

The Case for Intersectional Theology: An Asian American Catholic Perspective

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MY LIFE TOOK A DECISIVE TURN WHEN I GRASPED THE magnitude of the daily crystallization of white hegemony not only in broad social milieus, but also in my professional, academic, and institutional settings. My naïve and generous assumption—which resulted from my internalized racism and white adjacency—was that liberally informed, highly educated, adequately trained groups of scholars and religious people who often wrote, voiced, and worked for racial justice would not allow such dominance to transpire. My new-found consciousness led me to read and focus on various perspectives by scholars of color who brought to light many ways in which such a power dynamic is sustained. As a Catholic Christian moral theologian, then, it behooved me to discover the ways in which such forces are at play in the institutions and church to which I belong. To that end, I began tracing the way I came to discover this looming white supremacy and how it is sustained in academic settings. Mapping out that experience highlighted for me both the usefulness of my location in that journey and the necessity for other intersecting perspectives. Indeed, this intersectional approach—which helps to highlight and problematize Eurocentric white biases and dominance in the scholarly realm—was not entirely a novelty in the Catholic theological and intellectual tradition, being present in limited and incomplete form. By retrieving (in the form of *ressourcement*) the silenced voices and methods within that tradition, I became increasingly convinced by the intersectional approach and began to insist on a variety of intersectional perspectives to be included for ecclesial and personal introspection, growth, and development. To unpack all that, I must begin with my experience and story.¹

¹ See “Biography as Intersectional Theology,” in Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Intersectional Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 19–40.

INTERSECTING ASIAN AMERICAN LOCATIONALITY

One of my earliest scholarly publications was on Asian American Christian ethics of gender and sexuality.² The chapter was part of a book, itself a culminating product from the Asian and Asian American Working Group in the Society of Christian Ethics. At the onset, the publisher wanted to make sure that the contributions were not a disjointed list of works by Asian and Asian American Christian ethicists. The book was to be coherent, not necessarily in terms of individual topics, but in its structure. It was an attempt to avoid the common mistake of incoherency typical in edited volumes done by a group of scholars. To that end, the contributors were given a structure to follow, acting as golden thread among this variety of topics taken up by Christian ethicists of Asian descent. Most contributors stayed true to that structure.

The chapters follow a structure typical of the Western Christian tradition even as the contributors sought to do ethics from Asian and Asian American origins. My chapter also begins with an historical overview of the origins of dualistic gender norms in Western philosophical Christian tradition: dualism of the Greco-Roman world, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Barth, etc. Then, the chapter moves to giving modern (including secular) understandings and finally an Asian American perspective. It never occurred to me that there could be variants in gender thinking from non-Western perspectives in early Christian history. More accurately, while having written a part of a dissertation covering some of those variant perspectives, it never occurred to me that I was not addressing them in that chapter. The blind spots were not mine alone. For example, the book hardly addressed issues concerning the LGBTQIA communities within an Asian American context. Furthermore, the irony that the structure of my chapter reflected the locationality of the working group itself in the guild escaped me. That is, there is the “main” Society as the guild and the “working groups” as subsets of that guild, signifying the main Christian group and then the minoritized perspectives as subsets of it, rather than being integrated and intrinsic to all aspects of the Society.

Beyond the structure, however, the content—more particularly the strategic solution to foster conversation about hotly debated topics like gender and race that concludes my chapter—further demonstrates my internalization of ideological colonialization. Instead of drawing critical attention to members of my professional, religious, or personal circles as sexist, misogynist, patriarchal, etc., I supported a method of

² Hoon Choi, “Gender and Sexuality,” in *Asian American Christian Ethics: Voices, Methods, Issues*, ed. Grace Y. Kao and Ilsup Ahn (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 19–39.

“calling them in” and being more inviting to the conversation about sexism. I indicated that I could relate to the experience of their marginalization. My goal was to ensure I did not immediately turn them off to having this difficult conversation. I sought to find a congenial and safe space. Similarly, I recommended that rather than using terms like racist, sexist, white privilege, or white supremacy that immediately shut people down, scholars should use more congenial terms to foster better conversation. I had found this to be an effective tool in a series of conversations among Korean American Roman Catholic young adults at the time.³

However, once I recognized that the workings of hegemonic whiteness infiltrate just about every aspect of my life living in this country as an Asian American person, I no longer made such a recommendation. First, what worked for a group already marginalized—to help them understand other forces of marginalization—is not necessarily effective and persuasive to another, especially if the power dynamic is such that one’s interlocutor is part of the dominant power. Secondly, teaching students in Kentucky has taught me that not only are there wonderfully critical students who engage in such conversations with an open mind but also less critical students whom my “inviting” strategy hardly ever convinces to consider their privilege and benefits from their social locations. Rather, it only invites the knee-jerk and defensive perceptions of reverse racism and reverse hegemony. Finally, the fact that Asian Americans are constantly disciplined by their adjacency to white folks to be nice, mild, accommodating, agreeable, and accepting of the status quo if they want to “pass” and fit into whiteness and receive rewards in our society, further fuels my distrust in my former approach.⁴ In fact, I realized that such an approach is a result of my internalization of racism that puts white folks at ease while they take credit for performative liberalism or having taken part in the conversation without any substantial growth from their location of assumed supremacy.

