

LET ME BEGIN BY THANKING THE ORGANIZERS OF THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC COUNCIL FOR INVITING ME TO COME THIS EVENING AND SHARE WITH YOU FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A U.S.-BORN LATINA CATHOLIC.

MOST OF THE TIME I'M PROUD TO BE A NORTH AMERICAN AND A LATINA, WITHOUT BEING CHALLENGED THAT THESE ARE SOMEHOW MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. I LOVE NEW YORK. I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE CITY PROJECTS OF QUEENS, WITH ROOTS IN LATIN AMERICA. MY PARENTS ARE FROM ECUADOR, MY FATHER IS PANISH/ECUADORIAN, MY MOTHER IS INDIAN,/ECUADORIAN AND I LOVED SPENDING MY SUMMERS IN LATIN AMERICA AND I LOVED ALSO BEING RAISED IN NEW YORK. ALL THOSE EXPERIENCES HELPED FORM ME INTO WHAT WE CALL A BRIDGE. LOTS OF PEOPLE SAY BRIDGES ARE WONDERFUL BUT THE REALITY IS THAT BRIDGES GET WALKED ON FROM BOTH SIDES.

I'M ALSO GRATEFUL THAT I WAS A CHILD OF THE 1960s AND THAT I CAME INTO MY YOUNG ADULTHOOD AT THE UNFOLDING OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. AS YOU KNOW, PROBABLY YOU MORE THAN I, THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL CALLED ON THE CHURCH TO MAKE THE CONCERNS OF THE PEOPLE THE CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH. AND I, AND WE, WHO ARE CHURCH ARE CALLED TO ENTER A DIALOGUE THAT ADDRESSES THE HOPES AND THE STRUGGLES AND THE PAINS AND THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE.

I WAS VERY FORTUNATE IN THAT I REALLY FEEL LIKE I CAN SAY I'M A DAUGHTER OF THE CHURCH. I WAS A PROJECT KID BUT I WAS FORMED AND EDUCATED AND DIRECTED BY THE PRIESTS AND THE SISTERS AND THE LAY PEOPLE WHO HAD MADE A COMMITMENT TO THE POOR. MY CHURCH WAS A QUONSET HUT AND NOT MUCH OF A BUILDING BUT INSIDE WE HAD ALL, AS BETH JOHNSON CALLS IT, THE FRIENDS AND PROPHETS OF GOD. IT WAS VERY MEANINGFUL TO HAVE OUR WORKER PRIESTS AND OUR SISTERS WHO ACTUALLY NEVER LEFT US.

BUT I'M NOT HERE TO TALK ABOUT MYSELF, I'M HERE TO SPEAK ABOUT THE U.S. CATHOLIC LATINO AND I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE YOU A PICTURE. LATINO CATHOLICS ARE, WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE EMERGING CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES AND THIS IS TRUE NOT ONLY FOR CATHOLICS, BUT ALSO FOR MANY MAIN LINE AND EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT CHURCHES. YOU ONLY NEED TO LOOK AT THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN MANY OF THE CITIES TO SEE THE FUTURE OF OUR SOCIETY AND I REALLY DO BELIEVE THAT THIS COUNTRY AND THIS CHURCH WILL RISE OR FALL ON THE COMMITMENT THAT WE MAKE TO THESE COMMUNITIES TODAY.

MANY ARE IMMIGRANTS, MANY ARE SECOND AND THIRD GENERATION WHO, LIKE OTHER IMMIGRANT GROUPS IN THE PAST, HAVE MADE THIS COUNTRY THEIR HOME AND HAVE ENRICHED IT WITH THEIR CUSTOMS AND THEIR CULTURE AND THEIR FOODS AND MOST ESPECIALLY WITH RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND VALUES BROUGHT TO THIS COUNTRY AND PASSED ON THROUGH WHAT WE CALL POPULAR RELIGIOSITY. STILL, 86.5 OF THE LATINO YOUTH ARE NATIVE BORN. DOES THAT SURPRISE YOU?

LATINOS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES AND WE CALL OURSELVES A VARIETY OF NAMES. THAT'S BECAUSE OF THE DIVERSITY OF OUR ORIGINS AS WELL AS THE FACT THAT WE REPRESENT 21 PLUS NATIONALITIES WITH DIFFERENT POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES. OF COURSE, MEXICANS, PUERTO RICANS ARE THE LARGEST SUBGROUPS. WE MAKE UP 16% OF THE POPULATION, THAT'S 50.5 MILLION NOT COUNTING UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS. WHERE DID I HEAR THAT BEFORE? NOT COUNTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN . I KNOW I HEARD THAT BEFORE. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE DOMINANT CULTURE HAS TAKEN NOTICE, AS EVIDENCED

Transcript: Jeannette Rodriguez Keynote, Friday Evening, June 10 2011 (ACC)

NOT THROUGH THE CHURCH, BUT BY THE ADVERTISING DOLLARS THAT HAVE TARGETED LATINO COMMUNITIES. HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANY OF THAT? I WANT TO SHOW IT TO YOU.

