

HISPANIC/LATINO THEOLOGIES

Topic: Theological Anthropology from the Margins

Part II. Gender and Class

Convener: Roberto S. Goizueta, Loyola University Chicago

Presenters: Christine Firer Hinze, Marquette University

Carl Starkloff, S.J., Regis College, Toronto

This was the second of three joint sessions of the North American Contextual Theology Group, the Hispanic/Latino Theology Group, and the Black Catholic Theology Group. The session focused on the implications of gender and liminality for theological anthropology.

The first presenter, Christine Firer Hinze, examined the role played by gender in the process of marginalization. She defined gender as "a culture's interpretation of biologically based male and female sexual differences, and their expression in identities, roles, relations, and institutions." Arguing that gender is an essential, though not sufficient category for understanding marginality, she analyzed particular ways of understanding gender differences and the dynamics of power in human relationships. "Softer" articulations of gender differences view these as accidental, while "stronger" articulations suggest that such differences are essential and function iconically (e.g., John Paul II, Balthasar).

Hinze argued that right understanding and right praxis (in relation to margins, marginalization, and power) are necessary for a right understanding of gender differences; margins need not be exclusionary, but may function positively, to ensure identity, differentiation, and interdependence. Indeed, in an unjust social context, it is precisely on the margins that we belong if we are to speak and act in a countercultural, prophetic way. She suggested that the proper way of embracing gender differences might be through a "reflective incarnational solidarity" that is always open to excluded others and to the formation of new "we's" through affective relationships. This process would also involve movement "between" solidarities (affirming likeness and difference simultaneously).

In his presentation, Carl Starkloff asked whether the Church can foster cultural identity without creating alienated classes. Drawing on his own experience working with indigenous peoples, he suggested that margins are inherently ambiguous in that they allow for either exclusion or inclusion. Starkloff argued for a definition of "class" which would recognize power differences beyond the merely economic.

Having thus defined the notions of margins, identity, and class, Starkloff devoted the greater part of his presentation to a discussion of Victor Turner's understanding of "liminality" and the ways in which this notion might contribute to a theological anthropology from the margins. Liminality is a form of "accepted" exclusion that takes place through ritualistic, or dramatic separation, the formation of a liminal *communitas*, and an eventual reintegration, or reaggre-

gation. The pilgrimage is one example of this ritual process. As it is always in danger of degenerating into either anarchy or permanent exclusion, this process of *communitas*-formation requires great scrutiny and support. Starkloff gave examples of how that scrutiny and support are realized among the indigenous peoples with whom he has worked. Finally, he discussed the implications of this process for praxis theology, liturgical theology, social ethics, and theological anthropology.

A thoughtful and lively discussion followed the two presentations. One questioner underscored the danger that reintegration, or reaggregation of the liminal *communitas* could, in fact, lead to assimilation. Another participant questioned whether it is truly possible to apply to our own complex, highly institutionalized, modern societies those anthropological categories used to understand the experience of "face-to-face societies." Can one simply transpose categories derived from tribal societies (e.g., ritual liminality) to our own societies? Starkloff acknowledged that difficulty, noting the very significant differences between oral and literate societies (though, in the United States, the prevalence of audiovisual media represents a new form of orality). A final topic of discussion concerned the need for specifically *economic* analysis. How, for example, does the proliferation of gaming and casinos among indigenous peoples in North America impact those communities' experience of marginality? With reference to the first presentation, on gender, a question was raised concerning the appropriateness or accuracy of describing white, professional women as "marginalized." In responding to this question, Hinze agreed that class privilege changes gender marginalization in a profound way. Nevertheless, she was reluctant to simply discard the notion of marginality, suggesting that, while the white, professional woman is not marginalized in the same sense as poor African-American women or Latinas, neither is she fully integrated. This analysis elicited general agreement.

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