

BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY—CONSULTATION

Topic:	“To Set the Captives Free”
Convener:	Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Xavier University of Louisiana
Moderator:	Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, Mount Mary University
Presenters:	Dempsey Rosales Acosta, University of St. Thomas, Texas LaReine-Marie Mosely, S.N.D., Notre Dame of Maryland University
Respondent:	M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College

In the days before the 2017 CTSA Convention, the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States (ACHTUS) and the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS) met in a Joint Colloquium to reflect on the theme “To set the captives free” (Isa 61:1; Lk 4:18) concerning the incarceration, detention, and immigrant deportation of black and brown bodies in the United States. This session was planned as a continuation of that critical discussion.

In his paper, “Black and Brown Pauls: A Pauline Case of Racial Profiling: A Hermeneutical Reading of Acts 21:27–40a; 22:23–29 and the Reality of the African American and Hispanic Communities in United States,” Dempsey Rosales Acosta analyzes the historical context narrated in the canonical episode of Paul’s arrest and his treatment in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27–40a; 22:23–29) as the fundamental platform by which to present a hermeneutical and theological interpretation of the liabilities and ultimate ramifications of racial profiling, especially when exercised by the civil authorities. For Acostas, these biblical episodes embody a paradigm that becomes the reality of the marginalized communities as a consequence of the racial profiling in the US, leading to the incarceration of a large number of African Americans and Hispanics. Accordingly, he presents a theological biblical analysis having a distinct focus which concentrates on the ethnic perspectives of Black and Brown communities as living *loci theologici* through which the biblical text comes to be alive.

In her presentation, “A Womanist Imagination and the Detention and Mass Incarceration of our Sisters and Brothers: Nitty Gritty Approaches to Social Salvation,” LaReine-Marie Mosely suggests that imagination is a mental faculty that enables the human person to experiment with the belief that “another world is possible” through the development of new personal and communal mindsets and through concretely engaging in “nitty gritty” acts of resistance and justice. In this case, the focus is on vulnerable communities of color that have been subject to detention and mass incarceration and their families at home who share dimensions of this burden. Since survival and quality of life are two passions of womanist theologians, their imaginations have “plenty good room” for conceptualizing and promoting these values for the long haul—those involved now and in the future.

In response to the papers, M. Shawn Copeland commented on (1) the distinct methodological perspectives of the two papers, one biblical, one systematic, (2) human experience of incarceration and detention as the starting point for interrogation of social and cultural experience, (3) analysis of texts from the New Testament as well as from poetry, novels, memoir, and narratives of incarcerated black women; and (4) focus on the affective, cognitive, and imaginative. Both papers resonated with W. E. B. Du Bois’ famous question, “What does it feel like to be a problem?” and both papers consider black and brown bodies as living theological *loci*. Acosta’s paper challenged the

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Church to concrete solidarity with incarcerated and detained Black and Latinx persons; Mosely's paper challenged theology to learn from story, poetry, and narratives and to learn to collaborate actively with neuroscientists, physicians, and psychologists among others.

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