

PROPOSAL FOR CTSA INTEREST GROUP: FIELDWORK IN THEOLOGY

Many theologians appeal to experience or stress the importance of the contemporary situation in their research. And yet, if only used to further an argument, this emphasis on experience bears with it the danger of *ventriloquism* (to use a term from Religious Studies scholar Don Seeman). The rise of qualitative fieldwork within theology is one manner of mitigating this danger, which other theological guilds such as the Society of Christian Ethics and the North American Academy of Liturgy have embraced. The Catholic Theological Society of America can provide a space in which Catholic scholars across the theological academy can gather to investigate methods for integrating the category of experience into theological inquiry.

During the 2017 convention, Lorraine Cuddeback, Jaisy Joseph, and Layla Karst created a selected session titled “Permeable Boundaries: The Role of Ethnography in Attending to Integral Human Ecology” in which they presented papers that surveyed the potential of qualitative fieldwork for theological investigation. The panel offered a variety of ways that fieldwork is being employed by theologians, including individual interviews, immersive participant-observation, and the incorporation of ethnographic texts as source material. United by their use of ethnography, the presenters established that interest in this methodological conversation extends across theological subfields: moral theology, systematic theology, and liturgical theology. During the subsequent discussion, many theologians revealed their own difficulties with incorporating fieldwork into their research, thereby exposing a need for more sustained reflection on how we attend to human experience and how we incorporate it into our theological projects.

With this interest group, we will develop a progressive program that furthers this conversation concerning fieldwork in theology by highlighting the themes of embodiment, encounter, and ethics. These themes allow us to foreground the unique way that fieldwork contributes to theological knowledge by emphasizing the relationships between the researcher, the community, and the academy. Individual topic sessions or selected sessions have included papers that rely on grounded theories or qualitative research; however, this interest group would provide a place to host a methodological conversation for people across subfields around common questions concerning fieldwork. For three years, the interest group will serve as an outlet for scholars to more carefully consider the benefits and limitations of these methods, to develop professional standards for conducting qualitative research, and to reflect on our own positionality as theologians in and for the Church.

PROPOSED SESSIONS

Embodiment (2018): For the first year as an interest group, we will offer a panel that addresses the role of embodiment and social location in our theological knowledge. Since fieldwork presents, in a different way, the involvement of the body in theological research (as compared to working primarily with texts and similar sources), the group will seek papers that reflect on the method of fieldwork, and in particular the need for scholars to embrace reflexivity as a part of their theological work. Fieldwork and ethnography draw attention to how our bodies facilitate knowledge, such as: how a theologian might physically place herself within a new community, the potential bodily vulnerability of both researchers and community members within the field, and how the development of embodied relationships within a community affects both the *what* and *how* of generating theological knowledge.

Encounter (2019): The liberationist traditions in Catholic theology have long called for encounter with people on the margins and Pope Francis has regularly used encounter as a theme in his addresses to the Church and the world at large. Yet, it is important not to romanticize what we mean by “encounter” – in either fieldwork or theology. In the second year of the group, we will recruit papers that speak to what it means to “encounter” communities, how such encounters disrupt perceived boundaries, and how encounters and fieldwork become theologically generative.

Ethics (2020): To do fieldwork as theologians, regardless of which subfield we work in, is to inevitably bring Christian commitments into the field with us. Fieldwork relies on building relationships within a community, while also ensuring that the agency and dignity of community members is preserved. The final year of this interest group will seek papers that speak to accountability and ethics in fieldwork, offer best practices, and examine what the particular ethical challenges might be within different theological subfields.

CONVENERS

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The following active and associate members have expressed their interest and support for the proposed Interest Group, Fieldwork in Theology.

Khalid Anatolios, University of Notre Dame
Robert Brodrick, Boston College
Francis X Clooney, SJ, Harvard University
Jessica Coblentz, Saint Mary's College of California
M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College
Catherine Cornille, Boston College
Heather DuBois, University of Notre Dame
Benjamin Durham, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University
Nichole M. Flores, University of Virginia
Richard Gaillardetz, Boston College
Roberto Goizueta, Boston College
Cristina Lledo Gomez, Charles Sturt University
Elizabeth Groppe, University of Dayton
Judith Gruber, KU Leuven
Leo Guardado, University of Notre Dame
Edward Hahnenberg, John Carroll University
Kristin Heyer, Boston College
Brianna Jacobs, Fordham University
Michael P. Jaycox, Seattle University
James F. Keenan, Boston College
Christine McCarthy, Fordham University
Kathleen Mroz, Boston College
Stephen Okey, Saint Leo University
Amanda Osheim, Loras College
Brandon Peterson, University of Utah
Andrew Prevot, Boston College
Susan Reynolds, Boston College
Brian Robinette, Boston College
Michael Rubbelke, University of Notre Dame
Robert Schreiter, Catholic Theological Union
John Slattery, University of Notre Dame
David Turnbloom, University of Portland
Kate Ward, Marquette University

Mental Health in Theological Perspective CTSA Interest Group Proposal

The undersigned members of the Catholic Theological Society of America represent scholars actively engaged or interested in Catholic theological scholarship on mental health, and together we endorse this proposal for a 3-year interest group on “Mental Health in Theological Perspective.”

