

Catholic Theological Society of America
73rd Annual Convention
Indianapolis Marriott Downtown
Indianapolis, Indiana, June 7-10, 2018

GRACE AT WORK IN THE WORLD

The theme of the 2018 CTSA convention will be “Grace at Work in the World.” To my astonishment, and perhaps yours, “grace” has never been the theme of a CTSA convention, and so—long overdue—its time has come. If the theme were simply grace, of course, nothing from the Christian tradition would be excluded, and the conference might have no focus at all. Perhaps that is why it has never been addressed before, maybe just taken for granted as that which underlies consideration of every other theme. So the theme is not just grace, but grace as it is at work in the world. You will perhaps see immediately the play on words in the relationship suggested between grace and work, or works. But you will also note that the focus is on the work of grace in the world, thus inviting us to consider the whole range of issues that have to do with the way God is at work in the secular world. This should not be construed as only or even primarily a matter of the activity of Christians but also and perhaps more intriguingly attention to how the grace of God in the secular world and in religious traditions other than Christianity speaks to the Christian community of faith.

The selection of this theme reflects the wisdom of section 44 of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, which dwells at length on the relationship between the church and the wider world, and in particular on how the church benefits from secular knowledge and wisdom. “The church is not unaware,” so the text runs, “how much it has profited from the history and development of humankind... from the progress of the sciences, and from the riches hidden in various cultures, through which greater light is thrown on human nature and new avenues to truth are opened up.” Perhaps more startling even than this evidence of ecclesial humility in face of the world is the concluding remark of this section of the document, where “the church itself also recognizes that it has benefited and is still benefiting from the opposition of its enemies and persecutors.”

If the relationship of the church and the secular world is an obvious focus of this theme, another is the celebration of human creativity in the arts. The God who is the true and the good is also the beautiful, and the grace of God is present and visible to all human beings in the works of the imagination. Where the fires of the imagination are kindled in the work or the appreciation of any and all of the arts, there is grace at work in the world.

Finally grace is also the work of healing, whether the brokenness of church or world. Perhaps this is where the consideration of *sin* and grace might enter in, not only the love of God that reconciles the repentant sinner, but also in the work of healing and reconciliation in the world.

By the first week of July the Call for Papers and Selected Session Proposals will be available in the “News” section of the CTSA website, (www.ctsa-online.org).
Deadline for submission of paper proposals is September, for selected session proposals is October 1.

Here are some possible topics or directions to go in for sessions or paper proposals.

- Revisit the nature/grace controversy, perhaps this time around asking about the implications for already-graced nature theories of a more malleable understanding of human nature. If our natures are from the beginning already graced, what does this say about racial and ethnic differences, LGBTQ issues, transgender and so on?
- What new significances might we assign to the classical distinctions between created and uncreated grace, grace as “elevating” or “healing,” “habitual” and “sanctifying” grace and so on.
- More ecumenically, what can we make of the Reformation controversy over grace and works in the context of the theme of “grace at work in the world.” How can grace be at work in the world outside the scope of explicit faith in the Christian God?
- How do we see the Trinitarian, Christological and pneumatological understandings of grace contributing to reflection on how grace might be at work in the religious world beyond Christianity?
- What is the relationship between grace and human freedom?
- What might we learn about the place of sin and grace at work in the world and in the individual human being from (a) fiction, (b) poetry?
- Is the aesthetic a category explicable in terms of grace alone, or indeed of both sin and grace? Can there be a sinful work of art or evil music?
- When the secular world has wisdom to offer to the church, that corrects the errors or ignorance of the church, what does this have to say about ecclesial sinfulness?
- What, if anything, is the difference between the grace of God in the secular world and the grace of God in the believing community?
- Reconsiderations of the place of grace in the thought of Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Küng, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, Niebhur and Tillich, de Lubac and so on.
- How is feminist thought a grace-filled work, a corrective to the sin of sexism and patriarchy?
- How is grace at work in secular and even atheistic critiques of religion?
- Are there different “graces” pertaining to the baptismal and sacramental priesthood?
- Is ideology always sinful, or can it be a grace-filled means of spreading wisdom?
- In the theology of history God is at work in the world. But is God still at work in the eschaton? Do we need grace in heaven?
- Is there still a place for an extrinsicist theory of grace?