(VIDEO CLIP)

I REMEMBER BACK IN THE 1970s WE USED TO SAY WE WALKED AROUND WITH A NEWSPAPER IN ONE HAND AND THE BIBLE IN THE OTHER. NOW WE SEE WHAT CORPORATIONS ARE DOING WITH THEIR MARKETING STUFF TO GET A HEADS-UP. ANYWAY, NO ONE PERSON CAN SPEAK OF ALL LATINOS OR THEIR BELIEFS AND I CAN CERTAINLY ONLY SPEAK FOR MYSELF AND FROM MY EXPERIENCE WITH A VARIETY OF MANY DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES BOTH IN THE UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA . WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES THERE ARE MANY LIFE AND DEATH ISSUES THAT MUST BE FACED, IMMIGRATION, POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT, HEALTH ISSUES, EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES.

BUT THESE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES THAT WE JUST SAW IN THIS LITTLE CLIP HAVE MOTIVATED CRITICAL SELF-EXAMINATION NOT ONLY BY THE MARKETERS BUT BY VARIOUS CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS. WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT HISTORY YOU REALIZE THAT LATINOS SETTLED IN NORTH AMERICA CENTURIES BEFORE THERE WAS A UNITED STATES AND HAVE LONG CONTRIBUTED TOWARD THE NATION'S RELIGIOUS LIFE DESPITE NEWS ARTICLES BY **TIME** AND **NEWSWEEK**, THE COVER STORIES THAT TALK ABOUT THE BROWNING OF AMERICA. THE TRUTH IS AMERICA WAS BROWN LONG BEFORE IT WAS WHITE.JUST ASK ANY NATIVE AMERICANS.

WHILE HISPANIC PROTESTANTISM HAS A BRIEF HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES THOUSANDS OF HISPANIC CATHOLICS HAVE POPULATED OTHER PARTS OF THE SOUTHWEST .NOT TO DESCRIBE LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES OR ALLOW FOR THE DISSENTING PERSPECTIVES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY FAILS TO GRASP THE RADICALLY INCLUSIVE ETHOS OF LATINO CHRISTIANITY.

AS A THEOLOGIAN, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT ALSO TO JUST MENTION A FEW ELEMENTS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF HISPANIC THEOLOGY. MANY HAVE HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A MARGINALIZED MINORITY IN THE DOMINANT COUNTRY, OF BEING BILINGUAL AND BICULTURAL AND LIVING IN TWO CULTURES THAT OFTEN CLASH WITH ONE ANOTHER AND NEVER BELONGING TO EITHER. OUTSIDE THE PROJECTS I WAS CALLED A SPIC AND OTHER DEROGATORY TERMS. THEY WOULD CALL ME GRINGA. WHEN THEY SAID THAT IT WAS HURTFUL,SO WHAT U.S. LATINO THEOLOGIANS SEEK TO DO IS DEVELOP THE KIND OF DISCOURSE THAT BUILDS BRIDGES BETWEEN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, BETWEEN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, AMONG DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

U.S. LATINO THEOLOGIANS , WHILE RECOGNIZING THEIR INDEBTEDNESS TO LIBERATION THEOLOGY, WHICH HAS INSPIRED MANY OF US, WE'VE STRUGGLED TO CREATE OUR OWN DISTINCT IDENTITY AS A NORTH AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT. OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES, WE HAVE DEVELOPED A THEOLOGY DONE JOINTLY BY ROMAN CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, PENTECOSTALS .

A COMMUNAL APPROACH INVOLVES COOPERATIVE EFFORTS OF THEOLOGIANS, PASTORAL AGENTS AND LAY PEOPLE. ONE OF THE KEY MARKERS IN THIS THEOLOGY

FIRST AND FOREMOST IS WHAT WE CALLED ORIGINALLY A DEGRADING LABEL FOR THOSE OF US SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF NATIVE AMERICANS AND THE SPANISH. THE TERM THAT THEY USE, MESTIZO, SPANISH INDIAN, MULATO IF YOU'RE A SPANISH/BLACK COMBINATION, HAS BEEN APPROPRIATED BY LATINOS AS A TERM OF SELF-IDENTITY AND CULTURAL PRIDE. WE ARE NO LONGER BEING CALLED A HALF BREED. DO WE HAVE TO REJECT THE MOTHER IN ORDER TO EMBRACE THE FATHER? AND THIS IS A MAJOR, MAJOR STRUGGLE FOR THOSE OF US RAISED IN THE UNITED STATES TRYING TO ALSO MAINTAIN OUR ROOTS AND CULTURAL PRIDE.

THE PERSON THAT WAS VERY HELPFUL TO US IN MY GENERATION WAS FATHER VIRGILIO ELIZONDO. HE WAS A PIONEER IN THIS WORK AND HE WAS THE FIRST TO INTERPRET GOD'S WAY OF POSITIVELY TRANSFORMING A RACIALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVIDED WORLD. I REMEMBER AS A YOUNG THEOLOGY STUDENT THE FIRST TIME I HEARD HIM SPEAK AND WHAT IT MEANT TO ME TO BE REFERRED TO AS A NEW CREATION. NO LONGER NOT FROM HERE AND NOT FROM THERE, BUT NO, I AM A NEW CREATION AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT I AM THE FUTURE. THEY ARE THE FUTURE.

