

ASIAN/ASIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGY—CONSULTATION

Topic: Grace at Work in Asian/Asian-American Lives: Past and Present
Convener: Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University
Moderator: Elaine Padilla, University of Le Verne
Presenters: Anselm K. Min,

In his paper, “Divine Grace, Human Responsibility, and a Theology of Good Works: A Confucian Perspective,” Anselm K. Min addresses classic Catholic-Lutheran debate of the salvific significance of grace-empowered good works by looking for insights from Confucian thought. He began with three brief comments on the significance and implications of the doctrine of justification by faith in the contemporary context of the globalizing world: specifically a) a source of moral obligation to resist anthropocentrism and nihilism; b) a sense of solidarity with all things that will support social and environmental justice; and c) an attitude toward good works that is both humble and responsible enough to commit itself to political action. He continues with a turn to functional equivalents in Confucianism for insights in the construction of a theology of good works for today by examining the following: a) the doctrine of Heaven and its Dao and Li; b) the doctrine of the sympathetic unity of all things that brings together all things by ties of ren and shu; and c) a spirituality of good works that is humble but also responsible enough to do what the Dao of Heaven requires. He concluded by noting the comparative work he has not undertaken in the paper and posing a series of provocative questions about what any of this means to God.

Linh Hoang reflects on racism by looking at the presence of Asian slaves in the Americas in his paper, “Grace across the Pacific: Theological Reflection on Asian Slavery in the Americas.” He points to the Manila Galleon Trade as the vehicle through which people were taken from South and East Asia through the Philippines to Acapulco. He traced the history of slavery beginning in the Mediterranean World to the Philippines where he notes that slavery existed prior to colonization but was manipulated and exacerbated with the Spanish colonizers. He examines the response to slavery in the history of the Church looking at thinkers like Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo, noting the differing justification for who could be enslaved and under what conditions. He focused on the Catholic Spanish monarchs and their justification of slavery during the Manila Galleon Trade and the example of Catarina de San Juan, an enslaved chino who used the legal system to acquire the status of indigenous in the Americas to gain her freedom from slavery. The resilient struggle of chinos to gain freedom from slavery illustrated the presenter’s understanding of “grace across the Pacific,” the theological development of which was left for future consideration.

The presentation “Grace as Sharing in the Divine Silence,” by Peter Nguyen, brought into dialogue Shusako Endo’s *Silence* with Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theology of grace. Drawing from Balthasar’s theology, he argues that God can communicate Godself by means of silence, and conversely, the disciple is invited to share in this silence. He looks at the example of the presumptuous young Jesuit priest Sebastian Rodrigues, the protagonist of *Silence*, moves from prideful faith that is tested and tried to someone whose suffering opens to the possibility of being fruitful as it demands no spoken word but rather a deed that sinks into darkness for the sake of others. Such self-

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emptying act resembles the Buddhist's notion of selflessness. Through the example of Rodrigues, Nguyen demonstrates that Christian kenosis is an invitation by grace understood in deed to participate in Christ's self-emptying love to the world.

The conversation opened by pulling together of the three papers with a comparison of the Yin Yang and the flow of action from stillness and return to stillness and the idea of God's silence, specifically seeming silence in the face of slavery. The connection between prayer and silence was also noted as important in informing action as well as an invitation to consider the connection between the love of God as silence and the idea of kenosis. Comments also included an invitation to the speakers to undertake the tasks they explicitly avoided in their presentation, specifically a comparative look at the Confucian insights offered and Catholic and Protestant theologies of good works and a theological examination of grace in the context of slavery and the slave trade. Significant time was spent considering the first of these, including raising the comparative project of Confucianism and CST.

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