It was my experience from my intersecting identities, then, that gave a distinctive insight into the maintenance of white supremacy. My advocacy for including voices like mine is an effort to make such persistent white supremacy visible and work toward justice. However, from my other intersecting identities of economic, East Asian (producing ascendancy via adjacency to white Americans), cisgender heterosexual male privilege, I am limited and advantaged. I must constantly check my power and location by amplifying and learning

³ Choi, “Gender and Sexuality,” 35–36.

⁴ Ki Joo Choi, *Disciplined by Race: Theological Ethics and the Problem of Asian American Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), especially xiv–xv and 97–108.

from as many intersecting voices as possible in my self-examination and action. Similarly, my aim for this paper is to demonstrate that the church, both as institution and people, can benefit not only from my experience and perspective, but also the experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of many intersecting elements and people that affect and are affected by the life of the church.

INTERSECTIONALITY

But what is intersectionality? Originally, the intersectional approach aimed to uncover the victimhood of Black women made invisible via the universalizing of women's experience, the lack of attention to nuance, and presumable disinterest and apathy of the media and other institutions. According to Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, intersectionality captures better the multidimensionality of women's experience than a single-axis analysis that distorts and theoretically erases the experience of Black women

in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group. In other words, in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women. ... This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination.⁵

Thus, Patricia Hill Collins noted that an intersectional vantage point recognizes cultural patterns of oppression "not only as interconnected, but as shaped by intersecting systems of race, class, and nations," as W. E. B. DuBois already saw, but she expands it to "*gender*, sexuality, race, class, and nations."⁶ While Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, it has been part of Black women's experiences and other minoritized groups for a long time and is manifesting in a variety of ways in the present.⁷ Listening to the voices of the silenced, either

⁵ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, art. 8 (1989): 139–140.

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, "Gender, Black Feminism, and Black Political Economy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (2000): 42 and 48. Italicization is mine.

⁷ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw point to, among others, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Vivian M. May, Audre Lorde, Frances Beal, Beverly Smith, Angela Davis, Cheryl Clarke, bell hooks, and Barbara Smith as examples. They also highlight the intersectional reach beyond womanist experiences (Kim and Shaw, *Intersectional Theology*, 1–17).

through movements like #SayHerName and #StopAsianHate, or taking note and expressing them in the court of law, or taking up those issues in academic research and publications, helps the audience see victims marked as unsacred, ungifted, undignified, unimportant, and invisible.

ASIAN AMERICAN POSTCOLONIAL CONTRIBUTION TO INTERSECTIONALITY

An Asian American perspective is one of the intersecting points that move beyond the uncovering systems of white supremacy in the US by exposing the global reach and colonial origins of white imperialism. Asian perspectives, whose articulation requires the intersection of a variety of disciplines, are viewpoints stemming initially from the experience of geographic and temporal *colonization* of Asian nations and its side-effects are too many to address in this limited space.⁸ However, the colonial and imperial form of dominance persists, affecting not only those formerly colonized nations in Asia but also people living in the US. Thus, according to Agnes M. Brazal, different forms of colonization, namely, the “domination of a state by a superpower or by transnational corporations have emerged (e.g., neocolonialism/imperialism).”⁹ Colonization is beyond specific and temporal moments in history; it is *ideological*, systemic, and mutational. Thus, while colonialism is inextricably linked to global capitalism, ableism, “neocolonialism, class-ism, caste-ism, racism, and other forms of domination,” embedded in all of them is a “logic of domination.” The “post” in postcolonialism, then, suggests “the desire to go ‘beyond’ the colonial in all its manifestations in churches and in society.” The postcolonial gaze will not only give insight into the condition of those who are oppressed but, because of its intersectional nature, will also bring to the foreground folks marginalized in multiple ways.¹⁰

⁸ Formerly colonized nations suffered lasting consequences of imperial, hegemonic, geopolitical, socio-economic, financial, environmental, ecological, ethnic, gender, and sexual injustices; the limits of this space will not allow me to discuss them in depth.

⁹ Agnes M. Brazal, “Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique,” *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (2021): 221.

¹⁰ Brazal, “Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*,” 221; Catherine Keller, Mayra Nausner, and Michael Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004), 7; Gurpreet Kaur, “Postcolonial Ecofeminism in Indian Novels in English,” *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 2, no. 5 (2012): 384–390. See also the postcolonial discourse with the critical lens of transnationalism in Kwok Pui-lan, “Fishing the Asia Pacific: Transnationalism and Feminist Theology,” in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seung Ai Yang (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 3–22.

The imperial/colonial power is manifested in different forms of dominance in the United States, including Christian dominance throughout its history. However, the golden thread that weaves through the variety of forms of dominance is white supremacy, whether we recognize or acknowledge it or not. White supremacy is not only the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races and should therefore dominate society, but also heteronormative white forces (attitudes, behaviors, values, practices, policies, methods, norms, etc.) that sustain its scaffolding. As Frances Lee Ansley put it:

By “white supremacy” I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.¹¹

Unlike the past (including the Jim Crow Era), therefore, the “New Jim Crow” is more hidden and implicit—at least much more so until recently—in multiple facets of American life, most insidiously hidden in policies and practices of political, educational, housing, religious, criminal justice and prison systems. The “faith” in white supremacy has not vanished.¹² Today’s manifestation of it is often masked and centered around the perception that the superior white norms, methods, and way of life is under attack, drowned out, and even dominated by non-white people or their allies to the point of extinction. One can easily correlate all this to the academy, perceiving that there is a new hegemony of diversity that occupy their space and reversely discriminates against white folks. However, white academics overwhelmingly hold full-time faculty positions¹³ and, for

¹¹ Frances Lee Ansley, “White Supremacy (and What We Should Do about It),” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. R. Delgado and J. Stefancic (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1997), 592.

