


Nov 8th, 1:30 PM

Faith-Based Resistance, Human Rights, and Emancipatory Practices

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Kline, Curtis, "Faith-Based Resistance, Human Rights, and Emancipatory Practices" (2017). *The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy*. 1.

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2017 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Nov. 8-10, 2017, Dayton, Ohio

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Research Panel: Popular Movements: A Closer Examination

Presenter: Curtis Kline, University of Denver

Title: Faith-Based Resistance, Human Rights, and Emancipatory Practices

Abstract:

Progressive political theologies can expand and deepen both the strength and the conceptualization of human rights advocacy. However, not all political theologies are an effort to defend human dignity; neither are all understandings and practices of human rights. The validation of progressive political theologies as well as the validation of human rights conceptualizations comes from their capacity to concretely change the lived reality of poor and oppressed peoples of the world.

As with political theologies, there is a constant struggle over the control of how to conceptualize what constitutes a human rights issue. While many communities of faith find liberating practices in their traditions, others find oppressive and discriminatory practices. The same is true for the control and use of human rights conceptualizations. While human rights have been employed to protect and respect the most vulnerable sectors of society, human rights have also been exploited to start unjust wars, to validate the discrimination of certain identities, or to defend class inequality. When political theologies and/or human rights discourses become a liberating part of the struggles of the poor and oppressed, when they offer languages, ideas, and practices that not only sustain but strengthen resistance to oppression, domination, and discrimination, they are themselves re-conceptualized as the tools for human emancipation they were meant to be.

As the South American country of Colombia navigates through these historic times of peace processes and hopes to end more than 50 years of armed conflict, many faith communities and faith-based organizations are articulating the kind of society they would like to see arise through these new opportunities.

How have faith-based views on human rights in Colombia developed community-led resistance to oppression, domination, and discrimination? What has been the role of faith communities in articulating human rights as liberating to poor and oppressed Colombians?

About the presenter:

Curtis Kline is an international human rights professional who collaborates with local communities to advocate for the defense and promotion of their rights. By conducting research into social, cultural, and legal dynamics, he has worked with communities in campaign design, coalition building, and community organizing regarding the advocacy of human rights issues. He is currently living in Bogotá, Colombia, working as a peace-building and human rights trainer with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.