LATINO THEOLOGIANS USED THIS TERM TO DESCRIBE THE U.S. HISPANIC ETHOS OF RADICAL INCLUSION BECAUSE ETHNOCENTRISM CAN BECOME BOTH A SOURCE OF LIBERATING PRACTICE AND A POTENTIAL OBSTACLE TO CROSS CULTURAL DISCOURSE. THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY REMAINS A CENTRAL MOTIF IN U.S. LATINO THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION. EVERY CULTURE IS ETHNOCENTRIC. BISHOP RAMIREZ FROM NEW MEXICO TELLS THIS WONDERFUL STORY OF HIS MOTHER, HE COMES HOME AND HIS MOTHER THINKS THAT JESUS IS MEXICAN. AND HE IS TRYING TO TALK TO HER AND HE SAYS MOM, JESUS IS NOT MEXICAN, ALL RIGHT? HER RESPONSE IS, QUOTE, IS THAT WHAT THEY'RE TEACHING YOU IN THE SEMINARY? AND HE GOES ON TO SAY MOM, WHY DO YOU SAY THAT JESUS IS MEXICAN? AND HIS MOTHER SAYS WE HAVE PEDRO, WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT? SHE GIVES THESE NAMES IN SPANISH. THE BISHOP SAYS, WHAT ABOUT JUDAS? THE MOTHER SAYS: HE IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT. JUDAS IS NOT MEXICAN.

MY POINT IS THAT U.S. LATINO THEOLOGY HAS REINTERPRETED THIS NOTION OF THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR IN THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT TO INCLUDE NOT JUST THE ECONOMICALLY IMPOVERISHED BUT ALSO THE ETHNICALLY AND GENDERED OTHER.

THE SECOND MARKER OF THE BIRTHING OF U.S. HISPANIC THEOLOGY HAS BEEN THE INSIGHTS AND THE WISDOM OF U.S. LATINO/A SPANISH THEOLOGIANS. WHEN WE FORMED THE ACADEMY FOR SPANISH THEOLOGIANS IN THE UNITED STATES IT WAS INCLUSIVE OF FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS. WE'VE UNDERSCORED OUR THEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT TO NOT ONLY EXPLAIN AND INTERPRET THE FAITH BUT TO TRANSFORM SOCIAL REALITY ITSELF BY RECOGNIZING THE METHODOLOGICAL IMPOSSIBILITY OF SEPARATING QUESTIONS OF CLASS, RACE AND GENDER.

THE THIRD MARKER TO DISTINGUISH US IS THE USE OF POPULAR RELIGION AS A LOCUS SINCE POPULAR RELIGIONS PRACTICES, POPULAR RELIGIOSITY, STRENGTHEN IDENTITY AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT. THE MOST IMPORTANT IMAGE WOULD BE THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE WHICH I'LL SPEAK ABOUT IN THE BREAK-OUT SESSION, BOTH THE NARRATIVE AND THE THEOLOGY. DUE TO THE LATINO EXPERIENCE OF CULTURAL MARGINALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, OUR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ABOUT OUR HOPES AND OUR STRUGGLES ESPECIALLY AS MANIFESTED IN POPULAR RELIGIOSITY ARE NECESSARILY DISTINCT

FROM OFFICIAL ECCLESIAL STRUCTURES AND TRADITIONS BUT EXIST ALONGSIDE THE DOMINANT BELIEFS AND PRACTICES EVEN WHEN THEY AREN'T RECOGNIZED OR SANCTIONED. WE GET INTO TROUBLE SOMETIMES. EVER HEAR ANYBODY COMPLAIN ABOUT US BECAUSE WE AREN'T PARISH ORIENTED? THERE IS ANOTHER WONDERFUL STORY ABOUT A FAMILY WHO COMES TO A CATHOLIC PARISH AND THERE IS A VERY KIND AND WELCOMING PRIEST SAYING HELLO, WELCOME TO ST. MARK'S. AS THIS MEXICAN FAMILY APPROACHES THE PRIEST GREETES THEM, WELCOMES THEM BUT THEN SAYS: IS THIS YOUR PARISH? THE FATHER ANSWERS, IS THIS A CATHOLIC CHURCH? IT'S A WAY OF CAPTURING THAT REALITY. WE HAVE A LOT TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

MANY BELIEVE THAT OUR EXPERIENCE OF POPULAR RELIGIOSITY IS A CONCRETE EXPRESSION OF RESISTANCE BY A MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY WITHIN THE LARGER RELIGIOUS TRADITION. YET, WHEN WE LATINO THEOLOGIANS WEAVE THESE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES INTO OUR ACADEMIC DISCOURSE, WE ENCOUNTER RESISTANCE, IF NOT OUTRIGHT DISMISSAL AND WE HAVE OUR WORK EITHER LABELED AS DEVOTIONAL OR ACTIVIST, NOT ACADEMIC. ACCORDINGLY THE THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF POPULAR CHRISTIANITY REMAINS AN IMPORTANT FOCUS FOR US WHO SEEK TO INVITE THE LARGER CHURCH AND THE ACADEMY TO GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE EXPERIENCE AND FAITH OF THE PEOPLE AND THE PRACTICES OF THE PEOPLE IN ORDER TO AVOID THE RISK OF ENGAGING IN AN INSULAR DIALOGUE AMONG A HANDFUL OF SPECIALISTS.

