

COALITION OF BLACK, ASIAN, ASIAN-AMERICAN,
AND LATINO/A THEOLOGY II— CONSULTATIONS

Topic: That's How the Light Gets In (Session II)
Convenor: Shawnee Marie Daniel-Sykes, Mount Mary College
Moderator: C. Vanessa White, Catholic Theological Union
Presenters: Cecilia González-Andrieu, Loyola Marymount University
Gemma Tulud Cruz, Australian Catholic University
SimonMary A. Ahiokhai, Loyola Marymount University

The second of three sessions planned by the coalition of the Black, Asian/Asian American and Latina/o Consultations, and all entitled, “That’s How the Light Gets In,” was an exciting convergence of the giftedness of these three racial/ethnic groups. Inspired, in part, by the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the coalition acknowledged this conversion moment in history and pondered what a similar conversion moment in the Church might look like. The three papers presented are examples of taking action in the face of the marginalization experienced as underrepresented populations in the Catholic Theological Society of America and in the wider theology and religious studies academic communities.

Cecilia González-Andrieu, Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola Marymount University opened this session with her creative paper, “Letting in Light: The Little Stories of Metamodern Aliens.” The title of these three interrelated sessions, “That’s How the Light Gets In,” comes from the song “Anthem” by Jewish composer Leonard Cohen. The refrain is as follows:

Ring the bells that still can ring,
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything,
That’s how the light gets in.

González-Andrieu looked at three voices, the first being the voice of Cohen who reminds his listeners of humanity’s vulnerability as the path by which the cracks can be located and the light can get in. The second voice is that of Alex Garcia-Rivera and his work on aesthetic theologizing through “the little stories.” These little stories are like the ringing bells. They signal the colorful stories of our communities that capture the everydayness of our lives. The nitty-gritty of our lives, *Lo cotidiano*, situates and grounds us in our experiences as our beloved *mujerista* sister, Ada María Isasi-Díaz reminded us.

The presentation of Gemma Tulud Cruz, a Senior Lecturer in Theology at Australian Catholic University, “Interrupting Thinking: An Asian Perspective on Creative Cultural Forms of Resistance,” unfolded in three parts. First Cruz unpacked the oppression that Asian women continue to endure. Second she discussed the creative strategies of resistance engaged by Asian women in the face of oppression. Lastly, Cruz showed how these strategies of resistance can be a source for Asian American women’s theologizing and a reminder of the power of resistance strategies.

Asian women's status is problematic. In the realm of politics, women who have reached the heights of national leadership have done so because they are part of male dynasties. Feminist beliefs have not contributed to their positions. In the context of religion in Asia, women are sometimes taught submissiveness and encouraged to identify with the victims. Neither the realms of politics nor religions have been obvious places for Asian women to experience empowerment. Nevertheless, through humor, laughter, and dance, Asian women have found a way forward through "hidden transcripts," that is, Asian women's creative resistance. The performance of this resistance is indeed a way to critique injustice in nonconfrontational ways and at the same time affirm personal power.

SimonMary A. Ahiokhai, a lecturer at Loyola Marymount University, presented "The Prophetic Character of the Marginalized and Voiceless in Communities of Faith: The Nigerian Experience." In his paper he focused on the important presence of women in both indigenous religions and in Christianity. His inclusion of the Yoruba people and their child-bearing diety, Osun; the *Mami wata* cult and their female goddess of the rivers; and the Binis of Midwestern Nigeria, among others, was particularly enriching. All of these traditional religions give females and female dieties important roles that highlight their significance as bearers and nurturers of life. With this information, Ahiokhai signaled the overarching theme in these religions: female empowerment. He understands the prevalence of this theme to be cultural and suggests that inculturation in Nigerian Catholic life not be limited to worship, but also embrace such practices as female empowerment in concrete ways. Thus, the People of God in Nigeria can find in Catholic worship and life a reflection of their lived experience.

A lively conversation followed the presentation of these excellent papers—all enhanced by the efforts of the coalition.

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