

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Decoloniality and Comparative Cosmology in the Americas and Beyond
 Convener: Elsie M. Miranda, Association of Theological Schools
 Moderator: Susan Bigelow Reynolds, Emory University
 Presenters: Rafael Luévano, Chapman University
 Cecilia Titizano, Santa Clara University
 Gustave Ineza, University of Toronto

In light of the theme of this year's convention, "Thinking Catholic Interreligiously," the Practical Theology topic session invited papers that engaged grassroots realities and lived religious practice through a comparative lens.

Rafael Luévano, a Roman Catholic priest in the Diocese of Orange and an associate professor in the Religious Studies Department and Catholic chaplain at Chapman University, began the session with his presentation, "Interreligious Pandemic Death Narratives in the US and Mexico." Luévano observed that in late 2019, while what would become the global COVID-19 pandemic loomed, both Mexico and the United States initially responded with denial. At the core of these parallel repudiations, he argued, resides the unique death narratives of Mexico and the United States. Employing a comparative theological and interdisciplinary methodology, Luévano traced these dual death narratives. Drawing on Octavio Paz and Gloria Anzaldúa, Luévano suggested that historical memories of indigeneity, conquest, and violation undergird present Mexican death narratives characterized at once by the "push and pull" of celebration and guilt. The United States, by contrast, approaches death with the "cleansing optimism" of future-looking denial and intentional historical forgetting of racist violence. Dramatically illustrating how these two narratives inhabit the psyches of the two nations, Luévano framed Mexican and US responses to the pandemic as manifestations of these historical and psychological foundations.

Next, Cecilia Titizano, Director of Latina/o Theology and Ministry Leadership Network of the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, presented a paper entitled "Decolonizing Religious Landscapes for a Pluriversal Church." Titizano began by posing a provocative question: "Is the church a peach or an onion?" A peach, she observed, is composed of a durable core with a dissolvable pulp. An onion, on the other hand, has no distinctive center and can only be known through its many layers. A Bolivia native of Quechua-Aymara descent, Titizano observed that across the *Abya Yala* continent, Indigenous people, including those who are Christians, are decolonizing the religious landscape, bringing their epistemologies and philosophical and spiritual principles to the theological table. Following Pope Francis' call to embody a synodal church and value indigenous peoples' cultures, Titizano stated, indigenous theologians endorse "epistemological disobedience" (citing Roberto Tomichá Charupá). They want to drink from the millennial spiritual wells of their cultures and heal from the colonial wound. Thus, Titizano suggested, that the first step to incarnating Francis's vision of intercultural encounter requires challenging current inculturation efforts that, despite best intentions, continue to endorse platonic essentialisms. Titizano proposed an alternate vision. First, she proposed "demişsion," or stopping missions and allowing indigenous communities to drink from their

ancestral wells and heal. If the church fails to demission, she argued, the church runs the risks of perpetuating what she called a monocultural and monotonous Christianity, contributing to the extinction of indigenous peoples' cultural identities. Second, using inter-religious, decolonial, and intercultural hermeneutics, she offered a glimpse into the depth of Andean cosmology, emphasizing its complex metaphysical system that challenges the common assumption of universality—that is, the notion of a single world or reality divided into many cultures. Attending to Andean cosmology invites us to forego Eurocentric ontological assumptions and be open instead to a pluriverse or many worlds. Ultimately, Titizano concluded that it is indeed the image of the onion that guides a Pluriversal Catholic church.

Finally, Gustave Ineza, a Rwandan-born Dominican friar and doctoral student at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, presented a paper entitled, "Decolonizing Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the West." In Western countries, Ineza observed, engaging with Islam means overcoming deeply rooted colonial foundations. Ineza drew on several authors to present the challenges of deconstructing the Christian-Muslim dialogue established in colonial terms by medieval misrepresentations of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Highlighting the orientalist facets of certain Christian approaches to Islam constructed over the centuries, Ineza's paper proposed the reconstruction of a climate conducive to a healthier and more equitable dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the West through cultural humility, hospitality, and friendship.

Following these successive twenty-minute presentations, questions from those in attendance established a conversation among the papers to probe their theological, ecclesial, and interfaith implications.

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