

SPIRITUALITY – TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Julia Feder, Creighton University
 Moderator: Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, Seton Hall University
 Presenters: Vincent Miller, University of Dayton
 Wilson Angelo Espiritu, KU Leuven and Ateneo de Manila University

In his paper titled, “The *Panata* to Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno: Filipino Popular Devotion as a Catalyst of Social Commitment,” Wilson Angelo Espiritu explained that, in Filipino communities, *panata* is a Tagalog term that is often used to refer to a popular practice of devotion through which individuals take a pledge to their patron as a supplicatory prayer. The *panata* is used to negotiate with the spiritual world to gain a good life for oneself and one’s family. This “negotiation process” is transferable between family members, often across generations and is rooted in Filipino indigenous beliefs that predate conversion to Catholicism. To combat the problematic tendency of “a-political holiness” in Filipino Catholic spirituality, Espiritu argues that the concept of *panata* can be developed to unite spiritual practices and socio-political reforms. Espiritu draws out exemplary practices of *panata* to the *Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno* of Quiapo, Manila to demonstrate how a confluence of spirituality and social commitment is embodied in Filipino Catholic life. Espiritu appeals to the Flemish theologian Edward Schillebeeckx to argue that the mystical and the political are inseparable aspects of Christian faith; each interacts productively to bring about “an integral experience of grace.” Espiritu then maintains that a mystical-political performance of the *panata* manifests one’s pledge to Christ through commitment to the common good. In this model, the *panata* practice is not confined to private spirituality but bears the fruit of political love. This is exemplified by devotees who join the Green Brigade to sweep the streets during the January *Traslacion* feast, distribute food and water to fellow devotees and unhoused community members, donate funds to support vulnerable community members, and who go on to public service as civil servants, all because of their *panata* to the *Nazareno*. In these instances, the *panata* fosters mystical solidarity with Christ and political solidarity with those who suffer.

In the discussion period that followed, listeners asked about what role the recovery of the historical Jesus might play in the unity of the mystical and political dimensions of Filipino Catholic spirituality. Listeners also wondered about the extent to which nineteenth century vocabulary of “spirituality” and “mysticism” transfer to the twenty-first century Filipino context. Espiritu acknowledged the crucial role of narratives about Jesus’ public ministry in cultivating Filipino popular spirituality, but he noted that devotees to the *Nazareno* are not invested in scholarly debates defining “spirituality” or “mysticism.” These terms are rarely used by Filipino Catholics, who refer to their popular spirituality in terms of *debusyon* or *panata*.

In his paper, “Hope, Affect and the Particular: An Engagement with Joanna Macy’s Buddhist proposal for *Active Hope*,” Vincent Miller argued that while Macy’s Buddhist treatment of hope as a response to the climate crisis offers a way of transforming climate anxiety into action, it might not account for ecological grief for particular beings and proposed that Christian spirituality might offer resources for

doing so. Placing the doctrine of *paticca samuppada* (dependent co-arising, interbeing) into dialogue with biological systems theory and cybernetics, Macy offers a practice in which “attending to the pain of the world” alerts us to our interdependence with other beings and opens a path for acting on their behalf. Macy’s approach reframes ecological distress into active responsibility, fostering attentiveness to ecological relationships. This practice is valuable to the concerns of integral ecology. It does not, however, value particular emotional attachments to or grief for other creatures, ecosystems or species. Christian forms of passion-centered medieval Marian spirituality provide a starting point for addressing this. The medieval emergence of a spirituality centered on Christ’s passion mediated through the emotion-laden gaze of Mary, undergirds contemporary Catholic spiritual dispositions toward suffering. This spirituality offers a gaze on the particular and the ability to abide with profound suffering. This formation of sight and affect can provide a supplement to Macy’s notion of active hope, one that finds in grief for the particular a motivation for acting with compassion.

In the discussion period that followed, listeners wondered what role Pope Francis’s term “combative hope” or Douglas Christie’s treatment of *penthos* might play in the formation of a Christian response to climate despair. Another member of the audience asked about whether active hope is a communal exercise. In response to both of these inquires, Miller highlighted his concern to keep the gaze upon ecological suffering specific and particular. Miller suggested that his own emphasis on gaze paralleled *Espiritu*’s emphasis on touch; both presentations highlighted the role of sensory encounter with the particular in Christian spirituality.

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