

LATINO/A THEOLOGY—CONSULTATION

Topic: Latina/o/x Aesthetics of Grace
Conveners: Jeremy V. Cruz, St. John's University
Robert J. Rivera, St. John's University
Melissa Pagán, Mount Saint Mary's University
Moderator: Jennifer Owens-Jofré, Graduate Theological Union
Presenters: Elaine Padilla, Laverne University
Miguel H. Díaz, Loyola University Chicago

In her paper, “Dark Skin, A Soul’s Icon of Love,” Elaine Padilla analyzes how the “enbordering structures of modernity” function toward the fragmentation of the self wherein “multiple and at times contradictory sets of identities” exist but cannot all be embodied. Such fragmentation creates a “false sense of isolation” and the impulse to iconicize and subsequently embody identities structured according to “colonial schemas or sets of false images.” Padilla notes that the imposed self-split according to the logics of coloniality induces a state of *espanto*, an “intimate terrorism,” which can be countered by the “decolonization of the soul.” Padilla suggests that the decolonization of the soul requires the awakening of the soul to love through its very own “darkening.” She provides us with a functional metaphor for this vision with reference to St. John of the Cross’ “one dark night,” which enables the “negation of the self” through the “discipline” of “‘letting go’ of attachments” in order to free the self from the necessity of “embody[ing] the idol erected according to dominant and colonized schemas” thus enabling the possibility for the restoration of the kind of love that functions to “dispel terror” in the self and propel the self into relation with others. That is, the denuding of the soul bears the creative potential to embrace multiplicitous selves and mobilize a coalitional politics constituted by the “multiple selves with the world interiorly and in the world exteriorly.”

Following Padilla, Miguel H. Díaz presented his paper, “*Un Grito en y por la gracia: Latin@s in the Age of Political Desgracia.*” Díaz claims that the political climate in the U.S. evidences that we are living in a state of “cultural *des-gracia*,” revealed at least in part by the development of “Trumpology,” an ideology predicated upon white nationalism. To reveal and resist such *des-gracia*, Díaz argues for the creation of a Latin@/x “liberating theology of grace,” the *locus theologicus* of which are the experiences of Latin American migrants and Latinxs whose lives are increasingly threatened by the rhetoric and accompanying policies of the Trump administration. Díaz provides an analysis that stems from derogatory comments Trump has made “primarily in reference to Latin American migrants” and reminds us that, while words and accompanying actions have the potential to be disgraceful, they also have the power to be full of God’s grace, to create and “build bridges, rather than walls,” to embody the power of “*nos-otros*. . . a communal space that can house others and their differences.” Díaz then analyzes two specific comments. In the first, Díaz asks us to consider the presence of grace in what Trump referred to as the “shitholes of the world.” He notes that such words go against the crucial principle of the preferential option for the poor and contends that the “‘shitholes’ Trump rejects. . . become in God’s eyes the cornerstones from which. . . to build a more just and inclusive human community.” In the second, Díaz asks us to consider “grace in the animal kin-dom” and references Trump’s assault on undocumented migrants when he called them

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“animals.” Díaz notes that Trump’s rhetoric undermines Pope Francis’ call to embrace an integral ecology, a “grace-filled harmony intended for all creatures,” which is threatened when human persons are treated as “unusable commodities.”

After the presentations, Hosffman Ospino reflected upon Padilla’s use of the term *espanto* as he had witnessed that type of terror and panic within undocumented communities and emphasized that the two presentations echoed Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu’s plenary address, which claimed Trump embodies evil and that such evil theologians must not ignore. Jeremy Cruz raised questions surrounding sinful and graced images and the use of metaphors in relation to the use of “Trump’s America” both for its erasure of the reality that a majority of people did not vote for Trump and for its apocalyptic flare that imagines Trump as an almost indomitable force, which may prevent us from participating in graced action.

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