

RELIGION AND SOCIETY—INVITED SESSION

- Topic: De Lubac, de Certeau and Us: Theological Method and the Challenge of Unity in Three Different Cultural Ecologies  
Moderator: Neomi DeAnda, University of Dayton  
Presenter: Vincent J. Miller, University of Dayton  
Respondent: Kevin Ahern, Manhattan College

This thought-provoking session presented the role of media and its effects on ways in which ecclesial unity impacted societal notions of aggregation. In an hour-long presentation, Vincent J. Miller covered three historical and cultural moments as specified in his paper title, “De Lubac, de Certeau and Us: Theology and the Challenge of Unity in Three Different Cultural Contexts,” which argues that “de Lubac’s work displays a Catholic optimism that modern media technologies and their concomitant literacy can be used by the Church to offer an alternative to the rise of the cultural formation of the nation-state” (3).

First, Miller presented a sketch of these three contexts. Miller posed de Lubac’s context with a generation which experienced peasant cultures which had not lived through profound crisis and change, particularly of two world wars and political regimes. He places de Certeau a generation later where secular civil society decreasingly found massive consensus in Christian belief, commitment, and practice possible. Media then was a force for the Church to work within rather than imagine an alternative. For the context of today, Miller highlights media as providing tools that promote fragmentation where secularization and individual preferential niches of belief reign most powerful. Miller then moves to engagement with various theological points presented by both de Lubac and de Certeau.

Miller begins to construct a theological response counter to the current issues of fragmentation caused by contemporary media by incorporating both theological images and strategies from de Lubac and de Certeau. He finds both de Lubac’s Pauline image of the body of Christ and de Certeau’s image of the empty tomb as necessary, with their crux in the Emmaus account. Concerning strategies, Miller finds various components from both de Lubac’s and de Certeau’s thought still applicable if changed for our different context. He also finds that, while remembering de Lubac’s formation in Christian logics may assist us to ease the addressing of issues of secularization, his general project may have found its termination period. Miller also proposes employing de Certeau’s “attention to the actual practice of Christians on the ground and his attention to particular operations” (34) along with a broadening of these perspectives. Finally, Miller emphasizes the need to focus on unity as an ecclesial mark and expand how Christian operations may serve it because of the now-lacking culturally homogenizing factors.

Kevin Ahern, in his “Response to Vincent Miller,” presented three models of French social Catholicism, partially based upon his experience of living in France and working with an international church movement as well as some questions for continued engagement. The first, Distinction of Planes, presents a model which keeps church separate from society. Christian individuals were to move from ecclesial inspiration to act in the world but not as church. Catholic media in this model provided a means to inspire these personal Christian actions. This model may be linked to de Lubac’s vision of church which inspires social change but does not

directly intervene in it. The second, Integral Liberation, inspired and built upon praxis-oriented method of Joseph Cardijn, sought to work as church for social transformation. In this model, media becomes a tool for social change. Ahern links de Certeau with this ecclesial model as he had served as part of the French Young Catholic Student Movement (JEC), one of the first groups to challenge the Distinction of Planes model. The third, New Evangelization, provides little space for direct action toward social justice. Instead, this model, championed by John Paul II, focused on addressing secularization in Europe and relativism within the Church. Many working within this model form enclaves of the likeminded. Ahern links this model and those involved in it to what he labels as the idealistic model of de Lubac, “who they draw heavily on for their reading of communion ecclesiology and their appeals to unity and common identity” (5). Ahern concluded with the statement and question, “I’ve been recently toying around with the idea of a ‘networked’ ecclesiology. Do you see any resources in network theory that can support a new model of action for the church today?” (6)

During the discussion period, questions were raised both around how the growing Latino/a Catholic population of the USA along with the Spanish Catholic history of the southern border of present day USA impact the perspectives presented in this session.

NEOMI DEANDA  
*University of Dayton*  
*Dayton, Ohio*