

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION
(JOINT SESSION WITH THE LATINO/A THEOLOGY CONSULTATION)

Topic: Resistance
 Administrative
 Team: Joseph Flipper, Emmanuel Osigwe, Chanelle Robinson
 Convener: Joseph Flipper, University of Dayton
 Moderator: Chanelle Robinson, Boston College
 Presenters: Michelle Maldonado, University of Scranton
 Nicole S. Symmonds, McAfee School of Theology
 Cecilia Titizano, University of San Francisco

In 2022, the Black Catholic Theology Consultation partnered with the Latino/a Theology Consultation to offer two combined sessions around the conference theme. Through this collaboration, two observations arose regarding the conference theme, “Thinking Catholic Interreligiously.” First, the stories of Black and Latino/a Catholicism must be told together. Not only was it good to be together again in person, but theological collaboration between Black and Latinx members is a methodological necessity. Black, Latino, and Indigenous identities developed in relation over a long historical arc across the Atlantic. Second, the historical and social contexts of Black and Latinx Catholics are already interreligious. The “religious other” is not simply other. In this session we asked, “How do the interreligious lives of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Catholics contribute to resistance?” In the subsequent session, we asked, “How do they contribute to healing?”

In “Interrogating Identity: White-skin and Christian Privilege within Latino/a Theology,” Michelle Maldonado argued that the categories of Latino/a, Latinx, and Hispanic, while referring to ethnicity or culture, were deployed as racial categories. Whereas for Latin American liberation theologians, poverty and class constituted the “epistemic framework” to understand the situation of Latin America, US Latino/a theologians employed race as an epistemic framework. Due to the influence of Black liberation theology, Latino/a theology of the 1980s to the 2000s entered a landscape already shaped by a black-white racial dichotomy. And even though most of them were light skinned, Latino/a theologians employed “*mestizaje*, *mulatez*, *latinidad*, culture, and ethnicity” as “different ways of claiming a non-white identity as people of color.” The internal national, cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity of those who are described as Latinos/as is vast. The categories we use often obscure this diversity by defining who Latinos/as are in contrast to white Anglo culture. This flattening of identity also occurs in relationship to the complexity of religious identities. The institutions that support the study of Latinx religion tend to favor those working within fields of Christianity, theology, or pastoral/ministerial work. Maldonado argued that categories such as panethnicity and ethnorace can help us to recognize the complexity of Latino/a identity and to escape the binary constructions of race that conceal this complexity.

In “The Black Body as Religion: Blackness as a Site of Interreligious Theology and Ethics,” Nicole Symmonds observed that for ethicists and theologians “the project of liberation...is to set the Black body free from the constraints of colonized

Christianity. Yet, few theorize the Black body as a religion in and of itself.” Drawing from Anthony Pinn and M. Shawn Copeland, she argued that the Black body should be understood as a “site of divine revelation and thus, a ‘basic human sacrament’” and that the body, “as the physical dimension of existence and a part of a discursive formation,” is a theological source. Building upon Charles Long’s description of “religion as orientation,” Symmonds described the Black body as the site of practices of liberation that orient towards freedom, the locus of power to reconfigure the spaces in which it has been cast and to “re-place” itself. Symmonds observed that, within the American Christian tradition, the assumption has been that whiteness possesses a monopoly on the power “to reconfigure space, socially, culturally, economically.” Black bodies are viewed as a threat to this monopoly. But to think of the Black body as religion—as the site of orientation toward freedom—means to contend with the materiality of body as spiritual.

Cecilia Titizano, in “Ancestral Wisdoms as Sources for Peoples in Resistance,” stated that Indigenous communities across the Americas have been in resistance to colonialism/coloniality for centuries. The principles and practice of their millennial spiritualities have been resources for resistance and healing. In European colonization an ontology of substance supported an ethics of domination of the human over other created beings, contributing to a blindness to disequilibrium of creation. Titizano explained that Andean cosmology contains an ontology of relation: creation is understood as a “relational community of beings.” *Mama Pacha* refers to “the creative matrix, the advancing flow that makes the process of becoming possible.” In Andean cosmology, “disequilibrium” is a strife “created by a human community that has forgotten their place and role in *Pacha*.” She stated, “everything is alive, has awareness, volition, memory, and spirit” and each has a role. “Even the COVID-19 virus has life, spirit, will, and memory. This is why Quechuas and Aymaras have respectfully welcomed the virus among their midst.” It is not a disregard of science or the virus’s impact, she explained. Instead, the objective is *Suma Qamaña* (living well) in the community of beings rather than elimination of the virus.

Forty-four people attended this session and contributed to conversation on interrogating identity, the body, and “living well.”

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