

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

This year's workshop situated nascent Black Catholic Theology in a lively dialogue with several pressing and fundamental issues: philosophical pluralism, multiculturalism, interreligious dialogue, the translation of certain notions or expectations from one culture to another, the relation between religion and forms of secular or political governance, religious demands and notions of rights, and identity politics. These and other questions were raised provocatively by internationally noted scholar of Islam and West African Christianity Lamin Sanneh, D. Willis James Professor of World Christianity and Missions at Yale University Divinity School, in a presentation entitled "Islam, the West, and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*."

Sanneh began by locating the root of the unprecedented international controversy that met the publication of Rushdie's novel in the "clash between Islam's comprehensive worldview and the West's pragmatic secular liberalism, and between the novel's irreverent multicultural equalitarianism and a conformist tradition." Following a brief summary of the plot of the novel, Sanneh identified those passages in the novel which caused the most offense to Muslims. These include a section dealing with the character Mahound, a businessman turned prophet; "verses which deal with the whole question of the 'satanic verses' with reference to the well-known verses in the Qur'an (in surhas 53 and 21) that many commentators see as indicating a questionable Islamic monotheist compromise with Meccan polytheism;" sections in which Ayesha, a beloved spouse of the Prophet is dishonored; and, finally, the presentation of major events of the book as taking place in a dream, thus violating the crucial medium of revelation in Islam. Such a list affords us a rough grasp of "the depth of outrage and anguish [the novel] has caused in the Muslim world" and challenges the ease with which so many of us Westerners have "sidestep[ped] the serious questions the book has raised and [taken] refuge in matters of freedom and speech, the limits of citizenship and state jurisdiction, due process and the rule of law, a response that involves little cross-cultural awareness." Moreover, Sanneh lifts up our North American "inability or reluctance to see how religion, rather than market forces, can be a basis of social identity, personal motivation and the fundamental source of value. . . . For Muslims, by contrast, other criteria are more self-evident, such as shared beliefs and shared obligations. Indeed, for Muslims, the social, economic, political and military orders are all expressions of a fundamental religious truth."

Finally, Sanneh examined Rushdie's ambiguous and existential wrestling with "the norms of inherited tradition" and coming to self-knowledge by testing oneself by pushing against the ultimate boundaries of religious propriety. He also explored the themes of exile and immigration."

Diana L. Hayes (Georgetown University) served as the respondent.

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