

ASIAN/ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation
Convener: Anh Tran, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University
Moderator: Gemma Cruz, Australian Catholic University
Presenters: Julius-Kei Kato, King’s University College at Western University
Rachel Bundang, Santa Clara University
Respondent: Joseph Cheah, O.S.M., University of St. Joseph

Julius-Kei Kato’s paper, “Toward an Asian North American Liberationist Hermeneutics,” is an approach to and application of liberationist hermeneutics to help Asian-North Americans to better understand and analyze their context. Kato begins by giving an account of the situation of Asian-North Americans. Both as a group and as individuals, they still suffer subtle discrimination and marginalization, sometimes expressed as a “bamboo ceiling.” More often than not, they are treated as a homogenous group, seen as perpetual foreigners, are subjected to a stereotypical orientalism, and suffer from jealousy and hate-crimes. He asks, “How can Asian-North Americans resist the typical forms of discrimination and oppression they encounter, envision another possible world and work toward transforming this present one?” Drawing from David Tracy’s suggestion of a hermeneutical process, Kato urges the audience to bring their experience and context into selecting and reading biblical texts and then engaging them in a transformative response to reality. By way of example, Kato compares and contrasts the two gospel portraits of Jesus by Mark and John. He relates Mark’s tragic figure of Jesus to his own social locations as inter-racial, inter-religious and a bearer of a hybrid Asian-Canadian identity. Embracing one’s identity, Kato argues, can bring one the strength and courage to continue the struggle, both to resist the unjust hegemony of the powers-that-be and to achieve a fuller humanity for all, especially those who are subjected to any kind of marginalization

Focusing on the situation of overseas Filipino workers, Rachel Bundang’s paper, “‘My Family’s Slave’: A Theo-Ethical Reflection on Modern-Day Slavery,” uses the late Alex Tizon’s essay “My Family’s Slave” as the basis for a theo-ethical reflection on modern-day slavery in the form of the plight of migrant domestic workers. In the process of migration—in the shift from one home to another, one culture to another, and especially one generation to another—what was once taken as normal, ordinary behavior becomes an unintelligible cruelty that does not translate neatly in diaspora. The essay recounts the story of the Tizons’ nanny and domestic helper, Eudocia, who was separated from her family as a child and ended up spending most of her life taking care of three generations of her host family for 56 years, both in the Philippines and later in the United States. After she died in the diaspora, Tizon managed to bring her ashes home to her few remaining family members but was met with silence. Bundang’s analysis of the story explores complex intersections of gendered labor, economic exploitation, and physical and emotional violence endured by the domestic worker. Tizon’s story of the untold suffering and isolation of Eudocia challenges everyone involved to rethink what enslavement, servitude, trafficking and poverty mean and in what way we are all complicit in the existence and perpetuation of these practices. Bundang raised three important points in this situation: a) Can the subaltern speak? b)

Consultation: Asian/Asian Theology

Context matters, and c) Is the response adequate and proportional to the situation? She then urges the audience to read the situation through the lens of those suffering and to mobilize themselves for the transformation of human trafficking in the situation of migrant workers.

In his eloquent response, Joseph Cheah points out the connection between the two presenters in terms of the lived experience of Asians and Asian-North Americans. Personal experience and context are powerful invitations to do theological reflection. He then recounted his own family story of being exploited and marginalized. Cheah's personal testimony elicited a tremendous response from the audience. The question and answer session turned out to be more like a personal sharing and witnessing among the audience. Almost everyone had something to share about his or her experiences of the pain and struggles of being marginalized. It made this session one of the most lively and engaging sessions in recent history of the Asian and Asian American Theology Consultation.

ANH Q. TRAN, S.J.
Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University
Berkeley, California