

INVITED SESSIONS

ACADEMY OF CATHOLIC HISPANIC THEOLOGIAN OF THE UNITED STATES

- Topic: ACHTUS from the Founders through Generation Ñ:
20 Years of Theological Activism
- Convener: Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, Catholic Theological Union
- Moderator: Theresa Torres, University of Missouri-Kansas City
- Presenters: Gary Riebe-Estrella, ACHTUS President-Elect 2008-2009,
Catholic Theological Union
Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Editor, *Electronic Journal of Hispanic/Latino
Theology*, 1997-2012, St. John's University, New York
Carmen Nanko-Fernández, ACHTUS President 2008-2009,
Catholic Theological Union

For twenty years, the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS) has provided a creative and critical space for the ongoing development of the distinctive theological scholarship emerging from within la comunidad Latina. By privileging a method of teología de conjunto, theologizing latinamente affirms that scholarly product, production, process, and community cannot be compartmentalized. Collaborative scholarship and collective agency are a matter of accountability, especially to the Hispanic communities that Latino/a theologians accompany. However, this scholarship, and the process from which it arises, is also a form of constructive resistance, challenging the structures in the academy and church that marginalize the fastest growing presence in the Catholic Church and the USA. This panel explored the implications and results of twenty years of scholarly activism by ACHTUS, a grassroots professional association of primarily Hispanic theologians that is now one of the largest organizations of Catholic theologians in the world.

The presentation was prepared and delivered en conjunto by three ACHTUS members who are part of the 1.5 generation of Hispanic theological scholars and leaders. The 1.5ers can be characterized as a builder generation, responsible for stabilizing the structures and growing the resources necessary for sustaining the founding vision and mission.

Gary Riebe-Estrella, ACHTUS President 1996-97, and currently President Elect, 2008-09, began by framing his remarks as "Theological Multi-Tasking." He identified three key components of the ongoing ACHTUS agenda:

theology as a systematic liberative reflection from “the people”; interaction with and within the theological academy; interaction with other disciplines. He affirmed the underlying conviction that when one is doing theology *latinamente*, one is engaged in a “radically contextual theology that is not simply a variation on a theme.” Riebe-Estrella highlighted the distinctive approach to *ressourcement* that ACHTUS has favored, mainly an emphasis on *lo cotidiano*, lived daily experience, not merely as context of theology but as living text for theology to ponder. This focus on the daily encourages attention to interdisciplinary interaction that invites engagement beyond narrowly ecclesiocentric concerns. Ultimately, a method of *teología de conjunto*, which draws upon lived daily experience as source, manifests an ethical commitment to empowerment and agency.

Jean-Pierre Ruiz, ACHTUS President 1995-96, and editor of the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* reflected on agency and empowerment as demonstrated by scholarly publication. He cited the ACHTUS-sponsored online bibliography (<http://latinobibliography.org>), a resource of more than 2500 titles, as evidence of the growing contributions of Latino/a scholars to the knowledge base of theological literature. Ruiz noted that in the spirit of *teología de conjunto*, the individual efforts of U.S. Latinos/as have converged in what he calls the “anthological imagination,” to produce co-authored and co-edited volumes that are more than collections of individual essays. These reflect sustained collaboration focused on such key concerns as the meaning and significance of tradition (*Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*, Orlando Espín and Gary Macy, editors) and feminist intercultural theology (*Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, María Pilar Aquino & María José Rosado-Nunes, editors). These collaborative efforts have not been at the expense of important monographs in a variety of theological disciplines, ranging from liturgy (Raúl Gómez Ruiz’s *Mozarabs, Hispanics and the Cross*) to *mujerista* theology (Ada María Isasi-Díaz’s *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*). Ruiz concluded with the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, a refereed print quarterly founded by Orlando Espín in 1993 and now a peer-reviewed electronic journal (<http://latinotheology.org>). This initiative insures a critically engaged scholarly presence that is faithful to the ACHTUS mission of “promoting research and critical theological reflection within the context of the U.S. Hispanic experience.”

