

CONSULTATIONS

ASIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: “Between Generations: Asian Theologies Between Cultures and Religions”
- Convener: Gemma T. Cruz, St. Ambrose University
- Moderator: Paul Varuvel, Christ the King Seminary
- Panelists: Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, Loyola Marymount University
Rachel Bundang, Santa Clara University
- Respondents: Michael McLaughlin, St. Leo University
Ruben Habito, Southern Methodist University

Asian and Pacific islanders have long been present in American soil. More correctly known as Asian/Pacific Americans or APA they constitute a significant diasporic group in American society not just in terms of number but also in terms of socio-political, economic, and religio-cultural contributions. This session focused on the theological reflections going on among APA theologians with regard to the contextual and generational connections (or lack thereof) between Asian theologies and APA theologies, particularly when it comes to cultures and religions.

Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, in her presentation, “The Inter-religious Imperative for Asian and Asian North American Communities” noted that while the religious plurality of Asia and Asian North America has long been recognized, sustained comparative and inter-religious theological reflection in these contexts is just gaining momentum. Tracy argued that this movement shifts attention away from a theology about inter-religious dialogue and instead focuses on a theology through dialogue. Drawing on an example from Hindu and Christian traditions, Tracy contended that such a shift is essential, for it allows Asian/Asian North American theologians to engage their multi-religious contexts more authentically, to construct their theologies more concretely, and to promote justice more effectively.

In his response immediately following Tracy’s presentation Michael McLaughlin pointed out the leitmotif in Tracy’s paper, that is, it is not so much a theology of religions but a theology of dialogue. As a contribution, Michael suggested the body of Christ in the Eucharist and the body of Krishna as an interreligious point of connection to the excerpts from *Tiruppāvai*, a song by 9th century Hindu Vaiṣṇava saint Āntāl which Tracy used in her presentation. Michael also offered a point for further exploration with regard to Tracy’s presentation in terms of what happens to Asian religiosity in the Asian diaspora.

Rachel Bundang's presentation titled "Situating Moral Agency Within Asian/Pacific American Theo-Ethics," in the meantime, explored approaches from Asian/Pacific-American theo-ethics and theory as it encounters the limits of liberative, contextual frameworks based on politics of difference. Offering reflections on what it means to be a theological and moral subject as an Asia/Pacific American (APA) woman Rachel focused on the re-examination, retrieval, and reconstruction of religiosity in Asian/Pacific diasporic communities in North America. She argues that, for APAs, problems arise in contextual theological construction when customary thinking does not meet the challenge of lived experience. Since APA is in itself an unwieldy category and life in diaspora presents some unique and multiple contexts Rachel suggested: 1) constantly subjecting "APA" as an analytical category to re-definitions; 2) personhood (not so much realities or events *in Asia*) as the point of departure for APA theo-ethics; and 3) privileging the heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity of APA identities. In the articulation of an APA feminist theo-ethics, in particular, Rachel maintained, that while there is more to APA than identity politics and cultural retrieval, it is important that theo-ethical discourse is predicated on identity and difference and that disruptive wholeness and unruly identity are valued.

Ruben Habito offered a response to Rachel's presentation as an Asian-American theologian who has been living in the United States for decades. Ruben lauded the critical contribution of Rachel's presentation (and the related research that she is engaged in) to the daunting challenge of developing an APA theology or APA theologies to be more precise. Ruben, however, presented three interesting questions which constituted the bulk of his response: 1) How is APA theology related/connected to the realities and concerns of Asians (especially APAs' relatives) in Asia and the Pacific, e.g. poverty?; 2) How could we mainstream APA theology within the larger CTSA?; and 3) Can we just be contented with the fact that we already have a place at the table since we already have a consultation session?

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