

ASIAN/ASIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION

- Topic: “All You Who Labor...”: Theology, Work, and Economy
 Convener: Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, University of Detroit Mercy
 Moderator: David Kwon, St. Mary’s University of Minnesota
 Presenter: Stephanie Wong, Valparaiso University
 Deepan Rajaratnam, Saint Louis University
 Respondent: Susan Abraham, Pacific School of Religion

In her presentation “Chinese Catholic Action,” Stephanie Wong compares Catholic Action (*gongjiao jinxing*) in China to the initiatives that later grew under the banner of Catholic Action in Western Europe and the US, showing that Chinese Catholic Action differed significantly from later iterations in Western Europe and the US. The Catholic Action Association in China grew not primarily as an anti-communist movement but rather as a hallmark of the indigenous or “native” church. Catholic Action served as a network for communication and resource-sharing between the scattered “indigenous” dioceses in North China trying to respond to the physical and economic vulnerability of their peasant and refugee populations. The Chinese case shows that issues of indigenous leadership and wartime aid relief were originally at the forefront of Catholic Action. She concludes her presentation by noting that “we do well not to limit our theological understanding of ‘labor’ to that atomized sense of ‘job’ which the Western Industrial Revolution tended to give it.” Instead, noting what has been made abundantly evident during this time of the pandemic is the “labor or survival” because “precarity is *still* the basic condition in which humans try to muddle on.”

Deepan Rajaratnam demonstrates the *sensus fidelium* is a theological locus from which to respond to situations of economic exclusion and poverty within the local church in his piece, “The *Sensus Fidei* of the Poor: A Theological Locus from which to Respond to Economic Exclusion.” He notes that although the *sensus fidelium* has been recognized as a source for theological reflection, its connection to issues of economic and social exclusion is less clearly articulated. With this in mind, he argues that solidarity is an essential disposition necessary for authentic participation in the *sensus fidei*. He builds on Pope Francis’ recognition of the epistemological priority of the poor and economically excluded to connect the *sensus fidei* with the social dimension of mission.

In her response, Susan Abraham, draws on both Wong’s attention “precarity” to underscore the essential role of the “precariat,” many of whom are found in Asia, to the functioning of the global economy citing this convention’s plenary address of Gemma Cruz. Shifting from marginality, precarity and survivability in Asia within the global economy, she draws attention to a similar dynamic of invisibility or erasure at play within the academy. She points to an “aesthetics of inclusion,” which, she argues, serves as evidence that Asians have a peripheral identity in the academy and white theology’s “fantasy of inclusion” serves to silence and erase the distinct contributions of Asian/Asian-American theology. Drawing on Wong’s notion of precarity and Rajaratnam’s focus on solidarity, she posed the question of the relationship of precarity and solidarity and offered the challenge of a “precarious solidarity.”

The two presentations and response evoked a lively conversation among the twenty-five persons present for the session. A key question that emerged is how to bring the contributions of Asian/Asian-American theologians from the periphery to the center in the North American theological academy.

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