EVEN IN THE ACADEMY, WE HAVE TO ASK OURSELVES WHETHER THE BIBLE IS THE RECORD OF THE ACTS OF GOD IN HUMAN HISTORY THAT PROVIDE RELIABLE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF GOD, OR IS THE BIBLE RATHER ONE COLLECTION OF NARRATIVES FROM THE MANY HUMAN NARRATIVES OF RELIGIOUS REFLECTION THAT GIVES MEANING TO SOME BUT NOT TO ALL PEOPLES' EXISTENCE?

JUSTO GONZALES IS A UNITED METHODIST THEOLOGIAN. HE ARGUED THAT THE UNIFYING THEOLOGY RESTS ON THE LIBERATING READING OF SCRIPTURE. ALL THINGS ARE MEDIATED THROUGH CULTURE BUT TO TRANSCEND THE PARTICULARS OF CULTURE, RACE, GENDER AND PLACE, LIBERATION THEOLOGY SAYS CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO MAKE A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR BECAUSE IN THE SCRIPTURE GOD ACTS IN FAVOR OF THE WEAK AND ABUSED IN HUMAN HISTORY. THIS READING OF SCRIPTURE LEADS US, WE WHO ARE CHURCH, TO MAKE POLITICAL COMMITMENTS IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE OPPRESSED SEEKING HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF OPPRESSIVE STRUCTURES AND SITUATIONS.

IN ADDITION, EVEN IN OUR CHRISTIANITY, WHILE WE ACCEPT AND REFLECT ON THE LOCUS THAT IS CHRIST, WE ALSO KNOW THAT IN SPANISH JESUS IS NOT JUST THE WORD BUT JESUS IS THE VERB. THIS LINGUISTIC CULTURAL INSIGHT LEADS US TO ACT IN A PARTICULAR WAY. A TRUE CHURCH IS A CHURCH LIKE UNTO JESUS. TO RESEMBLE JESUS IS TO PRODUCE THE STRUCTURE OF JESUS'S LIFE AND IN GOSPEL TERMS, THE STRUCTURE OF JESUS'S LIFE IS A STRUCTURE OF INCARNATION, OF BECOMING REAL FLESH IN REAL HISTORY.

MANY OF US BOTH LATINOS AND NON-LATINOS HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY LIBERATION THEOLOGY. IT WAS A MOVEMENT THAT BEGAN IN LATIN AMERICA IN THE 1960s AND 1970s IN PARALLEL WITH THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES FOLLOWED BY THE ARTICULATION OF FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIES AND WHAT WE CALL LIBERATION THEOLOGIES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. WHILE NO SINGLE EVENT MARKS THE BIRTH OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY I

BELIEVE THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL STANDS AS AN IMPORTANT FORMATIVE EVENT. THE THEOLOGICAL STATEMENTS EMERGING FROM VATICAN II CHALLENGED THE CHURCH TO INTEGRATE DOCTRINE WITH PASTORAL PRACTICE IN ORDER TO BRING THE MISSION TO BEAR ON THE HARSH SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITIES IN MUCH OF THE WORLD. THREE FOURTHS OF THE WORLD LIVES IN SUCH MISERY AND SUFFERING. THIS INCLUDES PEOPLE HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, THE FORGOTTEN ONES.

THIS CHALLENGE WAS THEN TAKEN UP BY THE SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL OF LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS (CELAM) RESULTING IN STRONG PASTORAL STATEMENTS ADDRESSING THE LATIN AMERICAN REALITY OF ABSOLUTE POVERTY, THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE UNDER REGIMES OF INSTITUTIONALIZED VIOLENCE AND THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF FAITH IS MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH POST VATICAN II ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY. EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER ARE THE PROTESTANT SOURCES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO ITS FORMATION, THEOLOGICIANS, THE CONFERENCES THAT THEY HELD.

BUT IT WAS THE PUBLICATION OF THE WORK OF FATHER GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ -- HIS SEMINAL WORK, **A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION** THAT GAVE LIBERATION THEOLOGY A GLOBAL AUDIENCE. THIS GREATLY INFLUENCED THE FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE 1979 THIRD GENERAL CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS IN MEXICO. THE CHURCH'S MISSION IS DEFINED AS LIBERATING EVANGELIZATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A JUST SOCIETY IN TERMS OF GOD'S OPTION FOR THE POOR .

