? Provocations on the Theme of Social Salvation Today,” alluding to the title of Metz’s 1984 essay, “Do We Miss Karl Rahner?” He addressed three main points around which he structured his remarks. First, he noted how Metz picked up and expanded on Rahner’s “aggressive fidelity to the tradition in and for a church setting off in a new direction,” pleading, like Rahner, for “an aggressive fidelity” to the tradition in the implementation of Vatican II. This in turn required a “second courage for reform” from theologians and church leaders. Metz did not attempt to organize a system so much as develop such categories as narrative, memory, and solidarity in connection with the primacy of praxis and the importance of contextual theology. Second, Ashley turned to Rahner’s critiques of the church from within the church to voice his “‘Pathos for God’ as the source of critical freedom towards the church.” He addressed Metz’s idiosyncratic understanding of the theodicy question under the rubric of “the soteriological enspellment” of soteriology where the church moved away from the primary sensitivity of Jesus to the suffering of others, adopting in its place a primary focus on sin and guilt. Third, Ashley addressed what Metz calls “a mysticism of open eyes,” augmenting the way Rahner addresses the schism between theology and spirituality in biographical terms. Metz addresses the mystical-political schism before which he insisted that theology hold itself accountable to history’s victims. In his concluding remarks, Ashley reflected on Metz’s insistence that theology always be a “corrective theology.” He also deduced several parameters by which Metz measured whether a corrective was needed. He concluded noting that, while Metz never developed a constructive theology of his own, “his provocative, interruptive prose”

moves us, as theologians, “to tarry just a little bit longer than our comfort level allows...with the world’s history of suffering.”

Julia Prinz, in her paper entitled “Lament, Memory, and Healing: Johann Baptist Metz and the Inherent Politicalness of Salvation,” illustrated how Metz’s political theology not only resists the bourgeois privatization of religion, but ideological justifications of the political uses of religion and theology as well. Investigating the German cultural context in which she, like Metz, grew up, Prinz projected images from German artists Franz Marc, Ernst Barlach, Paul Klee, Kaethe Kollwitz, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, August Macke, and the Russian, Wasily Kandinsky, works that the Nazis first dubbed “Bolshevik Cultural Art,” and later condemned as “Degenerate Art.” Contrasting these works with fascist art represented by Josef Thorax, Arno Breker, Adolf Wissel, and images used in Nazi propaganda, she then focused on a particular painting by the Jewish artist, Marc Chagall entitled, “Die Prise” [*“The Snuff”*]. It depicts a Hasidic Jew studying Torah on the Sabbath, while enjoying a bit of snuff (which, unlike smoking, did not violate the Sabbath.) The Nazis castigated this humorous image, interpreting it as depicting “the Jew that is thinking about how to destroy the Germans.” Turning to Metz’s celebrated early work, *Poverty of Spirit*, Prinz illustrated Metz’s “anthropological theology” using some of the same works of art. Moving from Metz’s understanding of vulnerability, the need for community, and a view of salvation that is communal, she then addressed how dangerous memory and remembrance (not mere repetition) are needed to create and sustain a living tradition. Prinz asked: “Is it perhaps precisely the Geschichts-boundedness of lament and the timelessness of the cry, ‘Maranatha,’ that calls us forth to continue to do theology in dialogue with Johann Baptist Metz?” She concluded with Chagall’s famous painting of the “White Crucifix” which depicts Jesus the Jew crucified and surrounded by other images of Jewish suffering—victims and witnesses of Russian pogroms, Kristallnacht, and Auschwitz, along with refugees, a widow and an orphan, and Ahasver, the always-on-the-move Jew (a central figure in late Medieval antisemitism)—who together form a rich tableau of social suffering and the need to participate in social salvation.

KEVIN F. BURKE, S.J.  
*Regis University,*  
*Denver, Colorado*

## GUN CULTURES AND GUN VIOLENCE – INTEREST GROUP

Convener: SimonMary Asease Ahiokhai, University of Portland  
 Michael R. Grigoni, Wake Forest University  
 Moderator: SimonMary Asease Ahiokhai, University of Portland  
 Presenters: Michael R. Grigoni, Wake Forest University  
 Luis Vera, Mount St. Mary's University  
 Anna Floerke Scheid, Duquesne University

The first session of the three-year Gun Cultures and Gun Violence Interest Group focused on the following questions: How do we make sense of gun cultures in the United States? What role has Christianity played in forming and sustaining such cultures? How do gun cultures relate to gun violence? What is the impact of gun cultures and gun violence on our political life? What vision of the human do gun cultures and gun violence produce in our society? In exploring these questions, this year's papers addressed the cultural conditions that sustain, and the social consequences that emerge from, gun prevalence and gun violence in the United States, laying the groundwork for discussion in the second and third years of the Interest Group.

Michael Grigoni's paper, "American Gun Cultures as Signs of the Times: Historical and Sociological Perspectives," opened by arguing that Catholic theological treatment of guns in the United States cannot proceed in abstraction from the historical and sociological dynamics that characterize this issue. He provided an overview of gun-related statistics, with special attention to how rates of gun ownership and firearm-caused death increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the vast presence of guns negatively impacts social and political life in the United States. Guns are certainly among the signs of the times, he argued, but to "scrutinize and interpret them in light of the Gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes* 4), we must see them not simply as practical tools but as cultural objects resonant with meaning for those that use them.

Grigoni elaborated further by presenting David Yamane's typology of American gun cultures, distinguishing between Gun Culture 1.0 which centers long guns for hunting and recreation and Gun Culture 2.0 which centers handguns for armed self-defense. This latter expression of American gun culture has become dominant from the late twentieth century onward in the United States. Grigoni continued by reviewing ethnographic accounts of Gun Culture 2.0, drawing from the work of Harel Shapira, Jennifer Carlson, and his own research with evangelical Christian handgun owners for whom handgun ownership is understood to be consistent with Christian discipleship. He concluded by inviting us, as we begin a three-year deliberation on this issue, to center the truisms that guns are always situated within particular forms of life; that guns are cultural objects pregnant with significance and meaning for their users; and that our responses to this issue must attend to matters of context in dialogue with literatures bringing such dimensions of American gun cultures to light.

Luis Vera, who was scheduled to present a paper titled, "Concealed Carry Culture and the Technocratic Paradigm," was unable to attend the convention due to personal extenuating circumstances.



Anna Floerke Scheid's paper, "Christian Nationalism, Extremist Violence, and Guns in the US," called attention to the growing impact of Christian nationalism in the United States and explored its significance for understanding the place of guns in America. Drawing from sociological research, she shed light on the demographics of Christian nationalism as well as its historical and theological trajectories. She elaborated upon three key themes that characterize the relationship between Christian nationalism and American gun cultures. First, Christian nationalists view the right to bear arms as a right that is bestowed on American citizens by God. Further, this belief connects to the Christian nationalist conviction that the founding fathers and the founding documents of the United States were divinely inspired, including the Second Amendment. Second, among Christian nationalists there is strong correlation between gun ownership as a means of carrying out a felt responsibility to protect others and a belief in supernatural evil, which is reinforced by a premillennialist belief that the world must descend into chaos, lawlessness, and violence in order to usher in the Second Coming of Christ. Third, Christian nationalists view gun violence, including mass shootings, as a moral and religious problem that can be fixed only through moral and religious strictures. They believe that the nation will only experience peace if we "turn back to God" and embrace the nation's "Christian heritage." Gun violence is driven by a "breakdown in Christian values," in other words, not access to firearms. Scheid concluded by calling biblical theologians to become more involved in countering interpretations of scripture that are used by Christian nationalists to support their views on guns, and to exegete passages that support reducing gun ownership and critique the views articulated above.

After their presentations, Grigoni and Scheid addressed questions and comments raised by the audience in the context of a lively discussion.

SIMONMARY ASESE AIHIOKHAI  
*University of Portland  
Portland, Oregon*

MICHAEL R. GRIGONI  
*Wake Forest University  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina*

## SYNODALITY – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Dispatches from the Synod on Synodality  
 Convener: Martin Madar, Xavier University  
 Moderator: Jakob Rinderknecht, University of the Incarnate Word  
 Presenters: Catherine Clifford, Saint Paul University  
 Maureen O’Connell, LaSalle University  
 Brian Flanagan, New Ways Ministry

The Synod on Synodality, currently underway, is the largest consultative process in the history of the Catholic Church. After the synodal listening on the local and regional levels, all eyes have been on Rome where the first synodal assembly took place last October (2023) and the second one is scheduled for this October (2024). Many see the synodal process as a *kairos* in the life of the church and the most significant event in Catholicism since Vatican II (1962-1965).

This session was the first round of a three-year interest group dedicated to synodality steered by Martin Madar, Jakob Rinderknecht, and Susan Reynolds. The group intends to provide an opportunity for critical assessment of the synodal assemblies of 2023-2024 and to offer a creative contribution of the members of the society to this timely topic.

The panelists were invited for their deep and diverse forms of involvement with the synod and in the promotion of synodality. Catherine Clifford is one of the ten non-episcopal delegates at the synod from North America. Maureen O’Connell is the Director of Synod on Higher Education Engagement for Discerning Deacons. Brian Flanagan is a Senior Fellow at New Ways Ministry who has used synodal methods in his work with LGBTQ+ Catholics.

The session started with each panelist giving short opening remarks regarding their key take-aways from last year’s synodal assembly. Clifford reflected on her experience as a synod participant. She first pointed out the significance of the arrangement in which the synodal assembly took place. Instead of the synod being an auditorium-style speech-making event, the synod members sat at round tables and engaged in synodal listening using the method of a conversation in the Spirit. She stressed the significance of the fact that both episcopal and non-episcopal members (even women) were placed at the same tables. In this connection she pointed out some remarks of Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., who was a retreat master for the synod. He noted that there can be no fruitful conversation between the synod members unless they recognize that they each speak with the authority of a person baptized into Christ, and that there need be no competition between the bishops and the laity. Clifford also reflected on the idea that while synodality is not a theology but a spiritual practice, it does need critical study and reflection, though this is not the entry point of synodality.

Maureen O’Connell reflected on her experience of accompanying young adults in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and beyond in the synodal process. She started by explaining that one concrete result of her work has been the appointment of Julia Oseka, a student at St. Joseph University in Philadelphia, as a synod voting member, which in O’Connell’s mind underscores the efficacy of participating in the synodal processes and is an example of profound change taking place in the church. O’Connell

then informed about four other synodality projects in which she has been involved: SCHEAP (Synodality in Catholic Higher Education), HECoS (Higher Education Coalition on Synodality), Pedagogies for Protagonism, and CENTERS (Catholic Education Network to Engage Rome and Synodality). She concluded by offering five consolations and five tensions that have surfaced from her engagement with synodality.

Brian Flanagan began his remarks by thanking the theologians, some present at the session, who through their scholarship in the last fifty years prepared the ground for the current discussions on synodality. He then reflected on three predictions about the synod he had made in various talks he gave in the last two years and found them largely accurate. Those predictions were that

- synodality was going to be messy and that the synod on synodality would be opposed, especially in the US,
- synodality would be empowering, particularly to the historically marginalized voiced in the church, and
- the synod would bring some disappointment.

Flanagan concluded by raising one issue of crucial importance lying ahead of the church, namely, that theologians need to be thinking about synodality after the conclusion of the synod. The real test of the synodal moment will be what happens with the reception and normalization of synodality long term, especially on the local level.

After these presentations, the session continued with a conversation among the panelists and concluded with an energetic discussion among members of the audience and the presenters.

MARTIN MADAR  
*Xavier University  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

COMMITTEE FOR UNDERREPRESENTED ETHNIC AND RACIAL GROUPS  
(CUERG) DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR-LEADER AWARD

Chair: Stephanie M. Wong, Villanova University  
Committee  
Members: Leo Guardado, Fordham University  
Byron Wratee, Loyola University Baltimore

During the 2024 CUERG Luncheon, the Committee for Underrepresented Ethnic and Racial Groups inaugurated a new award, presenting it to Dr. C. Vanessa White. The purpose of the award is to honor a member of the CTSA whose work as a scholar-leader has carried forward the theologizing of underrepresented and underrecognized communities in the academy, church, and/or wider society.

The CUERG leadership committee found it fitting to create the award at this time for two reasons.

First, CUERG has now existed for several decades as a consultative, advisory committee to the CTSA Board and as a network of intellectual and professional support for CTSA members from underrepresented or under-recognized ethnic and racial backgrounds. In the early years, the committee strove mainly to create possibilities of presence and thriving for minoritized scholars in the Catholic theological community. While this remains a key priority, CUERG is no longer new nor simply trying to find a place at the discursive table. Through the concerted efforts of past leaders, CUERG has developed into both an institution within the convention (for instance, the annual CUERG Luncheon) and a professional community with a deepening sense of its particular history, struggles, and contributions to the Society as a whole. As CUERG continues to mature, it is valuable for CUERG to take stock and recognize all that has and is still unfolding in the Society's efforts to theologize en conjunto (together), in a truly inclusive way.

Second, the CUERG committee desired to joyfully highlight the contributions of under-recognized teacher-scholars, noting their work as a gift to the wider academy and church. Theologians working at the ethnic and racial margins of theological discourse have often tackled sobering and lamentable topics (for instance, the horrors of slavery, colonial campaigns, forced migration, systemic racism, etc.) and wrestled with the legacies of such structural inequities in the history of our own church and academic discipline. Nonetheless, these and other myriad scholarly reflections should not be perceived as an encumbrance on the theological enterprise, but rather an aide and gift to Catholic theological thinking. Insofar as church and academy can holistically address the realities facing racially and ethnically minoritized Catholics, we are able to theologize better. This unfolding honesty and proficiency are a gift to treasure and celebrate!

The chosen inaugural awardee, Dr. C. Vanessa White, has been instrumental in calling for and modelling a more inclusive church and academy in numerous settings.

During the academic school year, Dr. White serves as an associate professor in at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, teaching in spirituality and ministry and serving as director of the Certificate in Black Theology and Ministry. As her nominator wrote, "Vanessa has dedicated her life to leading important conversations in the fields

of spirituality and pastoral theology, lifting up theological subfields that do not always receive the affirmation they should in contexts like the CTSA and other similar academic guilds.” During her summers, she serves as the associate director for the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University—a program that has run for more than forty years with a mission to form disciples for more effective ministry in the Black Catholic community, the church, and the community at large. Her work with college professors, Catholic clergy, and Black Catholic parishioners actively advances the CTSA’s mission of developing a mature understanding of faith among Christian communities.

In addition to this teaching and administrative service, Dr. White has been a leading voice in challenging both church and academy to a fuller witness to God. Her nominator wrote of her role in conversations with the USCCB, she “speaks with prophetic voice and ecclesial love, embodying the type of theologian that Pope Francis has encouraged during his pontificate: close to the people of God, attentive to those who live in the peripheries, and writing scholarship for the entire church, not just the learned minds.” Dr. White has been a formative guiding presence in the CTSA and CUERG, serving in key leadership roles in the Society and mentoring members who self-identify with underrepresented communities. She can be seen year after year accompanying junior scholars in different settings: sessions, plenaries, conversations, and mentorship initiatives. Leading in all these ways through her teaching and scholarship, formal administration and personal example, Dr. White has been a strong advocate for underrepresented communities and their theological reflection.

After receiving the award (an engraved charcuterie board), Dr. C. Vanessa White gave a speech reflecting on the history of CTSA and CUERG and issuing a charge to members to continue their work.

STEPHANIE M. WONG  
*Villanova University*  
*Villanova, Pennsylvania*

TEXTUAL JOURNEYS: COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY  
 READING GROUP – PRE-CONVENTION MEETING

- Topic: Salvation and Perfection in Selections from Wang Yangming,  
*Instructions for Practice*
- Conveners: Daniel P. Scheid, Duquesne University  
 Axel M. Oaks Takacs, Seton Hall University
- Moderator: Daniel P. Scheid, Duquesne University
- Presenters: Stephanie M. Wong, Villanova University

The purpose of the Textual Journeys reading group is to bring theologians together who wish to explore the practice of comparative theology through guided readings of texts from a non-Christian tradition. This meeting invites someone to select short texts from a tradition (other than Christianity) and prepare some introductory commentary. The texts along with the commentary is circulated ahead of time. At the breakfast, following a brief explanation of key terms by the presenter, the group engages in an interreligious, close reading together as a community so that fresh theological insights may be encountered.

This year's presenter was Stephanie M. Wong, Assistant Professor in the Department of Theology/Religious Studies at Villanova University, and the selected texts were from Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practice*. In her introductory text distributed prior to the convention, Wong explained that Wang Yangming (1472-1529) was a Neo-Confucian philosopher who contributed to the revival of Confucian thought during the Song through Ming dynasties. Neo-Confucians were a community of scholars who sought to revive Confucian thought after the arrival of Buddhism during the Tang dynasty. Neo-Confucianism was a response to Chan Buddhism, incorporating some elements of Buddhist thought such as Buddha-nature while also rebutting other elements.

Wong focused her texts around certain key ideas. Neo-Confucians generally "affirmed both that the universe is a dynamic and organically arising reality, and that humans possess the ability to discern accurately what is good and in keeping with the Dao." The underlying principle of Li gives identity to all beings, though their particular identities differ according to the condensation of the material force of Qi. Wang Yangming is known for reclaiming the heart-mind as a privileged place to investigate and know the universal principle, and in particular he is known for two ideas: 1) the idea of *liangzhi*, which is an endowment of moral consciousness, or a good conscience, that can be cultivated by the sage into a powerful demonstration of moral action; and 2) the idea of a unity of knowing and acting, so that something cannot be truly known until it is put into action. In this way Wang contests a seeming dualism within Neo-Confucianism that privileges knowing the world prior to and above acting in it.

The discussion in the small groups was wide ranging, including a focus on conscience and the source of moral clarity; the balance between personal freedom or salvation and social order (which was a focus for Neo-Confucians as well as embodied in the career of Wang Yangming); and examples of someone might demonstrate the unity of knowing and acting through a seemingly impossible dilemma of competing moral responsibilities.

In addition to providing a primary text from a non-Christian tradition and an introductory overview of the thinker and text, presenters also often include a selection from a Christian theologian. Wong provided some passages from Teresa of Avila's (1515-1582) *The Interior Castle* because both texts were intended as practical guidance for people who were seriously committed to a life of spiritual perfection. *The Interior Castle* offers a map of the soul's journey to God in a series of seven mansions, and Wong focused on Teresa's discussion of self-knowledge and recollection. Wong suggested many possible points of intersection, including the question, "What personal or experiential resources make it worthwhile for a person to attempt sagehood or holiness?" We did not have much time to discuss the second text, and the group generally agreed it was helpful to have a specific Christian text to put in dialogue with the first text.

Thanks to Stephanie Wong for the use of her introductory text and remarks in composing these proceedings.

DANIEL P. SCHEID  
*Duquesne University*  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

## REPORT ON THE 2022-2023 MID-YEAR GATHERINGS

*Ad Hoc* Board Committee on Virtual Events:

Elyse Raby (Chair), Mary Kate Holman, Christina Astorga

Fall Topic: Synodality and Listening Reports from the Field  
 Date: December 5, 2022  
 Moderator: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Kristin Colberg, St. John's School of Theology and Seminary  
 Stan Chu Ilo, DePaul University  
 Edmund Chia, Australian Catholic University

Spring Topic: Theology and Teaching in Light of ChatGPT  
 Date: April 4, 2023  
 Convener: Christina Astorga, University of Portland  
 Moderator: Mary Kate Holman, Benedictine University  
 Introductions: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Anne Carpenter, Saint Mary's College of California  
 Stephen Okey, Saint Leo University  
 David Turnbloom, University of Portland

In the 2022-2023 academic year, the Society continued the practice of holding two online gatherings. The sessions were organized by a committee composed of Elyse Raby (Santa Clara University and Committee Chair), Mary Kate Holman (Benedictine University), and Christina Astorga (University of Portland and CTSA Board Member). Both meetings were well attended by members of the Society.

The theme of the first meeting was “Synodality and Listening Reports from the Field.” It met on December 5, 2022. The session sought to engage members of the Society on practices of synodality, with an eye toward the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality. Elyse Raby moderated a panel discussion of three CTSA members—Kristin Colberg, Stan Chu Ilo, and Edmund Chia—who each drew on their disciplinary expertise and their experience in formal synodal processes. Kristin Colberg, drawing on her experience as a member of the Theological Commission assisting the Synod of Bishops, addressed the theological foundations and processes that are shaping the Synod on Synodality. Stan Chu Ilo addressed what he has learned as the head of the Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries Project of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development. Edmund Chia drew on his earlier work as executive secretary of the Office Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference. Following the three presentations, participants broke out into small groups for discussions. When members returned from their breakout sessions a robust discussion ensued about the possibilities and challenges for a synodal church. There were sixty-nine attendees.

The theme of the second meeting was “Theology and Teaching in Light of ChatGPT.” It met on April 4, 2023. The session sought to provide an opportunity for members to engage in discussion about the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) and chat bots on theology and teaching theology after the release of the AI chat bot,



ChatGPT, in November 2022. It began with a demonstration of the capabilities of ChatGPT by Elyse Raby. Following Raby, three panelists addressed the challenges posed by ChatGPT and similar technologies. David Turnbloom spoke about the nature of artificial intelligence and encouraged members not to avoid assignments that might allow students to use ChatGPT (e.g., traditional essays and papers). Rather, he proposed assigning those traditional essays and papers in ways that reduce the pressure that leads students to use AI technologies (e.g., scaffolding assignments or contract grading). Stephen Okey drew on the developing conversation among academics from various disciplines as he highlighted the challenges of student and faculty use of AI (e.g., the threat to the development of critical thinking skills and originality in student work, the potential perpetuation of biases that AI models have learned and which would further harm already marginalized groups, the ability of students to easily use AI to fulfill basic course requirements in ways that seems like and may be cheating) as well as some opportunities (e.g., reimagining the types of assignments we develop and ask students to complete). Critically, he addressed these topics within a framing question about purpose of higher education—and Catholic higher education, in particular. Anne Carpenter used the work of Bernard Lonergan and John Henry Newman on the nature of belief and knowledge to frame the problem of not knowing whether students have completed their work or whether it was completed by an AI chat bot. In doing so, she pointed out that the dilemma is not merely a problem of morals (cheating or not cheating) but also a problem of the desire for learning, knowledge, and understanding. Following the three presentations, participants moved to small groups before coming back together for a larger conversation with the panelists. The conversation highlighted the limits of ChatGPT and what it gets incorrect, differences in responses to AI among various student populations, the importance of critical thinking, concerns about AI that are particular to the teaching of theology (e.g., biases and claims about the nature of the divine), possibilities for new types of assignments, and the pressures that lead students to turn to AI. The session was attended by forty-nine members.

B. KEVIN BROWN  
*Gonzaga University  
Spokane, Washington*

## **SECRETARY’S REPORT THE SEVENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL CONVENTION**

The Catholic Theological Society of America held its seventy-eighth Annual Convention on June 13-16, 2024, at the Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland. The theme of the convention was “Social Salvation.” Registration for the convention was conducted electronically in the months leading to the meeting. The Women’s Consultation on Constructive Theology met on Thursday, June 13 from 3:00 to 5:30 p.m., EST. The 2024 Ann O’Hara Graff Award was presented to Lisa Sowle Cahill, J. Donald Monan Professor at Boston College. At 7:00 p.m., EST, CTSA President Kristin Heyer formally opened the Convention, starting with a Land Acknowledgement Statement. Reverend Tyler George Kline, priest-secretary to the Most Reverend William Lori, Archbishop of Baltimore gave a word of welcome to all convention participants on behalf of Archbishop Lori and led the opening prayer. President Kristin Heyer introduced the first plenary speaker, Dr. Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, O.P., from Boston College. The evening concluded with a reception. The CTSA gratefully acknowledges the support of the following institutions: Boston College’s Morrissey College of Arts & Sciences; Callaghan-Pierog Family Foundation; Center for Catholic Studies, Fairfield University; Georgetown University; Loyola Marymount University; Loyola University Chicago; Loyola University Maryland’s Masters in Theological Studies Program and the Office of Mission and Identity; Pacific School of Religion; Regis St. Michael’s Faculty of Theology, Toronto School of Theology (in the University of Toronto); Saint Louis University’s College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Theological Studies; St. Mary’s Seminary and University; and University of Dayton.