¹² As Michelle Alexander notes, “White supremacy, over time, became a religion of sorts. Faith in the idea that people of the African race were bestial, that whites were inherently superior, and that slavery was for the black’s own good, served to alleviate the white conscience and reconcile the tensions between slavery and the democratic ideals espoused by whites in the so-called New World” (*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* [New York: New Press, 2010], 26).

¹³ While racial and ethnic diversity has increased, “of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2018, some 40 percent were White males; 35 percent were White females.” See the study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, “Race/Ethnicity of College Faculty,” Fall 2018, nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61.

those with tenure, men overwhelmingly occupy full professorship and leadership roles¹⁴ where their preferred methodologies flourish while allowing some space for alternative, diverse, or cutting-edge methodologies.¹⁵ Even when women of color occupy middle-management leadership roles, however, they fall off the “glass-cliff.”¹⁶

Christine J. Hong poignantly articulates, from her perspective of Asian American woman of color, her responsibility—from her proximity to that whiteness—to unlearn, undo, and reform, from which the rest of us can glean our own individual and collective responsibility.

I was like many others, defined through the lens of white normativity. As a non-Black, non-Indigenous woman of color, I am also familiar with the powerful lure and lie of white adjacency, white junior partner-ism, and settler colonialism ... by being a non-Black person, I am both target of white supremacy and also the agent and beneficiary of anti-blackness. I know what it's like to discover religious bias, racial bias, and patriarchy embedded under my skin through a lifetime of internalizing whiteness and the white framework of Christianity as normative. I have a responsibility to both undo and remake the ways in which I have been formed and conditioned by white supremacy, Christian hegemony, and their entangled saccharine poison.¹⁷

While this work of decolonizing in postcolonialism has begun to take shape for a while in other circles, including Asian theological groups,

¹⁴ Beverly J. Irby and Genevieve Browen, *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal* 14 (Fall 2003): 7. Moreover, the same study showed that women faculty with tenure are disproportionately found in the ranks of associate professors, rather than full professors.

¹⁵ Note the requiring of the hegemonic metanarrative of the “historical-critical method,” typical of Eurocentric white male approach to biblical scholarship, before any methodologies from minoritized scholarships to count in tenure review for biblical scholars, the insistence on and favorable outlook for the non-accessible language of the scholarly journals against more distinctive and storytelling style of many scholars of color, the relegating and placing of “spirituality” and ministry as disciplines and practices less rigorous, and the siloed spaces of non-Western scholars within professional conferences, to name a few. See Angela N. Parker, *If God Breathes, Why Can't I?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), chapter 1.

¹⁶ “Glass cliff” refers to the societal barrier that keeps women from achieving the highest positions. See Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam, “The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions,” *British Journal of Management* 16 (2005): 81–90.

¹⁷ Christine J. Hong, *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2021), 2; Frank B. Wilderson III, “Essay,” in *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

it is just beginning to take shape in Catholic Asian/Asian American (moral) theological circles.¹⁸

INTERSECTIONAL THEOLOGY AS CATHOLIC *RESSOURCEMENT*

Theologically, then, intersectionality can problematize Eurocentric bias and white supremacy and uncover/recover many marginalized groups by discovering multiple expressions of oppressive realities within theological circles. In that sense, intersectional theology is a development and expansion of inherited Catholic theology and not entirely a “new theology.” In other words, it is a retrieval, a *ressourcement*, of what is already within the tradition, albeit in a limited way.¹⁹ What is new and “developing” is the recognition of the shortfall of the original *ressourcement* movement. According to Joseph Flipper, “The inadequacy of most accounts of *ressourcement* lay in what they exclude ... the extensive theological retrieval that takes place in Africa, Asia, and Latin America during the twentieth century.”²⁰ In fact, many theologians have already had an instinct for an expansive definition of *ressourcement* “not exclusively as a twentieth-century European movement or method, but as a theological approach they employ that is integral to liberationist, contextual, and decolonial perspectives.”²¹ Many womanist, liberation, contextual, and postcolonial theologians see *ressourcement* as “not only compatible with decolonial and liberation theology, but is also requisite within decolonial and liberationist perspectives.”²² Flipper points to and expands on theologians of the Global South and Black American theologians, including Cyprian Davis, M. Shawn Copeland, and Bryan N. Massingale, who have been doing this kind

¹⁸ One can consult the works of Seung Ai Yang, Agnes M. Brazal, Justin Tse (Eastern Greek-Catholicism), Susan Abraham, Sharon A. Bong, Albertus Bagus Laksana, and Mukti Barton among others.

¹⁹ I invoke *nouvelle théologie* and *ressourcement* intentionally here to refer to the Catholic debates in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century because the current debates do not depart too much from these disputes. The reader will notice that the current criticism of the intersectional approach as “secular” parallels the criticism of the *ressourcement* of Maurice Blondel and Henri de Lubac among others as revisiting and revitalizing “modernism.” See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?,” *Angelicum* 23, nos. 3–4 (1946): 126–145; in English as “Where is the New Theology Leading Us?,” *Catholic Family News Reprint Series* 309 (Niagara Falls: Catholic Family News, 1998), 1 and 7. My suggestion is not only that the intersectional method is an age-old approach but also that the criticism against it is nothing new.

