

## FREEDOM FOR ALL OF US – INVITED SESSION

Topic: Freedom for *All* of Us  
 Convener: Bryan Massingale, Fordham University  
 Moderator: Miguel Diaz, Loyola University Chicago  
 Presenters: Elsie Miranda, The Association of Theological Schools  
 Bryan Massingale, Fordham University  
 Respondent: Adam Beyt, St. Norbert College

The session began with Bryan Massingale briefly explaining the project that inspired this session: “A New Agenda for Catholic Theology and Ministry: Perspectives from Queer Theologians of Color.” The project’s central question asks, “*What would Catholic theology and pastoral practice look like if they were done from the perspectives of non-European LGBTQI+ theologians and activists of color?*” The project was an unprecedented collaboration among openly queer-identified Catholic theologians and pastoral activists of color to explore what new forms of theological scholarship could emerge from serious intersectional reflection. Massingale also noted that this session occurs during what some have described as a “state of emergency” for the LGBTQ community in the United States. Thus forging a new, broader, and more inclusive theological and ministerial agenda is essential for defending human dignity and preserving human lives.

In her paper, “Free to Be Queer and Catholic: Gender Identity and the Liberating Love of God at the Intersection of Church and Culture,” Elsie Miranda used ethnographic research among Queer, Catholic, Hispanic Latiné persons to examine the distinctive contours of Catholic Cuban culture and to challenge well-intended impositions of gender complementarity that rely on unscientific interpretations of gender identity to oppress, and diminish the dignity, beauty, depth, and complexity of, LGBTQ persons. In particular, she illustrated how her experience as a Catholic Cuban lesbian reveals how much Aquinas’ essentialist anthropology has influenced the thinking and beliefs of Cuban, American and Catholic patriarchal cultures. In the process of contextual storytelling, this paper raised up instances where the power of God’s love emerges to liberate and celebrate the fullness of what it means to be a human being. Giving such narratives voice and visibility provides a prelude for a socio-religious critique of Hispanic Latinx cultures that embrace heteronormativity and support oppressive judgments of their queer children.

Bryan Massingale’s paper, “‘I’ll Fly Away’: Toward a Black Queer Male Spirituality of Desire, Transformation, and Resistance,” examined the distinctive characteristics of a spirituality of and for Black gay men. Beginning with GerShun Avilez’s phenomenology of the Black queer person as “an injury-bound subject who desires,” Massingale asked what spiritual resources are needed to sustain Black queer men who must navigate social and ecclesial contexts marked by the dual compounding threatening realities of heterosexism and anti-Blackness. Noting the paucity of research on the spiritual lives of Black gay men, he highlighted how art, music, literature, dance, and other forms of cultural expression become sites that communicate the interior spiritual nature of desire that pushes against and challenges external constraint and injury. Artistic production and practices attest to a Black queer spirit that maintains a

commitment to freedom even in a social context of injury. Moreover, research suggests how “pleasure and the erotic are integral to the decolonization of Black bodies and minds.” Massingale concluded by stating that future explorations of the spirituality of Black sexual minority men must further articulate the role of erotic pleasure and creative energy in their spiritual understandings and practices (and those of us all) and how the “dark night” of classical Carmelite spirituality might be a fruitful avenue for articulating a Black Catholic queer spirituality. He avows the claim that Black sexual minority men en flesh the Holy Mystery completely reorients our understanding not only of these men but our understanding of the Divine itself.

Adam Beyt’s response expressed appreciation for the groundbreaking intersectional nature of this project. He noted how gender and sexuality are always mutually constituted while also entangled in other categories ascribed to humanity, specifically race. Racializing categories are sustained by ongoing processes of colonization which persist in a multitudinous array of hideous social formations. Yet the compounding impacts of multiple social influences upon personal identities and cultural formations are not always recognized. Nor is the complicity of church teaching and policies in intersectional social evils often forthrightly addressed. Beyt noted how this project interrogates concerns that are usually addressed by the discipline of theological anthropology, while also calling for the creation of a different kind of church, one that is a countersign of the Reign of Sin—a faith community that promotes a sacred freedom for all and honors the human dignity of all regardless of ascribed social categories.

A lively discussion among the thirty-five attendees followed for about a half hour. Among the central concerns that surfaced were the meaning of and need for the “erotic” in Christian spirituality and theology, and the meaning of “queer”—specifically, how destabilizing of identity can Christian theology and ethics be given its commitment to a normative revelation.

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