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Asian American Catholics and Contemporary Liturgical Migrations: From Tradition-Maintenance to Traditioning

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In this essay I examine the implications of hybridities, multiple belongings, and multiple migrations for the liturgical practices of Asian American Catholics in the contemporary United States. First, I will argue that the ahistorical essentialism of early theologies of liturgical inculturation emphasized the ideals of cohesive group identity, overarching harmony, and unity, thereby subsuming differences to the exclusion of the particularities and conflicts that are generated by generational shifts, multiple belongings, and manifold border crossings. The uncritical attempt to create inculturated Asian American liturgies by transplanting romanticized and essentialized cultural forms from the Asian motherlands raises more questions in the face of the complicated experiences of the 1.5 generation,[1] US-born children of first-generation Asian immigrants,

1. The term "1.5 generation" was first coined by the Cuban American sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut to refer to those who immigrate to a new country between the ages of six to twelve. For in-depth discussions on the significance and implications of the 1.5 generation, see Rubén G. Rumbaut, "The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children," in *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services,* ed. Frederick L. Ahearn Jr. and Jean L. Athey (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 53–91; Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Ages, Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Second Generations in the United States," *International Migration Review* 38 (2004): 1160–205; and Kyeyoung Park, " 'I Really Do Feel I'm 1.5': The Construction of Self and Community by Young Korean Americans," *Amerasia Journal* 25 (1999): 139–63.

Asian American adoptees of white parents, and bi/multiracial Asian Americans. Second, I will make the case that the essentialized categories of racial-ethnic, cultural, and faith identities have to be deconstructed, challenged, contested, and, finally, remixed in new keys and forms to address the implications of hybridities, multiple belongings, and multiple border crossings within contemporary Asian American Catholic communities. Third, I will propose that Asian American Catholic liturgies move away from classical *tradition-maintenance* to the creative remix of *traditioning*, from liturgies that uncritically reinscribe the past to liturgies as creative and dynamic endeavors that seek to encompass the multiplicity of pluralistic, hybridized, and conflicting constructions of faith and identity.

For the purposes of this essay, I am using the term "Asian American" as a generic and convenient shorthand to categorize all Americans of Asian ancestry and heritage—whether they are US-born second or later generations, the 1.5 generation, or first-generation immigrants—with their diverse languages, cultures, and traditions. At the same time, I also acknowledge that the term "Asian American" masks distinct racial-ethnic communities under the façade of a homogenous and monolithic pan–Asian American identity that exists more in theory than in reality. In reality, the category of "Asian Americans" encompasses groups of peoples of diverse languages, cultures, spiritual traditions, worldviews, socioeconomic classes, and generational levels, such that all attempts at generalizations run a significant risk of error. Instead of viewing the Asian American identity in rigid and normative terms, perhaps this identity is better understood as diverse and multiple, constantly in flux and shaped by, as well as shaping, historical, social, cultural, and political contexts.[2]

More significantly, labels such as "Asian American," "Vietnamese American," "Chinese American," "Filipino American," "Korean American," and so forth, are double-edged swords. On the one hand, they are useful generic shorthand to identify and categorize distinct ethnic Asian American communities, giving them a united and collective voice vis-à-vis the dominant white mainstream. On the

2. The Asian American scholar Lisa Lowe explains the implications of Asian American heterogeneity as follows: "What is referred to as 'Asian American' is clearly a heterogeneous entity. From the perspective of the majority culture, Asian Americans may very well be constructed as different from, and other than, Euro-Americans. But, from the perspectives of Asian Americans, we are perhaps even more different, more diverse among ourselves. . . . As with other diasporas in the United States, the Asian immigrant collectivity is unstable and changeable, with its cohesion complicated by intergenerationality, by various degrees of identification and relation to a 'homeland,' and by different extents of assimilation to and distinction from 'majority culture' in the United States." Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 22–44, here 27.

other hand, they are also problematic insofar as the categories break down when confronted with the 1.5 generation, the American born, and adoptees, as well as bi/multiracial Asian Americans who are the products of interracial marriages. Indeed, the presence of adoptees and bi/multiracial Asian Americans challenges the uncritical presumption of a normative, monolithic, and static notion of "Asianness," "Chineseness," "Vietnameseness," and so on. The incongruity arising from their presence serves as a reminder that identity is negotiated and constructed, neither given nor born, and neither static nor fixed. Are the 1.5-generation, US-born, adoptee, and bi/multiracial Asian Americans authentically Asians and Americans? How would Asian American liturgies address their needs, concerns, and hopes?