On Friday, June 14, the Convention resumed with the second plenary session and a Memorial Service to remember and honor CTSA members who passed away during the previous year. The second plenary session was delivered by Dr. Susan Abraham from Pacific School of Religion. After a day of sessions and conversations, the Business Meeting was held in the afternoon from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., EST, presided by Dr. Heyer. Active members at the Business Meeting welcomed the new Active and Associate members presented to them by the Admissions Committee. The president’s reception for new and newer members followed the business meeting.

After morning prayer on Saturday, June 15, Dr. Vincent Miller from the University of Dayton delivered the third plenary session. Convention participants proceeded to a full day of sessions and conversations. The CUERG Luncheon took place between 1:00 p.m. and 2:15 p.m., EST. During this luncheon, Dr. C. Vanessa White, Associate Professor of Spirituality and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union, received the inaugural 2024 CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award.

At 5:00 p.m., EST, Convention participants gathered at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Baltimore, Maryland to celebrate the Eucharist. Rev. David Hollenbach, S.J., presided the celebration and Dr. Kristin Heyer offered the reflection. After the liturgy, all gathered at 6:30 p.m., EST for a reception and the convention banquet at the Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel. Toward the end of the meal, President Kristin Heyer read the citation and presented the John Courtney Murray Award to Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P.

On Sunday, June 16, after morning prayer, Dr. Kristin Heyer delivered her Presidential Address. After this, she formally concluded her term as CTSA President and introduced the new President, Dr. Nancy Pineda-Madrid.

Dr. Layla A. Karst from Loyola Marymount University served as the Liturgical Aide. During the convention several special receptions, breakfasts, sessions and other meetings took place. See the convention program below for more details.

## CONVENTION PROGRAM

### Concurrent Sessions At-A-Glance

#### **I. Friday Morning**

1. Keeping Faith with Our Interreligious Partners in a Time of War
2. Fundamental Theology/Method
3. Comparative Theology
4. Practical Theology
5. Disability Theology
6. Creation/Eschatology
7. Catholicity and Mission
8. Hans Urs von Balthasar
9. Lonergan
10. Journeying Together (Synodality)
11. Contemplating Creation, Resurrecting Time

#### **II. Friday Afternoon**

1. Bioethics
2. Catholic Theology & the Contemporary University
3. Church/Ecumenism
4. Catholic Social Thought
5. Joint Asian-Latinx-Black Consultation: Sound, Spirituality & Social Salvation
6. Baltimore & the Black Catholic Experience
7. Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church
8. Christianity and Judaism
9. Dispatches from the Synod on Synodality
10. Peacebuilding and Nonviolence
11. Decolonizing Social Salvation

#### **III. Saturday Morning**

1. Theology and Science
2. Spirituality
3. Historical Theology
4. Moral Theology II
5. Joint Asian-Latinx-Black Consultation: Social Salvation and Institutional Hospitality
6. Eucharistic Revival and Social Salvation
7. Dissent as a Means of Salvation
8. Liturgy/Sacraments
9. Christ
10. Sanctifying Social Structures
11. Laudate Deum and the Future of Catholic Theology on Ecology

#### **IV. Saturday Afternoon**

1. Moral Theology I
2. Joint Asian-Latinx-Black Consultation: Reclaiming Our Roots
3. The Enduring Gift and Theological Challenge of Johann Baptist Metz
4. Rahner
5. Public Theology
6. The Moral Theology of Pope Francis
7. Gun Cultures and Gun Violence
8. Historical Theology II
9. Decolonizing Catholic Theology
10. Thomas Aquinas
11. Anthropology

### Pre-Convention Events, Thursday, June 13, 2024

<b>CTSA Board Meeting</b>	9:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m. <b>Guilford Room</b>
<i>Theological Studies</i> Board Meeting	1:00–5:00 p.m. <b>Federal Hill Room</b>
<b>Registration</b>	1:00–4:30 p.m. and 6:00–7:00 p.m. <b>Baltimore Foyer</b>
<b>Exhibits</b>	1:00–7:00 p.m. <b>Baltimore Foyer</b>
<b>Rev. Dr. Heber Brown Black Church Food Security Network</b> <i>Pre-registration required to participate in the tour. Group will meet in hotel lobby.</i>	10:45 a.m.–2:30 p.m. <b>Offsite</b>
<b>Women's Consultation on Constructive Theology</b>	3:00–5:30 p.m. <b>Baltimore Ballroom</b>

#### Administrative Team:

Margaret Mary Moore, Cristina Lledo Gomez, Stephanie Edwards  
Julia Feder

Co-Conveners: **Cristina Lledo Gomez**, BBI-The Australian Institute of  
Theological Education

**Margaret Mary Moore**, Theology & Life Institute

Moderator: **Margaret Mary Moore**, Theology & Life Institute

Presenter: **Phyllis Zagano**, Hofstra University

Paper Title: "Deliverance, Women, Church, World"

Presenter: **Taylor Ott**, KU Leuven

Paper Title: "It Was the Husband: Women's Social Salvation and Our  
Fascination with True Crime"

Presenter: **Joy Ann McDougall**, Candler School of Theology

Paper Title: "Rising with Mary: Vocation as Conversion to the Future"

**Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award**

4:30–5:00 p.m.

*The 2024 Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award will be awarded to****Lisa Sowle Cahill****J. Donald Monan Professor**Boston College***Business Meeting**

5:15–5:30 p.m.

WCCT Steering Committee Members:

Conveners: **Cristina Lledo Gomez**, BBI-The Australian Institute of  
Theological Education**Margaret Mary Moore**, Theology & Life InstituteTreasurer: **Stephanie Edwards**, Boston CollegeSecretary: **Vacant**Award Convener: **Julia Feder**, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)Members: **Rosemary Carbine**, Whittier College**Elissa Cutter**, Georgian Court University**Mary Jo Iozzio**, Boston College**Nichole M. Flores**, University of Virginia**Jessica Coblentz**, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)**Annie Selak**, Georgetown University**Thursday Evening, June 13, 2024****Opening and First Plenary Session**

7:00–9:00 p.m.

**Maryland Ballroom C-F**Presiding: **Kristin E. Heyer**, Boston College  
President, CTSA

## Land Acknowledgement

**We, the Catholic Theological Society of America, acknowledge and recognize** that we are on the ancestral and unceded homelands of many Indigenous nations. When Catholic settler colonizers arrived on the Ark and the Dove ships in 1634, they came into contact with the Iroquoian-speaking Susquehannock peoples and the Algonquian-speaking Piscataway peoples. As have their descendants, members of these nations have cared for the land and waterways on this portion of Turtle Island for millennia. We also recognize the Lumbee peoples who migrated to this territory in the mid-twentieth century, along with many other Indigenous peoples, to pursue work opportunities and to escape the increasing restrictions of Jim Crow segregation in North Carolina. Along with enslaved Africans from the Kongo, Angola, present-day eastern Nigeria, and the rice-growing Windward Coast that stretches from Senegal down to Sierra Leone and Liberia—these

Indigenous and displaced nations stewarded the land and waterways that nourish and sustain us today.

**We give thanks** for the land and the waterways. We admire the delicious singing of the Atlantic coastal plain's numerous tributaries, especially the open-mouthed hymn of the Patapsco River. This great river's tidal portion forms the harbor for the City of Baltimore. It empties into the Great Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the United States, the second largest on Turtle Island, and the third largest in the world. The Indigenous nations named this great river "Patapsco," which derives from the Algonquian potapsk-ut and translates to "backwater" or "tide covered with froth." As guests in these overdeveloped backwaters, we are mindful of our responsibility to practice good relations with the land and water as elders and ancestors—past, present, and emerging—have done. We confess our complicity in historical and ongoing systems of oppression that render Indigenous peoples displaced and disenfranchised. Especially here in the former Catholic colony of Maryland, the Church internalized settler colonial and racist ideologies. We have adopted lifestyles that ignore Indigenous cultures and sustain Indigenous dispossession. Mindful of Pope Francis' repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery in March 2023, and in a spirit of repentance and reconciliation, we resolve to work for healing and reparation in the face of the unjust experience of violence, enslavement, displacement, and dispossession known by Indigenous peoples here in Baltimore, and in the many communities where we live and teach.

**We hope against hope** that this land acknowledgment opens us up to learn from Indigenous cultural traditions that inform good stewardship of our environment and about various Indigenous movements for identity, freedom, and self-determination. Amen!

Welcome and Opening Prayer:

**Reverend Tyler George Kline**

Priest-Secretary to the Archbishop of Milwaukee

*on behalf of the*

**Most Reverend William Lori**

Archbishop of Baltimore

Address: **Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, O.P.**, Boston College

“Social Salvation as Re-existence: The Resistance of Survivors,  
Theological Imagination and the *Potentia* of Sacramentality”

**Opening Reception**

9:00 p.m.

**Maryland & Baltimore Foyers**

***The CTSA is grateful for the support of the following Donors***

Morrissey College of Arts & Sciences, Boston College

Callaghan-Pierog Family Foundation

Center for Catholic Studies, Fairfield University

Georgetown University

Loyola Marymount University

Loyola University Chicago

Master's in Theological Studies Program and the Office of Mission and Identity,  
Loyola University Maryland

Pacific School of Religion

Regis St. Michael's Faculty of Theology, Toronto School of Theology  
(in the University of Toronto)

College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Theological Studies,  
Saint Louis University

St. Mary's Seminary and University

University of Dayton

**Friday Morning, June 14, 2024**

<b>von Balthasar Society Breakfast</b>	7:00–8:15 a.m. <b>Watertable Ballroom A</b>
<b>Mentorship Breakfast: How to Publish</b> <i>Prior registration required</i>	7:00–8:15 a.m. <b>Watertable Ballroom C</b>
<b>Schillebeeckx Breakfast</b>	7:00–8:15 a.m. <b>Homeland</b>
<b>Comparative Theology Reading Group Breakfast</b>	7:00–8:15 a.m. <b>Watertable Ballroom B</b>
<b>Zen Meditation</b>	7:15–8:15 a.m. <b>Federal Hill</b>
<b>Exhibits</b>	8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. <b>Baltimore Foyer</b>
<b>Registration</b>	9:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. <b>Baltimore Foyer</b>



**Second Plenary Session & Memorial Service**

8:30–10:45 a.m.

**Maryland Ballroom C-F**

Presiding  
Memorial Service: **Kristin E. Heyer**, Boston College  
President, CTSA

Presiding  
Second Plenary: **Francis X. Clooney**, Harvard University  
Past President, CTSA

Address: **Susan Abraham**, Pacific School of Religion

“Saving (Catholic) Higher Education: Critical Pedagogies  
of Hope and Resilience”

Respondent: **Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier**, Loyola Marymount University

**Coffee Break**

10:45–11:15 a.m.

**Maryland & Baltimore Foyers**

**Concurrent Sessions I**

**11:15 a.m.–1:00 p.m.**

I.1 Keeping Faith with Our Interreligious Partners  
in a Time of War – Invited Session

**Baltimore A**

Convener: **Elena Procaro-Foley**, Iona University

Moderator: **Elena Procaro-Foley**, Iona University

Panelists: **Heather Miller-Rubens**, Institute for Islamic, Christian and Jewish  
Studies

**W.G.B.M. Pim Valkenberg**, Catholic University of America

**Philip Cunningham**, Saint Joseph's University

I.2 Fundamental Theology/Method – Topic Session

**Baltimore B**

Administrative Team: Ryan Duns, S.J., Nicholas Olkovich, T. Derrick Witherington

Convener: **T. Derrick Witherington**, Loyola University Chicago

Moderator: **Jack Pappas**, Fordham University

Presenter: **Sara Hulse Kirby**, DeSales University

Paper Title: “The Social Aspects of Dogma: Henri de Lubac’s Catholicism in  
Trinitarian Perspective”

Presenter: **Chris Cimorelli**, National Institute for Newman Studies  
 Paper Title: “The Fate of Original Sin in an Age of Social and Ecological Awareness”

Presenter: **Joseph Ogbonnaya**, Marquette University  
 Paper Title: “*Dei Verbum* and Contextual Reading of the Bible in Africa”

### I.3 Comparative Theology – Topic Session

**Maryland A**

Administrative Team: Stephanie Wong, Julius-Kei Kato, Laurel Marshall Potter

Convener: **Stephanie Wong**, Villanova University  
 Moderator: **Julius-Kei Kato**, King’s University College

Presenter: **Andrew Massena**, Loras College  
 Paper Title: “Social Salvation in the Gospel Parables: Rereading Matt. 21:33-46 and Matt. 25:31-46 Through Rabbinic Accounts of the Messiah”

Presenter: **Katie Mahowski Mylroie**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: “Ecological Salvation in the Gospel Parables: Rereading Matt. 21:33-46 and Matt. 25:31-46 Through *Advaita Vedanta*”

Respondent: **Bede Bidlack**, St. Anselm’s College  
 Paper Title: “Toward a Welcome Eschaton: Thinking Through Universal Salvation as Renewal”

### I.4 Practical Theology – Topic Session

**Maryland B**

Administrative Team: Ish Ruiz, Susan Reynolds, Cynthia Cameron

Convener: Ish Ruiz, Emory University  
 Moderator: Cynthia Cameron, University of Toronto

Presenter: **Brett Hoover**, Loyola Marymount University  
 Paper Title: “Stories that (Don’t) Save: Cultural Narratives of Migration as Operative Soteriologies”

Presenter: **Benjamin Durheim**, College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University  
 Paper Title: “Country Heaven: Toward a Rural Aesthetic of Salvation”

Presenter: **John Allen**, Duquesne University  
 Paper Title: “Narrating the Sacred: “Thin Places” of Recovery Spirituality and Ethics”

I.5 Disability Theology – Interest Group**Kent**

Administrative Team: Mary Jo Iozzio, Miguel Romero

Convener: **Mary Jo Iozzio**, Boston College  
 Moderator: **Stephanie Edwards**, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium

Presenter: **Anne Masters**, Archdiocese of Newark  
 Paper Title: “Disability, Freedom, and the Growing End of Human Dignity: Challenges of Co-Responsibility for Social Salvation”

Presenter: **Mari Rapela Heidt**, Notre Dame of Maryland University  
 Paper Title: “Profit and Loss: Disability and the Minimum Wage”

Presenters: **Megan Hopkins**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: “Conversion through Convalescence: Recovering the Disabled St. Ignatius of Loyola”

I.6 Creation/Eschatology – Topic Session**Federal Hill**

Administrative Team: Elizabeth Groppe, Daniel Schied, Paul Schutz

Convener: **Elizabeth Groppe**, University of Dayton  
 Moderator: **Daniel Scheid**, Duquesne University

Presenter: **Christopher Hadley, S.J.**, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: “Doxological Contrition, *Theosis*, and *Apokatastasis*”

Presenter: **Kathleen McNutt**, Marquette University  
 Paper Title: “Deep Deification: Ecotheology and *Theosis*”

Presenter: **Axel Marc Oaks Takacs**, Seton Hall University  
 Paper Title: “Who Saves Whom? Nishaaberg Grounded Normativity and *Creatio ex Nihilo* for a Practice of Deep Reciprocity”

I.7 Catholicity and Mission – Topic Session**Fells Point**

Administrative Team: Antonio Sison, Cristina Lledo Gomez, Kevin Considine

Convener: **Antonio Sison**, Catholic Theological Union  
 Moderator: **Cristina Lledo Gomez**, BBI- The Australian Institute of Theological Education

Presenter: **Leo Guardado**, Fordham University  
 Paper Title: “Social Healing and Salvation in New York City”

Presenter: **Wilson Angelo Espiritu**, Ateneo de Manila University  
 Paper Title: “Popular Piety and Social Salvation: Lived Soteriology in the Grassroots”

Presenter: **James Adeoye**, Duquesne University  
 Paper Title: “‘Missionary Spirituality’ in the Light of *Redemptoris Missio*: A Theological Appraisal for a Pluralistic World”

### I.8 Hans Urs von Balthasar – Consultation

**Guilford**

Administrative Team: Charles Gillespie, Jennifer Martin, Christopher Hadley, S.J.,  
 Anne Carpenter

Convener: **Charles Gillespie**, Sacred Heart University  
 Moderator: **Catherine Yanko**, The Catholic University of America

Presenter: **Kristen Drahos**, Baylor University  
 Paper Title: “The (Im)Possibility of Social Salvation in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Gabriel García Márquez”

Presenter: **Brian Bajzek**, Molloy University  
 Paper Title: “Form, Face, and Otherness: Cruciform Church as ‘Event of Intersubjectivity’”

Presenter: **Henry Shea, S.J.**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: “Balthasar, Social Salvation, and Vatican II”

### I.9 Lonergan – Consultation

**Gibson**

Administrative Team: Jennifer Sanders, Jeremy Blackwood, Erica Siu-Mui Lee

Convener: **Jennifer Sanders**, Saint Louis University  
 Moderator: **Cecille Medina-Maldonado**, Marquette University

Presenter: **Zane Chu**, Saint Mary’s College of California  
 Paper Title: “‘By a More Difficult Good’: The Social and Practical Significance of the Law of the Cross”

Presenter: **David Budiash**, *Review for Religious*  
 Paper Title: “Three Contemporary Challenges to the Ecclesial Good of Order”

Presenter: **Giadio De Biasio**, Boston College  
Paper Title: "Salvation of Man, Salvation of Cosmos: Soteriological Comparison between Bernard Lonergan and Elizabeth Johnson"

I.10 Journeying Together: Synodality and the Path  
Towards Social Salvation – Invited Session

**James**

Convener: **Kevin Ahern, Manhattan College**  
Moderator: **C. Vanessa White**, Catholic Theological Union at Chicago

Panelists: **Maria Cimperman, RSCJ**, Catholic Theological Union  
**Victor Carmona**, University of San Diego  
**Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J.**, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

I.11 Contemplating Creation, Resurrecting Time: A Symposium  
of Brian D. Robinette's *The Difference Nothing Makes* and John  
E. Thiel's *Now and Forever* – Invited Session

**Pride of Baltimore**

Convener: **Brian D. Robinette**, Boston College  
Moderator: **Chelsea J. King**, Sacred Heart University

Presenters: **Jennifer Newsome Martin**, University of Notre Dame  
**Andrew Prevot**, Georgetown University

Respondents: **Brian D. Robinette**, Boston College  
**John E. Thiel**, Fairfield University

**Friday Afternoon, June 14, 2024**

**Women's Consultation on Constructive Theology Luncheon** 1:15–2:30 p.m.  
**Watertable Ballroom B & C**

**Hearing of the Resolutions Committee** 1:15–2:30 p.m.  
CTSA procedure: <https://ctsa-online.org/Resolutions> **Maryland Ballroom C-F**

**Concurrent Sessions II**

2:45–4:30 p.m.

II.1 Bioethics – Topic Session**Baltimore A**

Administrative Team: Stephanie Edwards, Dan Daly, Kate Jackson-Meyer

Convener: **Stephanie Edwards**, Boston Theological Interreligious ConsortiumModerator: **Marc Rugani**, St. Anselm CollegePresenter: **Emily Reimer-Barry**, University of San Diego

Paper Title: “Can an Institution Have a Conscience? Sticky Questions in Catholic Health Care”

Presenter: **Michael Jaycox**, Seattle University

Paper Title: “Autonomy and Medical Racism: Rebalancing Bioethics in a Secularizing Society”

Presenter: **Nicholas Kockler**, Providence St. Joseph’s Health

Paper Title: “Generating Insights from Catholic Social Teaching: Ethical Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare”

II.2 Catholic Theology and the Contemporary University – Interest Group**Baltimore B**

Administrative Team: Edward Hahnenberg, Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos

Convener: **Edward Hahnenberg**, John Carroll UniversityModerator: **Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos**, Seattle UniversityPresenter: **Jonathan Heaps**, Seton Hall UniversityPaper Title: “*Servus Servorum*: A Lonerganian Theory of Theology in the University and the University in Society”Presenter: **Christopher Vogt**, St. John’s University

Paper Title: “Building Communities of Encounter for the Common Good”

Presenter: **Jaisy Joseph**, Villanova University

Paper Title: “Catholic Higher Education Sixty Years after King’s ‘I Have a Dream Speech’: Black Dignity and the Telos of Catholic Universities”

II.3 Church/Ecumenism – Topic Session**Maryland A**

Administrative Team: Kathryn Reinhard, Elyse Raby, Jaisy Joseph

Convener: **Kathryn Reinhard**, Christ Church BronxvilleModerator: **Elyse Raby**, Santa Clara UniversityPresenter: **Daniel Minch**, Ruhr University of Bochum

Paper Title: “The Persistent Problem of Institutional Ecclesiology: Absolutist Theopolitics as a Stumbling Block for Social Salvation”

Presenter: **Meg Stapleton Smith**, Fordham UniversityPaper Title: “Queer Soteriology: The Effects of *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Church”II.4 Catholic Social Thought – Topics Session**Maryland B**

Administrative Team: William George, Kate Jackson-Meyer, Kevin Ahern

Convener: **William George**, Dominican UniversityModerator: **Katherine Tarrant**, University of VirginiaPresenter: **Marcus Mescher**, Xavier University

Paper Title: “‘No One is Saved Alone’: Evaluating Pope Francis’ Vision of Social Holiness”

Presenter: **Simeiqi He**, Independent Scholar

Paper Title: “Social Salvation as Universal Love: From Teilhard, Berry to Francis and Beyond”

Presenter: **Thomas Massaro, S.J.**, Fordham University

Paper Title: “Imagining Social Salvation: The Potential Contribution of Utopian Thought”

II.5 Black Catholic Theology – Consultation**Kent**(Joint Session with Asian and Asian American TheologyConsultation And Latinx Theology Consultation*Sound, Spirituality, and Social Salvation*

Administrative Team: Craig A. Ford, Jr., Nicole Symmonds, Chanelle Robinson

Conveners: **Craig A. Ford, Jr.**, St. Norbert UniversityModerator: **Ish Ruiz**, Emory University

- Presenter: **Min-Ah Cho**, Georgetown University  
 Paper Title: “Embracing Silence: Sharing Struggles and Fostering Transformation for Women of Color”
- Presenter: **Rufus Burnett, Jr.**, Fordham University  
 Paper Title: “Blue Notes on Flesh: A Blues Reading of Afro-Christian Soteriological Imaginings of Flesh”
- Presenter: **Antonio Alonso**, Emory University  
 Paper Title: “*Mi Luz y mi Salvación*: Singing as a Salvific Practice in Latine Communities”

II.6 Baltimore and the Black Catholic Experience – Invited Session      **Federal Hill**

- Convener: **Kathleen Dorsey Bellow**, Xavier University of Louisiana  
 Moderator: **Kathleen Dorsey Bellow**, Xavier University of Louisiana
- Panelists: **Therese Wilson Favors**, ed., *What We Have Seen and Heard: Essays and Stories of Black Catholic in Baltimore*  
**Ralph Moore**, St. Ann Church, Baltimore  
**Michael G. Middleton**, SB7 Coalition, Inc., Baltimore

II.7 Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church – Consultation      **Fells Point**

*The Power and Theology of Abuse*

Administrative Team: Cristina Traina, Stan Ilo, Megan McCabe, Daniel Horan, O.F.M., Julia Feder

- Convener: **Julia Feder**, St. Mary’s College (Notre Dame, Indiana)  
 Moderator: **Daniel Horan, O.F.M.**, St. Mary’s College (Notre Dame, Indiana)
- Presenter: **Karen Peterson-Iyer**, Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: “Theorizing Sexual Violence”
- Presenter: **Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier**, Loyola Marymount University  
 Paper Title: “Coloniality, Power, and Sexual Abuse”
- Presenter: **Christine Hinze**, Fordham University  
 Paper Title: “The (Ab)uses of Power in the Catholic Church: Where Do We Go From Here?”



