

HISPANIC LATINO/A THEOLOGY

- Topic: Methods in Latin@ Theologies: Re-imagining Lo Cotidiano
 Convener/
 Moderator: Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, Catholic Theological Union
 Presenters: Gilberto Cavazos-González, Catholic Theological Union
 Cecilia González-Andrieu, Loyola Marymount University
 Respondent: Sixto García, St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary

This session continued the pioneering work of Sixto García by focusing on method in Latin@ theologies in a transgenerational conversation. The presenters reconsidered trajectories of Latin@ theologies with attention to sources, silenced voices, and implications across theological disciplines, with a particular focus on aesthetics and spiritual theology.

In his paper entitled “La cotidianidad divina: a Latin@ Method for Spirituality,” Gilberto Cavazos-González, a self-described “Spiritualogian,” developed what he calls a socio-spiritual methodology. He proposed an engagement with texts, in this case “Spiritual Classics,” that draws on insights from Latin@ theological scholarship. Attending in particular to lo cotidiano, daily lived experience, he observed, “[s]piritual authors do not write, paint or practice for explicitly cultural or social reasons, however their work cannot be extraneous to the contexts from which they came. We should not be afraid to apply the social sciences to the academic discipline of Spirituality. Nor should we forget or negate the movement of the Spirit and the influence of the Gospel on these authors and audiences.” His focus on the daily also revealed the impact of these texts as dynamic, in conversation across time and space in varying media with new generations and communities. However, he also affirmed that “spiritual classics” are not merely a confirmed canon of texts. “For many Latin@s spiritual classics are the devotional practices, works of charity and la lucha that are part of our popular religiosity. Like spiritual texts, popular devotions in our cotidianidad or the sacramental and liturgical cycle of life, are meant to provoke action and modification in the life of the believer.”

Cecilia González-Andrieu, utilizing text and image, presented “Theological Aesthetics and the Recovery of Silenced Voices.” She made a case for the unique vision of Latino/a theology with its re-imagining of ways to access the theologies of marginalized peoples. She critiqued the predominance of models privileging written texts as the only sources of theology, and through her reflection on “border art,” sought to do theology in a manner that engages creative works, as sources, through theological aesthetics. Employing what she described as a “methodology of interlacing,” González-Andrieu looked at the *milagros* on both sides of the border fence in Nogales, “which effectively efface the categories of art, popular religion and folklore,” blurring distinctions between art and religion. She observes instead “an intricate interweaving, an interlacing, of artistic religiosity, religious art, myriad iconic traditions, political protest, Latin American popular religion, European Medieval Catholicism, and Amerindian symbology?”

Her focus on the “*milagros* artwork” allowed for the ambiguity of the expression as well as multivalent interpretations. She resisted temptations to impose meaning by employing effectively “[a] methodology that effaces and decenters traditional categories of engagement between art and religion, and which, owing to its debt to Latino/a ways of doing theology expresses itself in a joint, fluid and dynamic approach to a work of art, the artist and the many communities involved in its beautiful life.”

Sixto García responded to these two papers by reflecting on four defining categories integral to his own retrieval of method in Latino/a theology: passion, awe and wonder, personalism, philosophy. For García, *passion* is neither passing nor irrational; rather it entails “the integration of faith, reason, and love found at the heart of the great masters and mistresses of our tradition. . . . Love, truth, faith, and reason dancing around together in a mad, wild, Dionysian perichoretic embrace!” *Awe and wonder* serve to keep theology from becoming manipulative and arrogant by grounding the humility necessary “to listen to the voices, clamors, songs, and cries of our sisters and brothers.” *Personalism*, with its prophetic edge, calls Latino/a theologians “to somehow articulate into credible forms the promise of redemption, of healing, of liberation, hence of absolute love and immortality.” García, mindful of post-colonial critiques, draws upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas in appreciating *philosophy* as the “wisdom of love.” Ultimately, García concludes that method, in Latino/a theology “must yield pride of place to the practice of theology.” As the scholarship presented by his two conversation partners demonstrates, “method often suggests itself on the go, along the way.”

In the spirited conversation that followed these presentations, editor of the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, Jean-Pierre Ruiz observed that the freshness of these reflections reinvigorate the ongoing discussion of method and sources for theology. These papers will appear in Fall 2008 in the online *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* (<http://www.latinoteology.org/>), the peer-reviewed journal published under the auspices of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS).

CARMEN M. NANKO-FERNÁNDEZ
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois