

WOMEN'S CONSULTATION ON CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Scholarship, Activism, and Theological Vocation:  
The Ecumenical Vision of Puerto Rican *Teólogas*
- Conveners: Rhodora E. Beaton, St. Catherine University  
Julia H. Brumbaugh, Regis University
- Moderator: Julia H. Brumbaugh, Regis University
- Panelists: MT Dávila, Andover Newton Theological Seminary  
Doris García Rivera, Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico

Inspired by the meeting of the CTSA in Puerto Rico, the Women's Consultation invited two Puerto Rican *teólogas* to reflect on and challenge the members of the consultation regarding the work—both academic and activist—of Puerto Rican women. MT Dávila, associate professor of Christian Ethics at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, and Doris García Rivera, biblical theologian and President of the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, presented on the situation and creative courage of Puerto Rican women.

Dr. Dávila began her presentation by articulating the double oppression of women in Puerto Rico—the oppression experienced by the women of the last colony of the world. Asking pointedly, does Puerto Rico hate women, Dávila told the story of her great grandmother, who was a slave on the island, a victim of human trafficking, who did not know the full story of her origin. Today, women's lives in Puerto Rico are marked negatively by a misogyny masquerading as religious tradition that redoubles the struggle and suffering that are endemic to the impoverished, colonial situation in Puerto Rico. Add to the problems on the island, the problem of migration, particularly of those Puerto Ricans who are educated. In response to this situation, Puerto Rican women have responded with ecumenical and interfaith collaborations to promote gender education, to educate about violence against women, to free political prisoners, and to remove the U.S. Marines from Vieques. All of these local issues are directly influenced by the fact that Puerto Rico continues to be a colony of the United States, a fact that is significant for public and social experience as well as more personal, psychological experiences. What, Dávila asks, is the effect of colonial status on a person's spirituality and intellectual awareness? One troubling part of Puerto Rican reality for women, within this context is a disturbing quasi-religious tradition of blaming women's suffering on their own permanent guilt expressed in terms of "eternal punishment." In response to this multilayer problem, resourceful and courageous Puerto Ricans have reasons to hope: women in the legislature; ecumenical coalitions heading environmental efforts; women returning after being educated on the continent to contribute and educate; women talking about race; Inter-Religious Women's Collective; and overall the witness to friendship and faith that mark many Puerto Rican women's lives.

Rev., Dr. García Rivera addressed the gathered assembly and shared that, not wanting to speak for Puerto Rican women without first listening to them and gaining permission, she had interviewed a group of women scholars and activists about their lives and concerns. Opening up the conversation with questions about women and theology, she continued by addressing the context of theology for Puerto Rican women. In their response to her questions, women shared that theology's context for them included a wide range of things from personal and family circumstances and

birth order, to the emergence of theology in relationship to when you first realized that you are going to be punished by God (a relative tells you this), to difficult national circumstances, to beaches, good food, and hospitality. Working from within this complex world, Puerto Rican women have responded in an important range of intersecting social and cultural issues, and they have sought to understand them theologically. In the 1980s, in response to a surge of violence, women's groups gathered to work on issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Puerto Rican feminist consciousness emerged under the leadership of Sandra Mangual, who was at Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico in the 1990s. More recently, collaborations have emerged around support for women pastors, anti-feminist backlashes, and environmental and justice issues. The ecumenical culture of the seminary marks the theology that emerges from it in all these contexts.

Puerto Rican *teólogas* face many future challenges, foremost among them are the need to rescue and write the stories of these women, systematizing their theological foundations. Other challenges include mentoring; developing a link between human rights and Bible; dealing with people with no church affiliation but who do have a meaningful spirituality; and helping women who have a call to seminary but face loneliness. There is, however, hope and energy for theology in Puerto Rico, which must reach beyond the written word toward the arts, music, movies, and other places where people can encounter God, to raise ecumenical voices, and to create common theological spaces with other faiths.

Following round table conversation and large group discussions, the Women's Consultation turned to the presentation of the Ann O'Hara Graff Award to Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University. Moderated by Collen Carpenter (St. Catherine University), Mary Catherine Hilkert (University of Notre Dame), Christine Firer Hinze (Fordham University), Natalia Imperatori-Lee (Manhattan College), and Julia Brumbaugh (Regis University) each took a turn sharing the gifts of Dr. Johnson, celebrating in turn her scholarship, teaching and mentorship, and her leadership in the theological community. For her part, Dr. Johnson used her time to recall the work and legacy of Ann O'Hara Graff, whose leadership in the early years of the Women's Consultation still resonates.

JULIA BRUMBAUGH  
*Regis University*  
*Denver, Colorado*

RHODORA BEATON  
*St. Catherine University*  
*St. Paul, Minnesota*