I. The Limits of Liturgical Inculturation as Tradition-Maintenance

In 2007 a friend of mine participated in the annual Lunar New Year Eucharist at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco and shared with me the photos he took of the ancestor veneration ceremony that was incorporated into the Lunar New Year liturgy. Bishop Ignatius Wang, then auxiliary bishop of San Francisco and the first Chinese American bishop in the US Catholic Church, led the concelebrants in offering prayers and incense at the ancestral altar that was specially set up for this ritual. The concelebrants were followed by members of the assembly in a well-choreographed and picture-perfect ritual. As my friend showed me the photographs, he turned to me and acknowledged that while the ritual meant a great deal to the older generation, it did not speak to him and his peers. He was plainly uncomfortable with the ritual; he thought that it was oriented toward the migrant or first-generation Asians in the United States, who long for the sociocultural world in which they grew up but which is no longer present in the United States for both 1.5-generation and US-born Chinese. As far as my friend was concerned, the ancestor veneration ritual emphasizes filial piety, patriarchy, and patrilineal transmission, all of which are incongruous with his values, aspirations, and hopes, as well as those of his peers. He pointed out that his generation and the next value and celebrate individuality, independence, and the freedom to define their own lives.

This conversation reminded me of a conversation that I had with a Vietnamese elder several years back. We were admiring the new parish hall, and an extension to the existing church building, of a Vietnamese American national parish. This elder turned to me and said that he despaired of the younger generation of US-born Vietnamese Catholics who were turning away from the Vietnamese language and culture that his generation is fighting so hard to preserve in the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States. He expressed his

disappointment at the teens and young adults in the parish who leave for English-language services elsewhere because the Vietnamese parishes no longer hold any meaning or significance for them. What was more troubling for him is that the US-born Vietnamese no longer see the strict preservation and uninterrupted transmission of Vietnamese language and culture as essential and normative of "Vietnameseness," the essence of Vietnamese identity.

Remembering these two conversations, I cannot help thinking about the implications of hybridities, multiple belongings, and multiple migrations on the liturgical practices of Asian American Catholics in the contemporary United States in general and the question of Asian American Catholic liturgical inculturation in particular. Liturgical inculturation is commonly understood as integrating liturgical worship with a community's sociocultural tradition. This task may appear to be deceptively simple, but in reality determining the ambit and limits of tradition, as well as identifying who gets to define what a community's tradition is and is not, is fraught with difficulty. While the two examples cited above are textbook accounts of liturgical inculturation in the Chinese and Vietnamese American Catholic communities in the United States, both examples reveal the limits of liturgical inculturation in Asian American communities. Specifically, both highlight the complexity, ambiguity, and plurality of the question of whether it is possible, let alone desirable, to identify specific normative elements as defining the sociocultural tradition that lies at the heart of liturgical inculturation.

To complicate matters, when one attempts to define the "tradition" that underlies liturgical inculturation, one realizes that the term "tradition" raises further questions that defy easy and simplistic answers. Even scholars and experts have differing opinions on what constitutes tradition. For example, according to the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, tradition is more than simply "a set of memories which are delivered from one generation to the other"; it is rather "the recollection of those events which have gained significance for the bearers and receivers of the tradition."[3] By contrast, Catherine Bell, a scholar of religion and ritual, asserts that tradition "is not created once and then left to its own momentum," but rather "exists because it is constantly produced and reproduced, pruned for a clear profile, and softened to absorb revitalizing elements."[4] Going one step further, the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, who sees tradition as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which auto-

3. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3:300.

4. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 123.

matically implies continuity with the past,"[5] has strenuously argued the case for tradition to be viewed as invented fictions, explaining that "insofar as there is such a reverence to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious" because they are, in reality, "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition."[6] He points to the period between 1870 and 1914 in Europe as the period that witnessed the deliberate invention of new traditions as a means of defining and propping political power and social identity.[7]

In response to Hobsbawm, the Catholic theologian Terrence Tilley counters that "traditions can be made and remade without being deliberately invented" because "they adapt with integrity to changing circumstances."[8] He points out that traditions mutate as they are transmitted, explaining that the "environments in which traditional beliefs, practices, and attitudes are transmitted and the items from other traditions that their holders encounter change their significance."[9] He explains that if traditions are "perfectly rigid, they either die as contexts change because that elite can no longer maintain the identity of the tradition" or the tradition becomes the possession of an esoteric elite who "keep the old traditions alive" as a compartmentalized practice or set of practices and beliefs."[10]

Moving from theorizing to practical realities, it should come as no surprise that many first-generation Asian Americans insist that tradition is stable and fixed, timeless and unchanging, invariant and immutable, anchoring their identity in a turbulent new world of contemporary US society. For them, tradition represents an authoritative and prescriptive precedent, a treasured family heirloom that they brought with them from their homelands in Asia to their adopted land of the United States, which they hope to transmit lock, stock, and barrel from their generation to the next. Woe betide anyone who dares to tinker with tradition or challenge its ontological certitude! The first wave of Asian American Catholic liturgical inculturation took for granted such idealized and essentialized

5. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

6. Ibid., 2.

7. Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1879–1914," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 263–307.

8. Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 41.

9. Ibid., 30.

10. Ibid., 36.

biological and cultural notions of what constituted identities of "Asian," "Vietnamese," "Chinese," "Korean," "Filipino," and so on. Their underlying theology of liturgical inculturation assumed a romanticized and essentialized understanding of tradition that defines culture and identity—that is, identity definitions and cultural norms that are stable, normative, homogeneous, and unchanging. The problem with this approach is its nostalgic tendency to essentialize and reify, as well as romanticize and idealize, tradition, failing to recognize its oppressive elements (e.g., patriarchy, misogyny, etc.). Going back to my first example above, we see that first-generation Chinese Americans perceive ancestor veneration as an important and definitive element of being Chinese and incorporate this ritual into an inculturated Lunar New Year liturgical celebration. Yet my friend rightly asks whether an uncritical use of ancestor veneration ignores underlying problems with this ritual. For example, ancestor veneration emphasizes maleness and male succession, marginalizing the position and roles of women, traditionally excluded in the patrilineal and patriarchal orientation of ancestor veneration. It also a ritual reminder of submission and obedience to elders in a world where younger Asian Americans, especially women, bi/multiracial people, adoptees, and LGBTs, are seeking the freedom to define and construct new identities that are meaningful for themselves.

No tradition is truly pure and innocent, devoid of shortcomings. The failure to engage in critical reflections on its challenges and shortcomings is often justified by the need to ensure the uninterrupted intergenerational transmission of cultural traditions and values in the face of the difficult challenges of dislocation, discrimination, and assimilation in the United States. This means that inculturated Asian American liturgies often ignore differences and particularities, focusing instead on harmony and unity as overarching Asian values. What is being overlooked here is the reality that culture and identity constructs are dynamic and affected by the ambiguities that emerge as a result of the blurring and confusion of boundaries caused by generational differences, adoptees, and bi/multiracial family frameworks.

For example, the Japanese American biblical scholar Frank Yamada questions the uncritical privileging of essentialized notions of what constitutes "Asian American," arguing that culture and identity constructions are shaped by forces of hybridity and heterogeneity. Specifically, he asserts that cultural identity for third and later generations of US-born Asian Americans is messy, complicated, and conflicting. He contends that one "must move beyond idealized and essentialist notions of culture" and a tendency to utilize the immigrant experience of marginality and liminality as normative of all Asian Americans to "emphasize particularity, contradiction, and complexity in order to counter

oversimplified personifications of what constitutes Asian American."[11] In particular, Yamada insists that themes of marginality and liminality are based upon stable, essentialized notions of what it means to be Asian and American.[12] As a result, he stresses hybridity and heterogeneity over essentialism, with the later generations breaking down fixed boundaries and "pure" notions of culture that earlier generations have uncritically assumed.[13]

