

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION

Topic: Black Survival in a Violent World: Passing On Our Stories
Convener: Joseph S. Flipper, Bellarmine University
Moderator: Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Xavier University of Louisiana
Presenters: Camillus O. Njoku, Duquesne University
Robert Masson, Marquette University
Craig. A. Ford, Jr., Fordham University

The first paper, “Sustainability: Recovering the Spirit in the Era of Eco-Racism,” was presented by Camillus O. Njoku. Njoku related the mentalities that undergird and sustain our current environmental crisis to the “logics of coloniality” that sustain the oppression of black people. He argued that, while environmental degradation does not have a simple cause, a characteristic feature is a dualistic ontological and anthropological dichotomy that treats nature (and black flesh envisioned as nature) as something in need of domination. Turning to a West African Igbo cosmology and religious anthropology—one that is relational and non-dualistic—Njoku retrieved the “dimension of spirits” as the ground for the interrelationality of all beings. This retrieval, he argues, allows for “an ecological pneumatology which expands the role of the Spirit beyond the frontiers of intratrinitarian *vinculum caritatis* toward a more explicitly ecocentric activity.” Responding to environmental racism and violence, the Spirit is in creatures and is that which brings about communion within creation, a communion that preserves the integrity of difference.

The work of African American playwright August Wilson was the topic of the second paper, “August Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle and the Theological Imagination.” In it, Robert Masson draws from Wilson’s “Pittsburgh Cycle,” ten plays that each reflect a different decade of the twentieth century in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, as a resource for accessing a “world of understanding that is not framed by a pervasive white lens.” Masson focused on *Two Trains Running*, a play set in the late 1960s in a diner owned by Memphis, a refugee from Jackson. The backdrop of the story is the decline and potential destruction of the neighborhood in which the diner is located due to projects of urban renewal. Masson argued that the story “discloses another world of understanding” through the characters’ struggles, hopes, and lamentations, a world that is not easily accessed unless one breaks through a pervasively white lens.

The third paper was titled, “The Witness of Black Theology in an Age of Complicity: Resources from Queer Theory and Black Queer Ethics.” In his presentation, Craig A. Ford, Jr. posed the question, “What will it take for us—for all of us—to be truly free?” The economic dimension of this freedom is undertheorized, he explained, and queer-of-color scholars provide resources to correct this deficit. He argued that neoliberalism suppressed or coopted movements working toward structural solutions to address economic inequality with the promise of upward mobility and increased consumption. Freedom has been circumscribed by neoliberal ends. He called for a rapprochement between the black Catholic liberation theologies and the black radical traditions, especially in the reorientation of understandings of economics and human flourishing. Ford pointed to sources within queer-of-color scholarship that

Consultation: Black Catholic Theology

could facilitate that rapprochement, namely a queer eschatology of “universal emancipation” and pleasure as the manifestation of resistance.

JOSEPH S. FLIPPER
Bellarmino University
Louisville, Kentucky