In the week leading up to the 2018 CTSA convention, US media covered two high-profile mental-health-related deaths by suicide. The CDC, too, released a study reporting a sharp rise in suicide across the nation, a vast majority of which are mental-health related. The confluence of this tragic news offered but a glimpse of the widespread mental-health challenges facing people in and beyond the Americas.

Many members of the CTSA know firsthand the ubiquity of mental-health conditions. Our friends, colleagues, and family members struggle with conditions such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, trauma, and eating disorders. Many of us live with these conditions, too. Our students arrive on campus with diagnosed mental illnesses at increasing rates. We, along with our institutions, strive to support them while often uncertain of how to understand this swell of suffering in our midst.

A nascent but growing body of Catholic theological scholarship on mental health offers some intellectual aid. Following pioneering monographs such as William Lynch’s *Images of Hope* (1990) on depression and Jennifer Beste’s *God and the Victim* (2007) on trauma, a critical mass of Catholic theologians across ethics (e.g., Dana Dillon, Elisabeth Vasko), systematics (e.g., Elizabeth Antus, Julia Feder, Robin Ryan, Bob Schreiter, Johann Vento), and other subfields (e.g., John Sheveland, C. Vanessa White) has emerged.

These and other scholars further Catholic theological reflection on mental health in the face of two significant challenges: first, the stigma associated with mental-health conditions, and second, the interdisciplinary competencies required for this work. This CTSA interest group would help to curb these challenges. By officially recognizing mental-health conditions and concomitantly affirming the value of Catholic theological scholarship on them, the interest group would, first, counter the stigma that continues to make research on this topic an especially delicate task in the church and the academy. Second, this designated, multi-year venue would enable participants to learn from and build upon the unique interdisciplinary expertise that individuals respectively bring to the group from psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies (including critical race, feminist, and queer theories).

Together, the group would facilitate the development of much-needed, **distinctly theological scholarship on mental health** that explores both how theology can respond to this social reality and how this complex instantiation of suffering might reshape theology. We plan to consider:

Year 1 – Clarifying the shape of this interdisciplinary field: How do we situate theologies of mental health in relation to other well-established theological subfields, such as political and liberation theologies, pastoral and practical theologies, theological

ethics, and systematic theology more broadly? What interdisciplinary tools, interlocutors, and methodological models are necessary for theological reflection on mental-health struggles? What are the disciplinary and methodological challenges facing us as we embark on this work?

Year 2 – Contextualizing mental health within our broader world: How does the link of mental-health struggles—such as depression, suicide and complex trauma—to systemic oppressions—including racism, sexism, homophobia, and capitalism—complicate theological analyses of and responses to all these social realities? Does this link engender new ethical and ecclesial imperatives?

Year 3 – Rethinking doctrine in view of mental health: What new theological insights emerge from the intersection of theology and mental health? How do the symptoms of self-hatred and self-harm that often constitute depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide require us to rethink Christian discourse about self-love and self-sacrifice? How can Christian theologies of suffering help or hinder our understandings of and responses to various forms of psychological distress? How might the human vulnerabilities that characterize various mental-health conditions inform our anthropological ideals, ecclesial mission, and eschatology?

These collective efforts would also answer the call of pastoral leaders such as the bishops of California, who in their 2018 pastoral letter, “Hope and Healing,” addressed the issue of caring for those who suffer with mental illness and exhorted proactive, church-wide attention to this growing phenomenon of psychological distress. The guild’s commitment to the life of the Church as well as the formation of ministers necessitates that we engage the topic of mental health.

Already at the 2018 CTSA convention, the selected session, “Grace at Work in the World? The Problems of Depression and Depressive Suicide” spurred theological discussion about mental-health issues. The sizable audience it garnered (44 participants, making it the second most attended session at the convention) as well as the casual conversations it prompted during the remainder of the conference inform our desire for this interest group and our hopes for its success.

