

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION
(JOINT SESSION WITH THE ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGY
CONSULTATION AND LATINX THEOLOGY CONSULTATION)

Topic: Sound, Spirituality, and Social Salvation
 Convener: Craig A. Ford, Jr., St. Norbert College
 Moderator: Stephanie M. Wong, Villanova University
 Presenters: Min-Ah Cho, Georgetown University
 Rufus Burnett, Jr., Fordham University
 Antonio Eduardo Alonso, Emory University

Hosting a joint consultation with the Latinx Theology Consultation and the Asian and Asian American Theology Consultation, the Black Catholic Theology Consultation's session featured three papers, one drawn from each of the participating consultations, all focusing on the relevance of sound in conceiving of social salvation.

The first paper, titled "Embracing Silence: Sharing Struggles and Fostering Transformation for Women of Color," was presented by Min-Ah Cho. Exploring the theological dimensions of silence for racial and linguistic minorities, Cho argued for a reevaluation of silence—not construed, as might typically be the case, as a sign of acquiescence, but rather as a way of providing space for fostering new contemplative connections with one another within the context of resisting oppression. Cho distinguished several forms of silence for the purpose, including "defiant silence" (silence in order to protect agency) and "loud silence" (silence that comes out of the unspeakable depths of suffering). Together, Cho argued, these forms of silence and others constitute pathways of solidarity on the road to social salvation by creating space for mutual recognition, for curiosity, for the appreciation for differences, for the willingness to embrace ambiguity, and for the ability to be attentive to suffering without intention to react or instruct.

Rufus Burnett Jr., presented the second paper, "Blues Notes on Flesh: A Blues Reading of Afro-Christian Soteriological Imaginings of Flesh." Drawing inspiration from a story involving a mother (Mary Johnson) and her son (Little Robert) in which the mother's spirit is drawn heavenward from the unlikely source of her son's blues-playing "devil's instrument," Burnett invites us to reimagine the theological significance of the blues within the Black experience. As an artform, the blues commemorated the secular dimensions of life that chronicled the "failure of Black people to live out the dimensions of their emancipation," precisely because of their continued vulnerability to racism—both structural and otherwise—despite the end of slavery. Constituted therefore as a "blues people," Black people have historically been denied the opportunity to know God "in the flesh." Nevertheless, Burnett argues, the blues demonstrate the possibility of alternative flourishing "in the flesh." Just as the blues note in a musical key is "technically wrong, but sonically pleasing," Black existence in the United States exists as a counterhegemonic epistemic force possessing the potential to incarnate hope in an oppressive world where the flourishing of a Blues people is also discursively ruled out.

The last paper, "*Mi Luz y mi Salvación: Singing as Salvific Practice in Latine Communities*," presented by Antonio Alonso focused on the *corito* as a privileged

source of theology for Latine Catholics. Originally embraced by Pentecostal communities as a way to return popular music to sacred significance, the *corito* was later celebrated in Latine Catholic communities as a way to implement the reform of the Second Vatican Council. By the 1970s they began to gain widespread use in Roman Catholic worship. Theologically, *coritos* reflect the social nature of salvation by being communal affirmations of the entire human lifespan, encompassing celebrations from birth to death. They are therefore deeply incarnational and relational. The artform itself also invites collaboration and participation, making *coritos* malleable to ritual action as well. Lastly their widespread use in liturgy provides evidence of a common core of spiritual resources by which different Latine communities fight against ongoing oppression in the wider world.

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