²⁰ Joseph S. Flipper, “The *Ressourcement* of Black Catholicism in Cyprian Davis, OSB,” *Modern Theology* 36, no. 4 (October 2020): 828.

²¹ See his treatment of these in Flipper, “The *Ressourcement* of Black Catholicism,” 829–30.

²² Flipper, “The *Ressourcement* of Black Catholicism,” 841.

of intersectional work. If one moves with caution—being mindful of the limitations of individual witnesses and embracing the collective witness—the fruits of these contexts that intersect can be life-giving for the church in general but more particularly for those whose lives are not only marginalized in their social location but also within their Catholic religious context. To consider those intersections, I will now reflect and concentrate on the often-neglected ordinary locations and methods of the faithful in the following sections.

APPLYING THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH WITHIN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION

Monica: A Neglected Voice

What would such a retrieval look like if one paid attention to different intersecting elements within the Catholic tradition by paying attention to neglected people, voices, and methods? What would we learn about our faith, knowledge, and God? Traditionally, one might begin with “church fathers.” For instance, one might begin with Augustine, who understood that the Holy Spirit infuses the human heart to understand the truth of God because believers in their faithful love of God possess such knowledge about God, whether they know or acknowledge this or not.²³

Instead, what if one began with biography, a personal story about a North African woman? Monica, mother of Augustine, is simultaneously uneducated and yet “instinctively able to resolve theological problems” during multiple dialogues with Augustine’s family and friends.²⁴ Monica resolves disputes, leads the group, and helps them understand difficult matters of faith and God. “Because Monica loves God, she has a sense of the truths of God that can equal or surpass the knowledge had by reasoned inquiry.”²⁵ Her love of God which comes from God can be its own way of knowing. The faithful, exemplified by Monica, possess just such an instinct of faith, though it is not at all clear whether and how those instincts are reliable determinants for the Tradition. Suffice it to claim for now that faithful followers like Monica possessed a spiritual inner sense—however one wants to call it—that enables them to determine rightly the matters of faith. While Monica belongs to a group hardly ever taken seriously, namely the ordinary “uneducated” woman, to demonstrate this inner sense, Augustine would *not* have recognized that such possession could stem from other facets of marginalization: economic, ethnic, gender, systemic, locational, situational, etc. However, just as one can

²³ Andrew B. Salzmann, “The *Sensus Fidelium* in Augustine,” in *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and Peter C. Phan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 3–17.

²⁴ Salzmann, “The *Sensus Fidelium* in Augustine,” 9.

²⁵ Salzmann, “The *Sensus Fidelium* in Augustine,” 10.

learn from the simple piety of Monica—a female person, a mother, situated in Northern Africa, marginalized in a patriarchal context—a great deal about faith and God, it is not hard to imagine a concerted gathering of knowledge of the faithful from a variety of vantage points—particularly of those neglected in the history of Christianity—and how they can enrich and inform faithful communities and the wider church. In any case, what is traditioned, then, is that the primary efficient cause of knowledge is God, and what is traditioning is intersectional, that is, how the instinct of marginalized ordinary faith makes sense of that Cause. How to recognize many faces of such marginalization that gives a better vision of God is still an open question.

What is clear through Monica's story is that one needs to be more attentive to creatures (including ordinary folks) to know the Creator and her intent. It is the people who make the music, and the artists arrange them. People experience the world and artists express it in a new light. Similarly, people are the church; church leaders "arrange" those experiences and express them but often in generalized, abstract theological language. What the intersectional method teaches is that without paying attention to ordinary folks and their multiple gifts and burdens, the church cannot arrange, recognize, or teach in an adequate and appropriate way. Without consulting the experience of the faithful, the church does not know what it does not know, which the people might have instinctually known all along, expressed through their autobiographical stories via popular piety, devotions, and practices.²⁶

Patristic Retrieval: A Case for (Ordinary) Voices of the Faithful

To be clear, however, consulting does not denote obedience, like how one might consult the barometer for temperature or doctors for sickness.²⁷ According to John Henry Newman, whatever consulting means, it does not mean that all voices of the faithful are the infallible church. It *does* mean, however, that the body of the faithful witnesses the fact of tradition as revealed doctrine and becomes voices of the church.²⁸ Thus, there is a kind of "particular preliminary, viz. the ascertainment of the feeling of the faithful both towards the doctrine and its definition."²⁹ While the laity echoes the clergy, these senses are not, of course, absolute and infallible and thus the role of *sensus*

²⁶ See Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

²⁷ John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed. John Coulson (London: Chapman, 1961), 54.

²⁸ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 63.

²⁹ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 71.

Ecclesiae is crucial in a dynamic cooperation of “pastorum et fidelium conspiratio.”³⁰ What is required, then, is attentiveness to what Justin Martyr called the “seeds of the Logos” (*sperma tou logou*) that point to “God’s presence in human history and human life even before the Word’s incarnation.”³¹ In that vein, among other things, it was for Augustine the “accord of populations and of nations, that held him in the bosom of the Catholic Church,” and that he “believed nothing but the confirmed opinion and the exceedingly widespread report of populations and of nations.” Therefore: “In matters whereupon the Scripture has not spoken clearly, the custom of the people of God, or the institution of our predecessors, are to be held as law.”³² St. Jerome, in defending the use of relics by ordinary faithful folks, claimed that if such senses of the faithful were not true, “the people of all the Churches who have gone out to meet holy relics, and have received them with so much joy, are to be accounted foolish.”³³ Similarly, the orthodoxy of Christianity was preserved during the Arian Controversy not by the episcopates alone but by, and being attentive to, the beliefs of the faithful.³⁴ So too we read that a cry of joy exploded in Ephesus from the faithful, including the “low-born” and “modest maiden,” when proclamation of Mary as the “Mother of God” confirmed their *sensus*. Clearly, before its declaration, the ordinary faithful as the Church has already instinctually known of the nature of her motherhood.

In that same spirit, Pope Pius IX (and currently Pope Francis) wished to know the sentiments of the people in “two-fold testimony” (“*pastorum et fidelium conspiratio*” in practice) and Pope John XXII was not content simply to declare the immaculate conception of Mary without confirmation by the laity.³⁵ In that spirit, “consulting” the

³⁰ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 65 and 104. See also the suggestion against a sharp distinction between the “teaching church” (*Ecclesia docens*) and the “learning church” (*Ecclesia discens*) in Ryan Marr, “John Henry Newman on Consulting the Faithful: An Idea in Need of Development,” in Hinze and Phan, *Learning from All the Faithful*, 42–52.

³¹ Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, 2.8.1. See a close treatment of this notion in Wendy Elgersma Helleman, “Justin Martyr and the ‘Logos’: An Apologetical Strategy,” *Philosophia Reformata* 67, no. 2 (2002): 128–147, especially 137. Also, viewed in the context of contextual theology, see Stephen B. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 175.

³² Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 72.

³³ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 72–73.

³⁴ See his suggestion that “to know the tradition of the Apostles, we must have recourse to the faithful,” and his treatment and excerpts demonstrating the outcry of the faithful against Arian claims in Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 76–101.

³⁵ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 71, 104; Gerard O’Connell, “Pope Francis: The People of God must be consulted before the October 2023 synod of bishops,” *America* (May 21, 2021), www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/05/21/pope-francis-people-god-listening-synod-bishops-2023-240721, accessed May 24, 2021.

saints, in their inadequacies—even perhaps especially in their inadequacies—and indeed the faithful, their popular expressions, experience of the ordinary, and invaluable experience of oppression and marginalization, become essential elements of that dynamic cooperation. These faithful expressions are also the “*instrumenta traditionis*” and vary one with one another in the evidence which they give in favour of particular doctrines; so that the strength of one makes up in a particular case for the deficiency of another, and the strength of the ‘*sensus communis fidelium*’ can make up (*e.g.*) for the silence of the Fathers.”³⁶ In other words, each individual conscience (*phronesis*), through the process of traditioning, is only confirmed and fulfilled in the collective instinct (*phronema*).³⁷ Each intersection, each collective confirmation of the Spirit, each collective sense functions as *instrumentum* or *indicium* in concert with the episcopate in ever-growing, often mutually correcting, and always asymptotic nearing and never quite touching the Truth. The same tradition traditioning today, always growing and never perfect, must be carried on in that same spirit.

Clearly, however, even as I make this case using the Patristic tradition, one’s intersectional gaze should recognize by now the inherent limitation of how “patristic” they are. To consider more adequately the knowledge of the faithful, whether instinctual, experiential, or intellectual, one must move beyond church “fathers” and the Western context. Like Monica, there ought to be careful studies of Perpetua, Felicitas, Lucy, Martia the presbyter, Martha, a spinner of Palmyra, Theodora, Bridget, Olympias of Constantinople, etc., when considering the “patristic” church history and theology.³⁸ Intense engagement with the patristic sources should therefore “transcend their particular historical contexts and be transformative for the present” and thus one must retrieve and remember patristic sources and contexts *with* an eye to rehabilitating and re-appropriating the tradition for the present context.³⁹ Adequate consideration of the church fathers will necessitate the reader to move beyond them.

³⁶ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 66.

³⁷ Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 23 and 33.

³⁸ See for example Gary Macy, Phyllis Zagano, and William T. Ditewig, eds., *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Paulist, 2012) and Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds., *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Pui Him Ip, “‘Back to the Fathers’: The Nature of Historical Understanding in 20th Century Patristic Ressourcement,” *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 23, no. 1 (2016): 5, 13.

Thomistic Tradition: Retrieval of a Method

How can the works of Thomas Aquinas, for example, display both his own white patriarchal hegemonic limitations and the call to include the experience and knowledge of the faithful? Thomistic understanding of the two ways to wisdom that judges rightly, namely knowledge and virtuous inclination, might point in that direction.

Presumably, the wisdom gained through knowledge is reserved for the literate episcopates at that time, though it could be said that its practitioners are expansive and include a vast number of scholars and theologians today. The other—wisdom that judges rightly, gained through the virtuous inclination—is like Monica’s understanding and it confirms the earlier discussion on the instincts of the faithful. In the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* (question 1, article 6), Thomas recalls the First Letter to the Corinthians 2:15: “The one who is spiritual judges all things,” to claim that it is possible for those who are “spiritual” (like Monica, for instance) to judge divine things through the Holy Spirit’s gift of wisdom, not through any formal theological education.⁴⁰ As Jesus preeminently is *the* “spiritual human being” judging all things, however, one must be incorporated into the Mystical Body through Baptism. Then, the spiritual sense that “flows from Christ’s head and illuminates his members ... can be correctly viewed as a rule of judgment that is the gift of wisdom itself.”⁴¹ Following Thomas, one can deduce that such grace and gifts are bestowed “not only to a majority of the present faithful but to the whole mystical body of the living and the dead.”⁴² Consulting the faithful and the saints remains essential in the traditioning of the traditioned faith through Thomistic understanding.

