

HISPANIC PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Zoila L. Diaz (Archdiocese of Miami Office of Lay Ministry) presented a paper entitled "A Theology of Ministry and Hispanic Popular Religion." Referring to the profusion of ministries in churches since the Second Vatican Council, and to the theology of ministry elaborated by such writers as Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Thomas O'Meara and David Power, she remarked that little attention has been given to traditional ministries in Hispanic communities which are associated with what is commonly called "popular religion." Nonetheless, in the past these ministries have served the life of faith and continue to exercise their influence even to this day, so that they need to be included in theological reflection on ministry and in the practical development of ministries for the future.

After summarizing the theology of ministry in her chosen authors, Diaz described the nature and role of popular ministries as they are still experienced today, based on a survey which she had conducted among small groups of men and women living in South Florida, representative of cultures from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, but already "comfortable in the dominant culture" of this country. Among the ministries discussed, she included *rezadores* or *oradoras*, *rezanderas*, *adoradores*, and *adoratrices al Santo Sacramento*, *consejeras*, and a variety of ministries associated with the popular celebrations of Holy Week. Leadership in prayer features widely in these services, but they also include elements of healing, of comfort in times of bereavement, and advice in times of trouble.

Reflecting theologically on these ministries, Diaz conjectured that they fit the descriptions of ecclesial ministry, as this is discussed in current theologies. They are done in the power of the Spirit, express personal charism, and are put to the service of the life of those who belong together in the Church of Christ. Incorporated more explicitly into the life of parishes, and given official recognition, they would undergo some modification, but retain their cultural and religious base. Because of their rooting in the faith life of the people and in their cultural traditions, they provide a valuable resource for evangelization and for the nourishment of faith, prayer, and mutual service among peoples with this background.

In the discussion that followed the paper, participants pointed to practices that arose from popular religion in European cultures but which had been absorbed into the life of the Church. These include such things as the rosary, devotion to the Sacred Heart, and various eucharistic devotions. On the one hand,

this means that the life of the Church as a community is nourished by what arose among the laity. On the other hand, the risk of their institutionalization is an absorption that undercuts lay initiative and leadership, as well as the emergence of other devotional practices and services. In integrating popular religious practices of Hispanic cultures on this continent, this comparison could provide useful avenues of reflection. At the same time, people of other origins could be prompted by the example of Hispanics to consider practices in their own communities which could be better integrated into community service.

Asked about the fine line between genuine piety and superstition, Diaz underlined the constant need of evangelization. Where there is a good preaching of the Gospel and good instruction in the faith, the people find the way in which their traditional practices become part of a living Christian faith, rather than superstitious recourse to supernatural forces. Among other things, they can explore the relation between sacramental practice and popular practice, just as in many places there has been a happy integration of Holy Week practices into the Church's liturgical observance of Holy Week. Thus some of the domestic rituals used on the occasion of a child's birth, could be well related to the practice of infant baptism, making this more fully a part of family life rather than simply a "Church" service. Similarly, traditional bereavement ministries have the potential to enhance the liturgy of bereavement and burial.

Another point discussed was the appeal to Hispanic peoples in this country of fundamentalist groups. Here it was surmised that the attraction was closely related to the sense of family fostered by such groups, as well as to their more explicit attention to cultural traditions. Since they include these reference points, the practices and ministries of popular religion could serve to incorporate them into the life of the Catholic parish, thus overcoming the barrier of alienation which Hispanics sometimes feel when the parish community ignores their language use and their cultural roots.

Diaz offered some concluding reflections on the need for reconciliation among peoples of Latin American or Caribbean origins, given the turbulent and strife-ridden background of the countries in which they claim their origins. She hoped that in their own ministerial traditions, these people would find new ways to address this pressing need.

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