

## ASIAN/ASIAN-[NORTH] AMERICAN THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION

Topic: Peter Phan and Thinking Catholic “Interreligiously”  
 Convener: Julius-Kei Kato, King’s University College at Western University  
 Moderator: Min-ah Cho, Georgetown University  
 Presenters: Erica Siu-Mui Lee, Regis College-University of Toronto  
 Anh Tran, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology-Santa Clara University  
 Leo Lefebure, Georgetown University  
 Respondent: Peter Phan, Georgetown University

This year’s Asian/Asian-[North] American theology consultation session wanted both to honor the lifelong achievements of Peter Phan, particularly, in the area of interreligious theology and to showcase various aspects of Phan’s theological work in this area. To that end, we gathered an intergenerational panel that would speak to various contributions of Phan to this year’s theme.

We began with fifteen-minute presentations by our panelists, Erica Lee, Anh Tran, and Leo Lefebure on various aspects of Phan’s work. That was followed by a brief response from Peter Phan himself. There ensued a very animated discussion on various topics that were highlighted either in the panelists’ presentations or the response of Phan.

Erica Lee’s presentation was entitled “Bernard Lonergan and Peter Phan: Trinitarian Reflections on Being and Thinking Catholic Interreligiously.” It was based on her recently defended doctoral dissertation at Regis College, Toronto. She spoke on the mutual complementarity in the insights of Bernard Lonergan and Peter Phan for Christian trinitarian understandings of religious diversity as well as for being and thinking Catholic interreligiously, this year’s theme. In his theological work, Lonergan aims at a more systematic understanding of religious plurality. Complementing that, Phan elaborates on different forms of Christology and an Asian pneumatology. One can say that Phan’s in-depth knowledge of and familiarity with other religions enrich Lonergan’s thought in our post-Vatican II context. Both thinkers emphasize orthodoxy and orthopraxy. While Lonergan analyzes human vertical self-transcendence from the trinitarian perspective, Phan encourages mutual learning among Christians and others to reach the Truth.

In a presentation which he described as “Religiously Betwixt and Between: Asian Catholic Theologians in the midst of Religious Pluralism,” Anh Tran situated Peter Phan in the recent history of various related events and currents in Asian and Asian-North American theology. Tran emphasized how different factors such as the Asian Synod in 1998, the investigation of Peter Phan himself by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), as well as the various concerns of Asian-North American theologians in general about identity, context, marginalization, etc., have all played a role in shaping how Asian-North American theologians such as Phan do theology. Tran underlined in a particular way the importance of contextual theology as a way of doing theology embraced by many Asian-North American theologians. Some dominant characteristics of this style are the following: they start from the situation of poverty, exploitation, and oppression in Asia, and racism in the US; they deal with cultural marginalization “betwixt and between” Asia and North America; they value religious

diversity as a dominant factor in theology; they read the Bible through a postcolonial and cultural lens, stressing on God's preferential treatment of the poor and outcasts. These are all areas that Peter Phan has worked on and contributed significantly to.

Finally, Leo Lefebure spoke on "Peter Phan's Interreligious Theology." Lefebure used this occasion to showcase a recently published book begun by the late Gerard Mannion and brought to completion by Lefebure himself: *Theology without Borders: Essays in Honor of Peter C. Phan* (Georgetown University Press, 2022). Among many points, Lefebure highlighted Phan's proposal for "Reading *Nostra Aetate* in Reverse" and its importance for engagement with indigenous traditions. He also reflected on Phan's claim that outside of migration there is no salvation. Particularly noteworthy is Lefebure's observation that Phan highlights migration positively in a rather one-sided way. We should not forget though that migration in the Bible and later Christian tradition is profoundly ambiguous. This is clearly seen in different ways such as in Deuteronomy where Israel's "migration" into the promised land practically includes a divine command for mass murder of its inhabitants. Later on in Christian history, Christian migrants will likewise think of migration as mandated by God and this resulted at times in terrible crimes against their fellow humans, such as those against various indigenous populations.

In his brief response, Phan reflected on his investigation by the CDF, remarking that it was an opportunity to reread and reflect anew on his work. He also offered other brief thoughts about the ethics of memory and his work on the theology of migration.

The animated and friendly discussion that followed touched on questions and themes that came to the fore from the presentations. It ranged from the rich possibility of the Catholic teaching on purgatory vis-à-vis the Eastern concept of reincarnation and Lonergan's thought on freedom and how actions have significant consequences to questions on secularization-hybridity, the current "shout-down" culture, and Pope Francis' emphasis on a culture of encounter.

This session was a rich experience of the crucial contributions that Peter Phan has made to the theme of "Being Catholic Interreligiously." It showed that this theme as well as Phan's contributions to it will continue to be some of the most important areas of contemporary Catholic theology.

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