

THEOLOGIES OF HOPE IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY
MENTAL ILLNESSES – SELECTED SESSION

- Topic: Theologies of Hope
 Convener: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education
 Moderator: Jessica Coblenz, Saint Mary's College,
 Presenters: Kathleen Mroz, Emmanuel College
 Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education
 Michele Saracino, Manhattan College

The panel proceeded with twenty-minute presentations from each speaker, followed by conversation between panelists and attendees. Kathleen Mroz, assistant professor in the theology and religious studies department of Emmanuel College, Boston, presented first. Her paper provided an entry point into the topic. It was entitled, "The Choice Between Faith and Recovery: The Need for Interreligious Cooperation When Talking About Mental Illness". Mroz argued three main points. First, she noted the importance of including a person's religious beliefs as part of mental health recovery plans. For example, suggested methods of recovery can run contrary to religious beliefs such as the referral of non-Christians to faith-based programs which can "make them uncomfortable," or the disregard of Jewish dietary laws which left some Orthodox Jewish women "in and out of eating disorder treatment centers" for many years. Mroz's second main argument was the necessity for religious literacy among clinicians, and inversely, mental health literacy among religious leaders. For example, "Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist patients...report struggling when working with dietitians who have never heard of the foods they and their families commonly eat." Inversely, suffering from mental illness can be viewed by religious ministers as having "a lack of faith," preventing their congregants from accessing appropriate mental health care. Last, Mroz highlighted the importance of dialogue between religious leaders and clinicians, and openness to each other's wisdoms.

The presentations then moved from the broader exploration of interreligious dialogue and mental health to the specificity of tapping into Filipino indigenous spirituality to better understand Christian values. The next presenter, Cristina Lledo Gomez, Presentation Sisters Theology Lecturer at BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education, and religion and society research fellow for the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre, at Charles Sturt University, used the Filipino indigenous spiritual-cultural value of *kapwa* to help understand the dynamics of forgiveness, specifically within mother-daughter relationships. Lledo Gomez's paper, entitled "Forgiving the Perpetrator: Imagining Hope After Grief," was presented in four parts. The first provided contexts which called for a daughter's forgiveness of her mother. These included a mother's inability to parent due to mental illness resulting from abuse. Another is the passing on from mother to daughter of an inferiority complex due to colonial mentality. This mentality can lead to a daughter's own mental ill health ranging from eating disorders to suicidality. The second part of the paper explored examples of daughters forgiving their mothers, providing key elements

enabling forgiveness in the concrete. The third part affirmed these elements, considering Filipin@ indigenous understandings of forgiveness through *kapwa*. The final part posited the beginnings of a theology of hope using *kapwa* as a foundation for motivation towards forgiveness, true reconciliation, and ultimately into trinitarian communion with all, including between victim/survivor and perpetrator.

While the previous paper provided an example of how other spiritualities or religious traditions can provide depth into Christian values, the final paper called for the broadening of those values using the wisdom of other spiritualities or religious traditions. More specifically, Michele Saracino, professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, New York, turned to the Buddhist value of self-compassion to broaden Christian anthropologies which overemphasized being “other-oriented...to the detriment of personal being.” Saracino’s paper entitled “Self-Compassion: Our Last Hope (The Case for an *Antennae* in Anthropology)” was presented in two parts. The first argued for a case for self-compassion in Christian anthropology, where a “...balance might be struck between being focused on others and attending to oneself.” In this section, Saracino highlighted the equal importance of “being kind, patient, and understanding of oneself in the middle of all [of] life’s challenges” to living a life for others. She described this turn to the self, as “living an *antennae* in anthropology”, gaining a sensitivity towards one’s own needs, in order to have resources to attend to the needs of others. The second part of Saracino’s paper sought to create a scaffold for “living the *antennae*”. This entailed utilizing Buddhist notions of building “a home in oneself” and maintaining awareness or *payu*, alongside Lonerganian scholarship on self-understanding. This scholarship included Lonerganian notions of individual and dramatic bias (as dangers to turning to the self only) and Robert Doran’s notion of psychic conversion (highlighting the importance of “dreams, images and affects” as also informative of the self).

The discussion consequently generated noted how interreligious engagement provided both depth and breadth into limited Christian and anthropological understandings.

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