

CONSULTATION ON ASIAN/ASIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGY

Topic:	Tapping the Riches of Asian Religions for Christian Spirituality
Convener:	Christina A. Astorga, University of Portland
Moderator:	Carolyn Chau, King's University College
Presenter:	Roger D. Haight, S.J., Union Theological Seminary Jonathan Y. Tan, Australian Catholic University
Respondent:	Ruben L. Habito, Perkins School of Theology

More and more Christians have turned to practices found in Asian religious traditions while remaining committed to their Christian faith. There have been critiques of such a move, both from within and outside the Christian community, for various reasons, including the danger of syncretism. There are, however, testimonies of many who, by engaging in such practices while maintaining the integrity of their root Asian traditions, are deepened and enriched in their Christian spirituality.

The review of the new book of Ruben L. F. Habito, *On Zen and Spiritual Exercises*, by Roger Haight, S.J., the first speaker, was on two levels. On the first level, Haight highlighted what the book offers to Asian spirituality within the framework of Ignatian spirituality. Habito, he said, is one of the very few who could engage Zen spirituality and Ignatian spirituality with masterful authority, because of his long familiarity and practice of both spiritualities. On the second level, Haight offered an interpretation of the implications of the book for theology and interreligious dialogue.

Haight concluded that Habito, by not homologizing the Zen and Ignatian spiritualities but rather stressing their autonomous differences, demonstrated the possible enrichment that is gained by crossing religious boundaries. One could call this work an interreligious spirituality because it is the result of a dialogue between two spiritual traditions that exist in one practitioner. Beyond spirituality, Haight also concluded that, by using how Habito re-appropriates the Jesus tradition within the framework of the Zen tradition, one could develop an Asian Christian theology which is a theology that arises out of the spiritual practice in a culture, using its own language and concepts.

The second speaker, Jonathan Tan, showed how the Charismatic movement has swept through much of Asia and transforming Asian Christianity in general, and Asian Catholics in particular. His talk focused on the *El Shaddai* movement in the Philippines and the movement in India. The personal and emotive intensity of the *gawain* or weekly lay-led prayer meetings of the *El Shaddai* movement incorporates ritual elements of the Catholic mass as a form of mimicry of the official liturgy, thereby creating an aura of orthodoxy and legitimacy, while pursuing innovation and accommodation. The members of the *Khristbhaktas* who are Indian devotees of *Yesubhagavan* (Christ Jesus) as their *Satguru*, the true lord and teacher, are not strictly speaking Catholics, as they have neither sought baptism nor participate in Catholic sacramental life.

Tan pointed out that the common thread that binds the Filipino, *El Shaddai* Charismatics, and the Indian *Khristbhaktas* is that many of their members belong to the subaltern classes; moreover, the multiple belonging and the hybridized identities of the members challenge the homogeneity of the ecclesiological vision of the

Catholic Church. In his conclusion Tan rejected monolithic uniformity and chaotic heterogeneity and argued that a renewed Asian Catholic Church would be nourished by the rich diversity and plurality of popular devotion, which offers a window to the *sensus fidelium* of the community, beyond the grasp of formal and normative ecclesial structures.

Ruben Habito, the third speaker and the respondent, affirmed Haight's and Tan's conclusions. He saw the growing and deepening identity and direction of the Asian Catholic church in the dialogue between Zen spirituality and Ignatian spirituality, and in the hybridized faith of the members of the Charismatic movements in Asia. Habito also asserted the importance of meditation and silence where we, reaching into our deepest core, become one with all, for there is where we experience transcendence and ultimacy.

The session was a full house and the audience actively participated in the discussion. Questions were raised such as: What is that which makes a spirituality or religion specifically Asian? What are the implications of the fact that subaltern people who mostly belong to the Filipino *El Shaddai* and the Indian *Kristbhaktas* do not experience Church in the sacraments? How does Latin spirituality compare to the Zen spirituality? What do they specifically contribute to the tradition of spirituality? What are the points of convergence and points of divergence of Zen spirituality and Ignatian spirituality?

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