In her section of the presentation, entitled “Theological Activism *Latinamente*: El Diablo Is In The Details,” Carmen Nanko-Fernández, ACHTUS President 2008-2009 and Treasurer 1995-2006, addressed the interrelationship between theology and strategy as necessary for the survival and thriving of minoritized scholarship. She focused on the intentionality with which infrastructure, space and alliances were developed with the goal of insuring Hispanic agency and access within both academia and the church. For a theology that engages *en conjunto* and privileges daily living, the creation and sustenance of a visible,

productive, and public presence calls for careful attention to practicalities and effective structures. She noted that as ACHTUS celebrates its 20th anniversary, the challenge is to shift from a survival mode to one that recognizes the significance of preserving institutional memory in order to continue to generate new insights.

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COMMUNICATING THE FAITH

- Topic: Communicating the Faith
Moderator: Timothy P. Muldoon, Boston College
Presenters: James Heft, Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies, University
of Southern California
Robert Imbelli, Boston College
Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Manhattan College
Timothy P. Muldoon, Boston College

This invited session took as its point of departure two books that addressed the challenges facing communities of faith today in their attempts to pass on and share faith with younger generations. James Heft edited the book *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generations of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Fordham University Press, 2006), which examines pervasive contemporary consumerist culture, features the reflections of leaders in the three religious traditions who engage young people well, and includes an original study of 12 U.S. congregations that are successful in connecting with the next generation. Robert Imbelli edited *Handing on the Faith: The Church's Mission and Challenge*, a volume from the Boston College Church in the 21st Century series (Crossroad, 2006), which focused on the challenges that Catholics face in cultivating a "depth grammar" among young people in the 21st century.

Both books underscore that there are new challenges in communicating the faith to young people in a consumerist culture. In light of the fact that adolescence has emerged as a relatively new demographic subgroup, formed in part because of changes in education, child labor laws, suburbanization, affluence and consumerism and the media, the old worries about secularism are less pressing than those about consumerism. To cite one example, it is consumerism that has yielded the false dichotomy of spirituality and religion today. Are not people who do not participate in any great religious tradition doubly vulnerable to being co-opted and, almost inevitably, themselves commodified by that pervasive cultural force that markets security, entertainment, comfort, and the illusion that they, the customers, are always right? And in an age of sophisticated marketing techniques, is there an even more important place for religious traditions like the Catholic tradition that are able to escape savvy manipulation oriented to customer satisfaction?

Both volumes address these questions in some depth. Christian Smith and Jack Miles, William Dinges and Paul Griffiths seem to agree that a pervasive characteristic of contemporary North American society is that it is "individualist" and "consumerist." The danger in such a culture is to reduce religion to but one more commodity in the cultural supermarket. The challenge this poses to handing on the Catholic Tradition, whose "deep structure" (Peter Phan's term) is ecclesial and sacramental, cannot be overestimated. But challenge is also opportunity.

Both volumes insist on the need to be rooted in the life-giving soil of Tradition to ground and sustain one's spiritual quest. To use one example, Heft's

book includes essays written by leaders of two communities—B'nai Jeshurun in New York and Taizé in France—which emphasize immersion in an experience of real prayer. It may well be that such experiences can help young people challenge the proposition that everything can be commodified.

For the Catholic tradition, the key challenge to commodification is precisely the person of Jesus, a point that Imbelli makes explicit in the introduction to his book. He follows Pope Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est*: “The beginning of Christian existence is not an ethical decision or a sublime idea, but rather the encounter . . . with a person, who gives life a new goal and, at the same time, a sure growth.”

Thus, handing on the faith requires schooling in the Christocentric and Trinitarian vision of Catholicism, as well as the rich liturgical, iconic, musical, poetic, and prose products of that vision. Further, practices are ingredient to the language of the Tradition and serve to embody it. Our task is to develop this mystagogical catechesis creatively in ways appropriate to different ages and situations. Natalia Imperatori-Lee, in particular, raised the point that communicating the faith is complicated by the continually growing diversity of the audience to which catechetical instruction is directed. This includes in a special way the fast-growing Latino/a population in the United States, which increasingly composes the present, and not merely the future, of the Catholic Church. Communication should therefore be inculturated and sensitive to popular religious devotions and other non-hierarchical ways in which diverse communities express the *sensus fidelium*.

Communicating the faith is fundamentally about inviting young people to model their lives after those whose lives have displayed the surplus of meaning that results from faith—in a word, sainthood. To learn the poetry of the saintly life depends first upon learning the vocabulary and grammar of the tradition, a new catechesis, and mystagogy.