What is intriguing is that Thomas not only makes these claims, but also puts them in practice. He constantly works in concert and consultation with his predecessors and the saints. Moreover, in that very article (question 1, article 6), he refers not only to Augustine but also to Aristotle: a non-Catholic, non-baptized, and what one might call “secular” source. He employs this method throughout the *Summa Theologiae* without any rationale or explanation, as if such an approach is self-evident. Thomistic *method* expands the consultation and contexts, placing these secular sources in conjunction with other important sources. While Aristotle occupies an important location in Thomas’s work (to whom the reference is often translated as “the philosopher”), however, it is not the determining factor. Rather, it serves as an instrument, an additional intersection, to solidify and

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 6, a. 3 (hereafter ST). The following treatment is from Jonathan M. Kaltenbach, “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Foundation of the *Sensus Fidelium*,” in Hinze and Phan, *Learning from All the Faithful*, 18–26.

⁴¹ Kaltenbach, “St. Thomas Aquinas,” 24–26; see ST III q. 69, a. 5c.

⁴² Kaltenbach, “St. Thomas Aquinas,” 26.

confirm his theological conviction. While defensive anti-Protestant polemic has since moved away from this Thomistic method and toward more narrow definitions and methods of the Tradition, the traditioned method of the early church fathers and expansion of it in Thomistic writing seem to suggest that such a multi-intersectional method is not far-fetched from the standpoint of the tradition. One may see reflections of Thomistic method intermittently but more recently with *Renewing the Earth* (USCCB) and very recently with *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis) with references to scientists and philosophers.⁴³

The reluctance to use secular sources is, however, understandable. After all, the very method Thomas uses results in the most offensive conclusions about women. More specifically, his understanding, which stems from Aristotelian biology, infamously stated that a woman is “something deficient and misbegotten” (*aliquid deficiens et occasionatum*) and therefore one can mistakenly conclude that “children and even the insane could be validly ordained as priests—as long as they were male—but adult and healthy women could not be!”⁴⁴ Notwithstanding these inaccurate assertions, one may not want to jettison his method altogether. While his scientific data was inaccurate, we have better biological, sociological, and scientific knowledge. The improved understanding illuminates a vision beyond patriarchal understandings. Could better knowledge confirm, for example, that which the faithful has already instinctually known and practiced? Rather than seeing women and women’s bodies as deficient or inferior, one could use his method and employ secular disciplines to confirm that a woman’s womb plays an active and decisive role in guiding the sperm.⁴⁵ Non-artificial biological procreation is

⁴³ *Renewing the Earth* mentions geophysicist Thomas F. Malone and *Laudato Si'* cites Paul Ricoeur. There are occasional scientific footnotes from documents by the United States Catholic Bishops, too. See for example USCCB, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2009), 27. However, even when church documents seem to use social scientific terms such as psychological imbalance, the phenomenon of machismo, or “absence of a father,” the scientific sources are rarely acknowledged, credited, or footnoted. In fact, more often than not, scientific progress is acknowledged only in passing (especially when it is advantageous to the document’s viewpoints) and mostly downplayed as dangerous and/or suspicious. See for example *Familiaris Consortio*, nos. 25, 30, and *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 33, 46, 76.

⁴⁴ Daniel C. Maguire and Sa'Diyya Shaikh, *Violence against Women in Contemporary World Religion: Roots and Cures* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2007), 3–8; ST I q. 92, a. 1, ad 1; q. 99, a. 2, ad 2; Supplementum q. 39, a. 2. See also Thomas Laqueur’s treatment of Aristotle in his *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 30, 41, 149, 151, and 254; Aristotle’s *On the Generation of Animals*, 738b20–23, 716a5–7, 729a 25–30 and *Politics*, I.5.

⁴⁵ Margaret A. Farley, “New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution,” *Theological Studies* 36, no. 4 (1975): 637.

impossible without the active nature of women and women's bodies. Thus, rather than blindly using the conclusion of Thomas's work, one could use his *method* (inclusive of secular disciplines) as a corrective to highlight the instincts of faith already present, especially in women's experience in this case.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it demonstrates the necessity of taking seriously the perspectives made invisible and minoritized in church history and theology to revise the nearsightedness and go beyond their blind spots. A careful retrieval and reflection of Patristic and Thomistic methods make it necessary, therefore, to go beyond these traditions.

Contextual and Liberation Theology: A Modern Example

So far, one can recognize both possibilities and limitations within the Catholic tradition for intersectional theology. They can appreciate a method inclusive of marginalized voices and secular disciplines. They must, however, also acknowledge the typical male-centered way in which traditional theological consideration is done. Contextual/liberation theologies can move beyond these limitations and set the margins front and center in these theological inquiries. The conviction of contextual and liberation theology is that when it highlights, amplifies, and unveils aspects of God's engrafted creation neglected, overlooked, ignored, violated, or erased—from our teachings, curricula, policies, conference presentations, and, indeed, theology itself—our distorted and partial vision of commonly shared inalienable and indivisible grace and dignity will gain better insight and clarity.

