

## HISPANIC/LATINO/A THEOLOGY

- Topic: The Vocation of the Latino/a Theologian:  
Speaking for Whom? Speaking to Whom?
- Convener: Gary Riebe-Estrella, Catholic Theological Union
- Presenters: Jean-Pierre Ruiz, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York  
Carmen Nanko, Trinity College, Washington, D.C.

Using the recent decision of the AAR to hold annual stand-alone meetings rather than joint meetings with SBL, Jean-Pierre Ruiz presented an historical post Vatican II overview of the mutual understandings of roles between biblical scholars and theologians. The division of labor suggested by this overview envisions the exegete as "listening to the past," while the theologian's role is to expose the meaning of a text for believers today. This division is premised on the theologian's ability to identify "centrist" biblical scholars and to use only materials that come from such middle positions. However, since all interpretation is contextual, a search for warrants for determining what positions are centrist and which bear other agenda exposes the illusory nature of such a simplistic approach to building productive conversations between biblical scholars and systematic theologians. Indeed, Ruiz stresses that little if any exploration of ground rules or grammar for interdisciplinary conversation between U.S. Hispanic theologians and biblical scholars has taken place to date. As a case in point he uses the interpretation of biblical Galilee which undergirds the classic work by Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise*. Galilee is depicted as a crossroads of cultural and religious mixing which placed Galilean Jews on the margins of the purist tendencies of the Jewish leadership located in Jerusalem. Both of these reputed characteristics of first-century Galilee, "mixing" and "marginalization," become, in Elizondo's work, the biblical foundations for understanding Jesus as the preeminent symbol of God's preference for the *mestizo* and the marginalized, and so for any peoples, such as U.S. Latinos/as who find themselves defined by these same characteristics. The work of Mary Boys, asserts Ruiz, which bears a much more nuanced understanding of the cultural and religious currents present in the Galilee of Jesus' times, exposes how a too-easy crossing of disciplinary boundaries by theologians into the world of biblical exegesis can allow for the imposition on the biblical material of an agenda, which does not find its origin in the material itself, or for the selective use of biblical material, which lends credence to an already held theological position. Ruiz suggests that new and clear rules for conversing across disciplinary borders are needed, ones which recognize the contextuality of all biblical and theological discourse.

Carmen Nanko echoed Ruiz's insistence on the contextual nature of all theological discourse. In so doing, she raised three significant factors of the contemporary U.S. Latino/a context: (1) the place of Latinos/as as the fastest

growing minority in the U.S. Catholic Church; (2) the lack of proportional presence of Latinos/as in ecclesial leadership; (3) the recent cooption of the Encuentro process into a multicultural celebration only when Latinos/as threaten to become the majority of the U.S. Catholic population.

These new contexts, Nanko insists, call for U.S. Hispanic theologians to ask new questions. As examples she raises up the work of Benjamín Valentín, Miguel Mejido, Michelle González, Raúl Gómez and Jean-Pierre Ruiz who probe such areas as whether current U.S. Latino/a theology: (1) has restricted its reflections primarily to issues internal to the institutional church; (2) has adequately captured the reality of *lo cotidiano* as beyond reflections on common religious beliefs and practices; (3) has homogenized the voices of Latina theologians; (4) has intentionally overlooked the Iberian influences present in U.S. Hispanic popular religious practices; (5) has given short shrift to the use of solid biblical exegesis.

For Nanko, these new questions of U.S. Latino/a theologians highlight a series of areas which call for deeper and more thorough theological reflection. For example, she holds that our work on *mestizaje/mulataje* could benefit from greater use of postcolonial discourse on hybridity. We should resist the temptation to "pan-Latinize" popular religious practices. We should more actively engage popular culture in our theological reflections. And lastly, we should do explicit theological reflection on the reality of our community's growing affluence and influence and the issues of class that these conditions raise.

GARY RIEBE-ESTRELLA  
Catholic Theological Union  
Chicago, Illinois

\* | \* | \*

#### ECCLESIOLOGY

- Topic: What Does the Scandal in the Church Teach Us?  
 Convener: Susan K. Wood, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota  
 Presenter: Susan K. Wood, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota  
 Respondents: Nicholas Healy, Saint John's University, Jamaica, New York  
 James Coriden, Washington Theological Union

Susan Wood developed the thesis that the present crisis in the church is a crisis of symbols in addition to being a moral crisis and a crisis in governance. In this crisis we have experienced the shattering of icons, images of the holy, in the misdeeds of some priests and bishops. The icons shattered correspond to the special graces invoked in the prayer of ordination. The offenses of priests shatter the icon of holiness of the clergy, while the abdication of responsibility in this by certain bishops shatters the icon of governance. This shattering is related first,