WITHOUT A DOUBT LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY HAS GREATLY INFLUENCED U.S. LATINO THEOLOGY BUT THERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOTH MOVEMENTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THEIR DIFFERENT SOCIO-CULTURAL AND HISTORIC LOCATIONS. I WANT TO NAME THREE. WHAT THEY SHARE IS AN EMPHASIS ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY. TWO, A COMMUNAL PRACTICE GROUNDED IN LIBERATION, AND THREE, A BIBLICAL HARMONY THAT QUESTIONS DOMINANT POWER STRUCTURES AND PRIVILEGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OPPRESSED.

WHERE U.S. LATINO THEOLOGY DIFFERS IS IN THE WAY IT BROADENS ITS UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR TO THOSE WHO SUFFER MARGINALIZATION. WHILE IT EMPHASIZES POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIBERATION. U.S. LATINO THEOLOGY IS COMING TO TERMS WITH THE COMPLEXITIES OF CULTURAL, RACIAL AND ETHNIC ELEMENTS THAT LINK POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIBERATION TO ISSUES OF CULTURAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY. ONE OF THE AMAZING THINGS ABOUT VATICAN II IS THAT IT WENT GLOBAL. A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE COUNCIL HAS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT HOW THE COUNCIL MARKS A TRANSITION, SOME PEOPLE SAY A RUPTURE, OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH FROM A PREDOMINANTLY WESTERN AND EUROPEAN CHURCH TO A WORLD CHURCH.

SO WHEN THESE BISHOPS WHO MET AT THE COUNCIL WENT BACK TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CONTINENTS, AFRICA, ASIA, LATIN AMERICA, ETC., THEY REFLECTED ON AND BROUGHT WITH THEM THAT SPIRIT THAT SURROUNDED THEM AND OUT OF THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA AROSE WHAT I CALL THE CULTURAL MEMORY OF THE POOR, THE CHURCH OF THE POOR, THE UNMASKING OF UNJUST SOCIAL STRUCTURES INCLUDING AT TIMES A CHURCH UNFORTUNATELY DEDICATED TO PROFIT. NOT ONLY LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES BUT OTHER CHRISTIANS AND MANY PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL WERE MOVED AND THEY BECAME ALIVE BY THE

PROPHETIC STAND OF THE CHURCH WOMEN AND JESUIT MARTYRS AND COUNTLESS NUMBERS OF U.S. COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO HAVE SPOKEN OUT AGAINST THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS, FOR EXAMPLE. WHY? BECAUSE THEY WERE INSPIRED AND INFLUENCED BY PEOPLE LIKE ROMERO WHO RESURRECTED THE BEST OF OUR TRADITION ABOUT THE CHURCH OF THE POOR AND THE CHURCH OF THE MARTYRS.

WE KNOW NOW THAT WE CANNOT, TO QUOTE ROMERO, BE SERVANTS OF A WORD WITHOUT DISTURBING THE WORLD, A WORD WITHOUT ANY COMMITMENT TO HISTORY, A WORD THAT CAN SOUND IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD BECAUSE IT BELONGS TO NO PART OF THE WORLD. A WORD LIKE THAT, HE SAYS, CREATES NO PROBLEMS AND STARTS NO CONFLICTS. BUT THIS MARTYRED BISHOP CONTINUALLY REMINDS US, QUOTE, THAT THE CHURCH WOULD BETRAY ITS OWN LOVE FOR GOD AND ITS FIDELITY TO THE GOSPEL IF IT STOPPED BEING A DEFENDER OF THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR, A HUMANIZER OF EVERY LEGITIMATE STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE A MORE JUST SOCIETY THAT PREPARES THE WAY FOR THE TRUE REIGN OF GOD IN HISTORY. FINALLY HE TELLS US THAT WHEN THE CHURCH HEARS THE CRY OF THE OPPRESSED, IT CANNOT BUT DENOUNCE THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE THAT GIVES RISE TO AND PERPETUATES THE MISERY FROM WHICH THAT CRY ARISES . AND THAT'S WHAT YOUR PRESENCE HERE TONIGHT DOES.

EARLIER IN THE VIDEO THERE WAS A REFERENCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN RESISTANT TO THE CHURCH. I LIVE IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST NOW, IN SEATTLE. IT IS CONSIDERED THE MOST UNCHURCHED STATE IN THE COUNTRY. IT IS THE PLACE WHERE PEOPLE SAY THINGS LIKE I'M SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS. I HATE THAT PHRASE, BUT I UNDERSTAND WHERE IT'S COMING FROM. THEY SAY THEY'RE RECOVERING CATHOLICS, ETC., AND THEN THEY GO AND TRY TO FIND SOME OTHER FORM OF SPIRITUALITY. I AM LISTENING TO THEM AND SAYING, ACTUALLY JOHN OF THE CROSS SAID THAT A LOT BETTER. THEY DON'T KNOW THEIR OWN TRADITION.