Paying attention to a particular and often invisible locality and making visible the authentically human experience from its perspective provides opportunities for others, both those who share that social location and those who do not, to engage the topics at hand *from their own particularities*. In defense of using Asian sources, for example, Peter Phan identifies theologizing first and foremost from the stories of the "ordinary people themselves along with the Bible and the Tradition. More particularly, he prioritizes the stories and memories of women and girls, and local experiences including their texts, practices, philosophies, and spirituality. In doing so, one can discover some essential aspects of Christianity and the ongoing manifestations of it in the discounted and discredited locations, which might include "Latin America, Africa, Oceania, or Asia, or ... marginalized groups

⁴⁶ The anthropological model (one of the six models of contextual theology) would also support this practice. The idea is that since God was present from the beginning (logos), God's presence and grace must have inspired God's creation before people's contact with Christianity or the historical Jesus (Bevans, *An Introduction*, 174–177).

in Western contexts.”⁴⁷ One can further ask from that context: What else is hidden? What else hinders the visibility of the beauty of God’s creation more fully, *and* how complicit in this invisibility is it?

In other words, by observing *a* particular location, a contextual-liberation framework makes visible that which has been made invisible within that location *and*—if done carefully, intentionally, and honestly—recognizes the *observer’s own* (or their tradition’s) locationality, privilege, and complicity. Therefore, what is just as important as seeing and treating God’s creation as sacred and good is seeing both what internal inadequacies distort our vision of the good and what external obstacles make grace invisible. Contextual and liberation theologies address these external obstacles within theology, including Catholic theology.

To put it differently, contextual theology is not—or at least ought not—to be understood as a different, ethnic, or cultural form of Catholic theology. All (Catholic) theology is done in some context.⁴⁸ Contextual theology is—or ought to be—understood simply as (Catholic) theology. The fact that contextual theology must be described, like disenfranchised groups in the US are often described (African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, etc.) rather than simply received as given (i.e., Americans), reveals the location of contextual theology within what has been a hetero-normative Eurocentric understanding of *the* Catholic theology.⁴⁹

Therefore, two of the most important tasks of a (contextual/liberation) theologian are to move beyond the Catholic theology that has predominantly been highlighted, namely the Global North and normative Eurocentric theology, and remove these methodological obstacles by moving the periphery to the center, enabling the visibility of a variety of vantage points of outward and visible signs of grace made invisible. If one perspective can help us better see the inherent sacredness of God’s creation in this way, then the crystallization of perspectives from the unheeded, “least,” and

⁴⁷ Peter C. Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianity: Different Resources and New Methods,” *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 29 and 37–39. See also the in-depth discussion of Phan’s approach in Stephen Bevans, “Models of Contextual Theologizing in World Christianity,” in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights*, ed. Jonathan Y. Tan and Anh Q. Tran, SJ (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 146–149.

⁴⁸ Bevans, *An Introduction*, 4, 165, 167.

⁴⁹ I am aware of the irony of using the phrase “contextual theology” here. That is, if using “contextual” as a descriptor is a problem, why use it at all? I use the term not because it ought to be different from Catholic theology but because it is useful to point out the fact that it is already used to differentiate from mainline “Catholic” theology. This is not dissimilar to how scholars use the category of “race” because it points to the current reality while never forgetting that it is a mirage created by racist power (Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* [New York: One World, 2019], 37).

“rejected” can result in fuller/clearer vision and appreciation of God’s grace in the world, although never fully adequate and perfectly clear. The intersection of these different contexts in contextual/liberation theology making God’s creatures more visible must be at the heart of a Catholic Christian intersectional theological approach. The spirit of that method was alive and well since the inception of Christianity.

However, contextual/liberation methods also need an intentional usage of intersectional methods to go beyond their own limitations. Some claim, for example, that contextual and liberationist methods have not adequately considered a broader vision because their typical focus is on socio-economic concerns. That is, issues of colonialism, gender, race, and sexuality have not been visible enough both in mainstream theology and within (Catholic) contextual-liberation theology.⁵⁰ These limitations are perhaps why it is not easy to find considerations for LGBTQ Black women, Asian queer theology, white colonialism in the Catholic Church, or to name white supremacy as a central problem in the body of Catholic theology. As demonstrated earlier with an Asian American perspective, more voices will give a better chance at seeing the complex interconnectedness of effects of any phenomena, including colonial and global forces.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGIAN AND THE CHURCH

Dismantling white supremacy must be intersectional. Because white supremacy has been the norm in our society and church, there are many internal, domestic, and international blind spots, including our own. As demonstrated, there are already enough intersections within the tradition to advocate for the concerted inclusion of neglected, marginalized, and minoritized voices, the collective consensus of ordinary and instinctual sense of faith, and secular knowledge, all of which is vectored toward an asymptotic move toward the truth. Furthermore, these intersections are inextricably connected to global capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacist dominance. A global and world church must begin unveiling its complicity in all of this.

From the highest offices occupied in the Catholic Church down to the textbooks and sources used to train the church’s youngest members in religious education classes, multiple disciplines, knowledge, contexts, voices, and experiences must illuminate that which enables visibility and move beyond its shortcomings. In that church, my children might learn about St. Columba Kang Wansook, the first Korean woman catechist from Korea, or Sts. Ba Thanh De or St. Agnes Lê Thi Thành, the female Vietnamese saints, or Sister Thea

⁵⁰ Kim and Shaw, *Intersectional Theology*, 13–14.

