

ASSESSING THE *SENSUS FIDELIUM* OF THE “SINNED-AGAINST”: A
CRITICAL CONVERSATION WITH NEGATIVE CONTRAST EXPERIENCES—
SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Assessing the *Sensus Fidelium* of the “Sinned-Against”: A Critical
Conversation
Convener: Kevin P. Considine, Calumet College of St. Joseph
Moderator: Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P., University of Notre Dame
Presenters: Kevin P. Considine, Calumet College of St. Joseph
LaReine-Marie Mosely, Notre Dame of Maryland University
Julia Feder, University of Notre Dame

In his paper, “The *Han* of the Sinned-Against: A *Sensus Fidelium* in Intercultural Perspective,” Kevin Considine explores the question of how the experiences of innocent suffering and the victims of sin—the “sinned against”—offer a global *sensus fidelium* to which the Church must attend. He summarizes Raymond Fung’s theology of “sinned-againstness” and the concept of *sensus fidei* clarified by the International Theological Commission (ITC) to suggest that the experiences of being “sinned-against” are a global phenomenon that should be understood as a *sensus fidei*. Using a method of intercultural hermeneutics, Considine then engages with the Korean anthropology of *han*; he argues that *han* is one example of this global *sensus fidei*. He concludes by suggesting that Edward Schillebeeckx’s idea of “negative contrast experiences” is one valuable tool for accessing and understanding the *han* of the sinned-against. He uses it to suggest that the global experiences of innocent suffering may be understood as a *consensus fidelium* that can judge and authenticate doctrine, faith, and praxis.

In her presentation, “Negative Contrast Experience, Bias, and the Ignatian *Consciousness Examen*,” LaReine-Marie Mosely critiques Edward Schillebeeckx’s idea of negative contrast experience by discussing the research investigating “unconscious bias” in human beings and, in particular, “unconscious racial bias” in U.S. society. Mosely explains that Schillebeeckx’s idea of negative contrast experiences has four movements: awareness of evil and unwarranted suffering, indignation that this reality exists, protest against this reality, and, finally, a praxis of liberation to eradicate all that causes this evil. She points out that the phenomenon of “unconscious bias”—prejudice that shapes human consciousness through socialization—can prevent a person from being aware of an evil and injustice. She suggests that if one cannot first become aware of and acknowledge a particular instance of evil and suffering, due to the blindness caused by unconscious bias, then a contrast experience becomes impossible and good people will take no action. She concludes by discussing ways of fostering mindfulness and mental purification, in particular the Ignatian *consciousness examen* and, surprisingly, the experiences of white video gamers using black avatars, as means for addressing this problem.

In her paper, “Human Distinctiveness and Negative Contrast Experience: A Way Forward?” Julia Feder offers a critical appraisal of contrast experiences through engaging the fields of evolutionary anthropology and trauma theory. Feder briefly defines trauma as the state of being overwhelmed, physically as well as psychologically, by an external threat of annihilation, and she suggests that the deep negativity of trauma may be so overwhelming that it becomes impossible to undergo

Selected Session: Assessing the Sensus Fidelium of the “Sinned-Against”: A Critical Conversation with Negative Contrast Experiences

a contrast experience. A victim’s ability to resist evil, or even perceive and recognize evil, can become deeply impaired. She then offers a way forward by looking at the phenomenon of “symbolic imagination” (a term offered by evolutionary anthropology) that is at the foundation of all human cognition. Feder points out that this makes possible the human capacity to seek hidden meaning, to envision alternative futures, and to work together. She concludes that, by virtue of their evolutionary history, human beings have inherited a “landscape of perceptual reality” that provides us the capacity for symbolic thought. This symbolic capacity makes possible experiences of negative contrast as well as the capacity for great systems of evil.

The conversation that followed focused on Mosely’s discussion of unconscious racial bias in the U.S., Feder’s discussion of trauma, and questions about processes for healing trauma and enacting liberation from the violence of racism. The question arose whether or not “contrast experiences” truly are universal, pre-religious, and shaped by culture. Also, a person’s inability to undergo a contrast experience because of trauma and bias was an ongoing debate that questions the usefulness of the concept. This led to a discussion of Schillebeeckx’s context of secularism and the very different context of racism in which the U.S. Black Church continues to protest injustice.

KEVIN P. CONSIDINE
Calumet College of St. Joseph
Whiting, Indiana