II.8 Christianity and Judaism – Consultation

**Guilford**

Administrative Team: Andrew Massena, Carol Ann Martinelli, Mia Theocharis

- Conveners: **Andrew Massena**, Loras College  
Moderator: **Carol Ann Martinelli**, Independent Scholar
- Presenter: **Magda Teter**, Fordham University  
Paper Title: “Christian Supremacy: Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism”
- Respondent: **Mary C. Boys, S.N.J.M.**, Union Theological Seminary

II.9 Dispatches from the Synod on Synodality – Interest Group

**Gibson**

Administrative Team: Martin Madar, Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, Susan Reynolds

- Convener: **Martin Madar**, Xavier University  
Moderator: **Jakob Karl Rinderknecht**, University of the Incarnate Word
- Panelists: **Catherine Clifford**, Saint Paul University  
**Maureen O’Connell**, LaSalle University  
**Brian Flanagan**, New Ways Ministry

II.10 Innovative Theological Approaches to Integrating  
Peacebuilding and Nonviolence – Interest Group

**James**

Administrative Team: Eli McCarthy, Leo Guardado

- Convener: **Eli McCarthy**, Georgetown University  
Moderator: **Leo Guardado**, Fordham University
- Presenter: **Ki Joo (KC) Choi**, Princeton Theological Seminary  
Paper Title: “Racialization: ‘Self-Gift’ and Cultural Violence”
- Presenter: **Tina Astorga**, University of Portland  
Paper Title: “Laughter and Lament as Two Pathways of Resistance”
- Presenter: **Byron Wratee**, Loyola University Maryland  
Paper Title: “Just Peace and Just Survival: An Exploration of Howard Thurman’s Nonviolent Theological Anthropology”

II.11 Decolonizing Social Salvation and Spirit-Based Practices for Communal Healing – Selected Session

**Pride of Baltimore**

Convener: **Shannon M. McAlister**, Fordham University  
 Moderator: **M. Katie Mahowski Mylroie**, Boston College

Presenter: **Cristina Lledo Gomez**, BBI- The Australian Institute of Theological Education

Paper Title: ““Believing in the Spirits is not ‘woo woo’: Christian and Philippine Indigenous Anitist Belief”

Presenter: **Shannon M. McAlister**, Fordham University

Paper Title: “Spiritual Direction and Social Well-Being: A Decolonizing Theology”

Respondent: **Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J.**, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

**Friday Evening, June 14, 2024**

**CTSA Business Meeting**

4:30–6:00 p.m.

**Maryland Ballroom**

Presiding: **Kristin E. Heyer**, Boston College  
 President, CTSA

Parliamentarian: **William Loewe**, Catholic University of America

**President’s Reception for New/Newer Members**

6:15–7:45 p.m.

*Prior registration required/*

**Watertable Ballroom AB**

*ticket provided in registration packet*

**Saturday Morning, June 15, 2024**

**Benedictine Universities and Colleges Breakfast**

7:15–8:45 a.m.

*Sponsored by Saint Martin’s University*

**Watertable Ballroom A**

**Breakfast Meeting: Karl Rahner Society**

7:15–8:45 a.m.

**Watertable Ballroom C**

**Zen Meditation**

7:15–8:15 a.m.

**Federal Hill**

<b>Morning Prayer</b>	8:30–8:45 a.m. <b>Federal Hill</b>
<b>Exhibits</b>	8:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. <b>Baltimore Foyer</b>
<b>Registration</b>	9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. <b>Maryland Foyer</b>
<b>Third Plenary Session</b>	9:00–10:30 a.m. <b>Regency Ballroom</b>
Presiding:	<b>Nancy Pineda-Madrid</b> , Loyola Marymount University President-Elect, CTSA
Presenter:	<b>Vincent Miller</b> , University of Dayton “Seeking Social Salvation amidst the Docetic Default of a World Made Frictionless”
Respondent:	<b>Annie Selak</b> , Georgetown University
<b>Coffee Break</b>	10:30–11:00 a.m. <b>Baltimore &amp; Maryland Foyers</b>
<b>Concurrent Sessions III</b>	11:00 a.m.–12:45 p.m.
<u>III.1 Theology and Science – Topic Session</u>	<b>Baltimore A</b>
Administrative Team:	Kevin Vaughan, Megan Loumagne Ulishney, Benjamin Hohman
Convener:	<b>Kevin Vaughan</b> , The College of St. Scholastica
Moderator:	<b>Megan Loumagne Ulishney</b> , Gannon University
Presenter:	<b>Robert G. Elliot</b> , Providence College
Paper Title:	“Evolutionary Anthropology, Self-Legislation, and Original Sin”
Presenter:	<b>Joyce Ann Konigsburg</b> , DePaul University
Paper Title:	“Artificial General Intelligence: Proponent or Opponent of Social Salvation”
Presenter:	<b>Jordan Joseph Wales</b> , Hillsdale College
Paper Title:	“Social Salvation Among Apparent Persons: Can We Live Our Personhood while Owning Sociable AI?”

III.2 Spirituality – Topic Session**Baltimore B**

Administrative Team: Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, Michael Rubbelke, C. Vanessa White

Convener: **Axel Marc Oaks Takacs**, Seton Hall University  
 Moderator: **Michael Rubbelke**, St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary

Presenter: **Dorris Van Gaal**, Calvert Hall College High School  
 Paper Title: “A Call to Social Transformation: A Reflection on Spiritual Storytelling among African Migrants to the USA”

Presenter: **Rafael Luévano**, Chapman University  
 Paper Title: “The Central American Caravans: Social Salvation of the Spiritual Pilgrimage”

Respondent: **Leo Guardado**, Fordham University

III.3 Historical Theology I – Topic Session**Maryland A**

Administrative Team: Rita George-Tvrčković, Joshua R. Brown, Robert Trent Pomplun

Convener: **Robert Trent Pomplun**, University of Notre Dame  
 Moderator: **Joshua R. Brown**, Mount St. Mary’s University

Presenter: **Elissa Cutter**, Georgian Court University  
 Paper Title: “Salvation and the Port-Royal Community: A Feminist Historical-Theological Reconstruction of the Theology of Mother Angélique Arnauld”

Presenter: **Andrew Gertner Belfield**, St. Bonaventure University  
 Paper Title: “‘Worthy Acts of Penance’ in Early Franciscan Soteriology”

Presenter: **Nicole Reibe**, Loyola University Maryland  
 Paper Title: “Gather Round the Font: Social Salvation and the Baptismal Font at St. Bartholomew’s in Liège”

III.4 Moral Theology II – Topic Session**Maryland B**

Administrative Team: Kate Ward, Marcus Mescher, David Kwon

Convener: **David Kwon**, Seattle University  
 Moderator: **Cathy Melesky Dante**, Marquette University

Presenter: **Bridget Burke Ravizza**, St. Norbert College  
 Paper Title: "Salvation and the Sacrament of Same-Sex Marriage"

Presenter: **R. Zachary Karanovich**, Mount Mary University  
 Paper Title: "Universal Salvation and the Victims of History: Considering Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation from the Margins"

### III.5 Latinx Theology – Consultation

**Kent**

(Joint Session with the Black Catholic Theology Consultation  
 and the Asian and Asian American Theology Consultation)  
*Social Salvation and Institutional Hospitality*

Administrative Team: Ish Ruiz, Cesar Baldelomar

Convener: **Ish Ruiz**, Pacific School of Religion  
 Moderator: **Stephanie Wong**, Villanova University

Presenter: **Jaisy Joseph**, Villanova University  
 Paper Title: "Church as Leaven and Pilgrim: Interstitial Epistemologies for an Interstitial Church"

Presenter: **SimonMary Asese Ahiokai**, University of Portland  
 Paper Title: "'Who Do You Say that I Am?': Making A Case for Existential Inclusive-ness at the Crossroads of Liberation, Institutionalality, and Hospitality"

Respondent: **Jeremy V. Cruz**, St. John's University (Jamaica, New York)

### III.6 The Eucharistic Revival and Social Salvation – Selected Session **Federal Hill**

Convener: **Brian Flanagan**, New Ways Ministry  
 Moderator: **Dorothy Grace Agolia**, Boston College

Presenter: **Lucas Briola**, Saint Vincent College  
 Paper Title: "Deepening the Eucharistic Revival, Deepening Social Salvation: Eucharistic Processions in Rural Communities"

Presenter: **Brian Flanagan**, New Ways Ministry  
 Paper Title: "The Eucharist, the Church, and Real Presence"

Presenter: **Elyse Raby**, Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: "Contested Bodies: The Eucharistic Revival and 'Gender Ideology'"

III.7 Dissent as a Means of Salvation: Soteriological  
Dimensions of Dissent – Selected Session

**Fells Point**

Convener: **Travis LaCouter**, KU Leuven  
Moderator: **Elizabeth M. Pyne**, Mercyhurst University

Presenter: **Travis LaCouter**, KU Leuven  
Paper Title: “When Doctrine Wounds: Dissent as a Response to Feelings of Ontological Disjunction”

Presenter: **Ryszard Bobrowicz**, KU Leuven  
Paper Title: “Truth or Obedience? Dissent as a Conflict between Individual and Communal Soteriology”

Presenter: **Ryan McAleer**, KU Leuven  
Paper Title: “Unity as Violence: Prioritizing Dissent as an Ethical-Dialogical Approach to Truth”

III.8 Liturgy/Sacraments – Topic Session

**Guilford**

Administrative Team: Xavier M. Montecel, Benjamin Durheim, LaRyssa Herrington

Convener: **Xavier M. Montecel**, St. Mary’s University  
Moderator: **LaRyssa Herrington**, University of Notre Dame

Presenter: **Megan Effron**, University of Notre Dame  
Paper Title: “Women Preaching in the Spirit: A Dialogue Between Catholics and Pentecostals”

Presenter: **Susan Reynolds**, Emory University  
Paper Title: “The Sacrament of Reconciliation Under the Gaze of the Surveillance State: An Accidental Study of Confession on the US–Mexico Border”

Presenter: **Jakob Karl Rinderknecht**, University of the Incarnate Word  
Paper Title: “On Baptism into a Sacramental (and therefore Not-Final) Church”

III.9 Christ – Topic Session

**Gibson**

Administrative Team: Mary Kate Holman, Eugene Schlesinger, Robert Lasalle-Klein

Convener: **Mary Kate Holman**, Fairfield University  
Moderator: **Eugene Schlesinger**, Santa Clara University

Presenter: **Ligita Ryliskytė, SJE**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: *"In Solidum Obligari: Without Kenotic Solidarity, No Social Salvation"*

Presenter: **Michael Lee**, Fordham University  
 Paper Title: *"Crucified People as Judge: Agency for a Social Salvation"*

Presenter: **Paul Schutz**, Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: *"Love of Christ, Heart of Creation: Salvation as Socioecological Flourishing"*

III.10 Sanctifying Social Structures: Interdisciplinary Resources for Catholic Theology – Selected Session

**James**

Convener: **Vincent Birch**, Catholic University of America  
 Moderator: **Nicholas Hayes-Mota**, Santa Clara University

Presenter: **David Cloutier**, Catholic University of America  
 Paper Title: *"Social Structures, Alienation, and Self-Gift"*

Presenter: **Christina McRorie**, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry  
 Paper Title: *"Theological Implications of the Claim that Social Contexts can Sanctify"*

Presenter: **Vincent Birch**, Catholic University of America  
 Paper Title: *"Divinized via Social Construction?: A Semiotic Analysis of the Relation between Social Construction and Holiness in Revelation and its Reception"*

III.11 *Laudate Deum* and the Future of Catholic Teaching on Ecology – Selected Session

**Pride of Baltimore**

Convener: **Daniel Scheid**, Duquesne University  
 Moderator: **Daniel Castillo**, Loyola University Maryland

Presenter: **Sara Bernard-Hoverstad**, Gonzaga University  
 Paper Title: *"Laudate Deum and the Vatican's Global Climate Action"*

Presenter: **Daniel Scheid**, Duquesne University  
 Paper Title: *"Laudate Deum and Hearing the Cry of Indigenous and Nonhuman Creation"*

Presenter: **Meghan Clark**, St. John's University  
 Paper Title: "*Laudate Deum* within Francis' Social Magisterium"

**Saturday Afternoon, June 15, 2024**

**Theological Studies Editorial Consultation Luncheon** 12:50–2:15 p.m.  
**Homeland**

**CUERG Luncheon** 1:00–2:15 p.m.  
**Watertable Ballroom BC**

**CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award**  
*The Inaugural Award will be presented to*

**C. Vanessa White**  
*Associate Professor of Spirituality and Ministry  
 Catholic Theological Union*

**Concurrent Sessions** 2:30–4:15 p.m.

IV.1 Moral Theology I – Topic Session **Baltimore A**

Administrative Team: Kate Ward, Marcus Mescher, David Kwon

Convener: **Kate Ward**, Marquette University  
 Moderator: **Jens Mueller**, Notre Dame of Maryland University

Presenter: **Kathleen Bonnette**, Georgetown University  
 Paper Title: "'Saved Together'? Questioning Social Soteriology in Light of Systemic Oppression"

Presenter: **Melicia Antonio**, University of Notre Dame  
 Paper Title: "Replacing Coercion with a Renewed Moral Authority: Lessons from the Spanish Experience"

IV.2 Asian and Asian American Theology – Consultation **Baltimore B**  
(Joint Consultation with the Latinx Theology Consultation  
and the Black Catholic Theology Consultation)  
*Reclaiming Our Roots*

Administrative Team: Stephanie Wong, Min-ah Cho, Stephanie Puen

Convener: **Stephanie Wong**, Villanova University  
 Moderator: **Craig A. Ford, Jr.**, St. Norbert College



Presenter: **Cecilia Titizano**, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: "Indigenous Relational Epistemologies and a Moral Cosmos"

Presenter: **David De La Fuente**, Fordham University  
 Paper Title: "Saving *Kapwa*: Investigating Decolonial Pneumatology Among Filipino-American Catholic Charismatics"

Presenter: **LaRyssa Herrington**, University of Notre Dame  
 Paper Title: "Memory, Narrative, and Solidarity: Africana Marian Popular Piety as Embodied Political Theology"

#### IV.3 The Enduring Gift and Theological Challenge of Johann Baptist Metz – Interest Group

**Maryland A**

*Johann Baptist Metz: Political Salvation beyond the Soteriological Spell?*

Administrative Team: Kevin Burke, S.J., Julia Prinz, V.D.M.F., J. Matthew Ashley

Convener: **Kevin Burke, S.J.**, Regis University  
 Moderator: **Kevin Burke, S.J.**, Regis University

Presenter: **J. Matthew Ashley**, University of Notre Dame  
 Paper Title: "Do We Miss Johann Baptist Metz? Provocations on the Theme of Social Salvation Today"

Presenter: **Julia Prinz, V.D.M.F.**, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: "Lament, Memory, and Healing: Johann Baptist Metz and the Inherent Politicalness of Salvation"

Respondent: **Kevin Burke, S.J.**, Regis University

#### IV.4 Karl Rahner Society – Consultation

Administrative Team: Brandon Peterson, Mark Fischer, Jakob Karl Rinderknecht

Convener: **Mary Beth Yount**, Neumann University  
 Moderator: **David Dault**, Loyola University Chicago

Presenter: **Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M.**, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)  
 Paper Title: "The Cosmic Significance of the Incarnation: Karl Rahner's Supralapsarian Christology as Social Salvation"

Presenter: **Michael Rubbelke**, St. John's School of Theology  
 Paper Title: "Integrating Fragmented History: Social Salvation in Rahner's Theology of Purgatory and Indulgences"

Presenter: **Andrew Vink**, Marymount University  
 Paper Title: "Historical Soteriology as Social Salvation: A Synthesis of Rahnerian and Ellacurían Themes"

#### IV.5. Public Theology – Interest Group

**Kent**

Administrative Team: Rosemary P. Carbine, David DeCosse

Convener: **Rosemary P. Carbine**, Whittier College  
 Moderator: **David DeCosse**, Santa Clara University

Presenter: **Kathleen Dorsey Bellow**, Xavier University  
 Paper Title: "Full, Conscious, and Active Participation: In Liturgy and Life"

Presenter: **Rosemary P. Carbine**, Whittier College  
 Paper Title: "Nevertheless, We Persist: A Feminist Public Theology"

Presenter: **Jennifer Owens-Jofré**, Loyola Marymount University  
 Paper Title: "Pastoral Theology as Public Theology at Dolores Mission"

#### IV.6 The Moral Theology of Pope Francis:

**Federal Hill**

##### An Invitation to Enact Social Salvation – Selected Session

Convener: **Conor M. Kelly**, Marquette University  
 Moderator: **Daniel DiLeo**, Creighton University

Presenter: **M.T. Dávila**, Merrimack College  
 Paper Title: "New Sources and a Stronger Pastoral Impact: Moral Theology in Light of Francis's Social Ethics"

Presenter: **Laurie Johnston**, Emmanuel College  
 Paper Title: "From Where? For Whom? Tradition and Moral Theology in Light of Francis's Ethics of War and Peace"

Presenter: **Andrea Vicini, S.J.**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: "Broader Concerns and a Deeper Christological Focus: Moral Theology in Light of Francis's Bioethics"

IV.7 Gun cultures and Gun Violence – Interest Group

**Fells Point**

Administrative Team: Michael Grigoni, SimonMary Asese Aihiokhai

Convener: **Michael R. Grigoni**, Wake Forest University

Moderator: **SimonMary Asese Aihiokhai**, University of Portland

Presenter: **Michael R. Grigoni**, Wake Forest University

Paper Title: "American Gun Cultures as Signs of the Times: Historical and Sociological Perspectives"

Presenter: **Luis Vera**, Mount St. Mary's University

Paper Title: "Concealed Carry Culture and the Technocratic Paradigm"

Presenter: **Anna Floerke Scheid**, Duquesne University

Paper Title: "Christian Nationalism, Extremist Violence, and Guns in the US"

IV.8 Historical Theology II – Topic Session

**Guilford**

Administrative Team: Rita George-Tvrtković, Joshua R. Brown, Robert Trent Pomplun

Convener: **Joshua R. Brown**, Mount St. Mary's University

Moderator: **Rita George-Tvrtković**, Benedictine University

Presenter: **John Zaleski**, Loyola University Maryland

Paper Title: "How Long is Forever? Medieval Christian and Islamic Reflections on Universal Salvation"

Presenter: **Robert Trent Pomplun**, University of Notre Dame

Paper Title: "Debates about Universal Salvation in Catholic Theology from Newman to Tyrrell"

Respondent: **Mara Brecht**, Loyola University Chicago

IV.9 Decolonizing Catholic Theology – Invited Session

**Gibson**

Administrative Team: Elizabeth Gandolfo, Rufus Burnett, Jr., Bradford Hinze

Convener: **Elizabeth Gandolfo**, Wake Forest University

Moderator: **Bradford Hinze**, Fordham University

Presenter: **Rev. Dr. Heber Brown**, Black Church Food Security Network  
 Paper Title: “From Sanctuary to Soil: Reflections on the Black Church Food Security Network”

Respondent: **Chanelle Robinson**, Boston College

Respondent: **Rufus Burnett, Jr.**, Fordham University

#### IV.10 Thomas Aquinas – Consultation

**James**

Administrative Team: David Elliott, Gregory LaNave, Andrew Hofer, O.P.

Convener: **David Elliott**, Catholic University of America  
 Moderator: **Gregory LaNave**, Dominican House of Studies

Presenter: **Frederick Bauerschmidt**, Loyola University Maryland  
 Paper Title: “Eucharist and Social Salvation in Thomas Aquinas”

Presenter: **Monica Marcelli-Chu**, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Paper Title: “Living With All Things: Navigating an Anthropocentric and Universal Common Good in Aquinas”

Presenter: **Matthew Dugandzic**, St. Mary’s Seminary and University  
 Paper Title: “On Light Matter in the Sin of Lying”

#### IV.11 Anthropology – Topic Session

**Pride of Baltimore**

Administrative Team: Eric Daryl Meyer, Tiffany Hartnell-Howden, Adam Beyt

Convener: **Eric Daryl Meyer**, Carroll College  
 Moderator: **Tiffany Hartnell-Howden**, Boston College

Presenter: **Valentina Nilo**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: “The Victim’s Resistance as Salvation: A Decolonial Approach to the Reality of Imprisoned Women in Latin America”

Presenter: **Timothy Perron**, Fordham University  
 Paper Title: “Human Ecology as an Approach to Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Vatican Documents”

Presenter: **Madeline Jarrett**, Boston College  
 Paper Title: “Risking Resurrection: Agency, Phenomenology, and the Feminist Ethic of Risk”

**Saturday Evening, June 15, 2024**

**Eucharist at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church** 5:00 p.m.  
120 North Front St., Baltimore, Maryland

**Walking Directions:** Exit hotel and turn left onto Guilford Ave./South Street. Walk Guildford/ South Street approximately 5 blocks to E. Fayette St. Turn right onto E. Fayette. Walk E. Fayette approximately 4 blocks to East Coast Greenway / Jone Falls Trail. The church will be on the right-hand side.

**Limited Transportation** will be provided for those unable to walk to the church at 4:15 p.m. Two coach lines will be parked near the hotel entrance.

**John Courtney Murray Award Reception** 6:30 p.m.  
**Maryland Foyer**

**John Courtney Murray Award Banquet** 7:00 p.m.  
**Maryland Ballroom D-F**

**Sunday Morning, June 16, 2024**

**Conveners' Meeting** 7:15–8:45 a.m.  
**Homeland**

*New conveners (or their delegates) of Topic Sessions, Interest Groups, and Consultations will meet Nancy Pineda-Madrid, CTSA President-Elect, Susan Abraham, CTSA Vice President, and B. Kevin Brown, Editor of Proceedings, for evaluation and preliminary planning for the 2025 convention.*

**Zen Meditation** 8:00–8:30 a.m.  
**Federal Hill**

**Morning Prayer** 8:30–8:50 a.m.  
**Federal Hill**

**Exhibits** 8:30–11:00 a.m.  
**Baltimore & Maryland Foyers**

**Fourth Plenary Session: Presidential Address**9:00–10:00 a.m.  
**Maryland Ballroom D-F**Presiding: **Susan Abraham**, Pacific School of Religion  
Vice President, CTSAAddress: **Kristin E. Heyer**, Boston College  
President, CTSA

“Heart(s) of Flesh: Structural Sin and Social Salvation”

**Appointment of the New President**10:00–10:15 a.m.  
**Maryland Ballroom****Coffee and Pastries**10:15 a.m.  
**Maryland Foyer****Meeting and Luncheon: CTSA Board of Directors**11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.  
**Fells Point**-----  
**Catholic Theological Society of America  
79<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention****“One Baptism: Evolving Visions of Catholicity  
from Nicaea to Vatican II and Beyond”****June 12–15, 2025  
Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront  
Portland, Oregon**-----  
*The CTSA would like to thank the following members for their service and assistance  
with the annual convention:*Local Arrangements Committee**Daniel Castillo**, Loyola University Maryland (Chair)  
**Nicole Reibe**, Loyola University Maryland  
**Byron Wratee**, Loyola University MarylandLiturgical Aide**Layla A. Karst**, Loyola Marymount University

Parliamentarian

**William Loewe**, Catholic University of America

Photographer

**Paul J. Schutz**, Santa Clara University

Program Organization Assistant

**Dorothy Lee Goehring**, Boston College

Registration Team

**Andrea Bischoff**, Harvard Divinity School

**Dorie Goehring**, Boston College

**Christine Mellick**, University of Dayton

**Joseph Rosales**, Harvard Divinity School

Catholic Theological Society of America  
Board of Directors 2023-2024

<b>President</b>	<b>Kristine E. Heyer</b> Boston College
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<b>Proceedings Editor</b>	<b>B. Kevin Brown</b> Gonzaga University



**JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY AWARD 2024**

Citation from Dr. Kristin Heyer, CTSA President:

The John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Theological Achievement

For the past forty years, the recipient of the CTSA's 2024 John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology has leavened and led the theological community in major academic institutions, international venues, and our guild itself. The awardee has centered the foundational role of proclamation in our craft with intellectual depth and prophetic vision. Through an integration of theological rigor, pastoral expertise, and generous mentorship, the honoree has modeled excellence and invited us into an expansive understanding of our shared vocation.

