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## Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology (Book Review)

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sacrificial death of Christ, is your notion or "acceptance" not ill-founded?

N. Douglas Meeks: Have you not limited the biblical concept of justice by defining it solely in terms of economics?

Jose Miguez Bonino: What is specifically Christian about solidarity in which "every human being" is involved?

Letty M. Russell: Would it not be preferable to speak about a "biblical" rather than a "feminist" concept of authority?

Charles S. McCoy: Will you explain how "covenant theology" helps us to relate to Khomeini's Iranian Muslims?

Stephen W. Sykes: You oppose Paul's concept of authority. But did he not lovingly exercise authority in the service of the early Christian church?

Susan B. Thistlethwaite: How does the "making right" which you describe relate to the justification provided through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Christopher Morse: Does not the declaration "All authority has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18) mean that God's word of promise was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

By raising these questions, of course, I indicate how I differ with the authors of this significant publication.

*Gracias: A Latin American Journal*, Henri J.M. Nouwen (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1983. 188 pp. \$14.45 Reviewed by Nicholas V. Kroeze, Dean of Students.

Knowing the will of God for one's life, to be able to discern from a multiplicity of influences, experiences, impressions, and emotions those that direct a person to his or her true calling, true witness — this is the motivation for Dutch Catholic priest Henri Nouwen in his six-month trek through Bolivia and Peru. My first impression of this book was that it is for people with a "Spanish" bent. But what initially seems solely a walk through Latin America is truly a walk through the Christian life.

Two main emphases of the book are (1) the importance of prayer and (2) a willingness to associate with the poor. As Nouwen observes the political, economic, and social inconsistencies and conflicts experienced by those with whom he comes into contact, he is led to a deeper conviction that prayer and lowly association provide an environment from which one can correctly view and act in any culture. This is the tying together of divine perspective and true human need.

The insights of Nouwen provide carry-over into the "state-of-the-art" society which many of us enjoy. He would make the reader sensitive to the fact that his points of emphasis are meant not just as observations

nested in Latin culture but as crucial for living a truly Christian life in the midst of peace and plenty:

One of the temptations of upper-middle-class life is to create large gray areas between good and evil. Wealth takes away the sharp edges of our moral sensitivities and allows a comfortable confusion about sin and virtue. The difference between rich and poor is not that the rich sin more than the poor, but that the rich find it easier to call sin a virtue. When the poor sin, they call it sin; when they see holiness, they identify it as such. This intuitive clarity is often absent from the wealthy, and the absence easily leads to the atrophy of the moral sense. (159)

*Gracias* is wonderfully bereft of political and theological bias. Picking up a book by a Catholic priest associating with the poor in Latin America, one might immediately conclude that it would be a book on liberation theology. This is not so. Nouwen presents the basic, simple Christian faith as it might be experienced and expressed by all believers. This book is worthy of recommendation not only as a text for study, but also, by nature of its format and content, as appropriate for personal and family devotions.

*Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*. Ada Maria Isasi-Diax and Yolanda Tarango (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1988. 123 pages. \$8.95. Reviewed by Anne C. Kwantes, Ph.D., Christian Reformed missionary to the Philippines.

Openness marks the opinions which are expressed by those who were interviewed and who offered material to support the theses of the authors of this volume. Plain talk also marks the explanations and claims of Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango in *Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church*. In their prologue, the authors set the stage with their opening statement, "First and foremost we are activists—Hispanic Women committed to the struggle for justice and peace."

Who are the Hispanic Women of this book, and what is their liberation theology? Hispanic Women (HW) are here represented by a group of women who met for the purpose of discussing and compiling the infor-

mation on which this book is based. They belong to a culture within a culture. Living in the USA, they have their ethnic roots in Amerindian, African, and Spanish cultures and histories; the three main Hispanic groups in the USA are Cubans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans (70). It is the deeply ingrained influence of Spanish culture in their lives which binds these women together. These *mestizas* all share a Hispanic understanding of basic issues and the meaning of life (5). And since Spanish culture of the 16th century centered on Christianity and the church, HW have a common bond of religiosity, even if that religiosity is expressed in various manners.

