Modern Catholicism and Difference: Negotiating with Cultural and Religious Others from the First Jesuits to the Present

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Tuesday 4:00-6:30pm

This course offers a historical analysis of the ways in which modern Catholics - laity, monks and nuns, theologians, Church officials - have adapted to change, appropriated and resisted the presence of new neighbors, and built their own complex identities in negotiation with others. The purpose of the seminar is to concretely help prepare graduate students pursuing academic positions in Catholic colleges, universities, and/or Catholic/Christian positions at secular schools or high schools. Given the current state of our country and our world, scholars in all kinds of different educational settings are interested in richer, more generous ways to think about issues of difference and inclusion. What do scholars with a deep training in the history of modern Catholicism bring to the conversation? How does rich historical knowledge in this field enlarge our understanding of difference: its uses, implementation, and transformation in the creation of social, political, and religious communities?

Indeed, most studies of Catholic knowledge production of religious and cultural others (studies of orientalism, for instance) have been preoccupied with knowledge used to exert domination and control over the Other. But what other kinds of knowledges have existed, among what audiences, and for what purposes? In particular, what approaches to difference could constitute knowledge not for control and domination, but as Edward Said called for in his 2003 preface to Orientalism, “the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons”?

Starting with the founding of the Jesuit order in 1534, seminar themes will include the re-thinking orientalism and Catholicism, Jesuit missions, Catholic acquiescence and resistance to antisemitism during WWII, racism and racial justice, and more. Specific books are still to be finalized, but may include: Tacey Fossenedd’s new Religion Around Billie Holiday; John W. O’Malley, The First Jesuits; John Connelly, From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution on Catholic Thinking on the Jews (1933-1965); selections from the new edited volume, Crossings and Dwellings: Restored Jesuits, Women Religious, American Experience, 1814-2014 (ed. K. Roberts and S. Schlosser); Peter D’Agostino Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism; Thomas Tweed, Our Lady of the Exile; Diasporic Religion at a Catholic Shrine in Miami; excerpts from Kristen Norge’s new Anthropology of Catholicism; Anthony O’Mahoney, Christian Responses to Islam: Muslim-Christian Relations in the Modern World, and Matthew Cressler, Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Catholicism in the Great Migration.

Sources will also include primary source materials, such as the published proceedings from University of San Francisco’s 2016 conference Islam at Jesuit Colleges and Universities, documents from Vatican II, and more. We may also host Dr. Alan Delozier, archivist at Seton Hall University, which contains the holdings of several fascinating Catholic intellectuals and activists who were pioneers in this field, such as Msgr. John Oesterreicher and John C.H. Wu. An archival workshop will help us ask: what are different methods theologians might use to investigate the past for new resources to think about the present? How do we use evidence from the past for constructive projects? What does this kind of writing look like?