Our awardee hails from a family of ten, including one other member of this society. She attended St. Sebastian grade school and St. Vincent High School before joining the Dominican Sisters of Akron, Ohio (now the Dominican Sisters of Peace). After graduating from the University of Dayton with B.A. in English (1971) she taught English and religious studies at St. Vincent-St. Mary High School in Akron before earning an M.A. and Ph.D. in systematic theology from the Catholic University of America (1979, 1984). There her doctoral dissertation traced evolving shifts in Edward Schillebeeckx's approach to a theology of revelation, with corresponding shifts in his hermeneutics of tradition, as the basis for constructing a Catholic theological approach to the ministry of preaching. That early work served as the basis for three of her major contributions to the field in subsequent decades: first, her now-classic work on a theology of preaching as "naming grace;" second, her internationally esteemed expertise in the field of Schillebeeckx studies—indeed she earned the admiration of Schillebeeckx himself in his lifetime—and, finally, research and teaching in fields of fundamental theology, theological anthropology, and feminist theology and spirituality.

A scholarly career spanning these topics has yielded several monographs: *Naming Grace: Speaking with Authority* (1997); *Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today* (2008); and, out last year, *A Time to Keep Silence and a Time to Speak*. She has also published three edited volumes, treating the thought of Schillebeeckx and William Hill, and nearly 70 articles and book chapters. Her expertise has occasioned over 60 major lecture invitations from across the United States and Rome, Fribourg, Nijmegen, Leuven, and Pietermaritzburg.

These major contributions have also been recognized with four honorary doctorates, as well as the Washington Theological Union's Sophia Award for Theological Excellence in Service of Ministry; Barry University's Yves Congar Award for Theological Excellence; and our own Ann O'Hara Graff Award. She has served on two international theological commissions of the Order of Preachers for studies related to the Order's preaching mission. Her work remains incomparable in contemporary Catholic homiletic scholarship, nourished by and shared through decades of lecturing and preaching in Catholic and ecumenical contexts in the United States, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Australia, and South Africa.

Taking deeply seriously her role as "teaching-scholar," our honoree has mentored generations of leading theologians, including many women and Latine scholars, in

particular. She taught at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis for eleven years before joining the faculty of Theology at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, where she has taught systematic theology for nearly twenty years. She has held visiting appointments at Radboud University in Nijmegen, Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and the Catholic University of America. During her years at Notre Dame, she has directed more than twenty dissertations and has served on nearly twice that number of other dissertation committees, while also receiving two university awards for undergraduate teaching. Through her pedagogy, ministry of presence, and preaching at 10:00 p.m. lay-led liturgical services in residence halls, she has inspired and sustained the vocations of countless colleagues within our field and beyond.

Here in the CTSA, after planning our 2005 meeting on the “Resurrection of the Body,” our honoree served as president during a period of restructuring our annual conventions. Her presidential address, treating “Dialogue, Proclamation, and the Sacramental Imagination” remains most relevant for today’s polarized contexts. In reflecting recently on the enduring contributions of Catherine of Siena, our awardee wrote, “One of the major challenges of our day is...to cultivate...a contemplative vision and wise judgment[,]...the true source of the bold speech and action...so needed in the Church and the world.”<sup>1</sup> As her career and very way of being attest, the author is herself an exemplar in this regard.

As her identity may be now becoming more apparent, I conclude by adding that she is aptly honored with her very own namesake “society,” which gathers annually over breakfast at our convention. It is with enduring gratitude for this unfolding legacy and with sincere delight that here tonight, in Baltimore, the Catholic Theological Society of America confers the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology upon Mary Catherine Hilbert, of the Order of Preachers.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Catherine Hilbert, *A Time to Keep Silence and a Time to Speak* (Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press, 2023), 8.

## ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The membership of the CTSA met for its annual Business Meeting on Friday, June 15, 2024. Dr. Kristin Heyer, called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m., EST. Dr. William Loewe served as parliamentarian

### ***Report of the Admissions Committee***

Dr. Andrew Prevot presented the report on behalf of the Admissions committee. Members of the Admissions Committee for 2023-2024 were Dr. Anna Bonta, Dr. Andrew Massena, Dr. Steven Battin, Dr. Ted Ulrich, and Dr. Hosffman Ospino, Secretary, *ex officio*. The Committee advanced its work during May 2024.

Between May 1, 2023 and April 30, 2024, the CTSA received a total of seventy-nine applications. There were forty-eight new Active membership applicants. Of these, seventeen corresponded to Associate members applying to Active membership. There were thirty-one new Associate membership applicants. The Admissions Committee recommended that the CTSA Active members present at this Business Meeting accept all seventy-nine applications put forward to the membership for consideration. There were no special cases this year.

The CTSA members present at the meeting approved the committee's recommendation by a voice vote. The new Active and Associate members present at the meeting were greeted with a round of applause. President Kristin Heyer encouraged them to participate actively in the life of the Society, including elections. The names and affiliations of new members are found in the appendices to the CTSA Directory contained in this volume of the *Proceedings*.

### ***Report of the Nominations Committee***

After a process of receiving, vetting, and discerning nominations from the general membership, the members of the Nominations Committee, Dr. Bradford Hinze (*Chair*), Dr. Mary Doak, and Dr. Bede Bidlack submitted the names of candidates recommended to stand for election to serve on the Board. Dr. Bradford Hinze read the names proposed by the committee:

The slate of nominees proposed by the committee follow:

For Vice-President:	Dr. Catherine Clifford Dr. Leo D. Lefebure
For board members:	Dr. Khaled Emmanuel Anatolios Dr. Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M. Dr. Laurie Johnston Dr. Holly Taylor Coolman

There were no nominations from the floor.

President Kristin Heyer thanked all CTSA members standing for election. As voting results became available, they were announced to the membership.

Dr. Catherine Clifford was elected as Vice-President. Dr. Laurie Johnston and Dr. Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., were elected as Board Members. Dr. Hosffman Ospino (Secretary) and Rev. Patrick Flanagan, C.M., (Treasurer) were reelected by acclamation for another one-year term.

Dr. Nancy Pineda-Madrid assumes the Presidency for the year 2024-2025. Dr. Susan Abraham becomes President-Elect. The other members of the Board of Directors are Dr. Kristin Heyer (Past President), Dr. Elsie Miranda (Board Member) and Dr. SimonMary Asease Ahiokhai (Board Member).

President Heyer thanked Dr. Leo D. Lefebure, Dr. Khaled Emmanuel Anatolios, and Dr. Holly Taylor Coolman.

### ***Report of the President***

The following is the text of the report read by Dr. Kristin Heyer:

As I conclude my presidential year, I wish to extend my gratitude to the Presidential Line, Executive Director, board officers, and board members for their significant support and engagement this year. I am grateful for their ideas and collaboration as we worked to respond to members' concerns and to emerging ecclesial, academic, and demographic signs of our times. Our standing and *ad hoc* committees also helped us to adapt to new needs, for which I am grateful.

In terms of the seventy-eighth annual convention, I offer deep thanks on behalf of the entire Society to President-Elect Nancy Pineda-Madrid for planning a wide-ranging and stimulating program addressing social salvation. Thanks too to Executive Director Mary Jane Ponyik, Program Assistant Dorie Goehring, the Local Arrangements Committee (Daniel Castillo [Chair], Nicole Riebe and Byron Wratee), and the Registration Team for bringing those plans to fruition; and thank you to the conveners, presenters, prayer/meditation leaders and photographer for enriching our shared time together in Baltimore. Special thanks to Christine Firer Hinze, who took the lead on drafting a Strategic Plan in the course of her service on the Centennial Committee; Layla Karst, who chaired the Ad Hoc Memorial Service Committee this year and continued her valuable service as Liturgical Liaison; and William Loewe, who extended his term as Parliamentarian through this convention. I also wish to thank the individuals and institutions whose donations support our convention and wider work: Morrissey College of Arts & Sciences, Boston College; Callaghan-Pierog Family Foundation; Center for Catholic Studies, Fairfield University; Georgetown University; Loyola Marymount University; Loyola University Chicago; Master's in Theological Studies Program, Loyola University Maryland; Office of Mission and Identity, Loyola University Maryland; Pacific School of Religion; Regis St. Michael's Faculty of Theology, Toronto School of Theology (in the University of Toronto); College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Theological Studies, Saint Louis University; St. Mary's Seminary and University; University of Dayton; and Villanova University. I thank members of the Society who have generously made gifts to the Society this year, as well.

I share below some general updates about the work of the Society this year:

1. The Centennial Committee, chaired by Francis Clooney, S.J., met monthly throughout the year, finalizing its work on a draft Strategic Plan and Vision Statements, which the Board will discuss at its June meeting.

2. In response to the 5-Year Convention Review Report, June 2023 resolution, October online event ("The End of the Golden Era: Theology in the Age of Academic Precarity"), and November member Job Survey, we conducted online Town Halls in February and March to gather member input on three proposals: (i) online conventions every third year, (ii) online business meetings, and (iii) fewer plenaries at the annual convention. The Board met on March 22 about the input received and decided to conduct a survey concerning the first proposal to gather broader input from the membership, particularly on whether to hold online conventions, and whether to hold them every 3 or every 4 years, if so.

Regarding proposal (i), the April survey results were as follows:

86 online meetings every 3 yrs (2027)

72 online meetings every 4 yrs (2028)

53 in-person meetings only 211 total responses

In light of the survey responses, the Board decided to bring to the voting membership at the June 2024 business meeting a ballot that asks them to vote for meeting online periodically or not, and if the former passes, to vote for whether they opt for meeting online every three or every four years.

Regarding proposal (ii), in light of Town Hall input, the Board decided to bring to the voting membership a measure to pilot conducting the business meeting and voting online for three years beginning in 2025 (preserving a block of time during the convention to serve as a forum for discussing matters of relevance to the Society's present and future). Given the Board's approval of eliminating the twenty-four-hour proviso for resolutions in March, it also decided to bring a ballot to the voting membership on this, with the related bylaws revisions. (A composite business meeting votes document was distributed to the membership on May 6, 2024.) With respect to proposal (iii), the Board decided in March to delay any change to the number of plenaries until the CTSA takes up a more comprehensive revision of the program structure in the years ahead.

The June 14, 2024, business meeting will create space for these deliberations and a more in- depth presentation on our finances by making most of our regular reports available to the membership online and having officers and representatives field questions rather than read reports.

3. Other responses to input from the 5-year Convention Review and the 2023 resolution included establishing a new "[Tutti Fund](#)" in January, covering registration and banquet ticket costs for members, whether or not they are presenting at the convention, and the commissioning of the [Study Group on the Value of Theology in University Education](#) in February.
  - a. This pilot year Tutti subsidies were awarded across a range of career stages and "sources" of relative need, as hoped; priority was given to those facing programmatic or institutional closures. Funds from the Callaghan-Pierog Foundation that allowed us to launch the Tutti Fund

also helped fund our Dolores L. Christie Scholarship scholarships this year.

- b. The Centennial Committee met about the scope and shape of the Study Group, three of its members volunteered to serve, and I then recruited eight more (all of whom have administrative experience with closures or reconfigurations, academic expertise in Catholic higher education, or relevant skills). I am grateful to its members for helping us meet the needs of this urgent moment in Catholic higher education: Elisabeth Kincaid and Daniel Rober, co-chairs; Massimo Faggioli, Edward Hahnenberg, Christine Firer Hinze, Linh Hoang, O.F.M., Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado, Catherine Punsilan-Manlimos, Susan Bigelow Reynolds, and Mark Yenson. On February 5, Edward Hahnenberg represented us with a panel presentation on “Changing Theology & Religious Studies Requirements” at the annual Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities convention in Washington DC (as part of the ACCU Working Group).
4. In March, I was asked to recruit delegates for a synodal conversation convened by an *ad hoc* USCCB subcommittee (Peter Casarella of Duke University, Kristin Colberg of St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, and Alessandro Rovati of Belmont Abbey University). They were tasked by the USCCB Synodal Coordinating Committee with producing a report summarizing the reflections of theologians in the United States on the Synod’s Interim Stage/Synthesis [Report](#). Like the listening sessions in which our members had participated in May and June 2023 at the invitation of Bishop Daniel Flores, the subcommittee also invited members from other North American theological guilds. Upon receiving the invitation, we opened up the opportunity for CTSA members to participate, even as we (and the *ad hoc* subcommittee) regretted the last-minute nature of the notice and initial restrictions on participant numbers. I am grateful that the CTSA response rate was so high, and that the subcommittee opened a second session in response; in the end, sixty-nine CTSA members participated in the two listening sessions. The subcommittee reported that they sent the Synthesis Report on the Interim Stage’s Listening Sessions with Theologians to the USCCB and that its Synod Writing Team will consider it as it drafts a national synthesis document for the Vatican.
5. Our April 8 Virtual Event (“Is Peace Possible in a World of Violence?”) included one presenter, Lilian Ehidiamhen, a Nigerian working in London, whose participation signaled how our online offerings already make possible increased engagement of international voices through these semiannual Virtual Events. I am grateful to our other presenters, Eli McCarthy and Heather DuBois, and to Mary Kate Holman, who has chaired this committee for 2023-2024.
6. On April 19, Canadian bishops’ liaison Catherine Clifford, President-Elect Nancy Pineda- Madrid, Past President Francis Clooney, S.J., and I met with the Canadian Catholic Bishops’ Conference’s Doctrine Commission (via

Zoom). Chair Bishop Gary Franken and four other bishop members participated. After sharing fruitful examples of collaboration between theologians and bishops (at Bishop Franken's request), we discussed the precarious state of Canadian theological education as it intersects with the Synod's focus on formation. It provided a valuable opportunity to learn more about the Canadian pastoral and theological contexts and what might be of service to the Commission. Leo Lefebure met with Rev. Ronald Kunkel, Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat on Doctrine and Canonical Affairs and Rev. Michael Fuller, General Secretary of the USCCB over the past academic year. He will provide updates on the joint learned societies' meeting mentioned in my January letter as plans develop. I am grateful to Catherine Clifford and Leo Lefebure for their leadership in cultivating these relationships.

7. On May 6 and 8, we co-hosted Interguild Synodal Dialogues, based upon our meetings with leadership representatives from other English-speaking, North American theological guilds over the past year (initiated by Francis Clooney, S.J. last year). Representatives agreed that gathering wider membership for such dialogues would be a productive next step as we continue to build relationships across guilds. CTS Past President Brian Flanagan, Maureen O'Connell, and I collaborated to plan the two sessions, recruit participants and train facilitators, and conduct exit surveys. Fifty-six members across the guilds participated, and the facilitator reports and exit surveys indicated valuable fruits and a strong desire for ongoing engagement; a full report is included below. Our leadership counterparts have also been invited to disseminate the report to their members.
8. Whereas the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT) global assembly was postponed until November 2024 and our World Forum on Theology and Liberation liaisons were unable to participate in the WFTL assembly in Kathmandu as planned, the reports from each liaison and President-Elect Nancy Pineda-Madrid offer updates.
9. At the June 2024 Convention we are implementing the Memorial Service changes agreed upon in October and announced in my January letter: inclusion of the memorial service within the second plenary session; inclusion of a petition for those who have died during the previous year at the convention Eucharist; inscription and display of a bilingual book of remembrance; and the inclusion of the names of those memorialized in our annual *Proceedings*. My thanks again to the *ad hoc* memorial service committee that made recommendations as we anticipate honoring growing numbers of colleagues in the years ahead. Thanks, too, to Bede Bidlack for inscribing names in our book of remembrance.
10. I have invited Emily Reimer-Barry and Byron Wratee to address attendees at the 2024 "New and Newer Members Reception," as well as Stephanie Wong as CUERG chair.

In closing, it has been an honor to serve the Society this year as it faces new opportunities and challenges, welcomes new voices, and plans for a new “era” already underway.

### **Report of the President: Appendix A**

#### **Interguild Synodal Dialogues Report**

Participating guilds that committed to participate and advertise to their members (4/15/24):

- Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS)
- Academy of Catholic Theology (ACT)
- Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS)
- Canadian Theological Society (CTS-CAN)
- Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA)
- College Theology Society (CTS)
- Fellowship of Catholic Scholars (FCS)

Monday May 8, 2024, 2:00-3:30 p.m., EDT

Twenty-nine member participants with seven trained facilitators

Wednesday, May 10, 2024, 7:00-8:30 p.m., EDT

Fifteen member participants with 5 trained facilitators

We met in April with longtime CTS member Maureen O’Connell, Ph.D., to plan the two events in light of our cross-guild bridge-building goals. She is an ethics professor at LaSalle University and works with Discerning Deacons to animate synodality among higher education populations. She recruited the trained, volunteer facilitators for both sessions, who have been involved in the synodal process in different communities across the United States. We sent out the central prompt for the conversations in the Spirit in advance to all those registered (fifty-six total): *Reflect on a concrete experience when you served the church as a theologian, directly or indirectly. What did you learn through that experience about being a theologian in the church?*

We framed the experience for participants in light of the aims of the interguild meetings over the past two years, so that it was clear that the encounter across guild differences rather than “official outputs” for submission was the primary goal. We had participants indicate their guild affiliation(s) to facilitate “mixed” breakout rooms upon arrival, recruited members from different guilds to lead us in prayer at the sessions’ beginning and end, and incorporated silent reflection opportunities. The hour-long small group conversations treated the initial prompt, with subsequent rounds asking participants to share *In light of what you have heard, what resonates with you?* And, in the third round, *What is our conversation revealing about the contribution of theologians to the process of becoming a synodal church?* Finally the facilitators took anonymized notes to gather the fruits of our conversation with participants sharing points of convergence and divergence from the discussion.



We maximized time in small group conversation rather than having each group report back in the main session, opting instead to have participants drop a word or short phrase in the chat reflective of the fruits of their conversation, and then building in time for participants to complete a brief online [survey](#) about the experience, including what they would like to see in terms of interguild opportunities in the future (results below). (Words dropped in the chat included humility, wisdom, inclusivity, deep listening, hope in community, and theologians are bridge people, e.g.) We debriefed with the facilitators at the end of each session and they submitted their notes (themes below) thereafter. We were struck by their gratitude for the opportunity to get a window into theologians' experiences, gifts, and struggles as a byproduct of their participation. No doubt it was valuable for theologian participants to have an experience of non-theologians actively engaged in the Synod, as well (pastoral associates, community organizers, pastoral life coordinators).

### **Facilitators' Notes' Themes**

One theme that many small groups converged upon was theologians' commitment to the church, what one report named as a "common love for the church" and a "common love for the people of God." Theologians expressed commitments to their students, to the church, and to the synodal process. Groups expressed a sense of the identity of theologians as "bridge-builders," both in the classroom and in the church. They converged in their experience in creating communities that allow for conversation, nuance, and deep listening, and a desire to help share that experience and those gifts for a more synodal church.

A second theme of conversation was the relation between bishops and theologians. Some groups expressed frustration at what they perceived as a lack of closer working relationships with bishops and other church leaders. One participant commented, "Theologians have a hard time being heard by church leaders," and another, more strongly, "Theologians are not valued and consulted to the extent that they could and should be." Another stated, "Our own pastors are often not interested in what we could offer our communities; many of us chose to be theologians because the vocation gives us life and we want to share that with others, yet it sets us outside our communities."

At the same time, this was a point of divergence among the theologians, with differences in experiences with their local bishops and other leaders leading to different perceptions. One facilitator commented, "Some expressed close relationships with bishops. Others expressed they had never had a conversation with a bishop. This appeared a little bit to be a male-female divide in our group. The women longed to be at the table of diocesan leadership. The men were there already." Another group noted that "the ability [of theologians] to contribute to synodality depends on the receptivity of the bishops." There were also other differences rooted in different contexts; one group noted that the US church seems much more polarized than in Canada. One report indicated that a participant asked, "What do our bishops want from us? What do they think of me individually, of fellow theologians in general? How do they see the role of theologians? How could we be in dialogue with them?"

A third theme was a mixture of hope for the future of theology, and concern for the future of theology. Many groups asked questions about how theologians could and should act as leaders in the church and in the synodal process, in partnership with their bishops. One facilitator reported questions like, "Who is really at the table for the

synod? What will become of this after October; what are the next steps? What do we need to let go of as a church? How can theologians help to move this forward?" Theologians also expressed concern for the place of theology in Catholic higher education, where theology courses, programs, and therefore positions, are being reduced, and for a felt disconnect between the theologians of the guilds represented and seminary education.

A final shared theme was the desire to continue these conversations in a variety of ways. Many groups expressed the desire to continue having such conversations among theologians from the various theological guilds in North America. Many groups also expressed hopes for opportunities for continuing engagement in the Synod on Synodality and on further synodal initiatives, as well as other ways in which theologians and bishops together might use the Conversation in the Spirit method and other synodal practices to enter into deeper dialogue and closer collaboration.

### **Survey Results**

Participants were invited to complete a survey at the completion of the session, which provided additional data on their engagement in the process. Many of the comments reflect the themes listed above, offered in a more personal manner. Some comments focused particularly upon the participants' positive experience of dialogue itself, and the realization of the commonalities theologians share across their contexts and guilds beyond perceived polarization or ideological differences.

For instance, in response to a question about what the fruits of the experience were for them, participants noted:

"It was just so tremendous to connect—so simply and yet deeply—with theologians from around the world. We shared! We listened! We acknowledged differences. We dreamed. It was edifying. The facilitated conversation made it possible for us to focus on being present—and not policing ourselves or each other."

"The sense that while we are often prisoners of polarization and think of each other as very different, true collaboration is possible."

"There is much common experience among theologians regarding the direction of our work within the church, formation of the church and the directions we could take going forward."

Additional comments highlighted the theme noted above regarding a shared love for the church and commitment to its flourishing:

"We all share a love for the church and its people and we can truly help each other live out our vocation as theologians who are servants of what Christ wants to do in the life of the church at this particular moment in history."

"Listening to fellow Catholic theologians express their love for their faith communities, the people of God, and their faith."

“Seeing how many ways theologians are engaging the people of God even outside the classroom”

Further comments, both regarding the fruits of the experience as well as possible future initiatives emphasized further collaboration, including ways to creatively engage with local church communities, with their bishops, and with the wider synodal process. Participants called for:

“Reflection on ways in which theologians need to do more (with all humility) to make their voices heard in parishes and other local church communities, and to collaborate together to think through those.”

“Additional opportunities to listen to one another and to discern our possible contributions to a church that is exploring what it means to be synodal”

“I think it would be good to continue bringing together theologians who are interested in the pastoral engagement of their work together.”

“Is it possible to build *Conversations in the Spirit* into our annual conventions? Can we prime the pump for those conventions by bringing people together—virtually—in advance to reflect on the themes in our own lived experience? Can we figure out how to have one of these conversations—privately and well facilitated—with some of our bishops, to see what we might be able to do with them (perhaps those in the committee on higher education, for example, who have already done some good work with college students)?”

“Continue these interguild conversations and also propose to the USCCB structured and ongoing ways for the guilds to collaborate with the episcopal leadership. We are entering a stage of discernment in the synodal journey when theological expertise and conversation are urgently needed.”

Among the (few) critical comments, some theologians suggested a need to “be more substantive in these conversations,” and/or to contribute to future “collaborations, projects, works, that encourage a deeper, different level of dialogue” or “a variety of contents—e.g., a theological topic; a teaching topic; a topic related to experience of local church,” as well as provide wider access to these kinds of conversations.

