

CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT—TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: “Glocal Justice”: Three Case Studies and their Implications for Contemporary Catholic Social Thought
- Convener: Laurie Johnston, Emmanuel College
- Moderator: Conor Kelly, Boston College
- Presenters: Min-Ah Cho, St. Catherine University
Patrick Flanagan, St. John’s University
Terence McGoldrick, Providence College

Given that Catholic Social Thought is a tradition of reflection that emerged primarily from a European context, the conference theme provided an opportunity to examine the unity and diversity in CST through attention to how it is applied in a range of contexts. This session examined three distinct cases of the application of Catholic Social Thought to a current reality, in order to uncover how such local applications might have implications for the broader Church and the development of future social teaching.

Min-Ah Cho’s paper, entitled “Weaving Fragmented Bodies: Catholic Social Thought in a Global Context Through Nonviolent Activism in Jeju, South Korea,” transported her listeners to the beautiful volcanic island of Jeju, South Korea. The construction of an enormous naval base has seriously threatened this UNESCO World Heritage Site and galvanized an ecumenical, interreligious protest movement. Korean Catholics have been actively involved in peace activism in Jeju, drawing on diocesan networks to transmit information and counter propaganda, holding public mass each day in front of the construction site (despite the risk of arrest) in conjunction with other protest activities including interfaith efforts, and intentionally creating new symbols and metaphors to link their peace activism with Scripture and the history of the island, so that the people understand their struggle and suffering as a continuation of the prophetic tradition of the Church. Despite these efforts by the local Church, the Korean Catholic Church, as a whole, has been hesitant to support the diocese and, in fact, blocked the Jeju protesters from communicating with international Catholic communities.

In the second presentation, titled “Opening a ‘Pandora’s Box’: The Importance of Labor Unions in the Digital Age,” Patrick Flanagan demonstrated the enduring importance of the support in CST for labor unions, including in the context of internet streaming music companies such as Pandora. Technological developments and globalization create new ways in which “the priority of labor over capital” must be maintained. Flanagan showed how Pandora’s executives have taken advantage of legislation to permit them to pay music artists extremely low wages; he concludes that this is wage theft and that buying music through Pandora thus should be regarded as cooperation with evil.

Terence McGoldrick provided a case study of a local Episcopal Conference’s application of CST to its context with his paper, “The CST Evaluation of Water as a Human Right in Bolivia and Collective Indigenous Property Rights.” He gave an overview of recent statements by the Episcopal Conference of Bolivia on water as a human right (2002), just use and care of the earth (2000), and a third a decade later to assess progress on those matters (2012). The Bishops’ input has played a role in the drafting of the 2009 Bolivian Constitution, as well as the 2010 “Law of the rights of

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mother earth” to protect the earth and all living systems as a legal person, including its indigenous people. McGoldrick showed that the Bishops’ teaching on these issues has drawn on the tradition of CST in a way that is in harmony with local indigenous traditions about the sacredness of earth, water, and humanity as part of nature. At the same time, these statements represent new developments in CST in the light of crises caused by climate change and economic injustice.

Following the presentation, there was a lively discussion about the common challenges faced by Catholic communities in various contexts as they seek to apply and live out the principles of Catholic Social Thought. In particular, speakers pointed to the need to build and sustain transnational networks of solidarity among Catholics and others, in the face of global economic and military powers. Those in attendance saw a number of ways in which the themes of CST invoked in this session could apply to other contexts and appreciated the opportunity to learn from the creative approaches to CST described by the presenters.

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