

NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

- Topic: How We Wrote, *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology—An Example of North American Contextual Theology*
- Convener/ Moderator: Robert Lassalle-Klein, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
- Presenters: Miguel Díaz, St. Vincent DePaul Regional Seminary
Orlando Espín, University of San Diego
Roberto Goizueta, Boston College
- Respondent: Nancy Piñeda-Madrid, Graduate Theological Union

Each presenter described how the culturally contextualized process of "teología de conjunto" shaped his or her article. Orlando Espín first explained the process and his coordination on behalf of the Center for the Study of Latino/a Catholicism at the University of San Diego. This is the first volume of a projected series aimed at "reinventing" Catholic systematic theology from a U.S. Latino/a perspective. Citing the Introduction, he noted that Latino/a theologians often refer to their style of doing theology as "teología de conjunto." It is a "process whereby a group of theologians gathers in order to do theology jointly. Hence the 'product' ultimately belongs to the community and not to any one scholar. Furthermore, 'teología de conjunto' must also spring from and reflect the reality and faith of the people among whom the theologians live and work (263)." The goal is to reflect Latino/a communal approaches to theological reflection.

Espín explained that the group met twice, for one week each time. Each draft was read and critiqued by all, then fine-tuned by the author. There were readings, consultations by telephone, and e-mail between meetings. Commenting on his own article, Espín said it became evident the group would have to address grace and sin from the perspective of "mature" Latina women. But could a man do it? Espín said a process of extensive consultation and critique made it possible. The piece was shaped by several years of dialogue with older Latina women in San Diego, and critical input from his coauthors and other theologians (some of them women).

Miguel Díaz explained that in 1995 he was a doctoral student working under Catherine LaCugna at Notre Dame. Over a meal at the annual meeting of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the U.S. he described her efforts to revisit systematic theology from the perspective of women's faith. Díaz suggested Latino/as carry out a similar project. Robert Ellsberg from Orbis was interested, and the project was born. The following year the Center received a grant from the Lilly Endowment, and a leading group of Latino/a theologians was assembled. Díaz said the group quickly realized the goal implied years of serious dialogue on methodological issues. Also, it was decided his original idea for a first volume on traditional systematic topics (God, Christ, Church, etc.) should be set aside in favor of an approach structured by key Latino/a social, cultural, ecclesial, and religious experiences. Thus, Díaz decided that, rather than writing an article on theological anthropology, he would address this concern through the popular Cuban devotion

to "La Caridad del Cobre," and the aphorism "Dime con quién andas y te diré quiéres." He distilled five theses regarding this devotion, showing how it functions as a kind of popular theological anthropology linking "theosis" to the praxis of Juan Moreno (the African slave associated with the beginnings of the devotion) in walking with marginalized and suffering persons. Thus, both the method and the content of the article by Díaz grew out of the process.

Roberto Goizueta followed with a reflection on the contribution of the process to his article outlining aspects of a theological anthropology implicit in the "fiesta." The article focused on the fifteenth birthday "quinceañera" celebrated by Latina females and their families. Its thesis was that "the fiesta, as a central element of Latino culture, reflects and expresses a theological anthropology fundamentally different from the modern notion of the autonomous subject-as-agent and that, as such, the fiesta is a principal form of cultural resistance."

He explained that the group process reminded him not to romanticize this, or any other popular religious experience. He was asked to be critical about the role of private property and personal wealth in the celebration, as well as the mechanisms for the involvement of the larger community. The expertise of the other participants manifested in their critiques helped to break down disciplinary boundaries. And Goizueta said his own tendency to generalize and oversystematize was helpfully critiqued. He concluded by describing his experience of "teología de conjunto" as "intellectually stimulating, but also very personally enriching."

The excellent response by Nancy Piñeda-Madrid argued that the essays show that U.S. Hispanic-Latino/a theology cannot accept modern epistemological presuppositions that truth, knowledge and the process of knowing can be conceptualized ahistorically and acontextually. Rather, they demonstrate that Latino/a theologians cannot accept the postmodern move (quoting Goizueta) to define truth and knowledge as "radically particular, radically contextual, radically relative, radically ambiguous, and always in flux." She says Latino/a theology "pushes through the examination of the particular to discover concrete universals...[which] ultimately imply the striving toward the truth of God." She argues that the process of "teología de conjunto" holds the theologian accountable to the "reality and faith" of the communities in which they participate, while the process of interpretation creates a bridge connecting the particular context to concrete universals. The faith and daily experience of Latino/a people thus functions as a principle of coherence for an emerging Latino/a rereading of Catholic systematic theology. She then showed how the contributions of each of the presenters "reveals the concrete universals embedded within the particularity of the faith and daily experience of Latino/as."

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