

GLOBALIZATION AND THE CONCERNS OF WOMEN

- Topic: Theology for the Preaching:
Crossing Boundaries, Transforming Methods
- Conveners: The Presenters
- Presenters: Patricia Benson, Adrian Dominican Sisters
Kathleen McManus, University of Portland
Colleen Mary Mallon, Queen of the Holy Rosary College

This session emerged from a conference on Globalization in Lima, Peru, in October 2001. The presenters were among six North American Dominican women theologians who joined sixty-six Latin American Dominican women theologians in theological reflection on how globalization affects women in our diverse contexts.

Patricia Benson provided the background and context of the Lima *Encuentro*, detailing the process whereby our Latin American sisters oriented us into the methods and themes of theological reflection that they had systematically engaged at the regional and international level on their own continent for years. Following a North American gathering in Adrian, Michigan in 1999, a core planning team was established to conduct a process of reflection in North America that would parallel that taking place in every country in Latin America for the next two years. The Latin American theologians set the agenda: Engaging the text of Luke 13:10-17, we would embark on a multilayered analysis of the ways women are bent over by the impact of globalization in our own North American society. Ultimately, six of us would carry the results of our local reflection into the wider process in Lima at the first Inter-American Conference of Dominican Women Theologians.

The ensuing presentations engaged the experience of the Lima *encuentro* in reflection upon how the specific theological methods employed there offer transformative possibilities for how we do theology in North America.

Kathleen McManus structured her presentation around the narratives of particular Latin American women whose experiences pose a critical challenge to the assumptions and methods of North American theologians. Latin American women's theological method is wrought out of the urgency of life in the face of death; they have little patience with what they perceive as the academic elitism of even *women* theologians in North America. McManus' starting point was a dialogue in which a woman from Argentina declared that she did *feminine* theology, not *feminist* theology. *Feminina* signifies the richly positive ground of being *woman* in Latin America; *una teologia feminina* signifies the theology crafted from reflection upon this positive understanding of woman in a praxis of resistance to the death-dealing forces of globalization that "bend women over." McManus identified a mysticism of resistance at the core of Latin American women's theology, and suggested that the strength of their theologizing lies not

merely in their solidarity with the threatened and vulnerable, but in their ownership of their own vulnerability in and through their shared experience.

McManus concluded that we in North America also do theology in the face of life and death; in a globalized world, the forces that diminish life are all interconnected. Staying in the dialogue with our Latin American counterparts compels us to turn back to our own context and construct out of our own reality a theology, a mysticism of resistance consciously wrought in the face of the *threatened humanum*.

Colleen Mary Mallon's presentation revealed the ways the Lima *encuentro* offered new points of entry for engaging the question, "How, where, and with whom are we doing theology?" From the concrete location of the asymmetries experienced by Latin American women, she explored new perspectives on sources and purposes of theology towards a transformative reformulation of theology's primary task, the preaching of the Gospel.

Mallon commented on the contradictory experience wherein we North Americans felt both welcomed and held at a distance in Lima. She analyzed the underlying sense of distrust by employing a Geertzian method of juxtaposed thick description in attending to actual exchanges between participants in the Lima *encuentro*. Maintaining hope that we *can* communicate across the hazardous boundaries of difference, she sought to underline how fraught with ambiguity that crossing is. The oppressive asymmetries experienced by Latin American women reveal to us our complicity in global structures of injustice. Only by owning that complicity, Mallon asserted, can we attain the humility required to cross the boundaries of difference.

With Clifford Geertz, Mallon concludes that when diverse fields of significantive action are brought into proximity, they can "shed a certain amount of light on one another." The practice of juxtaposed thick descriptions as an effort to "elaborate a language of significantive contrast" may allow us a more comprehensive reading of the signs of the times in the discourse of Roman Catholic theology.

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