

FEMINIST INTERCULTURAL THEOLOGY

Latina Explorations for a Just World



Editors **María Pilar Aquino &
María José Rosado-Nunes**

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Symposium Abstract

Feminist Intercultural Theology

Religion, Culture, Feminism, and Power

Maricel Mena-López and María Pilar Aquino

This abstract presents a few of the multitude of perspectives that were shared during the first Inter-American Symposium on Feminist Intercultural Theology, which brought together Latina women who are prominent social scientists and feminist theologians in the United States and Latin America. The symposium was tremendously significant for us because, for the first time in the history of Christianity in the Americas, feminist theologians of the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean were able to meet together to share our common concerns and visions about the present and the future of our theological work, on the basis of intercultural hermeneutical frameworks. Those of us who participated in this event brought with us a wealth of reflections that arises from our experience of life in thirteen different countries and that makes evident the ethnic pluralism of our region.

The general theme of this symposium was “Intercultural Feminist Theology: Religion, Culture, Feminism, and Power.” This theme allowed us to enter into a space of respectful and critical deliberation about how feminist intercultural theology can contribute to the strengthening of present-day democratic movements, which seek to contribute constructively both to transforming the oppressive religious and cultural environments in which we live and to reorient the often ambiguous and controversial processes of contemporary globalization. Conducted entirely in Spanish, this symposium took place in Mexico City from July 5 to 11, 2004, as a collaborative project of the Center for the Study of Latino/a Catholicism of the University of San Diego (San Diego, California), the

Institute of Missiology Missio (Aachen, Germany), and the Iberoamericana University (Mexico City, Mexico).

The objectives proposed for this symposium were:

1. To analyze and to understand critically the relations among religion, culture, feminism, and power, with a view to developing a feminist intercultural theology;
2. To establish a space for dialogue concerning the conceptual frameworks and the key analytic categories that might ground a critical feminist theology of liberation in intercultural terms;
3. To seek the resources needed to facilitate the work of Latino/a feminist theologians in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean;
4. To contribute to the visibility of critical feminist theological perspectives in our region;
5. To gather the shared reflections into articles that would be published in a collective volume.

The present book is the concrete result of our week-long meeting. We believe, however, that the attainment of these objectives cannot be judged solely on the basis of the contents of this book. For us, these objectives are still on the way to being achieved, for we still have many challenges ahead in terms of promoting processes of feminist theological communication that is at once intercultural and inter-American.

THE PROCESS OF THE SYMPOSIUM

We approached the theme proposed for this symposium by using a method of participation and deliberation that represented for us an *epistemological rupture*, insofar as all of us, rejecting a centralist and elitist style of producing knowledge, participated in theoretical activity as students and teachers, as disciples and instructors, as apprentices and experts—in a word, as true companions and colleagues. This method was designed jointly by the participants and the invited advisory team, which was formed by feminist sociologists Maria José Rosado-Nunes (Brazil) and Virginia Vargas Valente (Perú); feminist theologian María Pilar Aquino (Mexico–United States); and philosopher Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Cuba–Germany). The decentralized, participative mode of creating knowledge allowed us to share our varied wisdoms and to recognize ourselves as a confederacy of feminist wisdom for change and liberation.

We learned that this is a key epistemological principle that feminist intercultural theology presents to us as a challenge.

As the meeting progressed, we stressed the importance of the dynamic of active memory for recovering our feminist theological development. We likewise placed importance on the dynamism of imagination as a means of forging new routes that might equip us better for designing theological responses to the concerns raised by the contemporary scenarios of a globalized world. As a starting point, we recognized that our theologies pass through our bodies and that they express experiences that are at once plural, common, and simultaneous. Such recognition means that we ourselves are “frontier bodies,” because we move among different places: most of us do not work in our countries of origin, we drink of the wisdom that flows from other founts, and we assume that our identities are still in a process of construction. Our humanity as persons is constantly renewed on the basis of our joys, our cries, our shouts, our rhythms, our relations, our aspirations, and our spiritualities, all of which accompany us in the different contexts in which we live and work.

For that reason we proclaim and we celebrate the diversity of the faces of feminism: African American, Amerindian, Latina, Latin American—and every other frontier feminism that is open to the intermingling of wisdoms in the metaphorical space of *Nepantla*.¹ Among the many realities we experience, we also recognize the multiple, simultaneous forms of violence perpetrated against women because of their sexual condition, their social situation, their race, and their sexual orientation. Such realities lead us to affirm that our daily experiences are permeated with an ethical-political vision, since our theologies seek to overcome all forms of violence. Consequently, we also recognize that we have common objectives and that our bodies are historical subjects of change that proclaim that another world is indeed possible.

OPENING THE WAYS OF DIALOGUE

In the initial stage of our work, dialogue was opened up by a spontaneous exchange about the ideas, expectations, possibilities, and challenges that we found in the general theme and the proposed objectives of the symposium. We present below in summary form the four major themes that this dialogue brought to light. Since we do not accept historical linearity, these themes do not necessarily correspond to a preestablished chronological order, nor do they exhaust the contents of the dialogue; rather, they present the resonances of the whole group.

