

THEOLOGY AND CULTURE FROM A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE: TRADITIONS IN CONFLICT

Sixto J. Garcia (St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary) presented a paper in the Comparative Theology and Global Catholicism Workshop on the historical and contemporary situations of the Church in three Caribbean countries: the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Cuba. The purpose of the presentation was to lift up the issues of theology and culture in each of these settings and to reflect on the ecclesiological consequences growing out of the conflicts that have marked these places.

The histories of the Dominican Republic and Haiti were considered in tandem, since they not only share the island of Hispaniola geographically, but also political and ecclesiastical history. Among the major points developed by Garcia regarding these churches were their colonial histories, the often chaotic and frequently despotic histories since independence, and the intrusion of the United States into the affairs of both countries.

The history of the Church is played out within the crucible of this turbulent history. Santo Domingo is the oldest diocese in the Western hemisphere, erected in 1511. The first diocese established in Haiti, on the other hand, was as late as 1861. Both churches have historically been conservative, in the thrall of the ruling powers in their respective countries. Only more recently have there been significant developments: a liberationist movement in Haiti, exemplified in Jean-Claude Aristide; and a concern for theologizing on popular religiosity and the inculturation of faith in the Dominican Republic. At the same time, powerful forces work against these movements in both countries.

Cuban history moves in a different direction. The devotion to Our Lady of Charity provided a focus not found in many other Caribbean countries. The experience of the 1959 revolution has marked recent history, an experience that began with the Church supporting the revolution followed by a growing hostility between the Church and the avowed atheistic government. The 1986 National Ecclesial Encounter (ENEC) has set the agenda for the future. Its vision of a "church without frontiers," open to dialogue with all forms of faith-expressions and political structures, will be an important compass for guiding the Cuban Church into the immediate future.

The discussion following the paper tried to step back from the rich and complex detail of the history of these three churches to gain perspective. The interaction of politics and religion in each setting was noted, and how the

different responses have developed. The continuing power of voodoo in Haiti, especially when manipulated as a political tool against the Church, complicates the Church's interaction with the culture there in ways that other forms of popular practice (such as *santería* in Cuba) do not. The roles of international religious orders in these settings was also noted. All in all, these three countries with their local churches provided intriguing examples of the interaction of theology and culture instructive for global Catholicism.

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