

SELECTED SESSIONS

CHRISTIAN JEWISH RELATIONS

Topic: U.S. Latino/a Theologies and Christian Jewish Relations
Convener: Carol Ann Martinelli, Independent Scholar, Detroit
Moderator: Elena G. Procario-Foley, Iona College
Presenters: Jean-Pierre M. Ruiz, St. John's University, New York
Carmen M. Nanko-Fernandez, Catholic Theological Union
Respondent: Samuel M. Stahl, Temple Beth-El, San Antonio

Acknowledging that U.S. Latinos/as are heirs of a complex legacy marked by an Iberian colonization of the Americas involving violent encounters between Spanish and Portuguese conquerors, the native peoples of the Americas and Africans brought to the Americas, and considering statistics compiled by the Anti-Defamation League documenting varying degrees of antisemitism in the United States among foreign-born Hispanic Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics, Jean-Pierre Ruiz proposed that if U.S. Latinos/as and Jews are to understand each other in the twenty-first century it is important for U.S. Latino/a Christians to address the complexity of the noninnocent U.S. Latino/a history which holds lessons to be revealed through remembrance which can enable building understanding. He argued that accepting a status quo of Jews and Latinos/as living "in two different Americas" as proposed by Roberto Suro is a disservice to both Jews and Latinos/as and that history should be revisited to discover models and metaphors to shape the quest for an authentic *convivencia*.

The retrieval from the Iberian legacy, he proposed, should involve the idea of *convivencia* and the history of the engagement of Christians and Jews in serious discussion with each other about matters of faith. Ruiz invited us to take another look at the disputations between Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain with a view toward moving from disputation to dialogue. Ruiz referred to Maria Rosa Menocal's *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, and noted that though the *convivencia* was not actually a relationship among equals, it was a setting for a variety of interpersonal and intergroup responses. Transitioning from disputation to dialogue occurs when rules are changed and it is no longer necessary to marshal arguments to unsettle or subvert the convictions of the other. Dialogue allows a context for *convivencia* rather than mere tolerance.

Carmen Nanko-Fernandez's paper focused upon *lo cotidiano*, daily life, which she proposed as equally necessary for exploring the relationship between Jews and

Latinos/as as a retrieval of the past. *Lo cotidiano* is the site of sin and grace, where stereotypes are countered and right relationships nurtured and is the locus of theology. She argued that in order to engage in constructive dialogue Jews and Latinos/as must unwrap and explore both popular religion and hybridity which includes *mestizaje* and other sources informing theologizing *latinamente*.

Addressing popular religion, she noted that a relational anthropology marks Hispanic understandings of Jesus and Mary and that this anthropology has Christological implications. As the community accompanies Jesus through his suffering so too does Jesus accompany the community. She pointed out that theological reflection on popular religion *latinamente*, however, lacks an awareness of failings, ambiguities and silences that subtly communicate anti-Judaism. The dangerous omissions that are at the foundation of the problem include an appropriation of a hybrid Galilean Jesus rather than of Jesus as a faithful Jew, a distancing of Jesus from his primary community, the Jewish community, and Marian appropriations that do not acknowledge that Mary, too, was a Jew.

Christian sacralization of public space (e.g. Holy Week processions), she noted, might empower one community while serving as a source of post-traumatic stress to another. Nanko-Fernandez proposed that such reconfigurations of public space must be in conversation with daily lived experiences of others, *lo cotidiano*, the point of all intersection. She proposed that through relationships the communities will be known to each other, thereby creating the potential, through Jesus, to reveal to contemporary Latinos/as the network of Judaism that shaped Jesus' social location and providing a point of contact with a dynamic living tradition. The charge for latino/a theologies is to restore Jesus' life context and to address the influences of inherited anti-Jewish biases on popular religion.

In response to both papers, Rabbi Stahl pointed out that in the Jewish memory of the Medieval Iberian experience, Jews were tolerated for their commercial skills and for the Jewish community's intellectual and philosophical achievements; and that the goal of disputation was conversion, not learning about the other to establish relationships. With regard to the Christian appropriation of public space, he noted the memories of the violence of Good Friday in Lithuania and the anti-Jewish fury that reemerged each year in conjunction with the Christian holy day, reaffirming Nanko-Fernandez's point regarding the negative impact of the sacralization of public space in certain contexts. He proposed three steps to be taken in Jewish and Latino/a Christian relations: (1) recognition of a common heritage of Jews and Latinos/as as second-class citizens with whom God has suffered; (2) appreciation that both communities are peoples of very rich cultural traditions; and (3) teaching in U.S. Latino/a theologies that Jesus was a faithful Jew and the significance of his Jewish community life.

CAROL ANN MARTINELLI
Independent Scholar
Detroit, Michigan