The liberation theology of HW is viewed as necessary due to sexism and prejudice, to lack of recognition by Hispanic Men and their oppression of HW, and to the fact that they have an important contribution to make (3). HW believe that they need to be freed from the oppression of society and culture. They view the church as a patriarchal hierarchy, which often relegates women to a secondary position. HW assert that they, as well as men, were created in the *image dei*, the image of God, and that they need to be liberated from prejudice and oppression. Their struggle focuses on the survival of not only themselves and their children, but also their Hispanic culture, which becomes the vehicle of transmitting their religious convictions.

Hispanic Women Liberation Theology (HWLT) is, therefore, based on the life experience of HW. The authority of HWLT is this experience, rather than the Bible, or Christian tradition (xiv). This personal experience includes feelings and attitudes, some of which arose out of African traditions brought to Latin America by slaves, and out of Amerindian traditions from early Amerindian cultures (64-66). Thus the source of HWLT is formed from a combination of the Bible and the HW's struggle for personal and political liberation (64). When the question is asked whether this fusion of different beliefs can still be called Christian, the authors answer in the affirmative (69), one reason being that it conforms to the core of the gospel message of justice and love.

HWLT is defined as a *praxis* (1), a combination of action and reflection. Rather than being built on the Bible or the church, it is built on action. Actions in the lives of HW determine the theology, and the women themselves, as participants, are viewed as theologians. These women in community, as they struggle for survival of self, family, and community, are the real theologians, in the action aspect of their theology. Reflection, the second element of this theology, operates

*Forty Acres and a Goat: A Memoir*, by Will D. Campbell. (San Francisco: Perennial Library, Harper and Row) 1988. \$8.95. Reviewed by James C. Schaap, Associate Professor of English.

Will D. Campbell's reminiscence of his own participation in the early years of the civil rights struggle in the South is vividly told in his memoir *Forty Acres and a Goat*. However, what one might expect to be a story of winners turns out not so much an ode to the glorious cause but an honest portrayal of both the heroics of the movement, as well as its petty infighting and, oddly enough, its sad demise.

Even though we think of the civil rights movement as making significant gains for the poor and disenfranchised Southern Blacks, Campbell's story is not one of triumph, but of long, hard battles and a slow and quite painful death.

simultaneously. The women reflect, assisted by those who are academically trained (referred to as "theological technicians"). Together they give leadership, as in writing this book. This praxis of action and reflection has both created the movement of HWLT, and continues to give hope and vision (11) for the HWLT.

Isasi-Diaz and Tarango saw their goal for this book to be to present the views and thought of HW, rather than an analysis. They were "theological technicians," enabling real theologians (HW) to express their thought. A major part of this slim volume, therefore, deals with a nearly verbatim account of a group of HW regarding their understanding of God (chapter 2) and their ethical understanding (chapter 4). The authors place the women's views in focus with a brief statement of recurring themes in each case.

In order to achieve credibility and accuracy, each of the book's five chapters is followed by a brief synopsis in Spanish. The authors state that they wish to be accountable to those they quote, that something is bound to be lost in translation; also, the Spanish was inserted so that all HW, including those whose command of English is limited, may understand the book fully and appreciate its validity.

HWLT is a far cry from Reformed theology. But let this not deter Reformed Christians from reading the book. This reviewer, living in a Third World country which was a Spanish colony for over three centuries, recognizes much of the world-and-life view of HW in America as similar to that in the lives of women in the Philippines. While we may "do theology" very differently from the proponents of HWLT, let us face the fact that this is life. The material presented in this book authentically reflects one strand of present-day American culture. We must attempt to understand this slice of American culture if we desire to face and make an impact on HW. The book is written well, developed logically, and expresses clearly the life and thought of HWLT to its readers.

Campbell, who may be best known as the model for the Reverend Will B. Dunn in Doug Marlette's cartoon strip *Kudzu*, is a deeply serious Christian, although he might appear enigmatic to Christian readers whose eyes have been trained by lenses ground in a Calvinist worldview. He considers himself in the finest tradition of anabaptistic Christianity: "troublemaker, rebel, the left wing of the reformation. That's what we once were." That stance nearly always puts him at odds with whatever institutions tradition has built—business, government, education, or religion. He distrusts institutions because he sees them as soul-sucking vampires created to redirect Christians from the divine path