Coordinators:

1. Susan Abraham, Pacific School of Religion
2. Jessica Coblentz, Saint Mary’s College of California

Additional Signatories:

3. Sonja Anderson, Carleton College
4. Kevin Ahern, Manhattan College
5. Elizabeth Antus, Boston College
6. Kimberly Belcher, University of Notre Dame
7. Jennifer Beste, College of St. Benedict and St. John's University
8. B. Kevin Brown, Gonzaga University
9. Cynthia Cameron, Rivier University

10. Anne Carpenter, Saint Mary's College of California
11. Colleen Carpenter, St. Catherine University
12. Daniel Castillo, Loyola University Maryland
13. M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College
14. Robert Cortegiano, Fordham University
15. Kathy Lilla Cox, University of San Diego
16. Wendy Crosby, Siena Heights University
17. Paul G. Crowley, SJ, Santa Clara University
18. Maria Angela S. Cruz, Boston College
19. Lorraine V. Cuddeback, Mount St. Mary's University
20. Heather DuBois, Florida State University
21. Joseph Drexler-Dreis, Saint Mary's College of California
22. Julia Feder, Creighton University
23. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Harvard Divinity School
24. Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Fordham University
25. Richard Gaillardetz, Boston College
26. Cristina Lledo Gomez, Charles Sturt University
27. Christopher Hadley, S.J., JST of SCU
28. Jonathan Heaps, Marquette University
29. Kristin Heyer, Boston College
30. Mary Catherine Hilkert, University of Notre Dame
31. Benjamin Hohman, Boston College
32. Daniel P. Horan, OFM, Catholic Theological Union
33. Kate Jackson-Meyer, Boston College
34. Brianne Jacobs, Santa Clara University
35. Michael P. Jaycox, Seattle University
36. Jaisy Joseph, Seattle University
37. Layla Karst, Loyola Marymount University
38. James F. Keenan, SJ, Boston College
39. Jennifer Lamson-Scribner, Boston College
40. William Loewe, Catholic University of America
41. Megan K. McCabe, Gonzaga University
42. Christine E. McCarthy, Fordham University
43. Shannon M. McAlister, Fordham University
44. Brendan McNerny, College of St. Benedict
45. Marcus Mescher, Xavier University
46. Stephen Okey, Saint Leo University
47. Jennifer Owens-Jofré, Graduate Theological Union
48. Brandon R. Peterson, University of Utah
49. Andrew Prevot, Boston College
50. Nicole Reibe, Loyola University Maryland
51. Susan Reynolds, Emory University
52. Robert (Bobby) Rivera, St. John's University (NY)
53. Brian Robinette, Boston College
54. Robin Ryan, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago
55. Paul J. Schutz, Santa Clara University

56. Annie Selak, Boston College
57. John N. Sheveland, Gonzaga University
58. Sarah Thomas, Boston College
59. Kevin M. Vander Schel, Gonzaga University
60. Elisabeth Vasko, Duquesne University
61. Kate Ward, Marquette University
62. C. Vanessa White, Catholic Theological Union

Catholic Theology and the Contemporary University

Proposal for CTSA Interest Group

Submitted by:

Edward P. Hahnenberg, John Carroll University
Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University

July 26, 2019

For many CTSA members, the immediate context of our work is the college or university—a particular type of institution in the midst of a quiet metamorphosis. The forces reshaping American higher education are varied, and Catholic colleges and universities are not immune from them. They include: the pervasive influence of corporate models; the eclipse of reasoned debate in the public sphere; shrinking core requirements and an expanding corps of contingent faculty; demographic shifts; diversity and access; mounting student debt; the pressures of accreditation, rankings, and assessment; and the ever-growing divide between resource-rich research universities and smaller schools struggling to maintain enrollment.

On the one hand, these changes reveal the complicity of higher education in contributing to economic inequality, political polarization, and institutionalized injustice. On the other hand, as academic theologians, we act in the hope that our teaching, research, and writing—in other words, our university work—can contribute to the transformation of our deeply divided world.

Those theologians who serve in *Catholic* colleges and universities join their individual commitments to the shared mission of their academic institutions—a distinctive mission with a special responsibility for promoting the kind of transformation so needed in the world today. Is this institutional mission clear? enacted? effective? And what is the role of the theologian in advancing this mission?

In 1967 the Land O'Lakes Statement laid out a bold vision of the Catholic university in the modern world. While insisting on institutional autonomy and academic freedom, the statement at the same time emphasized the indispensable role of theology in fostering dialogue between the Catholic tradition and other academic disciplines. This proposed interest group seeks to reignite that dialogue fifty years later and extend it beyond academic affairs to the broader life of the university. The papers to be presented ask: *What can the Catholic theological tradition contribute to the various challenges facing contemporary university life?*

The co-conveners intend to develop these papers into an edited volume that will be of use not only to theologians, but also to faculty in other disciplines, administrators, board members, and engaged alumni. At the 2019 CTSA meeting, a Selected Session on “Catholic Theology and the Contemporary University” attracted over 80 participants, suggesting strong interest in seeing this conversation continue.