Finally, there was overwhelming support for continuing these kinds of initiatives—to have what one participant named “more of this!” Thirty-three out of thirty-four respondents (96.9 percent) indicated they would participate in an online interguild dialogue like this again; twelve out of thirty-four (35.3 percent) indicated they would be willing to help design and plan such an event; and seventeen out of thirty-four (50 percent) indicated interest in in-person, regional gatherings toward similar ends. Other suggestions on the exit surveys included linking to the other

theological guilds on each guild's home website; continuing online conversations on an ongoing basis, but centered around texts for discussion (e.g., *Ad Theologian Promovendam*); and partnering with Catholic journalists (via a related Zoom session) to be of service.

–submitted by Brian Flanagan, Past President, College Theology Society  
and Kristin Heyer, President, Catholic Theological Society of America

### **Convention Policy Proposal and Bylaws Change Votes**

The CTSA membership considered several policy and Bylaws changes. Materials related to this vote were sent to the membership in advance. The following were the votes taken and the results:

#### **Changes to CTSA business meeting, voting, and convention practices:**

The first two items follow from the input offered in the 5-year Convention Review Survey, the February and March Town Halls, and the April online survey:

**Vote Item 1:** *The CTSA will pilot conducting the business meeting and voting online for three years, beginning in 2025 (preserving a block of time during the convention to serve as a forum for discussing matters of relevance to the Society's present and future).* Active members to vote in favor or to oppose.

Results:

Votes in favor: 132

Votes against: 25

*The policy change passed.*

**Vote Item 2a:** *Given financial concerns raised in the 5-year convention review report, as well as the accessibility and new possibilities technology provides, the CTSA will begin a rotation of meeting online every few years.* Active members to vote in favor or to oppose.

Results:

Votes in favor: 102

Votes against: 49

*The policy change passed.*

**Vote Item 2b:** *If 2a passes, the CTSA shall move to meet online every three years, beginning in 2027, or to meet online every four years, beginning in 2028.* Active members to vote for one of these options.

Results:

Votes in favor of meeting every three years: 56

Votes in favor of meeting every four years: 97

*The annual Convention will meet online every four years, beginning in 2028.*

**Proposed Amendments to the CTSA's Bylaws:**

The proposed change to the CTSA's Bylaws was unanimously approved by the CTSA Board (March 22, 2024) after initial discussion in October 2023 and further consultation with Parliamentarian William Loewe, as follows:

***Given the new online resolutions protocol initiated in 2024, the CTSA will no longer offer a 24-hour proviso for new resolutions.***

As a reminder, January's presidential letter announced a [new online Resolutions practice](#) approved by the Board of Directors in October 2023 that did not require changes to the Bylaws.

The text of the **Bylaws, Article V.3.2** reads as follows:

*Any proposed resolution which has not been received by the previously mentioned deadline, but which has been received at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the beginning of the business meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Society, and which has been unanimously approved by the Committee, will be placed on the agenda of the business meeting.*

Given the new online protocol for resolutions (and in light of the vote on moving business meetings themselves online) the board proposes we strike V.3.2. entirely.

**If approved, Article V.3** would thus read:

1. Any member of the Society can transmit to the Committee a proposed resolution. The resolution should be accompanied by a clear account of the facts of the matter and by an explanation of the reasons for its adoption. It shall be received by the Chairperson of the Committee at least fifteen (15) days before the beginning of the Annual Meeting of the Society. If the resolution is approved by the Committee, it will be placed on the agenda of the business meeting.
2. Any proposed resolution which has not been approved by the Committee or any other resolution from a member can be placed on the agenda, if its being so placed is approved by one-third (1/3) affirmative vote of those active members of the Society present and voting at the business meeting. The motion to put the proposed resolution on the agenda shall be non-debatable.

**Vote Item 3:** *Given the new online resolutions protocol initiated in 2024, the CTSA will no longer offer a 24-hour proviso for new resolutions, and the bylaws will be amended accordingly.* Active members to vote in favor or to oppose.

Results:

Votes in favor: 138

Votes against: 10

*The proposed change to the Bylaws passed.*

**Report of the President-Elect**

The following is the text of the report read by Dr. Nancy Pineda-Madrid:

I am so grateful to many who contributed to planning and organizing this year's convention, in particular Executive Director Mary Jane Ponyik, Program Assistant Dorie Goehring, President Kristin Heyer, Vice President Susan Abraham, Past President Frank Clooney, each of our board officers and members. Thank you to the local arrangements committee Dan Castillo (chair), Nicole Reibe and Byron Wratee; liturgical liaison Layla Karst; liturgical music coordinator Tony Alonso; photographer Paul Schutz; and Zen meditation coordinator Ruben Habito. I am grateful to the leadership of CUERG who assisted with the Land Acknowledgement, in particular Byron Wratee, Stephanie Wong, and Leo Guardado. I also wish to express thanks to Rufus Burnett for his help facilitating the pre-convention event, "Rev. Dr. Heber Brown and the Black Church Food Security Network." Many colleagues offered sage advice for which I am grateful: Chris Hinze, Maria Pilar Aquino, John Markey, Richard Lennan, M. Shawn Copeland, Ben Hohman, Mary Rose D'Angelo, Elena Procaro-Foley, Rosemary Carbine, among others. Thank you.

**June 2024 CTSA Convention, "Social Salvation," Baltimore, Maryland**

Registration for the 2024 convention is at 366 (as of May 24). Before the pandemic, convention registrations would typically range between 360–420. I am encouraged by the many members committed to gathering for our annual convention this year, particularly as the ground of theological education is shifting beneath our feet, and as the wake of the pandemic continues to have a notable yet diminishing impact.

For the annual "Sharing the Wisdom" initiative, three new/er members registered to participate. And, we had seven experienced members who volunteered. I have encouraged the experienced members who were not matched up to volunteer again next year. The number of newer members registering for this initiative fluctuates from year to year.

During May, I was in email contact with the *National Catholic Reporter and America* seeking their coverage of our Convention. Jim Keane joined us and Heidi Schlumpf, who is often with us, was not able to do so this year.

The CTSA Board is taking steps to deepen members' ownership of the financial health of our Society. In the spirit of this, I want to call your attention to two examples related to this Convention in the hope that they shed a little light on a much bigger concern. CTSA has had to face a sharp increase in hotel charges for AV use, and for our banquet meals. I am grateful to Mary Jane Ponyik for again creating a QR Code where members, using their cellular phones, can find the concurrent sessions' shared documents available until the end of the Convention. CTSA's use of a QR Code system significantly reduces our AV expenses by roughly \$7000. By way of a second example, while CTSA charges members \$65 for a JCM Banquet ticket, in Baltimore the cost to CTSA is \$116.53 per person and this price does not include the cost of your drink

during the reception prior to the banquet. Accordingly, CTSA must draw on other resources to cover the balance of \$51.53 for each member attending the banquet. This gives you a sense of two Convention related expenses CTSA faces at present.

CTSA conveners have been asked to submit their presenters' paper, outline, and/or PowerPoint so that these can be posted to a designated CTSA Dropbox account, allowing them to be accessible through the use of a QR code. This form of accessibility means that CTSA is more responsive to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Again in 2024, we will videotape the plenaries, and these will be made available to members on the CTSA website.

For this year's convention, I purposely did not schedule a Friday night event. This allows more time for members to network with their colleagues.

Last year William "Bill" Loewe let us know that the June 2024 convention would be his last as CTSA Parliamentarian. Thank you so much Bill for your superb service to the society over many years. I am pleased to announce that Mary Doak will become the next CTSA Parliamentarian beginning after the 2024 convention. We are grateful that she is willing to offer her service to the society in this capacity, among others.

### Looking Ahead

There are several initiatives that continued developing or had their inception during the last year. In concert with President Kristin Heyer's report, we need to ensure continuity and follow-up regarding:

1. The most recent **5-Year Convention Review** which concluded in June 2023 generated three areas of possible changes to our convention structure and rubrics. At our June Business Meeting a vote is being taken on two possible changes and consideration of a third possible change is on hold for the present. I will move this process forward over the next year.
2. The ongoing work of the **Centennial Committee**, particularly its work on a CTSA strategic plan, is vital for our future. I have attended meetings of this committee over the last few months, and I look forward to taking on a more active role.
3. This past year, along with Edward Hahnenberg, I attended the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) annual meeting. It enabled me to become more accurately aware of the changes to departments of theology and/or religious studies on Catholic campuses across the United States. Indeed, much has changed and theology's place in Catholic institutions of higher learning requires particular attention in the moment. The newly formed **CTSA Study Group on the Value of Theology in University Education** has begun this vital and continuing work.
4. CUERG and the CTSA Board began conversations on **how CTSA recognizes different forms of diversities**. I will seek input from the Board regarding how this conversation might productively move forward.
5. In May 2024, CTSA participated in **Synodal Interguild Dialogues** along with members of ACT, ACHTUS, BCTS, and CTS. I plan to continue the fruitful work of these Interguild Dialogues in the coming year.
6. CTSA continues its work **to grow our relationships with the USCCB and the CCCB**. For example, in April 2024, along with CTSA Liaison Catherine

Clifford and members of the CTSA presidential line, I met with the five bishops of the CCCB's commission on doctrine to discuss "*how to strengthen the bonds and the practices of consultation between bishops and theologians.*" I plan to continue supporting this kind of collaboration.

7. CTSA has committed itself to **the work of climate justice**, particularly with our decision to move forward with the advice we received from the Fossil Fuels Divestment Task Force. I am committed to seeing this work develop and continue.
8. I will also be discussing with the board how we might continue our CTSA Zoom Convenings this coming year and our pilot book club experience.

### Looking Further Ahead

I am mindful that we need to think more deeply about opportunities and concerns on the CTSA horizon. These are some thoughts on my mind.

The make-up of CTSA has changed considerably over the years. For the first time in CTSA history, over a three-year span a theologian who is a woman will be CTSA president. In addition, this happens during a time of tremendous change in terms of the professional positions held by CTSA members. No longer can we assume that stable positions in colleges and universities are the default employment of CTSA members. We need to reimagine what the world of theological discourse looks like and where it is occurring. The reality of these changes invites us to reimagine the culture of CTSA.

Having spent the first twenty-five years of my life along the US–Mexico border, I have long mused about the name of our society, the "Catholic Theological Society of America." ". . . of America" haunts me. As we know, "America" is comprised of two continents, twenty-three countries in the North and twelve countries in the South. "America" is not simply or primarily English speaking. How might CTSA cross borders and live more deeply into ". . . of America"? I feel uneasy raising these questions, but they do haunt me.

On May 10, and at Pope Francis' invitation, ten members of the International Network of Societies of Catholic Theology (INSeCT) had a private audience with him. Because I was formerly CTSA's representative to INSeCT, I was asked to be among this group of ten theologians from around the world. The continents of Africa, Asia, Australia, South America, Europe, and North America were each represented among the ten members. I was asked to represent North America, to briefly comment on the gifts of and challenges confronting theology in North America and to present my thoughts in Spanish. Pope Francis' comments to our group signal a grace-filled opportunity and invitation to theologians. He highlighted "three guidelines for theology: creative fidelity to tradition, a cross disciplinary approach and collegiality," stating that these "are the essential 'ingredients' of the vocation of Catholic theologians in the heart of the Church." He made it clear that he sees theologians as a resource for the work of the church.

Who knows where this will lead. That said, Pope Francis is taking steps so that the conversation continues. I am heartened that Linh Hoang is now CTSA's representative to INSeCT.

With Gratitude for our Theological Ministry and Work.



***Report of the Vice-President***

The following is the text of the report read by Dr. Susan Abraham:

With grateful thanks to Mary Jane Ponyik, Kristin Heyer and Nancy Pineda-Madrid for help and assistance during my time as VP of CTSA.

The mentorship breakfast this year will engage the theme of "How to Publish" for new members. Nancy was kind to remind me to invite publishers who will come to CTSA to the breakfast and Mary Jane very kindly provided me with the list of emails to publishers. It is shaping up to be a very well attended event.

Many thanks to Layla Karst and generous colleagues who are able to pay tribute to the memory of recently deceased colleagues.

I am also glad that the plans for the 2025 convention in Portland are coming together. 2025 is a jubilee year: the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and also the 60th anniversary of Vatican II. Pope Francis has declared it an official jubilee year, with a focus on hope. Hence, my theme invokes this extraordinary time, drawing from one of the articles of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The theme, "One Baptism: Evolving Visions of Catholicity from Nicaea to Vatican II and Beyond," seeks to bring together theological reflection on what it means to confess one baptism for a global and worldwide church. I have also provided additional (and provocative) avenues for exploring what the implications of our confession of "One Baptism" might mean for the global church, for interreligious and ecumenical understanding, for understanding across ecclesial, liturgical, theological, disciplinary, theoretical, cultural, and national divides. I thank Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Nancy Dallavalle and Layla Karst for excellent help with formulating the rationale.

For the 2025 meeting, additionally, ACHTUS President-Elect Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu and I are in conversation on how to create a more inclusive space for ACHTUS members. As is known, ACHTUS members have felt alienated from CTSA for years. Cecilia and I are in conversation about overlapping the two meetings so that ACHTUS members may also stay for the CTSA meeting, especially in light of a year of jubilee and the theme of forgiveness.

To help with the meeting, I have asked Akhil Thomas, who is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University, for help with organizing the meeting. Additionally, Tina Astorga (University of Portland) has agreed to help with local plans. I do need to gather a few more willing and able people to help with event planning. Suggestions are welcome! Layla Karst is the liturgical coordinator, and all things liturgical are moving forward.

Invited plenary speakers: Nick Denysenko (Valparaiso University) will provide a reflection on the theme from the perspective of orthodox liturgical theology. The local ELCA Bishop, Laurie Carson Caesar of the Oregon Synod who is from Portland will provide the second plenary from a progressive Lutheran theological perspective. Respondents to the first two plenaries will be forthcoming. The third plenary will be an interactive session that will attempt to gather an intergenerational and intercultural group to talk about the theme of One Baptism. The fourth plenary will be delivered by President Nancy Pineda-Madrid.

As a prelude to 2025, and through the gracious kindness of Nancy Pineda-Madrid and Kristin Heyer to include this idea in the 2024 liturgical celebration, a group of CTSA colleagues from Boston College will invite people to create a mandala around

the baptismal font at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church in Baltimore. Members arriving to celebrate the liturgy will be encouraged to place an object of significance in the mandala that symbolizes the uniqueness of their self's journey to salvation. In addition, members can place items for the food pantry which will be collected by the church for their community. Invitations are being sent to the leadership of groups and consultations that focus on social justice issues at CTSA.

No resolutions have been presented thus far (5/27/2024). With sincere thanks to Bill Lowe for his excellent support as parliamentarian to CTSA for many years, and with warm welcome and gratitude for the expertise and generosity of Mary Doak for agreeing to step into the role of parliamentarian.

### ***Report of the Secretary***

CTSA Secretary, Hoeffman Ospino, renews his gratitude for the opportunity to serve the CTSA in this capacity. He gives thanks to the CTSA Executive Director, Mary Jane Ponyik, for her assistance with the membership database and compiling the final list of applicants. He also thanks this year's members of the Admissions Committee: Dr. Anna Bonta (2022-2025), Dr. Andrew Massena (2023-2026), Dr. Steven Battin (2021-2024), and Dr. Ted Ulrich (2022-2025).

He is glad to see new members joining the CTSA growing, which points to the health and potential of the Society. He also observes trends towards increased diversification in our society, which expands the possibilities of conversation new members bring and eventually call for creative engagement to retain these members, particularly as the theological education landscape changes. Dr. Ospino reminds the members that he is available to support all members as they navigate the life of the Society.

### ***Report of the Treasurer and Finance Committee Presentation***

The Treasurer, Dr. Patrick Flanagan, C.M. provided a brief overview of the financial statements corresponding to this year's report. The financial statements are available as part of the *Proceedings*.

This year the Treasurer's report included a presentation by Dr. Nancy Dallavalle and Dr. Elsie Miranda on behalf of the Finance Committee on the financial status of the Society. The highlights of that presentation are in a PowerPoint presentation used to support the analysis and is available as part of this volume of the *Proceedings* (Appendix IV).

### ***Report of the Executive Director***

The following is the text of the report submitted by Mrs. Mary Jane Ponyik:

Greetings! This year's convention attendance is 371 (as of May 29) with 73 percent attending the John Courtney Murray Banquet this year.

There are eleven publishing houses represented at this year's convention and eight program ads were purchased. There are seven additional ads within our program highlighting the universities and colleges who donated funds to the CTSA in support of our convention. These ad spaces were provided to these institutions as a token of our appreciation.

This year, fifty-one attendees reduced their carbon footprint by donating funds through Native Energy, an expert provider of carbon offsets initiatives. The project "Clean Water Project in Ethiopia" will be the recipient of the collected funds.

Daniel Castillo, Nicole Reibe, and Byron Wratee served as this year's Local Arrangements Committee. They have done a terrific job in assisting Nancy, Kristin, and me with the preparation of the convention. Dorie Geohring served as a program organization assistant and as a member of our registration team. Layla Karst is serving as the CTSA's liturgical aide. Our photographer is Paul Schutz and our videographer is Dorie Geohring. Thank you all so much for your contributions to the annual convention.

Our terrific registration team includes student volunteers from Boston College, Harvard Divinity School, Loyola University of Maryland, Notre Dame of Maryland University, and the University of Dayton. A huge thank you to our registration team members for their service to the CTSA.

Next year, the CTSA will travel to Portland. The room rate at the Marriott Portland Downtown Waterfront Hotel will be \$175 and the meeting dates are June 12–15, 2025.

### **CTSA Book Club**

Since its formation in May 2023, the CTSA Book Club has read and discussed Susan Bigelow Reynolds' book, *People Get Ready: Ritual, Solidarity and Lived Ecclesiology in Catholic Roxbury*; John McGreevy's *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis*; and Dan Minch's *Pastoral Criticism, Structural Collaboration*. The group is currently reading Massimo Borghesi's *Catholic Discordance: Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis over the summer*. The book club meets once a month. Please consider joining us!

### **CTSA Convention Housekeeping Matters**

For members who attend the convention, an electronic convention evaluation will be sent to the email address you provided when you registered for the convention. Please complete and submit the evaluation within two weeks after the close of the convention. Your comments are valuable to the president-elect in the planning of the next year's convention.

Three coach lines are secured to shuttle attendees from the hotel to St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church for the celebration of Eucharist. Upon return from the celebration of Eucharist, a brief reception will be held to enable everyone to return from the church. At the close of the reception, please enter banquet hall with your entrée ticket in hand. You will not be served an entrée without your ticket. Please see me if you have any questions.

For those attending the John Courtney Murray banquet, the CTSA provided the opportunity for attendees to pre-select their seats. If you have a banquet ticket and have not reserved your seat, please know that there will be a seat for everyone. Name tags will include your table number or "Open Seat" for ease of reference.

It is my pleasure and privilege to serve as your executive director. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if I may be of assistance to you.

### **Report of the Centennial Committee**

The following is the report submitted by Rev. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., CTSA Past President and Chair of the Centennial Committee during 2023-2024:

1. In June 2022, the CTSA approved the formation of the Centennial Committee, whose charge is to work with the Board of Directors to help the CTSA attend to North American Catholic theology's evolving contours and national and international contexts, challenges, and opportunities; to help articulate a guiding vision for the CTSA at 100; and to develop, recommend, and assist the Board in carrying out strategic plans for advancing the Society's mission in light of these. Recognizing the crucial role that financial resources play in enabling the Society to carry out its mission, the work of the Centennial Committee includes a focus on financial sustainability. Its purpose, however, is broader—namely, to assist the Board and CTSA membership in engaging in long range and strategic planning that sets financial and other resourcing goals within the larger, orienting context of the CTSA's mission, and of a shared vision for the Society's next quarter-century.
2. The Centennial Committee's initial tasks have included work toward the drafting of a vision statement for "the CTSA at 100," with membership consultation, shaped in response to questions such as, What may or ought the CTSA look like three, five or ten years down the road? What may or ought the CTSA look like at its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2045? What guiding vision for The CTSA at 100 best reflects our Society's mission and aspirations within the changed and changing circumstances of the twenty-first century? What priority issues and strategic goals can most fruitfully orient our work to advance this vision?
3. So too, the Committee, working under the authority of the Board, is also responsible for developing, submitting to the Board for approval, helping to monitor progress, and periodically refreshing and updating a series of mission-driven, multi-year (three to five year) strategic plans for the CTSA.
4. The Centennial Committee (henceforth CC) is currently comprised of these members: Antonio Alonso (who joined the CC this semester), Kevin Burke, S.J., Nancy Dallavalle (also a Board member), Francis Clooney (*ex officio* chair, as CTSA Past President), Patrick Flanagan (*ex officio* as CTSA Treasurer), Craig Ford, Christian Firer Hinze, Linh Hoang (also a Board member), Jaisy Joseph, Mary Jane Ponyik (*ex officio* as CTSA Executive Director), Daniel Rober. Kristin Heyer (CTSA President) attends our meetings regularly. Nancy Pineda-Madrid (CTSA President-Elect) attended the March and May 2024 meetings of the CC.
5. The CC met seven times this year from August to May. In the August to December meetings, we focused largely on items given to us for consideration by the Board, ranging from the dues structure to widening the profile of possible membership moving forward, and other timely items the Board was considering.
6. **Strategic Plan:** In the second semester, we focused first of all on drafting a Strategic Plan, in accord with the original mandate given to the CC. After broad discussion of the need for such a plan and aspects of it, I appointed a

subcommittee (Christine Firer Hinze [chair]; Antonio Alonso; Jaisy Joseph), who drafted a full draft of the SP, which was discussed at our May CC meeting. We have asked the Board to review it and provide comments and suggested revisions for the CC to take up in the summer and fall, with the intention of sharing it with the full CTSA membership in the near future.

7. **Vision Statement Drafts:** The CC also continued the imaginative work of drafting a Vision Statement, a necessary and distinct part of the Strategic Plan. At our May meeting, we reduced the options to three, as contained in **Appendix A**, immediately below.
8. The CC enthusiastically invites all members of the CTSA to react to the three drafts, expressing preferences and proposing edits and alternatives. CC members will be available for informal conversation and comment during the Baltimore convention; input may be given to any of the CC members. After the convention, a CC member or members will be delegated to gather all responses and digest them during the summer and fall of 2024, toward a refined vision statement or statements.

### **Report of the Centennial Committee: Appendix A Three Drafted Vision Statements**

In June 2022, the CTSA approved the formation of the Centennial Committee, whose charge is to work with the Board of Directors to help the CTSA attend to North American Catholic theology's evolving contours and national and international contexts, challenges, and opportunities; to help articulate a guiding vision for the CTSA at 100; and to develop, recommend, and assist the Board in carrying out strategic plans for advancing the Society's mission in light of these. One of the Centennial Committee's initial tasks has been to draft model vision statements for "the CTSA at 100," to share these with the CTSA members, and thus to receive feedback, toward the drafting of a single Vision Statement to serve our needs for the next few years. This is the context for the three model vision statements that follow.

At our May 24, 2024, meeting, the Centennial Committee (CC) finalized a short list of three examples of Vision Statements, modeling slightly different emphases:

1. The CTSA: Advancing theological scholarship and reflection in service of a changing Church, academy, and wider world.
2. The CTSA: Serving God's people by promoting theological wisdom, learning, and excellence.
3. The CTSA: Promoting theological wisdom, learning, and excellence in a spirit of service.

We think that they all speak to the reality and aspirations of the CTSA today and as it looks to the next decades.

The CC enthusiastically invites all members of the CTSA to react to the three drafts, expressing preferences and proposing edits and alternatives. CC members will be available for informal conversation and comment during the Baltimore convention; input may be given to any of the CC members. After the convention, a CC member or members will be delegated to gather all responses and digest them during the summer and fall of 2024, toward a refined vision statement or statements.

## **Report of CUERG**

Dr. Stephanie M. Wong, CUERG Chair 2023-2024, presented an abbreviated version of this report. The following is the full text of the CUERG Report for the activities of 2023 through the 2024 convention:

### **Identity, Mission, and Key Initiatives**

During the 2023-2024 year, CUERG continued to mature in its role as both an advisory committee to the CTSA Board and a support network for CTSA members from under-represented racial and ethnic groups.