I HAVE STUDENTS WHO COME IN KICKING AND SCREAMING. I TEACH AT A JESUIT UNIVERSITY SO THEY HAVE TO TAKE TWO THEOLOGY CLASSES. THEY DON'T WANT TO DO THIS. JUST LAST QUARTER I WAS TEACHING A COURSE ON THE THEOLOGY OF PEACE AND YOU GO AROUND THE ROOM, YOU ASK PEOPLE TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES AND SAY WHY ARE YOU TAKING THE CLASS? ONE STUDENT ACTUALLY SAID: I TOOK THIS CLASS BECAUSE IT DIDN'T HAVE THE WORD CHRISTIAN IN IT. OH MY GOD, YOU'LL BE VERY DISAPPOINTED, I SAID. BUT ALSO IT WAS A CONDEMNATION OF US THAT THEY WOULD FEEL THAT WAY.

THEY COME INTO MY CLASS ON LIBERATION THEOLOGY OR THEOLOGY OF PEACE IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL JUSTICE. I THINK WE DO GOOD. WE HAVE A GOOD TRACK RECORD, ESPECIALLY WITNESSING THE MARTYRDOM OF THE POOR IN LATIN AMERICA. IN A WAY IT HAS RECONVERTED MANY PEOPLE. IT HAS ALLOWED PEOPLE TO AT LEAST HOLD ON OR WRAP THEMSELVES IN THE ETHOS OF THE BEST OF OUR TRADITION WHEN THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH HAS BEEN SO DISAPPOINTING TO US. THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE MANY ELEMENTS, I THINK, THAT MAKE UP LATINO THEOLOGY AND I WANT TO END WITH ONE MORE MARKER IN THE LANDSCAPE AND THAT CONCERNS THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL ETHICS BECAUSE I THINK THIS AREA IDENTIFIES AS A KEY CONCEPT DIGNITY AS THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF HISPANIC LATINO ETHICAL REFLECTION AND JUSTICE IS CENTRAL TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF DIGNITY.

ACCORDING TO ETHICISTS, GRACE IS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A HUMAN BEING, ALL RIGHT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD? A PERSON WITH ACTIVE GRACE AND AN UNMERITED GIFT OF LIFE. OUR VALUES COME FROM SEEING OURSELVES AS WHAT WE SAY, GOD'S CREATURES. WAYS OF RELATING TO OTHERS THAT VIOLATE THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND GOD'S CREATION ARE AN OFFENSE AGAINST GOD AND OURSELVES AS PART OF CREATION AND SO A GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF LATINO MORAL REASONING IS THE QUESTION, WHAT SHOULD HUMANS DO TO MAINTAIN HUMAN DIGNITY? UNDERLINING THE VIEW FOR HUMANITY IS THE CONVICTION THAT JUSTICE IS NOT BLIND, THAT JUSTICE DOES INDEED TAKE SIDES AND IT DOES SO BECAUSE IN GOD'S JUSTICE, AS THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE REVEALS AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY REMINDS US, THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR. THAT ETHICAL DISCERNMENT IS MORE CORPORATE THAN INDIVIDUAL. OUR SPIRITUALITY IS SOCIAL CENTERED

THE VALUE OF THE GROUP TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER THE INDIVIDUAL. A FRIEND OF MINE ONCE TOLD ME A STORY ABOUT SISTER THEA BOWMAN. A WONDERFUL WOMAN. SHE WAS PRESENTING AT A GATHERING AND THERE WERE SOME BISHOPS PRESENT. ONE OF THE BISHOPS ASKED HER WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN AND CATHOLIC. YOU COULD HEAR A PIN DROP. WE WANTED TO KNOW HOW SHE WAS GOING TO RESPOND. WHAT SHE DID WAS START TO SING "SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD." NOT ONLY DID SHE SING IT, SHE GOT THEM TO SING. MIRACLES DO HAPPEN. I WAS MOVED BY THIS STORY. BUT AS I THOUGHT ABOUT IT AND I WAS PREPARING THIS PRESENTATION, I CAME TO THE REALIZATION THAT THAT IS NOT THE EXPERIENCE OF U.S. LATINO CATHOLICS. WE HAVE OUR MOTHER. WE HAVE GUADALUPE. WE'VE ALWAYS HAD HER.

WHAT I THINK WE ARE IN SEARCH OF IS A HOME. I DON'T THINK WE'LL REST UNTIL WE FIND A PLACE THAT WE CAN CALL OUR OWN. EXODUS REMINDS US OF THE POWERFUL PROPHETIC EXPERIENCE OF A PEOPLE SEARCHING FOR A HOMELAND AND AT THE SAME TIME TRUSTING IN THEIR GOD. THIS UTTER DEPENDENCE ON GOD. THE POVERTY AND THE DEPTH OF THE PROPHETIC TRADITION AMONG THE PEOPLE IN THE DESERT IS REFLECTED IN THE LATINO EXPERIENCE TODAY. WE LIKE THE ISRAELITES, ARE SPEAKING OUR FREEDOM AND OFFER TO THE LARGER CHURCH THE LIVED, INCARNATED EXPERIENCE OF THE ALIEN IN OUR OWN HOMELAND. THE PROBLEMS AND THE CHALLENGES THAT COME WITH THE CULTURE OF POVERTY ARE FAR OUTWEIGHED BY THE CULTURE OF LIFE WE HAVE AND THE LOVE OF LIVING THAT OUR PEOPLE BRING TO THIS COUNTRY.