Similarly, Henry Morisada Rietz and Mary Foskett have criticized the essentialism of the category "Asian American" in their theological reflections, especially with regard to the life experiences of Asian Americans who fall outside conventionally defined categories, challenging the uncritical privileging of certain essentialist traits that purport to define the Asian American identity. Rietz focuses on himself as a biracial *hapa-haole* who claims both German and Japanese ancestries, acknowledging that his mixed heritage prevents him from claiming one identity completely so that he is the "other" to both Asian Americans and white Americans. He asserts that his *hapa* identity reveals the limitations of essentialism and homogeneity in Asian American identity constructions that are usually based on boundaries defined by the commonalities of the members while at the same time accentuating their differences from biracial and multiracial Asian Americans, who do not fit neatly into traditional constructions of Asian American identities. In doing so, Rietz unmasks the painful tension between *inherited* (i.e., biological or "blood") reproduction and *constructed* reproduction. He challenges the privileged position of the former by articulating the controversial view that the Asian American identities could be constructed without reference to inherited biological ("blood") reproduction. As a solution, he proposes a new model of identity construction that is modeled on *differences* or *particularity* as the basis for community and communication, emphasizing that Asian American identities are not transmitted by inheritance but shaped by the dynamic process of identity-construction politics.[14]

11. See Frank M. Yamada, "Constructing Hybridity and Heterogeneity: Asian American Biblical Interpretation from a Third-Generation Perspective," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 166.

12. Ibid., 169

13. Ibid., 172–73.

14. Henry Morisada Rietz, "My Father Has No Children: Reflections on a *Hapa* Identity toward a Hermeneutic of Particularity," *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 145–57; see also "Living Past: A Hapa Identifying with the Exodus, the Exile, and the Internment," in Foskett and Kuan, *Ways of Being*, 192–203.

As an ethnic Chinese who was adopted by a white American family, Mary Foskett explores the plight of Asian American adoptees of white American families, an in-between group that has historically been ignored in many Asian American communities. According to Foskett, Asian American adoptees have to contend not only with the ambiguity and confusion of defining their identity but also with their invisibility and double marginalization within the wider Asian American communities. She rejects the essentialism of Asian American cultural traditions and norms within many Asian American communities and in doing so confronts the tension between biological reproductions vis-à-vis cultural reproductions in the construction of Asian American communities. In her rereading of Exodus 2:1-22 she offers a new vision of Moses' lost identity as replaced by a newly gained one through his adoption by the Egyptian princess, as well as through the ensuing bicultural socialization that resulted in his having to confront painful choices. By interpreting Moses' story as an adoptee's struggle to come to terms with his own identity and purpose in life, Foskett challenges Asian Americans to overcome their indifference toward the plight of Asian American adoptees in the United States and to discover ways of defining Asian American identity without essentializing cultural and bloodline identities.[15]

In other words, increasing hybridity and heterogeneity in Asian America is exemplified not only by the 1.5-generation and US-born children of first-generation Asian immigrants (see Frank Yamada), but also by Asian Americans who marry outside their group and end up with bi/multiracial identities (as discussed by Henry Morisada Rietz) and by Asian adoptees of white American families (see Mary Foskett). Indeed, neither Rietz nor Foskett fit neatly into essentialized and clearly demarcated, biologically defined racial and ethnic categories of Asian Americans. Rietz's writings reveal that he considers himself both Asian and white American. Does that make him any less Asian or white American?

II. From Tradition-Maintenance to Traditioning

How do Asian American liturgies go beyond essentialist and normative views of Asian cultural traditions and heritage to include the concerns, hopes, and dreams of the 1.5-generation and US-born children of first-generation

15. Mary Foskett, "The Accidents of Being and the Politics of Identity: Biblical Images of Adoption and Asian Adoptees in America," *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 135–44; see also his "Obscured Beginnings: Lessons from the Study of Christian Origins," in Foskett and Kuan, *Ways of Being*, 178–91.

Asian immigrants, bi/multiracial Asian Americans, and Asian adoptees? This question points to the difficult task of identifying content, as well as the processes of transmission and reception. In response, I would like to propose that contemporary Asian American liturgies move away from *tradition-maintenance*, that is, clinging to ethnic-bound traditions, customs, and theological positions from the "Old World" at all costs, in favor of what I would call *traditioning*, which I define as the largely unconscious and ongoing process of shaping, constructing, and negotiating new traditions, practices, and theological positions that seek to address the issues and questions confronting all Asian Americans, be they immigrant, US-born, bi/multiracial, or adopted. In some sense, tradition-maintenance is akin to a classical symphony in that both emphasize the ideals of overarching group harmony and unity, subsuming differences. By contrast, I see traditioning as comparable to the remix culture that is transforming the contemporary music scene: both traditioning and remixing challenge, contest, deconstruct, and reenvision essentialized categories, theological or musical, in new keys and forms. As the contemporary musical scene shifts away from the classical symphony to remixing, so too Asian American liturgies are shifting away from tradition-maintenance of age-old cultural ideals to creative traditioning, giving birth to new insights into worship and celebration that address contemporary challenges and concerns.

