

BEYOND TRENTO—INTEREST GROUP

Topic:	“Beyond Trento: North American Moral Theology in a Global Church”
Conveners:	Kristin Heyer, Santa Clara University Bryan Massingale, Marquette University
Moderator:	Bryan Massingale, Marquette University
Presenter:	Christine Frier Hinze, Fordham University
Respondent:	Victor Carmona, Oblate School of Theology
Respondent:	Anne Arabome, Duquesne University

The Beyond Trento interest group was initiated in the wake of the 2010 international gathering of Catholic ethicists in Trento, Italy (“Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church”) to consider how understanding CTSA members’ work as taking place in a global church should transform the shape of North American theological discourse and ethical praxis. This second gathering began with a moment of silent prayer for our colleague, Lucas Chan, S.J., who presented at the inaugural meeting last year and died suddenly just weeks before this year’s meeting.

Christine Firer Hinze’s contribution, “The Cross-Cultural Challenge to North American Theological Ethics,” focused upon the dangers of indifference and superficiality—the dual “coins of privilege”—in North American encounters with theological voices from the global South. Offering an Ignatian-inspired examen of conscience of her teaching and scholarship, she detailed two perils that North American scholars must contend with. The first, pedagogical indifference, she defined as a not caring caused by a concern for other justice issues (such as gender and race in the U.S. context), or stemming from an ability to conduct one’s work without reference to the voices of the global community (“I don’t have to care”); and/or motivated by a fear of the consequences or burdens that such a care might occasion. She described, pedagogical superficiality, as utilizing cross-cultural or global perspectives in an occasional manner or in a way that is insufficiently focused or reflective. The danger of such superficiality, she asserted, was that it could leave the students in an undesirable—even dangerous—state of ignorance while thinking that they in fact do know.

Agreeing with Catholic Social Teaching tradition, Pope Francis, and Jesuit Superior General A. Nicholas that encounter/solidarity is the appropriate remedy to these perils, she offered a reading of such solidarity inspired by decolonizing theorists. Such thinkers challenge understandings and practices of solidarity that are blind to their entanglements in disparities of power and resources, histories of exploitation and victimization, and their present unjust consequences. What such theorists do to privileged North American ethicists is “trouble” them. To do responsible ethical analysis and reflection in a global context “means waking up to the fact that we advantaged Christians start with a moral, and likely spiritual, disadvantage; we labor under cognitive, imaginative, and affective handicaps.” This demands that North American ethicists have the humility to listen and learn in ways that resist a facile eliding of difference. She proposed undertaking and modeling for our students regular examens of conscience and pedagogy, grounded in “tactics of troubling visibility,” which however self-implicating and even “sickening,” are the ways forward to responsible and indeed ethical moral reflection.

Victor Carmona deepened Hinze's observations by showing that the challenges of cross-cultural ethical work are much closer at hand for North Americans than is commonly acknowledged. Due to immigration, the Catholic reality in the U.S. is now deeply marked by the presence of persons from the global South. Carmona offered the demographics of the Oblate School of Theology—roughly 1/3 Hispanic, 1/3 white, 13% African American, and 20% international students principally from Mexico, Zambia, and Vietnam—his experience of teaching in such an environment as a case study. The major challenge, he related, stemmed not only text selection and syllabus construction in light of such diversity. The real challenge was *embodied*, in the various accents with which English was spoken in the classroom. The students had to learn the humility to listen to one another, and even at times to use French and Spanish to help each other learn the terminology of academic moral theology. But the patience required was not simply a pedagogical one or an exercise of charity. The embodied accents also became a summons to interrogate and challenge the unacknowledged assumptions of linguistic privilege, namely, the assumption that “particular accents betrayed a lack of intellectual capacity or a preference for certain values over others,” even indicating something of the moral comportment of their possessors.

The presence of the global South here in North America, Carmona argued, entails much more than acquiring a skill set of techniques to manage such diversity. Rather, it demands that our institutions, and even the academy itself, transform themselves in light of their engagement with the embodied voice of the others. Carmona deftly illustrated this by questioning the widespread assumption that French is accepted in theology graduate programs as an academic language, but not Spanish, by offering a part of his paper in both languages. It is assumed that Spanish may be pastorally useful to help teach a linguistically diverse student body, but there is scant realization that there is academic work being done in Spanish. This hurts the discipline's ability to understand scholarship that lies not only beyond but within our borders. Carmona concluded by reflecting upon and extending Bryan Massingale's previous summons to a “Copernican revolution” in theological ethics. Carmona stated that such a revolution demanded that Latino/a theologians see themselves as a “majority,” a stance that entails both prophetic interventions in view of their under-represented state in the academy and the church, and self-confident contributions that befit their reality as the at times majority presence in the church.

Anne Arabome response offered a reflection that focused on upon pedagogical text selection, but pedagogical approaches and attitudes rooted in her identity as an African woman. She described how she taught a theological anthropology course here in North America with a largely white undergraduate enrollment. She made three assumptions in the course. First, she would teach and relate to the students as a “family,” an image central in African cultures. Concretely, this meant that she and the students engaged one another “with the idea that each one has something to contribute.” Second, she made no distinction between the sacred and the profane, as such a distinction is foreign to the African mind set. Finally, she prioritized formation “rather than grading and intellectual production from students,” informing them on the first day that they were all “A” students “because they are made in the image and likeness of God.” She then offered several comments from the end of the semester student evaluations that eloquently and movingly revealed the deep transformation many had experienced through engaging a form of pedagogy that is rare in the North American university. In sum, the students reported not only a depth of theological understanding

but of a lived encounter with faith itself, facilitated by cross-culturally rooted pedagogy.

Arabome concluded her presentation by focusing on some systemic challenges that cross-cultural engagement poses of U.S. academic institutions. Among these are practices that assume that naturalized American citizens are not fully equal to native-born citizens. Such practices include restricting financial assistance (e.g., TA-ships) to American citizens and requiring proof of English language proficiency of foreign students—in both cases not acknowledging the American identity of those who are naturalized citizens. The changing demography of the U.S. requires a fundamental rethinking of who is meant by and included in the adjective “American.” She concluded with the summons, “In the age of globalization, dialogue, pedagogy, and hermeneutics are intercultural.”

The lively discussion that followed from the 55 attendees took up questions regarding what virtues may be required for internationally engaged pedagogy, what counts as legitimate cross-cultural dialogue, who is meant or included in the designation of “cross-cultural” or “global,” similarities and differences between the challenges posed by the voices of the global South and those stemming from race critique and feminism in the U.S., and caveats and opportunities for converting students and faculty alike in U.S. contexts. The session concluded with an update on CTEWC initiatives and the launch of the third book in its series, *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology and Resource Extraction*.

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