Bowman, who challenged her church to accept her as fully Black and Catholic, or the Venerable Augustus Tolton, the first Black Catholic priest in the US. That church would have been much more aware, vocal, and proactive in the fight against racism when Black bodies were/are being violated and murdered in this country, especially for those female victims often unnoticed. That church would continue to study the effects of global imperialism and colonialism fueling the logic of dominance, including within ecclesial structure and practices.

Imagine how that church would have consulted multiple sources that intersect in important ways when it first learned of the sexual abuses by the clergy and recognized the white male dominated church culture that enabled it, rather than deflecting the blame to the secular “culture of death.” Aside from a few sporadic statements by some bishops and/or sub/ad hoc committee representatives, imagine how the church might have responded differently to the growing anti-Asian violence. One might recognize the irony of quoting *Open Wide Our Hearts* when addressing anti-Asian violence without realizing that the quoted document, a pastoral letter against racism, does not even address the people of Asian descent—making their perpetual foreignness more pronounced and acute—and further minoritizes the minoritized community by othering them (to whom are “we” opening “our” hearts? Who is the “we” in “our” hearts?).⁵¹ While the US Catholic bishops acknowledged in 2001 that “Asian and Pacific peoples have remained, until very recently, nearly invisible in the Church in the United States,” Asian folks remain invisible to this day, until these notable acts of violence happen and even then are made visible only to the extent of warranting statements from ad hoc committees.⁵² An intersectional approach might shed new light, making these inadequacies visible and recognizing the need to move beyond acknowledging shortcomings and producing statements.

⁵¹ The document has major sections on “the Native American Experience,” “the African American Experience,” “the Hispanic American Experience” and two quick mentions in passing about Muslims, but only one sentence about people of Asian descent. “Many groups, such as the Irish, Italians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Poles, Jews, Chinese, and Japanese, can attest to having been the target of racial and ethnic prejudice in this country” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter against Racism* [Washington, DC: USCCB, 2018], 10). A similar point was made about the word “us” in *Brothers and Sisters to Us* in Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 75.

⁵² See the joint statements by Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez, Bishop Oscar A. Solis, and Bishop Shelton Fabre in Public Affairs Office, “Bishop Chairmen Condemn Racism and Xenophobia in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic,” USCCB News, May 2020, www.usccb.org/news/2020/bishop-chairmen-condemn-racism-and-xenophobia-context-coronavirus-pandemic; The Committee on Migration, *Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2001).

One might rightly criticize, however, the dangers of extending the sources of such illumination by highlighting the limits of secular sources. Relatedly, one might claim that contextual and liberation theologies are not the same as intersectional theology since one is theological in nature and the other perceived to be too secular. However, inward/spiritual grace is received and made visible through the outward/secular. The grace received at biological birth and the instinctual sense received at our spiritual birth are mediated through ordinary and secular objects and sources. The ability to think through scientific and secular disciplines is also given to us graciously. Secular intersections *can* help us see internal, invisible, spiritual, and mysterious grace. Just as with everything else, however, it is not perfect, as demonstrated with the Thomistic approach. In fact, the reality of sin reveals that nothing other than God is perfect, not even Scripture because it is written and interpreted by human beings, no matter how inspired they were/are. However imperfect, that is the world in which we live and who we are. What is traditioned is despite our imperfections, inadequacies, and sin; the followers of Christ still have the duty to use what is available to the best of their abilities to adhere to the message and ministry of Jesus.

INTERSECTIONAL JESUS

White supremacy broadly defined is as old as the Church. Just as long, however, is the history of Jesus. One can argue that from the very beginning of the Jesus movement, it was about dismantling dominance and more specifically white dominance (especially so if you see Jesus more accurately as Black). Furthermore, one can argue that Jesus's ministry—and indeed Jesus himself—is the embodiment of the point at which many areas of invisibility intersect: a Galilean Jew from lowly socio-economic status who caused disturbance at the Temple, disrupted the status quo, elevated the lowly, amplified the voice of the voiceless, and uplifted the dignity of victims from the systemic injustice of white ruling bodies, is as intersectional as it gets. Furthermore, even the historical Jesus in his own introspection realizes his locationality and privilege, learning to appreciate insights from a Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman (Mark 7:24–30; Matthew 15:21–28).

To the extent that it is possible, then, theologians and the church must consume, embody, and carry out *that* body of Christ. To that end, one can gather intersectional voices and knowledge that shed important light on systemic invisibility, amplify the lowly and marginalized by gathering their stories, fight for justice to give back the dignity stripped away from them, cause disturbance in *our* "Temple," call out white supremacy, all in the name of the preeminent intersectional Disturber. Where those intersections converge gets us closer to the Truth. In other words, the more we can gather the rejected

stones intersecting in complex ways, the better our understanding of *the* Stone that was rejected and thrown away, which became our Cornerstone (Matthew 21:42).

Furthermore, it will force the powers that be to acknowledge that there are rejected stones (*at all*) and their complicity in persistently rejecting them. The institutional church and individual followers *must* apply Catholic intersectional theology to begin a painful yet necessary journey to unveil how we are shaped by the white supremacist culture of dominance. Without such a process of truth and reconciliation/reparation, the church and its followers will continue to see God as white, and its leadership will reflect such a God. The contribution and application of an intersectional approach is nothing short of the attempt to move all followers of Christ away from blasphemy and idolatry. My conviction is that an intersectional approach to theology will jumpstart, enable, and indeed *force* this necessary process, without which I see little hope for healing in the church. **M**

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