From a theological perspective the process of traditioning is not something altogether new. Although the Catholic theologian Yves Congar did not use the term, he nevertheless argued against an essentialist understanding of tradition in favor of a dynamic perspective of tradition as something that is passed on, stating that "tradition is not primarily to be defined by a particular material object, but by the act of transmission, and its content is simply *id quod traditum est, id quod traditur* [that which is handed on or handed over]."[16] Similarly, although the late Jaroslav Pelikan did not use the terms *tradition-maintenance* and *traditioning*, he captures succinctly the sense of these two terms when he writes, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."[17] In a subsequent interview with Joseph Carey that appeared in *U.S. News & World Report*, Pelikan articulated a profound understanding of traditioning:

16. Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 296.

17. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

> Tradition is not fixed for all time. . . . It is the perpetuation of *a changing, developing identity*. Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives *in conversation with the past*, while *remembering where we are* and *when we are* and that *it is we who have to decide*. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.[18]

Pelikan's insights have far-reaching consequences for Asian American Catholics who are endeavoring to make sense of their cultural and ethnic traditions in the contemporary United States. Although he did not use the specific phrase, it is clear from the extended quotation that the verb "traditioning" best describes what Pelikan had in mind when he spoke about a tradition that "lives *in conversation with the past*, while *remembering where we are* and *when we are* and that *it is we who have to decide*." In other words, Pelikan unequivocally eschewed the static traditionalism that clings tenaciously to past precedents without any regard for the contemporary context and its specific needs, in favor of an active and dynamic traditioning that pays attention to contemporary social locations and challenges.

More recently, theologians such as Dale Irvin,[19] Simon Chan,[20] Carmen Nanko-Fernandéz,[21] Orlando Espín,[22] and Gary Riebe-Estrella[23] have reflected on the implications of traditioning in their theological writings. Within contemporary Asian theology, the Singaporean Chinese theologian Simon

18. Joseph Carey, "Christianity as an Enfolding Circle," *U.S. News & World Report* 106/25 (26 June 1989): 57, emphasis added.

19. Dale Irvin, *Christian Histories, Christian Traditioning: Rendering Accounts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

20. Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

21. Carmen Nanko-Fernandéz, "Traditioning latinamente: A Theological Reflection on la lengue cotidiana" (unpublished); "Language, Community and Identity," in *Handbook of Latino/a Theologies*, ed. Edwin Aponte and Miguel de la Torre (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 265–75; and "Handing on Faith en su propia lengua," in *Theologizing en Espanglish: Context, Community, and Ministry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 61–76.

22. Orlando O. Espín, "Traditioning: Culture, Daily Life and Popular Religion, and Their Impact on Christian Tradition," in *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*, ed. Orlando O. Espín and Gary Macy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 1–22. Espín is currently working on a full-length monograph exploring this issue.

23. Gary Riebe-Estrella, "Tradition as Conversation," in *Futuring Our Past*, ed. Espín and Macy, 141–56.

Chan observes that traditioning ensures that the Pentecostal faith tradition is handed down to a new generation "in a way that *takes account of the new context of a new generation of faithful.*"[24] For Chan, tradition, "far from confining a community to a static existence," is "the bearer of real change."[25]

Dale Irvin has articulated his understanding of traditioning as an antithesis to tradition as conformism with its "illusion of timeless and unchanging identity,"[26] citing Walter Benjamin's essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) with approval: "In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it."[27] In particular, Irvin speaks of traditioning as an "ongoing, constructive activity" that is "found wherever people in community remember a past and claim it as their own," as well as "a practice that makes present the historical past as memory and identity."[28] He views traditioning not in terms of seeking "to render an account of the past that is bound to its evidence," but rather as seeking "to render a meaningful account of the relationship of the past to the present."[29] For him, traditioning is "a renewing practice of faith"[30] that is not merely the repetition of the past, for mere repetition often indicates a loss of vitality and a failure of transmission.[31] In support of the foregoing, he cites Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who insisted that "*each generation has to act differently precisely in order to represent the same thing.*"[32] More importantly, Irvin insists that traditioning goes beyond simply "an act of passing on the authentic memory and identity of the past in a new historical situation" to encompass "an act of betrayal and treason":

> In every act of authentic traditioning there remains something of an act of treason, otherwise it would not be an authentic act of handing over, of change. Without a bit of treason performed in the act of handing over, the tradition remains inseparably bound to the world in which it was formed, hence not

24. Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 20, emphasis added.