*In our role as an Advisory Committee to the Board*, we continued to have semesterly meetings with Board Liaisons (this year, Board Secretary Dr. Hosffman Ospino, plus Dr. Nancy Pineda-Madrid and Dr. Susan Abraham and sometimes additional Board members). In the Fall, we discussed the importance of the Board taking responsibility for issuing clear commissions or tasks to CUERG, which the Liaisons did at several points in the year. Our subsequent Liaison–CUERG meetings then afforded opportunities for us to discuss those key issues:

- **Clarifying the scope of CUERG amid Society-wide deliberations about access and inclusion**
  - In response to the Board’s request for input on the scope of CUERG, we submitted a document recommending that the Board keep CUERG focused specifically on racial and ethnic representation while continuing (on the level of the Board and Centennial Committee) to engage larger questions of gender, disability, socioeconomic access, and social polarization that matter deeply for the health and viability of the Society going forward.
  - We also shared our perspective on CUERG’s role in the Society, framing it not only as one of pointing out dynamics of under-representation (i.e., presence or absence in the convention), but ideally also enhancing recognition (i.e., valuation in theological research, teaching, and pastoral service). Thus, CUERG focused this year on contributions of racially marginalized CTSA members, eager to frame their work as a gift enhancing the social experience and theological imagination of the academy and church.
- **Offering input on the 2024 Convention Land Acknowledgement**
  - In response to the Board’s request for feedback on the 2024 Land Acknowledgement, we offered detailed suggestions on the initial draft.
  - Our suggestions added more detail specific to the history of the Indigenous peoples and the Catholic Church and academy in the Baltimore region, and it also offered some organizational suggestions for reformulating the statement in a more liturgical or prayer-like structure, involving both repentance and gratitude.
- **Sharing feedback from the CUERG membership survey**
  - We conducted a survey of the CUERG membership in the Fall, and then shared the key results of this survey with the Board Liaisons.

In our role as a support Network for the larger CUERG membership, we worked to implement the suggestions offered by CUERG members at the 2023 Luncheon listening session.

- **Developing an e-communications system by which the CUERG leadership team might communicate with the wider CUERG membership**
  - With the agreement of the Board and facilitation by Mary Jane Ponyik, the CUERG leadership team now has an email account (cuergchair.ctsa@gmail.com).
  - The CUERG chair also has the ability to log into the CTSA newsletter system to email the CUERG members.
  - This year, the CUERG chair sent several memos to the CUERG members—offering mentorship for CTSA presentation proposals, sharing job posts, inviting nominees for the new CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award, reminding members of larger CTSA town halls, encouraging members to submit their work to be featured at the convention, and so on.
- **Responding to Scholars in Need**
  - When individual scholars reached out to CUERG for support (requesting advice on paper proposals, visa/funding issues, financial aid, etc.) we connected them to appropriate resources where possible.
- **Facilitating Joint Sessions Across Consultations**
  - After the 2023 Convention, some CUERG members expressed a desire for more cross-collaboration across the three consultations to both a) continue previous *ad hoc* efforts at building solidarity through partnerships, and b) to avoid the sense that the consultations must compete against each other for space/time at the convention.
  - Therefore, this year the leadership teams of the ethnic consultations organized three joint panel sessions which will each involve representatives from the Asian/Asian American, Black Catholic, and Latinx Theology Consultations.
  - Going forward, we anticipate the consultations will alternate between doing separate panels (to continue to have their own spaces for reflection) and coming together for joint panels of this sort (perhaps every three years).
- **Creating the CUERG Distinguished Scholar Award**
  - As part of our effort to celebrate CUERG members' contributions in teaching, scholarship, and pastoral service, we have developed a new annual CUERG award: "CUERG Distinguished Scholar Award" <https://ctsa-online.org/Awards>
  - We received several nominations in Fall 2024 and met as the CUERG Leadership Team to review them in the Spring
  - The inaugural honor will be presented at the 2024 Convention to Dr. C. Vanessa White during the CUERG Luncheon. She will give a brief address to the gathering.
- **Featuring CUERG scholarship at the convention**

- At the 2023 CUERG luncheon and in the subsequent survey, CUERG members expressed a desire for more recognition of members' scholarly work.
- Therefore, we are organizing a table at the 2024 Convention which will feature the books and articles published by CUERG members in 2023-2024.

### **Current CUERG Leadership Team**

During the 2023-24 year, the CUERG leadership team included:

- Stephanie Wong, Villanova University (2021–2024, Chair 2023-24)
- Leo Guardado, Fordham University (2022–2025, Anticipated Chair 2024-25)
- Byron Wratee, Boston College (2023-2026, Anticipated Chair 2025-26)

### *Records/Organization*

This year, the chair Stephanie Wong worked to recover and organize CUERG's paperwork. In the CUERG GoogleDrive and Dropbox, she collected and organized a) lists of former leadership, b) past reports, c) results of surveys, and d) minutes from meeting with the Board Liaisons. These accounts will be passed to the next chair so that future generations of CUERG leadership continue to have access to it.

### *Structure/Succession*

In the current structure of the last few years, the CUERG leadership team has been constituted by a representative from each of the Asian/Asian American, Latina/o/x, Black/African & African American Consultations. Thus, as Stephanie Wong cycles off as the out-going chair, we will be selecting somebody to replace her from the Asian/Asian American Consultation.

### **2024 Convention**

The following events are of particular importance for CUERG members at this convention:

- **CUERG Luncheon** (Saturday, 1:00 - 2:15 PM, Watertable Ballroom B/C): At the luncheon, we will be pleased to present the inaugural CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award to Dr. C. Vanessa White, Ph.D. (Associate Professor Spirituality and Ministry and Director of the Certificate in Black Catholic Theology and Ministry, Catholic Theological Union; and Associate Director of the Master of Theology program at Xavier University's Summer Institute for Black Catholic Studies). Dr. White will offer some words of wisdom to the CUERG fellowship.
- **Joint Latinx/Black/Asian and Asian-American Panels**  
Friday, June 14, 2:45 p.m.–4:30 p.m.  
 Joint Asian-Latinx-Black Consultation Panel A (Room: Kent)  
 "Sound, Spirituality, and Social Salvation"  
 Convener: Craig Ford (Black Catholic Theology Consultation)  
 Moderator: Ish Ruiz (Latinx Theology Consultation)  
 Presenters:
  - Minah Cho, "Embracing Silence: Sharing Struggles and Fostering Transformation of Women of Color"
  - Rufus Burnett, Jr., "Blue Notes on Flesh: A Blues Reading of Afro-



## Christian Soteriological Imaginings of Flesh”

- Antonio Alonso, “Mi Luz y mi Salvación: Singing as a Salvific Practice in Latine Communities”

Saturday, June 15, 11:00 a.m. –12:45 p.m.

Joint Asian-Latinx-Black Consultation Panel B (Room: Kent)

Convener: Ish Ruiz, (Latinx Theology Consultation)

Moderator: Stephanie Wong (Asian/Asian American Theology Consultation)

Presenters:

- Jaisy Joseph, “Church as Leaven and Pilgrim: Interstitial Epistemologies for an Interstitial Church”
- SimonMary Aihokai, “Who Do You Say that I am? Making a Case for Existential Inclusiveness at the Crossroads of Liberation, Institutionality, and Hospitality”

Saturday, June 15, 2:30 p.m.–4:15 p.m.

Joint Asian-Latinx-Black Consultation Panel C (Room: Baltimore B)

Convener: Stephanie Wong (Asian/Asian American Theology Consultation)

Moderator: Craig Ford (Black Catholic Theology Consultation)

Presenters:

- Cecilia Titizano, “Indigenous Relational Epistemologies and a Moral Cosmos”
- David De La Fuente, “Saving Kapwa: Investigating Decolonial Pneumatology Among Filipino American Catholic Charismatics”
- LaRyssa Herrington, “Memory, Narrative, and Solidarity: Africana Marian Popular Piety as Embodied Political Theology”

- **Additional Panels of Interest**

Baltimore and the Black Catholic Experience Invited Session (Room: Federal Hill)

Convener/Moderator: Kathleen Dorsey Bellow

Panelists:

- Therese Wilson Favors, ed., *What We Have Seen and Heard: Essays of Black Catholics in Baltimore*
- Ralph Moore, St. Ann Church Baltimore.
- Michael G. Middleton, SB7 Coalition, Inc., Baltimore

Decolonizing Catholic Theology Interest Group (Room: Gibson)

Convener: Elizabeth Gandolfo

Moderator: Bradford Hinze

Presenter:

- Rev. Dr. Heber Brown, “From Sanctuary to Soil”

Respondents:

- Chanelle Robinson
- Rufus Burnett, Jr.

### ***Report of the INSeCT Delegate***

Rev. Linh Hoang, O.F.M., CTSA representative to INSeCT provided the following report:

The International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT) was founded on August 4, 1996 to promote the advancement of Catholic theology around the world. Its mission statement strives for a perspective of Catholic theology that fosters: collaboration among theological societies; interdisciplinary theological inquiry; and an ecumenical as well as interfaith dialogue.

There are currently nineteen participating Catholic societies and four affiliated groups included in INSeCT membership. The current executive committee consists of President Ruben Mendoza, Ateneo de Manila University (Asia-Pacific Rep.), Vice-President Judith Gruber, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Europe Rep.), Vice-President Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade Pontificia Universidade Catolica do Rio de Janeiro (Latin America Rep.), Treasurer Ramon Luzarraga, St. Martin's University (CTSA and North America Rep.), and Past-President Maeve Heaney Australian Catholic University.

Ramon Luzarraga has served as the CTSA representative. I will be representing CTSA starting in 2024. Ramon will continue to serve as treasurer of INSeCT until the next election at the General Assembly (GA) in December 2024. I appreciate the appointment to be CTSA representative to INSeCT by our President Kristin Heyer.

The late Gerard Manion (CTSA member and INSeCT president) wanted to raise the profile of INSeCT before the Vatican. This was realized when a delegation of INSeCT met with Pope Francis May 10, 2024. This was composed of the current executive committee of INSeCT as well as some past executive committee members. This included CTSA's President-Elect Nancy Pineda-Madrid. The Pope stressed the importance of theology as "a significant and necessary ecclesial ministry" in today's rapidly changing world, a service that "cannot be carried out without a recovery of the sapiential character of theology." The essential "ingredients" of the vocation of Catholic theologians are "creative fidelity to tradition, a cross-disciplinary approach and collegiality." The INSeCT audience was reported not only in *Vatican News* in various languages but also in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

This relationship with the Vatican will continue with a General Assembly to be held in Rome on December 10-13, 2024. This will include the current representatives from the different regions of the world as well as presidents of the respective societies and guilds. There will also be an invitation only gathering with the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education. The Dicastery will be hosting a conference: "The Future of Theology in the University Environment and Its Necessary Conversions," on December 9-10, 2024.

The General Assembly will welcome new members and focus on membership reports. There will be also deliberation on proposed amendments to statutes, discussion on the research projects of each of the different membership regions, election for an executive committee and plan for the next global research project. The current global research project is entitled "A People of All Nations: Decolonizing Theologies—Decolonizing the World." With the conclusion of the assembly, the membership will initiate a new global research project for all its members. The new global research

project will be an invitation for all theologians to participate in the work and mission of INSeCT.

### ***Report of the Delegates to the World Forum on Theologies and Liberation (WFTL)***

Dr. Rufus Burnett, Jr., CTSA representative to the WFTL provided the following report:

It is with enthusiasm for the future that I submit this report to the CTSA. On February 13-19 in Kathmandu, Nepal, the WFTL held its eleventh forum entitled "Religion and Politics: Critical Views from the Perspectives of Liberation and Care." This was the first fully in-person meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic. I regrettably was unable to attend this year's forum in Kathmandu, Nepal due to an unexpected family matter that prevented my travel. However, this year the secretariat provided WFTL members with a detailed report of the forum in Kathmandu. I direct CTSA board members and CTSA members to the attached detailed report on the Kathmandu forum and will focus my written report on some of the latest developments in the WFTL.

### **The Work of the Forum**

As shared in last year's report, the WFTL continues to make adjustments to its programming to meet the challenges of climate change, economics, and political concerns across the globe all while trying to broaden its scope and impact. During the Kathmandu forum, these challenges were met by giving specific attention to local sites in Asia that embody the WFTL mission to engage the praxis of liberation with theological reflection. Presentations were given by representatives from India, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia and Nepal. Conference panels and presentations included the following titles: "Introduction to the Historical and Socio-Political Context of Nepal," "Religion and Politics an Unholy Nexus," "The Church's Position Between Development, Care, and NGO Status," "The Church at the Cutting Edges: Liberative Action Through Anti-Human Trafficking Interventions," and "Concerns of Catholic Youth: Intersecting Indigenous & Gender Identities from a Generation in the Making." The sessions dedicated to these topics were followed by reflective group discussions and site visits to local organizations struggling against human trafficking in Nepal.

### **Participation in the World Social Forum (WSF)**

In conjunction with the World Social Forum, the WFTL hosted two panels attended by WSF and WFTL participants. The first was entitled, "Palestine Under Siege in the Nexus of Politics and Religious Rhetoric," and the second was entitled, "Indigenous Spiritualities in the Nexus of Politics and Colonial Religions." These two panels have grown out of the new commitment of the WFTL to cultivate "pairing projects" in which the forum establishes ongoing relationships with projects for liberation across the planet. These pairing projects are aimed at building a global solidarity network that enriches the work of the forum beyond its regular commitment to meeting in conjunction with the World Social Forum.

### **Implications for CTSA Partnership:**

The topics discussed during the 2024 forum offer a global network that CTSA members can continue to draw from. Actionable items toward this connection could

include: extending the CTSA's involvement beyond the two-member liaison in order that interest groups, topic sessions, and consultations might also benefit from the partnership; inclusion of the WFTL Secretariat or WFTL members from the International Committee in future CTSA meetings. Towards this end, members of the secretariat have expressed interests in attending next year's CTSA conference and offering a "Meet the WFTL Secretariat" Zoom meeting.

### **Programming between the Forums**

This year the Executive and Methodological Committees held their first pairing project webinar focused on the Israel–Hamas conflict. The webinar, held on October 28, 2023, was entitled: "The Current Situation and Challenges for the Palestinian people and Palestinian Liberation Theology." Several CTSA members were in attendance and the event was announced on the CTSA Website.

The webinar took up the following questions:

1. What are the more urgent concerns for the Palestinian people in the current time?
2. How do these concerns challenge and enrich theological reflection on liberation?

These questions were addressed by the following panelists:

- **Mitri Raheb**, a prominent figure in Palestinian theology, founder and first president of Dar-al-Kalima University, in Bethlehem. Rev. Raheb served as the pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem from 1987 until 2017. He was elected as the President of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land from 2011-2016. Among his publications: *Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble* (2004); *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (2014); *The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christianity in the Age of Empire* (2021).
- **Varsen Aghabekian**, an expert in right-based community practice (RBCP), who has been engaged in several NGOs engaged in policy development on matters of Al- Quds/Jerusalem, education, youth, women and management. She holds a Ph.D. in Administrative & Policy Studies-Education from the University of Pittsburgh/USA (1988) and a M.Sc. in Nursing Management from Indiana University/Purdue University (1983). Among numerous positions, she served as Manager of Capacity and Institution Building at the Office of the President (2006-2009) and as the Executive Director of Jerusalem Capital of Arab Culture in 2009. She also was elected the Commissioner General for the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights in January 2016. Among her publications: *Palestinian Christians: Emigration, Displacement and Diaspora* (2017); *Middle Eastern Women: The Intersection of Law, Culture and Religion* (2020); *The Saga of Survival: Armenian Palestinians, the British Mandate and the Nakba* (2023).

### **Implications for CTSA Partnership**

As the situation in Israel/Palestine continues to be ongoing, the WFTL's commitment to pairing with scholars and activists on the ground in Israel and Palestine could prove to be an important network and resource for CTSA members interested in peace studies, just war theory, human rights, settler colonialism, decolonial theology,

transnational interpretations of liberation theology, and the intersection of theology and humanitarian crises.

### **Open Access Online Journal with PUM**

The WFTL has secured a contract with Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal (PUM) for an online open access journal. The online journal will publish proceedings from the forums as well as articles on practices of liberation. Proceedings from the 2023 forum held in Mexico, City have been edited internally by the WFTL editorial group and is in the process of being edited by the editorial staff at PUM.

### Implications for CTSA Partnership:

The open access journal will provide CTSA members with an additional resource to inform themselves about the theological perspectives that are emerging from the WFTL and its partners. It could also offer another outlet for CTSA members to publish if they are so inclined.

### **New Members**

Ahead of the forum in Kathmandu the forum invited the following members to the International Committee:

- Cecilia Titizano, USA
- Elizabeth Isingi, Kenya
- Patrick Gnanapragasam, India
- Paul Hwnag, South Korea
- Shiluina Jamir, India
- Felicia Dian Parera, Indonesia
- Zakia Soman, India
- Marta Luzie de Frecheiras, Brazil
- Afonso Murad, Brazil
- Cesar Baldelomar, USA
- Ariane Collin, Canada
- Ángela Haager, Mexico
- Laura Matamala Lienlaf, Mexico
- Ignace Ndongala Maduku, Canada
- Marisa Noriega, Mexico
- Florence Ollivry, Canada
- Marilu Salazar, Mexico
- Gareth Rowe, United Kingdom

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This year ends my formal participation in the CTSA liaison and I will be handing off my work to Cecilia Titizano, a newly accepted member to the WFTL International Committee and a newly elected member to the CTSA liaison. It has been a pleasure to serve despite the challenges of taking over this work primarily during the COVID-19 pandemic. I look forward to continuing informal service to the liaison and substantively supporting Cecilia as she takes over and we both work toward identifying a second member to the liaison.

### ***Presentation of the LaCugna Award***

Dr. Christopher Steck, S.J., read the citation for the Catherine Mowry LaCugna Award. He thanked the other members of the committee, Dr. Judith Gruber and Dr. Reid Locklin, for their work in reading the submissions and selecting this year's winner. He also thanked all who submitted essays.

This year there were twenty very fine essay submissions reviewed by the LaCugna Award Committee. Members of the committee reviewed the submissions independently, and then met over Zoom to discuss and evaluate each essay. We were finally unanimous in our choice of the winner of this year's LaCugna Award, Michael A. Grigoni, for his article, "The Christian Handgun Owner and Just War."

Dr. Grigoni's article offers a compelling ethnographic and theological analysis of the relationship between gun ownership and evangelical Protestantism. Emerging out of a broader project regarding how we might address the place of guns in the United States from a moral theological perspective, it is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out with evangelical Christian handgun owners in central North Carolina and offers a theorization of the results through a particular strand of Catholic thought: the just war tradition. It opens with an ethnographic vignette describing Dr. Grigoni's experience of taking a concealed carry course taught from a "Christian perspective" to explore how his interlocutors characterize their firearm-related practices in terms of service, protection, and care. It then engages Augustine and Paul Ramsey to show how the just war tradition can assist in rendering these characterizations in a moral theological register. It then considers a second case, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, an African American self-defense group founded in the mid-1960s that viewed firearms as integral to the advancement of civil rights, to show the limits of the just war tradition for issuing a definitive moral theological claim about guns in the United States. It concludes by gesturing toward other possible frameworks for advancing reflection on this issue.

The essay excels, first, in disrupting many assumptions that readers may bring to the question of gun ownership. Dr. Grigoni makes skillful use of specific, sympathetic examples, from the PowerPoint slides from a training course offering a "Christian Perspective" on concealed carry to the complicated, mutually supporting relationship of the pacifist Congress of Racial Equality and the gun-carrying Deacons for Defense and Justice during the Civil Rights Movement. Second, Grigoni articulates the category of "Christian Protector" to deepen and to challenge a reading of the Just War tradition as, fundamentally, an ethic of care and distinctive expression of Christian love. Grigoni's essay does not settle many questions about gun culture and Christian theology in the US context, but it raises them in new and fruitful ways, thereby inviting further reflection. Ultimately, its ethnographically rich comparison of gun ownership traditions within the moral framework of just war makes a theologically provocative case for the inextricable entanglement of Christian God-talk into the complex matrices of power that make up the fabric of social and political life. Congratulations, Michael.

### ***Action to Receive the Reports***

All reports were received by acclamation.

***New Business***

No new business was introduced.

***Adjournment***

There being no new business, the meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m., EST.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

HOSFFMAN OSPINO  
*CTSA Secretary*  
*Boston College*  
*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Dr. Nancy Dallavalle, Dr. Elsie Miranda, and I, as members of CTSA's Finance Committee, have been steadfast in our commitment to the society's financial health. We met regularly throughout the past fiscal year to review and strategize, and we are pleased to report an overall positive financial status. We extend our sincere thanks to Mrs. Mary Jane Ponyik, our learned society's Executive Director, and Rev. Dan Daly, S.J., who generously volunteers his time as CTSA's accountant. We also express our gratitude to Regis University President Dr. Salvador D. Aceves for his invaluable time and expertise in guiding the Finance Committee toward a healthy fiscal future.

In 2023, while dues revenue decreased 34 percent (\$34,203), with 834 members paying their dues by October 2023 compared to 890 of October 2022 totaling \$100,115, the CTSA enjoyed a surplus annual income of \$61,243.29. This reflects significant savings associated with our annual convention in Milwaukee. \$27,000 of the increase directly correlates to the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee reducing its invoice related to the 2023 convention. Also contributing to the increased savings, in October of 2022, the Board of Directors approved an increase in registration rates for 2023, anticipating inflation would impact our 2023 and, more so, our 2024 convention expenditures. Third-party events, institutional donations, and the lesser portfolio draw for scholarships are also reflected in this increase.

At our 2022 CTSA meeting, we voted to move our monies to Aperio, a financial company committed to more opportunities to further our commitment to Catholic values, particularly those associated with environmental sustainability, all in accord with the USCCB's Socially Investment Guidelines. This transition has given us a fresh start and offered the CTSA different investment opportunities. In 2023, our investment portfolio enjoyed a 14 percent return or \$76,817.52. While the latter increase does not match the level of our fund balance before the economic downturn associated with the COVID crisis, we are committed to fiscal responsibility with our funds and strategically investing monies into funds that might produce more significant returns. We were not alone in such a loss. In 2022, the S&P 500 Index of the leading publicly traded companies dropped 19.4 percent in 2022, the worst performance since 2008—the height of the Great Recession. More specifically, to us in the academy, the average 401(k) retirement plan balance fell 23 percent from the end of 2021 to the end of 2022. CTSA lost 22 percent of its own portfolio investments, decreasing from \$822,625.79 to \$644,573.16. I am pleased to report in our first seven months with Aperio, we met our benchmarks. As of May 31, 2024, our investments are \$802,895.

We are very grateful for the generous contributions in 2023 totaling \$14,320, with \$11,175 from institutional support and \$2,075 coming directly from members and a 20 percent or \$2,330 increase over 2022. These monies allow CTSA to assist colleagues who apply for the Dolores L. Christie Scholarship, as twenty-one did in 2023. In 2023,



through the remarkable efforts of outgoing Board Member Dr. Linh Hoang, O.F.M., \$10,000 in funding was secured from the Callaghan-Pierog Foundation; then, in the spring of 2024, an additional \$25,000 was secured. In turn, CTSA established the Tutti Fund to cover recipients' registration and John Courtney Murray banquet ticket costs, whether or not they are presenting at a convention. This year, eight members were recipients of disbursements from that fund. At its board meeting on June 13, 2024, the Directors voted unanimously on two related motions:

1. **Motion Approved:** Use the \$25,000 Callaghan-Pierog Foundation gift recently received to support the Dolores L. Christie Convention Scholarship Fund (\$15,000) and to strengthen the Tutti Fund (\$10,000). Increase each Dolores L. Christie Convention Scholarship temporarily from \$1,000 to \$1,250 until the \$15,000 allocated in this motion is depleted.
2. **Motion Approved:** CTSA members supported by the Tutti Fund will receive up to \$1,000 to cover the total cost of the annual Convention registration, the banquet, and an additional networking meal.

