

CONSULTATIONS

ASIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: The Survival of Asian Theology in America: Impasse, Ipseity, or Insistent Interruption
- Convener: Rachel Bundang, St. Catherine University
- Moderator: Michael McLaughlin, Saint Leo University
- Presenters: Jonathan Tan, Xavier University
Joe Cheah, Saint Joseph College
Joanne Doi, Franciscan School of Theology

This consultation continued a conversation begun in the previous year's session on Asian theologies between cultures and generations. Given this year's conference theme of "Impasse... and Beyond," these three papers offered historical, theological, and practical perspectives on the ways in which Asian theologies, grounded in each culture's experience and history of religion, have persisted and been transformed over generations of immigration and acculturation to North America. With attention to new contexts and changing socio-spiritual landscapes, Asian/Pacific American (APA) theologies are being articulated, crafted, and lived out in the process.

Jonathan Tan's presentation, "The Past, Present, and Future of Asian American Theologies" surveys the diverse theological landscape spanning two generations of Asian American theologians, with a particular emphasis on the histories, life experiences, and interpretive frameworks that shape the worldviews of these theologians. Following upon Tan's exposition of the APA theological landscape, Joe Cheah's paper, "Examining Teleological Impasse in Asian American Theologies" takes us into the realm of theory and theological method. Cheah begins with the claim that the notion of teleology is often implicit in many theories on race and ethnicity. Teleological aspects of hegemonic social patterns of behavior may encourage acceptance of hegemonic forces (such as assimilation or the categorization of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners," to cite only two examples) at the risk of erasing or marginalizing one's identity, culture, and agency. However, he argues, because Asian American theologies and new immigrant studies have borrowed concepts such as assimilation and the model minority myth from social sciences and Asian American Studies, some understanding of totalizing teleology that seeks to explain social change through predetermined economic and social processes is necessary. This presentation hence examined the teleological impasse inherent in some of these social science theories, especially models of race relations and racial formation and offer suggestions of transcending the limit of teleology.

Joanne Doi's paper, "Theological Bamboo Scaffolding of Postcolonial Pilgrimage," rounded out the set by showing, from the perspective of practical theology, how Asian theologies and religio-cultural sensibilities and commitments change in response to historic suffering, grief, and the drive to remember. Her starting point is the locus theologicus indicated by Asian American theologians (Phan, Matsuoka, Nakashima Brock): "in-betweenness, liminality, interstitiality." As shown on the brief video clip she provided, postcolonial pilgrimage to Manzanar, California, former World War II site of detention for Japanese Americans, is an embodied and spatial manner in which to inhabit this in-betweenness together. Such pilgrimage practice revisits shadowed ground and reconnects to the collective memory of the sacred traces of suffering and hope that live intergenerationally and in the land itself. They are journeys of mourning, healing and solidarity. Compassion is the interfaith bridge that deepens the promise and commitment to make present the tenaciousness of love in our world.

These three presentations provided good substance for the ensuing discussion. Audience and participants engaged questions on how these works fit within the histories intertwining colonialism/neo-colonialism and migration, and within the context of global Christianities. Implications for ministry and liturgy, especially for the second generation and onward, were also considered.

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