

## SEXUAL ETHICS: WOMEN IN THE LATINO COMMUNITY

The workshop served as a session for listening to voices not often heard formally by those engaged in the field of sexual ethics. Three women from the San Antonio community were invited by the CTSA to reflect on their own experience, the values of the Latino community, and the Church's tradition in sexual ethics. Nickie Valdez, one of the founders of Dignity, San Antonio, Gabriela Sanchez, of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, and Magdalena Alvarado, a member of the board of directors of the San Antonio Lesbian and Gay Assembly, made brief presentations.

Nickie Valdez discussed the role of the Church in her own life, remarking that she felt a need for spirituality and religious connection, especially in her own "coming out." She stressed the distinctive spirituality of the lesbian and gay community and the community's determination to maintain its presence. "We're not going to go away," she concluded.

Gabriela Sanchez began by saying that it was impossible to divide herself into her different identities: woman, Latina, working-class, lesbian. As a light-skinned Latina, and one who came from a two-parent family, she felt herself to be somewhat of an exception to the Latino experiences of racism and poverty. When it came to the Church's position on justice issues, she observed that the Church focused on "safe" issues, like refugees, and was not sufficiently attentive to women's issues. She said that Latina women face a difficult situation, as the roles of virgin and prostitute have been the only real choices offered. She argued that women must "take back" the cultural icons of the community, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe. Sanchez turned to the overwhelming military presence in San Antonio (there are five military bases) and maintained that while the Archbishop speaks out frequently against the violence of abortion, he is silent on other forms of violence, including militarism. In addition, she said, sexuality is in many ways a taboo subject among the religious orders in San Antonio, who avoid getting involved in AIDS, abortion, and gay and lesbian issues.

Magdalena Alvarado began by noting that her family's "coat of arms" was to question authority and that it was important to tell the true history of her people: a conquest of people in the name of God. She described herself as spiritual yet not close to the Church. Her own work in social services is a mission and she is very involved in social justice movements. Like Sanchez, Alvarado held that the Archbishop prays for the military installations, especially

for their economic impact, but does not make connections between the violence in the community and the military. She concluded by noting the range of views on the panel but the commonality of concern for justice.

There were a number of points raised in the ensuing discussion. Two participants raised the issue of the bishops' "prophetic role" in relation to the Church and the military. The high suicide rate, especially among gay men, and the despair of the community were related to the failure of the Church to instill a sense of self-worth in all its members. One participant related the crisis in San Antonio to the pedophilia crisis and another raised the issue of widespread illness in the community, especially among children. Another asked about the connection between lesbians and gays and the poor and the difficulty of avoiding "single-issue" politics.

In conclusion, the convenor commented that the retreat on the part of doctoral students and clergy from issues of sexual ethics showed how sexual ethics itself is being redefined: like the slogan "the personal is the political," social and sexual ethics are increasingly interconnected.

SUSAN A. ROSS

*Loyola University, Chicago*