I WANT TO END WITH HOW I FEEL LATINO CATHOLICS CONTRIBUTE TO OR HOW WE HAVE LIVED OUT THIS SPIRIT OF VATICAN II. NUMBER ONE, CELEBRATING LITURGY IN THE VERNACULAR HAS SPECIAL MEANING FOR US. WE SPEAK AND PRAY IN OUR MOTHER TONGUE AND WE OFFER A MULTILINGUAL CHORUS OF PRAISE TO GOD. VATICAN II UNDERSTOOD THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HEARING AND SPEAKING ONE'S OWN WORDS IN PRAISE OF GOD. LANGUAGES ARE LIKE SOULS. EACH IS A UNIQUE CREATION REFLECTING A WORLDVIEW THAT CANNOT BE TOTALLY ACCESSED EXCEPT THROUGH ITS OWN PORTALS. TO LOSE A LANGUAGE IS TO LOSE A SOUL. TO HEAR THE RICHNESS OF CENTURIES AND CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE IN SPANISH IS TO CONNECT TO THE ANCESTORS AND TO GOD'S SPECIAL CARE FOR OUR PEOPLE.

SECOND. LATINOS PARTICIPATE IN ALL THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES ENCOURAGED BY THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. IT TOOK THE FORM, AT LEAST BACK THEN, OF ALTAR GIRLS. WOMEN ESPECIALLY HAVE TAKEN ON NEW ROLES IN THE CHURCH. AT LEAST THIS WAS IN THE EARLY STAGES. I KNOW MYSELF WHEN I WENT TO COLLEGE, NOW REMEMBER, I'M A DAUGHTER OF THE CHURCH AND FORMED BY THE CHURCH. I GET TO COLLEGE AND NONE OF THE MAJORS ARE REALLY SPEAKING TO ME. NONE OF THEM CAN REALLY ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT I HAD, NOT TO SAY THAT THEOLOGY DID BUT AT LEAST IT GAVE ME SOME KIND OF RESPONSE. I REMEMBER SOMEBODY IN COLLEGE, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT 1970 SOMETHING. THEY SAID WHY DON'T YOU BECOME A MINISTER? AND I SAID OH NO, I'M CATHOLIC. AND THEN I FOUND OUT I COULD BE A LAY MINISTER SO I GOT MYSELF A SCHOLARSHIP AND WENT TO FORDHAM UNIVERSITY.

IT WAS A VERY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE OF CHURCH AND RELIGION AND THE FAITH FROM WHAT I WAS ACCUSTOMED TO. I ASKED A LOT OF QUESTIONS AND IRRITATED A LOT OF MY PROFESSORS. ONE OF THEM DECIDED TO ASK ME TO GO TO GUAM, MICRONESIA TO DO LAY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT. I'M A NEW YORKER. WHEN HE FIRST MENTIONED GUAM, I SAID GUAM, SOUNDS LIKE A DISEASE. WHERE IS GUAM? ARE YOU TRYING TO GET RID OF ME? YOU'VE BEEN DOING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SINCE YOU WERE 14. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE -- THEY'VE NEVER HAD A LAY MINISTER. THEY WANT A LAY MINISTER. THIS WAS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE COUNCIL, RIGHT?

I GO 10,000 MILES AWAY TO A PEOPLE I DON'T KNOW, TO A PLACE I DON'T KNOW, I GET THERE AND, YOU KNOW, I AM GOOD. I GET IN THERE. A FEW WEEKS LATER THE VILLAGE PEOPLE ARE FOLLOWING ME AND THEY ARE CALLING ME -- I SAID ME? ARE YOU TALKING TO ME? THEY SAID YES, YOU. I SAID OKAY, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? THEY SAID OH, YOU FEMALE PRIEST. WAIT, WAIT, WAIT, WAIT. BUT I AM A NICE CATHOLIC HISPANIC GIRL, I SAY OH, NO. THEY SAID THEN YOU MUST BE FATHER BOB'S WIFE. IN WHICH CASE I SAID NO, NO, THAT'S WHO I AM. THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS.

BUT HERE IS THE GIST OF IT. IN THE YEARS I SPENT IN THE MISSIONS IN GUAM AND MICRONESIA, TAIWAN AND THE PHILIPPINES BEFORE I WENT LATIN, I REALLY STEPPED INTO THAT TERM AND I REALLY UNDERSTOOD THIS NOTION THAT WE TALK ABOUT, ABOUT THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BAPTIZED. WHEN I REALLY GOT IT, I GOT IT BECAUSE OF PEOPLE BESTOWED IT ON ME AND I ALSO THINK IT'S BECAUSE WHEN YOU HAVE AN EXPERIENCE LIKE THAT, THERE ARE THINGS THAT YOU DISCOVER ABOUT YOURSELF THAT NOBODY HAS TO AFFIRM FOR YOU AND YOU KNOW WHAT? NOBODY CAN TAKE IT AWAY FROM YOU. THAT'S WHO I AM.