As we look at the coming year, the Finance Committee, together with the Board of Directors and the Centennial Committee, has established some goals related to treasury matters:

1. Identify and strategize how to achieve an ideal endowment of \$1.5 million dollars. This threshold will permit CTSA to take its annual 5 percent drawdown amounting to \$75,000 and increase the subsidization of conference costs, support more members' needs, and consider new initiatives for the future. With our endowment where it is, we have a \$15,000 gap or 8 percent in expense over revenue. To note, dues make up 90 percent of our revenues in support of operations. All revenues make up 92 percent of our operations and mission expenditures (e.g., annual convention).
2. Identify personal and corporate annual fundraising goals and strategize how to achieve them. Working closely with CTSA's Centennial Committee, the Finance Committee seeks to consider other revenue streams including grants and matching gifts.
3. Strategize ideal investment funds with Aperio paying close attention to the costs associated with our portfolio and benchmarking goals.
4. Identify ideal primary sites for future annual meetings.

5. Strategize how to network with other learned academic societies to learn more about how we might continue to build CTSA membership.

In all, our efforts are to enact an ongoing plan to ensure long-term fiscal stability, considering the headwinds facing the Academy and higher education.

*Addendum:* After consulting about the allocation of the \$25,000 Callaghan-Pierog Foundation gift approved at the June 13, 2024, meeting, Board members at its June 16, 2024, meeting unanimously decided to amend the use of the funds, this time reserving \$5,000 for investments.

1. **Motion Approved:** Amend the June 13, 2024, decision regarding the use of the \$25,000 Callaghan-Pierog Foundation gift with the following motion: Use the \$25,000 Callaghan-Pierog Foundation gift recently received to support the Dolores L. Christie Convention Scholarship Fund (\$10,000, restricted), strengthen the Tutti Fund (\$10,000, restricted), and to reserve \$5,000 for investments. The temporary increase of each Dolores L. Christie Convention Scholarship from \$1,000 to \$1,250 until the \$10,000 allocated in this motion is depleted remains. Until such time the \$20,000 restricted monies are used, they will be invested for maximum financial return.

PATRICK FLANAGAN, C.M.  
*Saint John's University*  
*Jamaica, New York*  
*CTSA Treasurer*

**Catholic Theological Society of America  
COMPARATIVE FINANCIAL REPORT  
Fiscal Years Ending December 31, 2022/2023**

PATRICK FLANAGAN, C.M.  
*Saint John's University  
Jamaica, New York  
CTSA Treasurer*

**COMPARATIVE BALANCE SHEET**

**Assets as of December 31, 2023/2022**

<b>Category</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
Cash in Checking	\$ 3,540.26	\$ 39,518.09
Cash in Checking – reserved for scholarships	9,528.30	-
Cash in CTSA savings	10,000.06	-
Cash in WCCT savings	1,511.31	-
Investment	725,165.00	644,573.16
University Agency Account (Deficit)	(7,501.42)	(3,091.03)
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 742,243.51</b>	<b>\$ 681,000.22</b>

**Liabilities and Fund Balances**

<b>Category</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
CTSA Fund Balance – Beginning of Year	681,000.22	\$ 842,867.07
Net Surplus (Deficit)	61,243.29	(161,866.85)
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$ 742,243.51</b>	<b>\$ 681,000.22</b>

## STATEMENT OF REVENUES AND EXPENSES

## Revenue

Category	2023	2022
Dues	\$ 65,911.97	\$ 100,115.00
Proceedings	90.00	80.00
Convention*	127,946.35	102,193.24
Sales of Labels & Misc.	600.00	400.00
Contributions*	14,320.00	11,990.00
Other	1,511.26	306.00
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$ 210,379.58</b>	<b>\$ 215,084.24</b>

## Expenses

Category	2023	2022
Convention*	\$ 100,900.93	\$ 119,468.09
Proceedings Expenses	5,110.09	5,064.34
Administration*	118,730.37	117,540.71
Fall Board Meeting*	712.42	592.52
Grant: Theological Initiative with Bishops	-	-
Grant: INSECT	500.00	-
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 225,953.81</b>	<b>\$ 242,665.66</b>

## Analysis

Category	2023	2022
Net Operating Revenue (deficit)	\$ (15,574.23)	\$ (27,581.42)
Gain (Loss) on Investments Net of Scholarship Withdrawal**	76,817.52	(134,285.43)
<b>Net Revenue (loss)</b>	<b>\$ 61,243.29</b>	<b>\$ (161,866.85)</b>

\* See additional information

## \*\* Withdrawals from Portfolio

Category	2023	2022
Portfolio Draw for 2022 Convention Scholarships	\$ -	\$ 9,000.00
Portfolio Draw for 2023 Convention Scholarships	5,000.00	-
Portfolio Draw for 2024 Convention Scholarships	9,528.30	-
Supplemental General Funds	-	38,000.00

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Convention Revenues

Category	2023	2022
Registration	\$ 81,329.58	\$ 66,988.00
Withdrawal from Portfolio for scholarships	14,528.30	9,000.00
Institutional Donations	16,500.00	14,000.00
Exhibitor Income	2,950.00	2,750.00
Program Ads	2,450.00	2,475.00
Carbon Footprint Assessment	972.00	-
Third Party Sponsored Events	9,216.47	6,912.69
Other	-	67.55
<b>Total Convention Revenues</b>	<b>\$ 102,193.24</b>	<b>\$ 102,193.24</b>

## Contributions

Category	2023	2022
Members	\$ 2,075.00	\$ 11,240.00
Institutional	11,175.00	750.00
Donations for Scholarships	1,070.00	-
<b>Total Contributions</b>	<b>\$ 14,320.00</b>	<b>\$ 11,990.00</b>

## Convention Expenses

Category	2023	2022
Speakers	\$ -	\$ 1,500.00
Travel	2,814.37	3,264.05
Hotel	71,638.14	93,579.48
Awards	4,009.00	2,589.50
Liturgy	2,275.71	3,121.77
Printing	1,452.54	1,944.52
Supplies	696.70	1,315.91
Postage	-	-
Software Subscriptions	199.19	-
Insurance	1,248.98	1,134.16
Carbon Footprint Donation	972.00	-
LaCunga	750.00	750.00
Scholarship Awards	11,823.57	8,055.82
President's Discretionary Expenses	2,500.00	1,000.00
Refunds	-	-
Miscellaneous	520.73	1,212.88
<b>Total Convention Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 100,900.93</b>	<b>\$ 119,468.09</b>

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION****Administration Expenses**

<b>Category</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
Salaries and Stipends	\$ 106,123.93	\$ 100,483.44
Professional Services	2,786.82	425.00
Telecommunications	335.48	336.37
Postage	293.68	579.93
Service Contracts	598.23	2,780.46
Duplicating	1.50	0.50
Supplies	111.62	63.65
Insurance	615.00	1,092.00
Printing	25.34	234.01
Bank Fees	4,838.77	6,235.96
Rent	3,000.00	2,916.90
Capital Equipment	-	2,392.49
Miscellaneous	-	-
<b>Total Administration Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 118,730.37</b>	<b>\$ 117,540.71</b>

**Fall Board Meeting Expenses**

<b>Category</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
Meeting	\$ 712.42	\$ 592.52
Institutional	-	-
<b>Total Fall Board Meeting Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 712.42</b>	<b>\$ 592.52</b>

**APPENDIX I:  
HOMILY FOR THE CONVENTION EUCHARIST**

~

**ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

~

**COOPERATING WITH GOD’S SUBVERSIVE ABUNDANCE**

KRISTIN E. HEYER  
*CTSA President*  
*Boston College*  
*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

The first spring our family lived in Boston, to our great surprise, flowers began to sprout from a still-frozen hill in our backyard. First the brave crocuses, then scattered hyacinth and daffodils, undeterred by an April Nor’easter. Next came elegant tulips, a vibrant forsythia bush, delicate lilies of the valley, bleeding hearts, lilacs, on and on throughout the season. Peering through the kitchen windows each morning in anticipation, we would inspect what new, mature perennials had miraculously appeared. We eventually learned one of our home’s previous owners had been a botanist. My favorites, fuchsia peonies, tend to bloom late, in early June. Their lifespan is so brief I pray I’m not away at a conference lest I miss their lush abandon. This spring symphony unfolds as sheer gift, reemerging annually through no real effort of our own. It offers stunning signs of rebirth, of hope, and abundance.

So too in today’s parable of the growing seed (or the seed that grows of itself), which appears only in Mark’s gospel, we are reminded of how God initiates the reign’s ongoing growth in our midst: quietly yet vividly, scarcely depending on our hard work or theological insights. “Of its own accord the land yields fruit” (Mk 4:28). Academic formation and professional culture reward careful, concerted effort according to metrics of individual productivity. We are trained to “verify” rather than to trust with the patience of the person scattering seed, even as he or she “knows not how” it grows (Mk 4:27), or to linger in the mystery of God’s reign not yet present in its fullness. Jesus’ parable invites us to attend to the stealthy and surprising ways God is at work in and around us—to plant seeds with our very lives for future blooms we may not ourselves wake up to enjoy, for harvests we may never reap. The vocation of teaching offers regular reminders that we plant seeds without knowing whether or how they may bear fruit down the road. Amid our wider results-driven, instant-gratification culture, what might each of us be invited to clear or prune—or simply take time to notice—in order to allow God’s transforming love to be planted in our lives and our communities?

The pairing of Ezekiel in the first reading with the gospel's second parable of the mustard seed reminds us that God's reign is also subversive, inverting worldly expectations that align power and even "right" with "might." In Mark's version the mustard seed grows into "a plant" rather than a tree, as in Luke's, such that this image of growth from a miniscule seed into a shrub providing "large branches" that offer a dwelling place for birds strikes us as improbable and even absurd (Mk 4:32). In Ezekiel the majestic cedar that will likewise "shelter birds of every kind" originates in a tender shoot, showcasing how YHWH "lift[s] up the lowly tree" (Ez 17:24).

Maybe some of you have beings in your lives who also used to be tiny and now tower over you. Unlikely sources such as these can provide remarkable, sometimes humbling wisdom. It is often fairly distinct from the knowledge we build by consulting experts. There is a disclosive power in the transparency of the young or in the perspective of the newcomer. We can miss God's ongoing promptings if we seek insights only from the established or credentialed, rather than from tender shoots in our midst. Just as today's arboreal metaphors challenge expectations about the traditionally powerful and majestic, we, who cooperate with the inbreaking of God's reign, are also called to transform structures that oppress and to empower those marginalized. For what we do in our bodies will matter for our judgment, Paul cautions, even as we long for our true home between the times. Whether offering the hospitality and solace of shade, shining light on things that needs exposure, cultivating a just peace and planetary survival, or nourishing one another at longer tables, it is through our concrete, embodied tending that we join our labors with God's.

Ezekiel's prophecy anticipates YHWH's restoration of the defeated Davidic monarchy, raising up a new king under whom Israel would thrive: a noble cedar offering protection to all nations. The imagery conveys both continuity and discontinuity, linking the cedar of Israel to an existing cedar, through the use of its twig, but also contrasting the other trees of the field with the grandeur of the cedar of Israel and YHWH's ability to "wither up the green tree" and "make the withered tree bloom" (Ez 17:24). Ezekiel writes at a time when Judah's sins had brought the people low, and yet the patience and mercy of YHWH here subvert expectations of vengeance, particularly appearing as it does amid the oracles of punishment.

Today's readings, then, remind us that God upends our expectations and our careful plans in a host of ways. They offer courage to all of us who are small in our efforts, but also issue a warning to those of us tempted by certitude about the contours of God's reign. Perhaps we are tempted by standard models of authority, rigid paradigms, or our own high control needs. The church, too, can be tempted by forms of power or exclusionary righteousness that neglect the nature of a hope borne of a humble shrub or a stable birth in the borderlands—a concrete, lifegiving hope for those disinherited and cast out. A prophetic hope that calls disciples of Christ to come and live another way. A yet-unfulfilled hope that we joyfully await.

We used to live in California, which has a far longer growing season. We planted vegetables in our manicured raised beds, and we installed a drip irrigation system to minimize water waste. But the unexpected yields of our sledding hill in New England, somewhere between "Third Winter" and Summer, summon us to cooperate with the extravagant, subversive abundance God sows in our shared lives every day.



**APPENDIX II:  
JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY AWARD CITATION**

*for*  
MARY CATHERINE HILKERT, O.P.  
*University of Notre Dame*  
*Notre Dame, Indiana*

For the past forty years, the recipient of the CTSA’s 2024 John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology has leavened and led the theological community in major academic institutions, international venues, and our guild itself. The awardee has centered the foundational role of proclamation in our craft with intellectual depth and prophetic vision. Through an integration of theological rigor, pastoral expertise, and generous mentorship, the honoree has modeled excellence and invited us into an expansive understanding of our shared vocation.

Our awardee hails from a family of ten, including one other member of this society. She attended St. Sebastian grade school and St. Vincent High School before joining the Dominican Sisters of Akron, Ohio (now the Dominican Sisters of Peace). After graduating from the University of Dayton with B.A. in English (1971) she taught English and religious studies at St. Vincent-St. Mary High School in Akron before earning an M.A. and Ph.D. in systematic theology from the Catholic University of America (1979, 1984). There her doctoral dissertation traced evolving shifts in Edward Schillebeeckx’s approach to a theology of revelation, with corresponding shifts in his hermeneutics of tradition, as the basis for constructing a Catholic theological approach to the ministry of preaching. That early work served as the basis for three of her major contributions to the field in subsequent decades: first, her now-classic work on a theology of preaching as “naming grace;” second, her internationally esteemed expertise in the field of Schillebeeckx studies—indeed she earned the admiration of Schillebeeckx himself in his lifetime—and, finally, research and teaching in fields of fundamental theology, theological anthropology, and feminist theology and spirituality.

A scholarly career spanning these topics has yielded several monographs: *Naming Grace: Speaking with Authority* (1997); *Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today* (2008); and, out last year, *A Time to Keep Silence and a Time to Speak*. She has also published three edited volumes, treating the thought of Schillebeeckx and William Hill, and nearly 70 articles and book chapters. Her expertise has occasioned over 60 major lecture invitations from across the United States and Rome, Fribourg, Nijmegen, Leuven, and Pietermaritzburg.

These major contributions have also been recognized with four honorary doctorates, as well as the Washington Theological Union’s Sophia Award for

Theological Excellence in Service of Ministry; Barry University's Yves Congar Award for Theological Excellence; and our own Ann O'Hara Graff Award. She has served on two international theological commissions of the Order of Preachers for studies related to the Order's preaching mission. Her work remains incomparable in contemporary Catholic homiletic scholarship, nourished by and shared through decades of lecturing and preaching in Catholic and ecumenical contexts in the United States, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Australia, and South Africa.

Taking deeply seriously her role as "teaching-scholar," our honoree has mentored generations of leading theologians, including many women and Latine scholars, in particular. She taught at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis for eleven years before joining the faculty of Theology at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, where she has taught systematic theology for nearly twenty years. She has held visiting appointments at Radboud University in Nijmegen, Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and the Catholic University of America. During her years at Notre Dame, she has directed more than twenty dissertations and has served on nearly twice that number of other dissertation committees, while also receiving two university awards for undergraduate teaching. Through her pedagogy, ministry of presence, and preaching at 10:00 p.m. lay-led liturgical services in residence halls, she has inspired and sustained the vocations of countless colleagues within our field and beyond.

Here in the CTSA, after planning our 2005 meeting on the "Resurrection of the Body," our honoree served as president during a period of restructuring our annual conventions. Her presidential address, treating "Dialogue, Proclamation, and the Sacramental Imagination" remains most relevant for today's polarized contexts. In reflecting recently on the enduring contributions of Catherine of Siena, our awardee wrote, "One of the major challenges of our day is...to cultivate...a contemplative vision and wise judgment[,...]the true source of the bold speech and action...so needed in the Church and the world."<sup>1</sup> As her career and very way of being attest, the author is herself an exemplar in this regard.

As her identity may be now becoming more apparent, I conclude by adding that she is aptly honored with her very own namesake "society," which gathers annually over breakfast at our convention. It is with enduring gratitude for this unfolding legacy and with sincere delight that here tonight, in Baltimore, the Catholic Theological Society of America confers the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology upon Mary Catherine Hilkert, of the Order of Preachers.

*Presented by the President of the Catholic Theological Society of America*

KRISTIN E. HEYER

*Boston College*

*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

*June 15, 2024*

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Catherine Hilkert, *A Time to Keep Silence and a Time to Speak* (Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press, 2023), 8.

**APPENDIX III:  
TRIBUTES AT MEMORIAL SERVICE  
FOR RECENTLY DECEASED CTSA MEMBERS**

**David B. Burrell, C.S.C. (d. October 1, 2023)**

*Tribute written and read by Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P.*

After graduating from the University of Notre Dame, David Bakewell Burrell entered the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1954. He was ordained a Holy Cross priest in 1959. By 1964 he completed S.T.B. and S.T.L. degrees in theology from the Gregorian University, a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Yale, and returned to Notre Dame as Theodore M. Hesburgh Professor of Theology and Philosophy.

The 2009 recipient of CTSA's John Courtney Murray Award, Fr. Burrell is widely recognized for his incisive and creative insights in the fields of philosophical theology, comparative theology, and interfaith dialogue, especially revelation, creation, and human freedom. David also served as Rector of the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies in Tantur, Israel, taught at Notre Dame College in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the Uganda Martyrs University in Kampala, Uganda, and Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya before returning to Holy Cross House at Notre Dame where he died on October 1, 2023.

**Richard R. Gaillardetz (d. November 7, 2023)**

*Tribute written and read by Nancy Dallavalle*

Richard Rene Gaillardetz, teacher, scholar, mentor, husband, father, colleague and friend, died on November 7, 2023, at the age of 65. Receiving the Ph.D. from Notre Dame, he taught at St. Thomas in Houston before his appointment as Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo. He later joined the Boston College faculty in 2011 as the Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology.

Rick Gaillardetz was an ecclesiologist for our time, with award-winning journal articles and books on authority and Vatican II. A past president of the CTSA, Rick received the Congar Award from Barry University, the Sophia Award from Washington Theological Union, and an honorary doctorate from Oblate School of Theology. During his last months, Rick wrote with insight and grace about the experience of moving toward death, now published by The Liturgical Press as *While I Breathe, I Hope: A Mystagogy of Dying*. Thus, a final title: disciple.

**M. Theresa Moser, R.S.C.J. (d. February 9, 2024)**

*Tribute written and read by Hosffman Ospino*

Sister Theresa Moser, R.S.C.J. was born in Dallas, Texas on October 5, 1936 and died on February 9, 2024. A member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart since 1956, she served as Secretary of the CTSA Board of Directors between 2004 and 2013, then

briefly in 2018. It is hard to think of an area of ministry or academic life where Theresa did not leave her mark: Catholic school teacher, principal, member of her community's leadership team, university professor, published scholar, president of the College Theology Society, university trustee, among others.

For nineteen years she was an assistant dean for academic programs at the University of San Francisco. At age 76, when many thought retirement was next, she quipped: "Religious people never retire, but move onto other things." She had energy to serve on the pastoral team at St. Ignatius Parish for a full decade. Her generosity was unmatched.

**James "Jake" Empereur, S.J. (d. February 24, 2024)**

*Tribute written by Ish Ruiz*

*Tribute read by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J.*

Father James Empereur, S.J., was born in Wisconsin in 1933 and entered the Jesuit order in 1952. His ministry was devoted to educating future Jesuits and theologians in the fields of liturgical and systematic theology. For twenty-one years, he taught at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, and then served as a pastor in San Antonio for twenty-eight years. He authored several books and offered many workshops on the Second Vatican Council and its implications for the liturgical life of the church.

During his time at the Jesuit School of Theology, he founded the Institute for Spirituality and Workshop. He was also the founding editor of the *Modern Liturgy Magazine*, now known as the *Ministry and Liturgy Magazine*. Those who knew him describe him as an engaging teacher, creative liturgist, challenging preacher, and a wise spiritual director. Father James entered his heavenly home on February 24, 2024. May he rest in peace.

**Joseph Bracken, S.J. (d. April 13, 2024)**

*Tribute written and read by Paul Lakeland*

Joe earned his Ph.D. from the University of Freiburg in Germany in 1968. His teaching career spanned over five decades, during which he held positions at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake Mundelein Seminary in Illinois, Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he served as the chair of the Theology Department and later as the first occupant of the Beckman Family Chair in Roman Catholic Theology.

A gentle and friendly presence at the CTSA meetings, Joe's scholarly work was characterized by his unique approach to process theology. He was a strong proponent of Whiteheadian thought and one of the foremost advocates for its thoroughgoing integration into Roman Catholic theology.

His thirteen monographs, three edited volumes, and over one hundred and fifty articles in scholarly journals address a variety of topics in process theology and philosophy, Roman Catholicism, and the intersection of religion and science.

**Mary Collins, O.S.B. (d. May 2, 2024)**

*Tribute written and read by Richard E. McCarron*

Sister Mary Collins, O.S.B., died May 2, 2024 at the monastery of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas. Born in Chicago in 1935, Mary earned the Ph.D. in

sacramental and liturgical studies in 1967 at The Catholic University of America, where she would return to teach, attain the rank of ordinary professor, and retire as professor *emerita* when she was elected prioress of her community, a position she held from 1999–2005.

A longtime member of the CTSA, whom she addressed on “The Church and the Eucharist” in 1997, Mary was a pioneering figure in liturgical theology in the United States, working at the intersection of ritual studies, feminist studies, and ecclesiology. She contributed to the ritual traditions of Benedictine women and shaped our liturgical language through her work on the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Mary’s call for a creative and constructive futuring of liturgical traditions remains vital for us today.

LAYLA A. KARST  
*Convention Liturgical Aide*  
*Loyola Marymount University*  
*Los Angeles, California*

SUSAN ABRAHAM  
*CTSA Vice President*  
*Pacific School of Religion*  
*Berkeley, California*

## APPENDIX IV: FINANCE COMMITTEE BUSINESS MEETING PRESENTATION

### SLIDE ONE



CTSA Business Meeting  
June 14, 2024 ♦ Baltimore, Maryland

#### Aims:

- respond to shifting needs in the theological academy
- increase financial transparency and cultivate shared stewardship
- reduce passive experience/retrospective focus of meeting

#### Procedure:

- bring to vote several measures that respond to signs of our times
- incorporate presentations on our finances, vision statements
- shift from reading reports to fielding questions on posted reports  
materials: the posted reports in the Dropbox remain available via the "Members Only" page of our website at the first link under "Correspondence & Reports" (link was sent to members on May 31<sup>st</sup>)
- conduct our regular annual business (elections, awards)



### SLIDE TWO



## President's Report

**Posted president's report online** reviews the year's progress in areas of:

- responding to academic precarity (Tutti Fund, Study Group on the Value of Theology in University Education, consultation re: convening our meetings online);
- engaging the Synod on Synodality (USCCB and Interguild Synodal Dialogues, CCCB);
- enabling international engagement (Virtual Event, online meeting votes, WFTL, INSeCT);
- addressing demographic shifts among our membership (Memorial Service changes)

Posted reports from CUERG and the Centennial Committee also indicate significant developments in enhancing recognition of contributions by colleagues from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and major planning for our future.

