

BEYOND TRENTO—INTEREST GROUP

Topic:	“Beyond Trento: North American Moral Theology in a Global Church”
Convener:	Bryan Massingale, Fordham University
Moderator:	Tobias Winright, St. Louis University
Presenters:	Jeremy V. Cruz, St. John’s University Shawnee M. Daniels-Sykes, Mt. Mary University
Respondent:	Kristin E. Heyer, Boston College

The “Beyond Trento” interest group has probed how understanding our work as taking place within a global church should impact North American theological discourse and ethical praxis. Just as Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church has sponsored regional conferences since its international meeting in Trento, Italy in 2010 (in Nairobi, Berlin, Krakow, Bangalore and Bogotá), this interest group has functioned to sustain a North American regional conversation.

Jeremy V. Cruz began the session with his presentation on “Traversing Merciless American Borders: Transnational Dialogue Between Colonized and Diasporic Peoples.” He argued that empire and its strategies of racism and coloniality constitute the central logic of oppression in this hemisphere; therefore, called for Catholic moral dialogues that challenge consequent unjust suffering black diasporic and non-black indigenous communities endure. He identified two dominant and problematic trajectories in Catholic moral dialogue in the contemporary United States: one that attempts to mediate between its “culture wars” in hopes of insulating the Church from partisan electoral politics without recognizing the mechanisms of imperial power; and a second that pursues global dialogue in inter-national rather than trans-national terms, ignoring transnational subjects and downplaying the role of the international social order in their oppression.

In response, he forwarded three characteristics of more adequate modes of dialogue. First, moral dialogues should be primarily missiological rather than ecclesiological, rooted in a social praxis aimed at survival and liberation from fundamental social causes of human oppression. Second, dialogues should foreground the voices of subordinated groups, which entails many relinquishing a seat at the table. Third, transformative, cross-cultural, and transnational dialogues already underway by diasporic and colonized peoples must be supported. Here he emphasized the insufficiency of dominant incrementalist or liberal idealist strategies. Drawing on critical race theory, he suggested conventional attempts at achieving common ground among dominant groups should not be the goal, but rather building subaltern coalitions’ capacity to make (material and structural) demands on those who oppress them.

In “Our Global Common Humanity: Whose Universals? Whose Particulars? (In Bioethical Discourse),” Shawnee Daniels Sykes cautioned against the dangers of attempting to transcend cultural differences by employing mainstream, universally binding Western bioethical principles. She underscored shortcomings of standard ethical principlism in some cross-cultural circumstances and, by recounting the history of the Tuskegee syphilis study alongside the *Nuremberg Code* and the

Declaration of Helsinki, made clear the glaringly exploitative risks of such inattention to particulars.

She then considered what it would entail to understand Western bioethics from the perspective of particularism that takes cultural differences seriously. Drawing upon Bernard Lonergan's method, she argued for the significant benefits gained from attentive, patient, effective engagement with the other about bioethical concerns through the use of open-ended questions. She warned that without this shift, Western bioethics risks reproducing white supremacy in its theories, methods, practices, and even codes. She suggested converting the principles adopted by UNESCO in its Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights into open-ended questions to more adequately approximate global minimal standards in biomedical research (e.g., information-seeking questions, situational questions, cultural questions, ecumenical questions, racial questions, gender questions). She deemed UNESCO's the document that best combines respect for cultural diversity with the standard principles of bioethics.

In response, Kristin Heyer expressed gratitude for the speakers' emphases on the ways "ethics from below" contests not only the adequacy of reified principles, but dominant modes' reinscription of power. She noted, for example, how migration ethics instructs us that engaging diasporic, transnational, and international voices need not be mutually exclusive, and how taken together they illuminate epistemological limits of Catholic theological ethics. She indicated how dialogues across borders not only expose the limits of conventional scholarship and syllabi but also sustain vocational affinities across difference. Encountering colleagues raising voices in classrooms and in civil society to combat structures and ideologies that erode the respect due women, for example, offers concrete hope and existential courage for reversing pervasive trends across diverse contexts.

Finally drawing upon the analogy of "desire paths" in landscape architecture, she suggested that transformative dialogue and accompaniment open horizons where well-paved disciplinary paths do not yet lead. Hence, walking away from a chiefly northern paradigm requires cultivating institutional virtues that facilitate our desire paths (e.g., rethinking what count as scholarly theological languages or legitimate coauthorship or assessable pedagogies). The discussion that followed considered how scholarly footnotes, guest lecture invitations, and even course titles function to constrain or empower in these veins. The session concluded with the launch of the fourth book in the CTEWC series, *Living with(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples* (Orbis Press, 2016).

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