Three Year Plan

Year 1: Working at the Contemporary University (2020)

How do market forces and corporate models impact those who work at Catholic colleges and universities today? What does the commodification of education, the emphasis on career readiness, and escalating financial pressures on our institutions mean for the mission of Catholic universities? How does that mission speak to issues such as the increased use of contingent faculty, efforts at unionization, human resources policy, the influence of donors, and the power of athletics? How is the mission handed on in the context of an increasingly diverse faculty, many of whom have little familiarity with the Catholic intellectual and academic tradition?

Year 2: Curriculum of the Contemporary University (2021)

What has been the historical development of departments of theology (or religion, or religious studies) at Catholic universities, and what might this history reveal about the contemporary situation? How can the Catholic theological tradition inform core review processes? teaching? Does the Catholic tradition offer resources for faculty engaged in interdisciplinary work or striving for greater diversity and inclusion? How can Catholic universities respond creatively to the pressures of accreditation and assessment? What is the future of liberal education?

Year 3: Students in the Contemporary University (2022)

How does the Catholic university understand its mission in light of a diverse student body, including the rapidly rising number of “nones” (unaffiliated) among the undergraduate population? What is the relationship between Catholic mission and student culture on campus? What does the high cost of a college education and, with it, the student debt crisis, mean for the present and future of Catholic universities? What are the issues and opportunities that come with new modes of course delivery and reaching out to non-traditional students? In this contemporary context, how might the Catholic university reimagine its service to the local church?

Co-Conveners:

1. Edward P. Hahnenberg, John Carroll University
2. Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University

Interested Participants:

3. Kevin Ahern, Manhattan College
4. Michel Andraos, Catholic Theological Union
5. Elizabeth Antus, Boston College
6. J. Matthew Ashley, University of Notre Dame
7. Alison Benders, Jesuit School of Theology
8. Jennifer Beste, College of St. Benedict - St. John's University
9. B. Kevin Brown, Gonzaga University

10. M. Cathleen Kaveny, Boston College
11. William Clark, SJ, College of the Holy Cross
12. Kristin Colberg, College of St. Benedict - St. John's University
13. Nancy Dallavalle, Fairfield University
14. Mary Doak, University of San Diego
15. Dennis Doyle, University of Dayton
16. Ryan Duns, SJ, Marquette University
17. Howard Ebert, Saint Norbert College
18. Massimo Faggioli, Villanova University
19. Joshua Furnal, Radboud University
20. Richard Gaillardetz, Boston College
21. Cecilia González-Andrieu, Loyola Marymount University
22. Si Hendry, SJ, University of Detroit Mercy
23. Kristin Heyer, Boston College
24. Mary Catherine Hilkert, University of Notre Dame
25. Mary Kate Holman, Fordham University
26. Anita Houck, Saint Mary's College
27. Amir Hussain, Loyola Marymount University
28. Jaisy Joseph, Seattle University
29. James Keenan, SJ, Boston College
30. Jason King, Saint Vincent College
31. Paul Lakeland, Fairfield University
32. Richard Lennan, Boston College
33. Martin Madar, Xavier University
34. William Madges, Xavier University
35. Thomas Massaro, SJ Fordham University
36. Timothy Matovina, University of Notre Dame
37. Marcus Mescher, Xavier University
38. Margaret Mary Moore
39. Stephen Okey, Saint Leo University
40. Ed Ondrako, University of Notre Dame
41. Amanda Osheim, Loras College
42. Hosffman Ospino, Boston College
43. Brandon Peterson, University of Utah
44. Elena Procaro-Foley, Iona College
45. Susan Reynolds, Emory University
46. Brian Robinette, Boston College
47. Julie Rubio, Jesuit School of Theology
48. Thomas Ryan, Loyola University New Orleans
49. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Harvard Divinity School
50. Krista Stevens, John Carroll University
51. Dave Stosur, Cardinal Stritch University
52. Donna Teevan, Seattle University
53. Janice Thompson, Kings College
54. Tracy Tiemeier, Loyola Marymount University
55. Elizabeth Vasko, Duquesne University

56. Todd Walatka, University of Notre Dame
57. Kate Ward, Marquette University
58. Tobias Winright, Saint Louis University
59. Sandra Yocum, University of Dayton