#### Updates to president's report:

- In late May, the Callaghan-Pierog Foundation made a second contribution of \$25,000 in response to our report on uses of its November \$10,000 gift
- Yesterday's Board meeting



Convention thank-yous: President-Elect Nancy Pineda-Madrid; own yearlong gratitude

SLIDE THREE



Overview of Votes



Consultation over the past year:

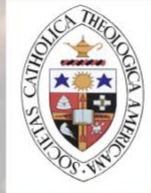
- October: 5-Year Convention Report (265 responses), “End of the Golden Era” virtual event (60 attendees)
- November: Member Employment Survey (237 responses)
- February and March: Town Halls (3 proposals, 54 total attendees)
- April: Online Convention Survey →

86 online every 3 years (2027)  
 72 online every 4 years (2028)  
 53 in-person meetings only  
 211 Total Responses

Resulting Proposals for vote today:

1. online business meetings (including voting)
  - retain forum for discussion at convention itself
- 2a. rotating online conventions (if passes, 2b. determine whether to meet online every 3 or 4 years)
  - signs of our times, balance of goods
3. elimination of “24-hr proviso” bylaws change
  - given the new online resolutions protocol (approved in October, announced in January) and related Board vote on the proviso in March

SLIDE FOUR



Financial State of the CTSA, 2024

Current Status  
 Challenging Trends  
 Stewardship for Sustainability

SLIDE FIVE



### Overview

The CTSA is moving proactively to think about a sustainable future, recognizing that the landscape for theological scholarship has changed.

This short presentation, focused on the financing of the CTSA, will highlight some of the concerns we all share.

SLIDE SIX



### Current Status: A Precarious Steady-State



**Current Status:**

1. CTSA **Infrastructure**: Annual Dues vs. Operating Expenses
2. The **Convention**: Revenue and Expenditures
3. The **Investment Fund**: Underwriting Institutional Stability



SLIDE SEVEN



## REALITIES IMPACTING Our Financial Status


● On Track   
 ● At Risk   
 ● Unknown

---

- Cost of Running the Society:  
 (1a) Annual Dues and (1b) Operating Expenses
- Cost of Convention:  
 (2) Revenues and Expenditures
- The Endowment:  
 (3) Underwriting our Financial Story
- The financial implications of a changing membership.



SLIDE EIGHT



## Overall Impact of these realities, thus far

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**1b** Dues Revenues vs. Operating Expenses

Year	Total Operation Expenditures	Dues Revenue
2017	\$135,000.00	\$95,000.00
2018	\$125,000.00	\$95,000.00
2019	\$115,000.00	\$98,000.00
2020	\$110,000.00	\$100,000.00
2021	\$125,000.00	\$90,000.00
2022	\$125,000.00	\$100,000.00
2023	\$125,000.00	\$65,000.00

Operating Expenses History

Year	Administration	Convention	Fall Board Meeting	Proceedings
2017	\$105,000.00	\$85,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00
2018	\$105,000.00	\$135,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00
2019	\$105,000.00	\$145,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00
2020	\$105,000.00	\$85,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00
2021	\$105,000.00	\$105,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00
2022	\$105,000.00	\$125,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00
2023	\$105,000.00	\$105,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$10,000.00

SLIDE NINE



### 1. Infrastructure: The Cost of Running the Society is Dues Dependent



- 2021 COVID drop in dues with recovery in 2022-23.
- 2023: Dues down by 1/3 – non-payment and lower payments.
- 2024: with most dues in by this point in the year, recovery reflects higher rates, but ... still lower numbers of dues-paying members.

SLIDE TEN



### CTSA MEMBERSHIP 2017 – May of 2024



**MEMBERSHIP**

A KEY INDICATOR OF OUR CURRENT STATUS:

\*14% loss of overall membership.

\*20% loss of "Members in good standing".

\*New member applications are down (30%), but future pattern for these unclear.

SLIDE ELEVEN



## 2: The Cost of the Convention

- Hospitality costs are up across the board.
- Academic travel budgets are tighter or not as available to our members.
- Publishers have also struggled, with fewer resources for conference travel, size of exhibits, and receptions.
- Presidential fundraising has been strong, but unpredictable.



SLIDE TWELVE



## 3: CTSA Investment Fund

### Underwriting Our Financial Story: Income and Stability

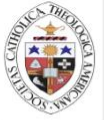
**Provides Income:**

- Generates annual income to support the Society and its mission.

**Guarantees stability:**

- Enables booking of future conventions at favorable rates
- Assures the stability of our institutional structure.

## SLIDE THIRTEEN



## Stewardship for Sustainability

What structures will serve our mission and how will we finance these?



### STEWARDED THE NEXT GENERATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP WILL REQUIRE...

- \*understanding how our day-to-day operations have been funded and how that is changing,
- \*recognizing what the CTSA's decades of care for theological scholarship has meant for this discipline, and
- \*a willingness to proactively structure our practices and funding model to address a rapidly shifting landscape.

## SLIDE FOURTEEN



## Stewardship for Sustainability: Pressing Issues for Our Mission

- Our investment fund is our hedge against sudden fluctuations in the patterns of our membership, ensuring stability.
- We are not falling off a "cliff," but we do continue to see pressure on our financial parameters.
- Our profession, as a whole, is precarious, with a fairly steady rate of contraction – fewer positions with travel funding, closed or merged departments or schools.
- Welcome new methods and identities in theological scholarship have resulted in the emergence of other scholarly societies, which may impact our convention numbers.
- Accessibility and affordability are increasingly impacting our convention attendance, requiring the consideration of new forms of engagement.



## SLIDE FIFTEEN



## Stewardship for Sustainability

● On Track ● At Risk

- Our primary focus is supporting scholars/scholarship that that are immersed in both the tradition of Catholic theology and the intellectual and pastoral life of the Church and the Academy today.
- The CTSA is committed to supporting scholars at a time when they are increasingly under-supported, and work is increasingly marginalized in university academic departments.
- The CTSA is committed to engaging and supporting the work of previously marginalized scholars and topics. **The CTSA needs members to invest in the work we know the Church needs, and not lose the prophetic voices among us by lack of engagement or attrition.**

## SLIDE SIXTEEN



## Stewardship for Sustainability: action items for Board and Finance Committee

**Maintain market-appropriate draw on investment fund to protect our long-term financial stability.**

**Identify “next step initiatives” for targeted fund-raising opportunities, bequests, and grants.**

- \* **CHRISTIE SCHOLARSHIPS: A history of assisting our membership**
- \* **TUTTI FUND: The CTSA responds with a new and successful initiative. This will require sustained support.**

**Craft and implement a structure for long-term fundraising efforts.**

SLIDE SEVENTEEN



# Stewardship for Sustainability

The Centennial Committee will help us to create a focused vision that communicates, to our many audiences, the importance of the CTSA's work for the Church's future.

**The Centennial Committee:**

- Has invited feedback on sample vision statements, as part of a larger Strategic Planning process.
- Created the ad hoc group: "CTSA Study Group on the Value of Theology in University Education"



SLIDE EIGHTEEN



## SLIDE NINETEEN



# ENVISION

...the CTSA at 100

## What is a vision statement?



“A mission statement deals with “why” an organization exists, while a vision statement succinctly expresses “what” that existence will eventually look like. Primarily intended for members and stakeholders, a vision statement describes what an organization aspires to *be* in the longer-term . . . Part roadmap, part inspiration, . . . a vision statement helps give the organization shape and purpose.”

[from “22 Vision Statement Examples To Help You Write Your Own,” BREX  
<https://www.brex.com/journal/vision-statement-examples/>]

## SLIDE TWENTY



# ENVISION

...the CTSA at 100

### 3 Sample Vision Statements: Please Share Your Responses & Ideas!

1. “The CTSA: Advancing theological scholarship and reflection in service of a changing Church, academy, and wider world.”
2. “The CTSA: Serving God’s people by promoting theological wisdom, learning, and excellence.”
3. “The CTSA: Promoting theological wisdom, learning, and excellence in a spirit of service.”

The Centennial Committee is eager to hear your comments via: **Written Form/Box; QR Code; Email; Or In person at our “Coffee Break Listening Post”--- or anytime during the convention!**

23-24 CC Members: Tony Alonso, Kevin Burke, Frank Clooney, Nancy Dallavalle, Patrick Flanagan, Kristin Heyer, Christine Firer Hinze, Linh Hoang, Jaisy Joseph, Daniel Rober

ELSIE MIRANDA

*CTSA Board of Directors, Finance Committee  
 Association of Theological Schools  
 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

NANCY DALLAVALLE

*CTSA Board of Directors, Finance Committee  
 Fairfield University  
 Fairfield, Connecticut*

## **APPENDIX V: ADDENDUM TO THE CTSA REGISTRY**

### **NEW ACTIVE MEMBERS**

Atienza, Christina. Ph.D. in Comparative Religion, 2023, Graduate Theological Union. Dissertation Title: *Who Do You Say That You Are? A Psycho-Theological and Sociological Comparison of the Identities of American Catholic Sisters and Vajrayana Buddhist Monastics.*

Bernard-Hoverstad, Sara. Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, 2023, Boston College. Dissertation Title: *From Religious Cosmology to Environmental Praxis: Empowering Agency for Sustainable Social Change.*

Birch, Vincent. Ph.D. in Fundamental Theology, 2024, The Catholic University of America. Dissertation Title: *The Semiosis of Revelation: God's Self-Communication to Humanity in its Semiotic Constitution.*

Bobrowicz, Ryszard. Th.D. in Practical Theology, 2022, Lund University. Dissertation Title: *Keeping Religion in the Closet: How Legible Religion Shapes Multi-Faith Spaces.*

Bonnette, Kathleen. Th.D. in Theology, 2016, LaSalle University. Dissertation Title: *The Heart of Justice: An Augustinian Ethic of Relational Responsibility.*

Choi, Ki Joo. Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, 2006, Boston College. Dissertation Title: *The Role of Beauty in Moral Discernment: An Appraisal from Rahnerian and Edwardsean Perspectives.*

Chu, Zane. Ph.D. in Systematic & Historical Theology, 2021, Regis College, University of Toronto. Dissertation Title: *Trinitarian Love Communicated by Christ: A Reading of Charity in Thomas Aquinas' *Lectura Super Ioannem* and *Summa Theologiae*.*

Cunningham, Philip. Ph.D. in Biblical Theology, 1992, Boston College. Dissertation Title: *A Content Analysis of the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Current Roman Catholic Religion Textbooks.*

Dallh, Minlib. Ph.D. in Comparative Theology / Mysticism, 2011, University of Exeter (UK). Dissertation Title: *A Mystical Encounter of a Dominican Friar and a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī: Serge de Beaucueil (d. 2005) and 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt (d. 1089).*



Dechant, James. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2023, Fordham University. Dissertation Title: An Ecological Education: Theological Paths to Liberative Praxis.

Dehm, Zachary. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2024, Duquesne University. Dissertation Title: The Ecclesiology of Catalino G. Arévalo: Inculturation, Mission, and Liberation in the Philippine Context.

Duffner, Jordan. Ph.D. in Comparative Theology, 2023, Georgetown University. Dissertation Title: Muhammad's Character as 'Fruit of the Spirit': Catholic Pneumatology and Portrayals of Islam's Prophet.

Dunar, Edward. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2021, Fordham University. Dissertation Title: Recognizing Race in an Ecclesiology of the Built Environment.

Espiritu, Wilson Angelo. Ph.D./S.T.D. in Systematic Theology, 2022, KU Leuven. Dissertation Title: *Locus Theologicus, Locus Politicus*: A Mystical-Political Model of the *Panata* to the *Nazareno* of Quiapo.

Fay, Peter. Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, 2024, Boston College. Dissertation Title: A Roman Catholic Account of the Flourishing and Virtuous Agency of People with Schizophrenia in the United States.

Francisco-Tan, Cecilia. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2019, University of Divinity (Australia). Dissertation Title: The Implications of Authentic Authority for Contemporary Pastoral Leadership: An application of Bernard Lonergan's Dialectic of Authority.

Gioia, Luigi. Ph.D. in Dogmatic Theology, 2006, Oxford University. Dissertation Title: The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

Grigoni, Michael R. Ph.D. in Moral Theology, 2020, Duke University. Dissertation Title: The Gun in American Life: An Ethnographic Christian Ethics.

Gumness, Matthew J. Ph.D. in Theology, 2024, University of Notre Dame. Dissertation Title: The Science of the Cross: Prolegomena to a Cross-Disciplinary Theological Anthropology of Desire.

Hall, Harold Ashley. Ph.D. in Historical Theology & Ecumenism, 2009, Fordham University. Dissertation Title: Philip Melanchthon and the Cappadocians: A Reception of Greek Patristic Sources in the Sixteenth Century.

He, Simeiqi. Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, 2023, Drew University. Dissertation Title: A Post-Critical Moral Theology of Marriage.

Hulse, Sara. Ph.D. in Religious Studies, 2023, Marquette University. Dissertation Title: Person and Society: The Trinitarian Anthropology of Henri de Lubac.

Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Daniel. Ph.D. in History of Christianity, 2005, Boston College. Dissertation Title: The Maccabean Martyrs in Medieval Christianity and Judaism.

Karanovich, R. Zachary. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2023, Boston College. Dissertation Title: Conversion in a World of Violence: James Alison, Thomas Merton, and the Stories That Change Us.

Kennedy, Emma. Ph.D. in Theologica Ethics, 2023, Boston College. Dissertation Title: Forming Agents, Forming Families: Moral Agency in the Context of Procreation.

Kim, Andrew. Ph.D. in Moral Theology, 2013, The Catholic University of America. Dissertation Title: Thomas Aquinas on the Connection of the Virtues.

Kime, Bernadette. D.Min, 2009, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia; Ph.D. in Instructional Management & Leadership, 2023, Robert Morris University. Ph.D. Dissertation Title: Roman Catholic Priests: The Need for Leadership and Management Training.

Lawler, Lauren. Ph.D. in Feminist Practical Theology, 2024, Palm Beach Atlantic University. Dissertation Title: Unmasking Clericalism: The Clown Feminine Lens as Hermeneutic Spiral – A Practical Theology to Employ a Path for Integration of Self.

Li, Fiona. Ph.D. in Mariology & Feminist Theology, 2024, Regis College, University of Toronto. Dissertation Title: Exploring the Image of Mary as Bridge-Builder (Pontifex) for Contemporary Contextual Theology.

Luciani, Rafael. S.T.D. with focus on Ecclesiology, 2002, Pontificia Università Gregoriana. Dissertation Title: El misterio de la diferencia: un estudio tipológico de la analogía.

Marcelli-Chu, Monica. Ph.D. in Moral Theology, 2022, Regis College, University of Toronto. Dissertation Title: Gifted Beyond Reason, Affected by Grace: Human Action, Passion, and the Gifts of the Spirit in Thomas Aquinas.

Mazza, George. Ph.D. in Religion and Culture, 2024, The Catholic University of America. Dissertation Title: The Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Roman Catholic Preaching: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Selected Contemporary Homilies.

McCarthy, Andrew. Ph.D. in Practical Theology, 2023, Palm Beach Atlantic university. Dissertation Title: Breaking Away: An Autoethnography of BD-I Generational Bipolarity Spiritual Story Through Liminal Paradigms of Neurodivergent Spirituality.

McDougall, Joy Ann. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 1998, University of Chicago. Dissertation Title: A Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian Life.

Meruzzi, Mauro. S.T.D. with focus on Biblical Theology, 2006, Pontifical Gregorian University. Dissertation Title: The Bridegroom, the Wedding and the Guests. Nuptial Aspects in Matthew's Theology (Originally in Italian: *Lo sposo, le nozze e gli invitati. Aspetti nuziali nella teologia di Matteo*).

Moon, Catherine. Ph.D. in Moral Theology, 2024, The Catholic University of America. Dissertation Title: *Τί ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια*: Towards an Account of Human Experience and Its Role in Moral Theology from the Perspective of Edith Stein.

Mousseau, Juliet. Ph.D. in Historical Theology, 2006, Saint Louis University. Dissertation Title: Images of Light in Adam of Saint Victor's Sequences: The Holy Spirit in Liturgy and Life.

Nwainya, Hilary Ogonna. Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, 2023, Boston College. Dissertation Title: Addressing the Need for Recognition: A Fundamental and Constitutive Point of Departure for Catholic Social Ethics.

Ortega, Leo. S.T.D. with focus on Dogmatic Theology, 2021, Pontificia università Della Santa Croce. Dissertation Title: The Sign of Kenosis in the Theology of David N. Power: Its Resonances with the Argentine Theology of the People, The Church of the Poor.

Potter, Laurel. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2024, Boston College. Dissertation Title: *Que esta misa nos haga soñar*: Liturgical Inter-Culturation and the Mesoamerican Reception of Sacrosanctum Concilium.

Scruggs, Mathew. Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, 2021, Duquesne University. Dissertation Title: Natural Law and Latinx Social Ethics: A Narrative Approach.

Stout, Huili (Kathy). Ph.D. in Interreligious Dialogue, 2023, University of Dayton. Dissertation Title: The Art of Dialogue and Proclamation: A Case Study with John C. H. Wu (1899-1986).

Teter, Magda. Ph.D. in Jewish History, 2000, Columbia University. Dissertation Title: The Jews in the Legislation and the Teachings of the Catholic Church in Poland 1648-1772.

Trang, Dung. Ph.D. in Historical Theology & Spirituality, 2023, Villanova University. Dissertation Title: The Sanctuary of Our Lady of La Vang: Negotiating the Space Between Marian Devotion and Vietnamese Catholic Women.

Ukwuije, Bede. Th.D. and Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2005, Institut Catholique de Paris/ KU Leuven. Dissertation Title: L'humanité de Dieu: Pertinence de la doctrine trinitaire d'Eberhard Jüngel pour le renouvellement de la nomination de Dieu dans la théologie africaine de l'inculturation.

Vink, Andrew T. Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, 2021, Boston College. Dissertation Title: Ellacuría's Tripartite Salvation: A Historical-Soteriological Analysis of the Problem of Neoliberalism.

Welle, Jason. Ph.D. in Religious Pluralism, 2016, Georgetown University. Dissertation Title: Clarifying Companionship: Al-Sulamī's (D. 412/1021) Kitāb Ādāb Al-Ṣuḥba.

Zaleski, John. Ph.D. in Religion, 2019, Harvard University. Dissertation Title: Christianity, Islam, and the Religious Culture of Late Antiquity: A Study of Asceticism in Iraq and Northern Mesopotamia.

HOSFFMAN OSPINO  
*CTSA Secretary*  
*Boston College*  
*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

## **APPENDIX VI: ADDENDUM TO THE CTSA REGISTRY**

### **NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

Agolia, Grace Mariette. Program: Ph.D. in Theology, Boston College. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): Instituted Ministries: Clerical Cooption or Opportunity for Ecclesial Reform?

Agustin, Jr., Danilo. Program: Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, KU Leuven. Exp. 2024. Dissertation (working title): A Theo-political Response to the Crisis of Philippine Democracy.

Antonio, Melicia. Program: Ph.D. in Moral Theology, University of Notre Dame. Exp. June 2025. Dissertation (working title): Lessons in Moral Authority from the Spanish Church in Transition.

Coya, Carmen Luisa. Program: Ph.D. in Moral Theology, University of Tilburg (Netherlands). Exp. January 2027. Dissertation (working title): Revolution of Virtues: the Catholic Sources of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Drury, Thomas E. Program: Ph.D. in Practical Theology, Palm Beach Atlantic University. Exp. Spring 2025. Dissertation (working title): Making St. Ann's Catholic School Catholic? Values, Spirituality, and Mission in the Experience of Adolescent Students.

Effron, Megan. Program: Ph.D. in Theology, University of Notre Dame. Exp. May 2026. Dissertation (working title): A Theology of Preaching Grounded in Yves Congar's Pneumatology.

Ferguson, Kyle. Program: Ph.D. in Ecclesial / Interfaith Studies. Regis St. Michael's (Canada). Exp. December 2025. Dissertation (working title): Re-imagining Catholic - Indigenous Relations in Canada through the Leanings of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue.

Krasskova, Galina. Program: Ph.D. in Early Christianity. Fordham University. Exp. June 2027. Dissertation (working title): Pain, Devotion, and Identity in Early Christianity.

Lemos, Antonio. Program: Ph.D. in Moral Theology, University of Notre Dame. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): Right of Migration and the Spanish Scholastics.

Lugo, David. Program: S.T.D. with focus on Ignatian Spirituality, Universidad Pontificia Comillas (Spain). Exp. June 2026. Dissertation (working title): Primer on Ignatian Soteriology.

Mathy, Pamela. Program: Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality, Oblate School of Theology. Exp. 2026. Dissertation (working title): Contemplative Practice, Semiotics, and Interpreting Transcendence.

Mbonyumugenzi, Deogratias. Program: Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, Loyola University Chicago. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): Forgive as We Are Forgiven: Reframing a Trinitarian Model of Forgiveness in the Post-Genocide Rwanda.

McAleer, Ryan. Program: Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, KU Leuven. Exp. July 2025. Dissertation (working title): Dialogical Theology and Catholic Education: Towards A Shared Future in Northern Ireland.

McLaughlin, Brett. Program: Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, Boston College. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): A Reign over Envy: The Kingdom of God's overturn of Conflictual Desires.

Medina-Maldonado, Cecille. Program: Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, Marquette University. Exp. 2025. Dissertation (working title): Towards Relationship: A Trinitarian Model in Defense of Human Embryo Adoption.

Myrose, Jamie. Program: Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, Boston College. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): Grace in the Here and Now: Towards a Christian Theology of Friendship.

Nilo, Valentina. Program: Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, Boston College. Exp. June 2026. Dissertation (working title): TBD.

Oliveros, Diane Francesca. Program: Ph.D. in Religious Education, Boston College. Exp. 2025. Dissertation (working title): Pedagogy of Discernment.

O'Neill, Brett. Program: Ph.D. in Theological Ethics, Boston College. Exp. Dec 2025. Dissertation (working title): Catholic Social Teaching and Nation-States' Regulation of Immigration.

Orozco, Amirah. Program: Ph.D. in Feminist Latina Theology, University of Notre Dame. Exp. 2027. Dissertation (working title): Methods in Latina Feminist Theologies.

Palmieri, David. Program: Doctor of Ministry, The Catholic University of America. Exp. 2025. Dissertation (working title): Forming Missionary Disciples: The Art of Accompaniment with LGBTQ Students in Catholic High Schools.

Pigneri, Dominic. Program: Ph.D. in Theology, The Catholic University of America. Exp. December 2023. Dissertation (working title): Scapegoat and Lamb of God: The Incarnation in Raymund Schwager's Soteriology.

Reilly, Christopher. Program: Th.D. in Moral Theology, Pontifex University. Exp. March 2025. Dissertation (working title): Does Artificial Intelligence Motivate the Sin of Acedia? Investigating the Problem of Materialized Instrumental Rationality.

Reisenauer Guidotti, Berit. Program: Ph.D. in Theology (Ethics). Boston College. Exp. 2026. Dissertation (working title): Theological Ethics: Emerging Technologies.

Thomas, Sean C. Program: Ph.D. in Practical theology. Palm Beach Atlantic University. Exp. Dec 2024. Dissertation (working title): The Promise of Post-Colonial Catholicism: An Empirical Practical Theology.

Thornton, Andrea. Program: Ph.D. in Theology and Health Care Ethics, Saint Louis University. Exp. 2025. Dissertation (working title): False Hope or False Gods.

Vale, Peter. Program: Ph.D. in Theology, Boston College. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): Jerome's Vulgate Judith: A Reader-Response Analysis.

Warner, Lauren. Program: Ph.D. Theology & Education, Boston College. Exp. May 2026. Dissertation (working title): TBD.

Williams, Trevor B. Program: Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, Villanova University. Exp. May 2025. Dissertation (working title): Remaining in the Silence of the Flesh: A Study of Emmanuel Falque's Trinitarian Animality.

Wundschuh, Kim Michelle Sally. Program: Ph.D. in Dogmatic Theology. University of Bonn. Exp. 2026. Dissertation (working title): Jesus Christ: Key to the New World of God.

Zhai, Yujia. Program: Ph.D. in Comparative Theology / Jewish-Christian Relations. Boston College. Exp. Spring 2025. Dissertation (working title): Toward a Catholic Covenantal Theology: Comparative Theological Reading of Joseph B. Soloveitchik and David Tracy.

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