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THEOLOGY OF JON SOBRINO

- Topic: Reflections on the Theology of Jon Sobrino
Convener: Eileen Fagan, College of Mount Saint Vincent
Moderator: Eileen Fagan, College of Mount Saint Vincent
Presenters: Kevin Burke, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
Stephen Pope, Boston College
Thomas Kelly, Creighton University
Eileen Fagan, College of Mount Saint Vincent

In the light of the “Notification” issued to Jon Sobrino in 2006 by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, a panel of speakers pays tribute to Sobrino’s theology. Our first presenter Kevin Burke opened with a provocative metaphor. “Theology is like a wild animal . . . It is dangerous, and given the propensity of human beings to domesticate and dominate what frightens them, it is also endangered.” In this context, Burke said, it is no surprise that some are alarmed by Sobrino’s writings in the area of Christology, “the lion of all dangerous theologies.”

In his presentation, Burke probed the deep logic of Sobrino’s Christology in terms of the Ignatian spiritual tradition that grounds it. Sobrino does Christology from the perspective of history’s victims and he admits that his experience among the “crucified people” of El Salvador influences his choice of a starting point for Christology. Burke argued that Sobrino’s Christology springs from the Ignatian vision. As a mystagogical Christology, Sobrino’s two-volume work begins by encountering Jesus, walking with him in the footsteps of his first disciples. The new element is the correspondence between Sobrino’s Christology and the mystagogical dynamism of the Ignatian Exercises. Both develop a spirituality of discipleship that responds to a suffering world. Therefore, theology must be salvific. It is theology as Mystagogy.

Our second presenter Stephen Pope speaks about the moral vision of Jon Sobrino. Pope stated that some critics charge that Sobrino’s prophetic mentality makes him rather lopsided, biased, and theologically imbalanced. Sobrino’s prophetic voice, Pope argued, serves an incarnational vision and an ethic of discipleship that integrates the major themes of the Christian life. Pope considered this incarnational vision and then discussed the implications of this vision for our understanding of the relation between mercy and justice in the Christian life. Pope showed how Sobrino’s agenda carried two challenges for the Christian moral life. First, Christians need to learn how to “let suffering speak” and to let it affect our understanding, imagination, reflection, and action. Second, one must live a life based on mercy. Effective mercy moves us to work for justice, especially for those unjustly oppressed. Mercy and justice are mutually reinforcing.

Our third presenter Thomas Kelly argued that the “poor” and the Church’s willingness to be evangelized “from below” is for Sobrino a historical-theological sign of the times which can serve to illumine our understandings of God, the Church, and the Kingdom. Kelly stated that Sobrino emphasized two

aspects of the life and work of Jesus Christ when doing theology. The first is Christ's incarnation, "becoming real flesh in real history," and the second is his inaugurating the Kingdom or "Reign" of God. For Sobrino, both occur in relation to the principle of mercy, specifically in how Jesus chose to bear the sin against those who were most vulnerable—the sociologically and economically poor. Mercy, as Kelly states, is a response to the suffering of others through a humanizing action that has a living urgency. It is mercy, Kelly continues that shapes and molds Jesus' entire life, mission, and fate. Thus, the church must focus outward on the "wounded one along the road." Kelly further states that one cannot speak of Sobrino's Christology and mission of the church without speaking of the Kingdom of God. We understand this Kingdom better when it is seen in relation to the poor, the addressees who reveal to us that both economic and sociological poverty are contrary to God's will.

Our final presenter Eileen Fagan addressed Sobrino's church of martyrdom. Fagan began her presentation by stated that ever since the death of Archbishop Romero, Jon Sobrino has taken as his responsibility and mission the task of keeping the memory of the martyrs alive, a mission that became stronger after the deaths of thousands killed during El Salvador's Civil War. Sobrino proposed and developed, Fagan said, principles that must guide a martyred church: (1) mercy and (2) hope. For Sobrino, the principle of mercy is activated when we do everything possible to bring the "crucified people" down from their cross. To engage in this kind of action is to work for justice. This work of justice shows forth the Samaritan church, the ideal church of Jesus. But the Samaritan church is one that lives also the principle of hope, a church that walks in the light of "God's Kingdom" or a more appropriate term "God's Reign." For Sobrino, this hope is not some abstract principle, but one that has two essential connotations: (1) God rules in his acts, and (2) God's Kingdom or God's Reign exists in order to transform a bad situation into a good one. Therefore, the Reign of God is a utopia, the longing of a people in the midst of injustice.

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