25. Ibid., 17.

26. Irvin, *Christian Histories*, 42.

27. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255, cited in Irvin, *Christian Histories*, 42.

28. Irvin, *Christian Histories*, 29.

29. Ibid., 35.

30. Ibid., 124.

31. Ibid., 28.

32. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future; or, The Modern Mind Outrun* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 130 (emphasis in the original), cited in Irvin, *Christian Histories*, 28.

> only irrelevant but also incomprehensible. Acts of treason and betrayal, on the other hand, are not unambiguous signs of the rejection of a tradition, but moments of contending for its authenticity. Acts of treason presuppose a traitor's decision to contend for the authenticity, meaning, or purpose of the tradition, either to reform it and restore it, or to displace it with another which the traitor at least perceives to be better.[33]

Moreover, Irvin sees the goal of traditioning as ensuring that faith remains relevant, because "a truly irrelevant faith will soon die of its own irrelevance, and the identity of the community will pass into the arena of being a historical relic or part of the archive."[34] What is at stake for Irvin is the fact that the failure of traditioning results in alienation from tradition—"tradition no longer belonging to us but being alien to us, set over against us, mediating a past which is not our own."

> They [i.e., the times we find ourselves more distanced, more alienated from the past that "is not our own"] are the moments when we hear ourselves or others saying that the traditional language no longer speaks to us, that the tradition appears to be empty of meaning or vitality for us. In these situations the past becomes other for us, heteronomous in a manner that closes off our relationship to it, and the dead become just that – merely the dead, no longer our saints or ancestors or companions. Traditions become artifacts relegated to museums where their vitality is lost even if their remains continue to be studied.[35]

What Irvin has described surely applies to my friend and his discomfiture with the ancestor veneration ritual in the Lunar New Year liturgy and to the increasing number of US-born Vietnamese who are no longer identifying with either their elders' Vietnamese national parishes or inculturated Vietnamese liturgies, which have more in common with pre-1975 Vietnam than contemporary United States society.

Many Latino/a theologians view traditioning as an important aspect of Latino/a theology that enables theology to be rooted in *lo cotidiano*, that is, "the daily."[36] For example, in the context of Latino/a pastoral ministry, Carmen Nanko-Fernandéz observes that traditioning is an ongoing process that not

33. Irvin, *Christian Histories*, 41.

34. Ibid., 41.

35. Ibid., 42.

36. The issue of traditioning is discussed at length in *Futuring Our Past*, ed. Espín and Macy.

only occurs "in the daily and is integral to the process of constructing identity, personally and collectively," but also requires "a habit of learning how to read across contexts in order to avoid absolutizing or universalizing the particular."[37] Orlando Espín sees traditioning as a cultural, human activity that facilitates "the transmission of Christianity across generations and across cultural boundaries" within daily human life.[38] Noting that "the ordinary traditioners of Christianity are ordinary Christians," he asserts that "*whatever is traditioned (the tradition or contents of Christianity) is shaped, selected, presented, and received according to the social position, gender, cultural, and so forth, of those who ordinarily transmit Christianity as well as of those who ordinarily listen to the gospel and accept it across generations and across cultural boundaries.*"[39]

In a similar vein, Gary Riebe-Estrella focuses on the process of traditioning as constitutive of tradition itself, such that "there is a mutual interaction between what is handed on and the handing on, in such a way that each influences the other."[40] He suggests that "the very reification of tradition as consisting of some *thing* that is handed on is based on an inappropriate metaphor or at least on one that obscures the interrelationship of content and process and, therefore, of the nature of tradition itself."[41] He makes the case for traditioning as the *contextualization* of tradition in the world and life experiences of the recipients. As far as he is concerned, "what is handed on is never an *already out there now* thing; rather, it is always human meaning as constructed within the specific and unique context of the human knower and his or her community."[42]

III. Liturgical Traditioning

From the foregoing discussion, we are able to see that the process of traditioning is based upon the premise that tradition is not fixed and static but rather dynamic, always changing, and deeply contextual. More importantly, liturgical traditioning questions simplistic and uncritical reproductions of the past, rejecting all attempts at fossilizing or archaizing the present in a state of stasis, as well as challenging any notion that liturgical inculturation seeks to root liturgy within a cultural framework that is ahistorical, atemporal, and independent of

37. Nanko-Fernandéz, "Traditioning latinamente."

38. Orlando O. Espín, "Traditioning," 2.

39. Ibid., 15, emphasis in the original.

40. Gary Riebe-Estrella, "Tradition as Conversation," 141.

41. Ibid., 141.

42. Ibid., 144.

sociocultural changes. Instead, traditioning entails critical reflections about a community's present liturgical worship. By going beyond mere replication of historical precedents, liturgical traditioning pursues strategic, dynamic, creative, and contextualized interpretations that seek to retell, reinterpret, and add nuance to liturgical worship within new layers of meaningfulness that address the concerns of the present context. It mediates between historical precedents and current concerns, thereby endeavoring to create a coherent liturgical worship that unites the rich legacy of tradition with contemporary needs and challenges.

In other words, liturgical traditioning is dynamic and flexible. It is open to life realities, as well as to healthy renewal and change that are integral to a community's social location and context, while remaining "in conversation with the past." Rather than looking for a single normative and essentialistic meaning in cultural traditions and heritage, liturgical traditioning seeks hybridized and multilayered meaningfulness, embodying and integrating both difference and consensus, past and present, precedent and innovation, authority and creativity, thereby facilitating the articulation of new meanings for the present and future. As a result, liturgical worship is constantly being renegotiated and renewed for all Asian American Catholics, immigrant and American born, bi/multiracial and adoptee.

I see liturgical traditioning as enabling Asian American liturgies to mediate contradictions that arise from the multiple subjectivities that Asian Americans constantly negotiate in their daily lives as they grapple with fragmented selves and mixed allegiances to many places, spaces, persons, and groups, all of which generate intersecting subjectivities, hybridities, and heterogeneous identifications. In addition, traditioning provides the impetus for Asian American liturgies to be dynamic, situational, and strategic, differentiating between elements as well as privileging the faith development of a new generation of faithful.

More importantly, traditioning reminds us that traditions do evolve and change in response to new contexts. Returning to the two examples of liturgical inculturation that were raised in the beginning of this essay, my friend is certainly justified in asking why one should romanticize the role of ancestors in Chinese American culture and religiosity or essentialize it without considering the fact that future generations of US-born Chinese Americans, bi/multiracial Chinese Americans, Chinese adoptees, and so forth, will have vastly different takes on ancestor veneration, affecting ancestor veneration in the Chinese New Year Eucharist. While my friend and I agree on the special significance of the Lunar New Year for Chinese Americans and that having a liturgical celebration of this important feast is similar to celebrating Thanks-

giving Day with a Eucharist in the United States, perhaps the highlight of this feast day could be something other than ancestor veneration, with its baggage of Confucian patriarchy, misogyny, patrilineal focus, and so on. Perhaps other aspects of the Lunar New Year celebration—for example, forgiveness of past transgressions at the start of the New Year, generosity and kindness toward others—could be emphasized. Similarly, the Vietnamese American Catholic community would have to acknowledge the fact that the day will come when Vietnamese American Catholic churches will have to celebrate their liturgies in English, compose new hymns in English, create new rituals, and in general respond to the needs of the 1.5-generation and US-born Vietnamese American Catholics, many of whom will be bi/multiracial and probably not conversant in the Vietnamese language.

Hence, liturgical traditioning enables contemporary Asian American liturgies to transcend the biological and cultural essentialism of early Asian American attempts at liturgical inculturation to address the concerns and aspirations of immigrant and US-born, bi/multiracial and adoptee Asian Americans. Through the process of traditioning, Asian American liturgies are able to engage in, nuance, and redefine theologies in a creative, strategic, flexible, and innovative manner to empower Asian Americans in their effective engagement with the joys and pathos of the postmodern conditions of their daily living, helping them to engage the world around them where they are, at worst, shunned or rendered invisible for being out of line with the majority or, at best, reluctantly tolerated for being different.