THIRD, WITH REGARD TO THE ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE LATINOS ARE LIVING THIS OUT IN THEIR FAMILIES AS SOME SEEK OUT RELIGIOUS HOMES IN NON-CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES OR PARTICIPATE IN OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES BECAUSE OF INTERMARRIAGE. MORE GROWTH, I THINK AND STUDY IS NEEDED IN THIS AREA TO DIMINISH THE ANTI-PROTESTANT BIAS AND FOSTER GREATER ACCEPTANCE OF THOSE WHO WORSHIP THE SAME GOD IN A DIFFERENT WAY OR THOSE THAT COME FROM A HISTORY OF ANTI-CLERICAL AND ANTI-RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS LIKE MY FATHER. MY FATHER IS VERY LATIN AMERICAN. HE GREW UP IN THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA, WALKED HAND IN HAND WITH THE POWERFUL. HE WAS NOT HAPPY ABOUT MY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CHURCH.

FOURTH, PERHAPS ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF TRYING TO IMPLEMENT THE

VALUES PROMOTED BY VATICAN II IS IN THE AREA AGAIN OF SOCIAL JUSTICE. THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH IN THIS AREA I FEEL HAVE FOUND A WARM EMBRACE BY MANY LATINOS WHO HAVE SUFFERED THE INJUSTICES THAT COME FROM BEING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LADDER WHEN IT COMES TO JOBS, HOUSING, HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION. THE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, OF UNDERSTANDING AND PROPHETIC DEFIANCE HAVE FOUND A POWERFUL ECHO AMONG FARM WORKERS, DAY LABORERS, MIGRANTS, POOR WORKING CLASS LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES. WHEN OUR PEOPLE HEAR IT SAID IN CHURCH THAT AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE THERE ARE NO ILLEGAL ALIENS OR WHEN OUR AMERICAN BISHOPS CALL FOR FAMILY WAGE FOR WORKERS, THE HEARTS OF OUR PEOPLE ARE LIFTED UP BECAUSE THEY SEE THAT THE CONCERNS OF THEIR FAMILIES ARE ALSO THE CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH. AND THEY DO NOT WALK ALONE. THE CHURCH IS THERE WITH THEM IN THE FIELDS, IN THE BARRIOS AND THE WORKPLACE. THIS THEOLOGY OF ACCOMPANIMENT MUST BE A PRIMARY TASK IN ANY MINISTRY.

AND FINALLY, DON'T GET ME WRONG, I'M NOT NAIVE ABOUT THE MANY FAILINGS OF OUR CHURCH ESPECIALLY IN RECENT TIMES. STILL I REALLY THINK A LOT OF GOOD HAS BEEN DONE. BUT AS MY FRIEND SAYS, MUCH MORE WORK STILL NEEDS OUR ATTENTION. I MENTIONED EARLIER THAT I WAS RAISED IN THE PROJECTS OF NEW YORK AND I REMEMBER A TIME WHEN IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE CHURCH, MANY OF US WOULD NOT HAVE HAD ACCESS TO EDUCATION. OUR FAMILIES WOULD NOT HAVE HAD SOMEONE TO HELP THEM BRIDGE FROM THE OLD WORLD TO THE NEW WORLD. THERE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE OR CHILDCARE OR ANY OF THESE SERVICES, MUSIC LESSONS, THAT WERE PROVIDED PRIMARILY BY THE RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES. AS MUCH AS WE LOVED OUR PRIESTS, THERE WAS A POINT WHEN THE PRIESTS DID LEAVE OUR INNER CITIES BUT THE SISTERS, THEY NEVER LEFT OUR CITY. AND FOR THAT AND FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE STILL OUT THERE I WANT TO SAY THANK YOU. I'M EXTREMELY GRATEFUL BECAUSE IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR YOU, I WOULDN'T BE STANDING UP HERE.

EVEN WITH ALL THESE WONDERFUL EXPERIENCES WITH THE CHURCH'S COMMITMENT TO THE POOR, WE ALSO HAVE LOTS OF SCARS AND WOUNDS AND SOME ARE CENTURIES OLD, BUT THIS IS THE CHURCH OF MY GRANDPARENTS AND MY PARENTS AND MY CHILDREN AND I WANT TO MAKE IT BETTER FOR THEM AND MY GRANDCHILDREN AND I WANT TO MAKE IT MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS AND THE SPIRIT OF VATICAN II. I MAY NOT SEE THIS IN MY LIFETIME, I MIGHT NOT SEE ALL THE CHANGES I WOULD LIKE TO SEE AND I KNOW FROM DOING THE WORK OF JUSTICE WE MAY NOT SEE THE FRUITS OF OUR WORK BUT I HAVE SEEN ENOUGH CHANGES AND ENOUGH COMMITMENT JUST LOOKING AT YOU ALL OUT HERE THAT I REMAIN HOPEFUL THAT MORE GOOD THAN BAD WILL CONTINUE TO EMERGE AND I REMAIN PART OF THE LOYAL OPPOSITION TO THOSE THINGS THAT WE NEED TO DISAGREE WITH.
I THANK YOU.

*Dr Jeanette Rodriguez presentation to ACC, Saturday, June 10, 2011.
Edited by Dr. Caridad Inda*