

TRANSNATIONAL CATHOLICITIES: FAITH AND POPULAR CULTURE IN
GLOBAL DIALOGUE – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation
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Moderator: Heejung Cho, Regis University
Presenters: Sophia Park, S.N.J.M., Holy Names University
Kevin P. Considine, Independent Scholar
Antonio Sison, C.P.P.S., Catholic Theological Union

The first year of the Transnational Catholicities Interest Group featured three presentations attending to the term transnational catholicities defined through the lens of popular culture. The three presentations leaned on the fact that, even though catholicity is universal and transnational, it is also experienced from a local place such as a physical landmass, embodied suffering, and third cinema. The places of Korea, Yemen, and Uruguay situated their locations and also bound together the local to the global. From these locations, the presenters underscored the endurance of human suffering in spite of faith claims for healing and betterment. Each of the presentations offered insights into a dialectical understanding of transnational catholicities: On the one side it is a response to transnational asymmetries and alienations that wound and on the other side it responds to transnational disjunctions.

Sophia Park's paper, "Transnational Catholicities: Refugees in a Global World," provided a working definition of transnational catholicities. This is a fluid term since it is not possessed by any authority. It is similar to a life force which is given to all people by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, transnational catholicities embraces the grace that is needed in any Christian endeavor. Being grounded in grace, transnational catholicities can be seen as a flow of dynamic movement that continues towards full development and wholeness in faith. This definition is best articulated through popular culture where the shifting of time and space demands different approaches. Popular culture has the tendency to be manipulated by the elite of the culture but also it can subvert the social order between high and low cultures. For instance, an established patriarchic discourse can be challenged by feminist writings that blurs the binary categories and subverts what is dominant. Further, the current movement of refugees across national boundaries challenges the comfortable and wealthy to see clearly the plight of those persecuted and displaced. The Yemini refugees on Jeju Island Korea is a concrete example of this current clash in a popular culture that possesses a bias against the strangers. While the suffering of those who are other is not easily remedied, the local church's response creates an alternative vision of transnational catholicities, emphasizing sharing meals and openness.

Kevin Considine's presentation, "'Analogy of the Wound' as Transnational Catholicity: Intercultural Theological Anthropology and 'Han,'" examined the experience of *Han* through a transnational scope. *Han* is the Korean term that describes a collective sense of sorrow, grief and resentment. It is being sinned against and a continuation of that wrong. The analogy of the wound provides a theological connection with *Han* that reveals the incomprehensibility and undefinable God. In analogical language, there are three approaches: affirmation, negation, and negation of

the negation. This approach exposes the limits of humanity to comprehend God at all. This also reveals the core of God, which is mystery, and humanity comes to realize its own mystery in this relationship. Curiously, mystery is the means of connection between God and humanity. *Han* is also a mystery because it is a black hole in the soul of people. It is not easily remedied nor actually strives towards being remedied. It even goes deeper to *Hu-Han* which verges on nihilism and can become violent. Here it seeks destruction of itself and others. This movement towards *Hu-Han* is not desired but can be traced in popular culture, where violence against others, mass shootings, white supremacy, and the destruction of homes stem from it. What comes from the analogy of the wound and *han* through an intercultural theological anthropology is the shared humanity in mystery.

Ton Sison's paper, "Diversity-in-Communion: Trinitarian Perichoresis and the 'Always Crucified,' in Third Cinema" reflected on the film *El Bano del Papa* (The Pope's Toilet). The development of Third Cinema from revolution to liberation stems from the storytelling of people in the periphery through the arts and popular culture. It also engages social analysis of current events and policies against those less privileged. Third Cinema is known now as an aesthetic liberation. The story of the Pope's Toilet utilizes an actual historical event—Pope John Paul II's visit in 1988 and tells the story through the eyes of a small village in Uruguay preparing for it. They wanted to capitalize on his visit by planning ways to make money from the pilgrims and tourists during his visit. The main character, Beto, schemed a way to bring a porcelain toilet to this backward village so that those privileged pilgrims and tourists can be comfortable. His efforts and those of the whole village fall apart when the Pope's visit is brief and the people do not buy any of their products or services. The juxtaposition of historic footage and the actors' movements provides a realistic glimpse into the struggles of those on the periphery. Placed on top of this are the words of the Pope who does not seem to speak directly to the local community but is projecting more towards the universal church. These poignant scenes provide an interpretation of a transnational catholicity which desperately wants to bind the local and the global together. The connection to *perichoresis* is obvious when the intimate relationship of the Trinity, crucial to Christian life, becomes disjointed by this historic event. How then does the Trinity speak to local impoverished people who seem to time and again miss out on the wealth of the universal church. This is tough to answer. But Third Cinema provides at least a critical analysis of this chasm between the local and the global.

The session concluded with discussion about the presentations. The thread of human suffering was apparent in each of the papers, but the suffering highlighted by each is neither resolved nor made better. Rather, the papers bring attention to how suffering, as an essential human element, composes the transnational catholicities and needs to be recognized and discussed. The suffering of Jesus Christ is a mystery that all believers and non-believers struggle to understand and connects all of humanity to one another. The interest group will continue to explore transnational catholicities next year with a focus on music, food and the arts in popular culture.

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