Gender, Race, and Identity

In view of the growing depoliticization of these concepts, we have taken as a common challenge the need to question their significance. For us, it is important to analyze how these concepts have functioned in academic and political rhetoric and what effects they have had in the practice of social change. The uncritical tendencies of those who would depoliticize these concepts challenge us to re-engineer our patterns of thought in order to propose new conceptual frameworks that support the visions of social and religious transformation in the complex contexts that we experience. We realize that it is necessary to approach these concepts in a way that allows us to overcome their reductionism, their provincialism, and their increasingly harmful effects in reproducing divided societies. We also see as important, however, the need to continue working on the deconstruction of the racial and sexual privileges that attribute superiority to the white race and to males, and the need to do so on the basis of the struggles for justice and cultural democratization undertaken by women and men.

Contextual Theologies

We affirm that all theology is contextual, the theologies of the North Atlantic and Western Europe as well as the feminist theologies of the northern hemisphere. These theologies have the duty to recognize and proclaim their own contextuality, just as does any other theology done in the context of the Two-thirds World. We believe that the different contextual situations will contribute to creating a community of theological subjects of equal intellectual dignity and to encouraging mutual communication and feedback among them. The consequence of this affirmation for us women is that we deem it necessary to continue fomenting a capacity for listening, learning, and interacting among the different types of feminism, whether Latina, Latin American, or Caribbean. By developing the capacity for mutual listening and learning, we place ourselves in the best position for intercultural communication.

Paradigm Changes and Theological World Views

The result of our theological activity expresses a systematization of our aspirations, experiences, and achievements. As discursive activity, theology expresses the values, visions, commitments and loyalties of those who practice it. In consequence, we agree to another epistemological

rupture, one that leads us to criticize and reject the notion of theology as a mechanism for establishing eternal truths, and we consciously assert the historical partiality of our knowledge. We understand partiality as a way of thinking rooted in our diverse situations and realities, in what we experience through our historically situated bodies. We distance ourselves from the dominant monocultural centrism and objectivity of thought, and we draw close to the social and intellectual peripheries, that is, to other centers of thought and wisdom that find no place in the hegemonic centers. Affirming the partiality of knowledge assumes a recognition of the diversity of knowledge, and this recognition implies the need to affirm egalitarian interaction in the processes of generating theological knowledge. Our major challenge as women is how to interact with the women of our communities and how to share our wisdom with theirs.

Power, Economics, and Knowledge in the Academy

A broader and more critical discussion of these categories will help us to *empower women* in their struggles for self-determination and liberation. We consider it fundamental to continue affirming the political character of feminism within the academy, but we also recognize the need to continue creating new ways of transmitting our discourse. The connections among feminist academic work, civil society, and the pastoral world continue to be a challenge that requires new responses. Although we understand that the academy is a key arena for the transformation of systems of thought, we also consider it important to promote the theological community's participation in other spheres of social life in order to bring about a change in oppressive ideologies. Given our contexts, we consider it vitally important for women to participate in the design of theology programs, because only thus will we succeed in getting critical feminist analyses and hermeneutics consistently included in the programs.

EXPLORING VALID PATHWAYS

In the second stage of our work, we proposed a dialogue about the perspectives and dimensions (conceptual, analytic, rhetorical, methodological, political, and so forth) that we discovered in the reading we did by way of preparing for the symposium.² We found that many of the doubts and worries that presented themselves in the earlier stage were clarified by the perspectives offered in the readings. At the same time,

though, we sought to turn the dialogue away from mere reaction to the readings and toward the framing of new questions, arising from both the earlier discussions and the readings.

The new questions that we shared had to do with the revision and subversion of our own concepts. We asked questions such as the following: Why do the classical concepts of theology and of gender seem to us inadequate? What consequences does the recognition of cultural diversity have for our work? How should we approach theologically the themes of citizenship, politics, and the state? What hermeneutical and political implications flow from recognizing ourselves as feminists, or as simply women? With regard to the theme of interculturality we also had many questions. For example, when we adopt interculturality, are we reasserting the same notions of universality that we have been combating? Can it be that the perspectives of intercultural dialogue are more demanding than the cultural deconstruction proposed by critical feminism? Is there a danger that we will so focus on dialogue among cultures that we will abandon the critique of religion and its many manifestations of intolerance? How might we understand the critique and the transformation of racism and sexism within the context of the intercultural paradigm?

Our bodies in movement took still another step forward, raising questions about our situation in the academic realm. What challenges do we as feminists face in the teaching of theology? What is our experience in the institutions where we work? What feminist proposals are we making in terms of pedagogy? What are we doing so that feminist theology becomes an articulating axis of our study programs? What resources do we have for publishing our writings? How can we create intercontinental feminist networks in which our materials can circulate? How are our theologies affected by the fact that there is no place for us in our own countries? All such questions reveal the complexity of our contexts and the anxieties that we share. Without pretending to offer comprehensive answers, we managed to deal with some of these questions in two broad areas: gender theories and epistemological frameworks.

Gender Theories

Gender theories were incorporated into Latin American feminist theology only in the decade of the 1990s, and they helped us to delve into the problematic lived by women in the context of our patriarchal societies, cultures, and churches. The category of gender comes from feminist movements that saw a need to broaden their theoretical frameworks in

ways that would help them achieve greater clarity and political commitment. We recognize, however, that those theories have their limitations and inadequacies for analyzing in depth the interstructural, multiplicative, and simultaneous nature of the present-day systems of domination. The greatest challenges for us today do not come from “gender,” since our particular contexts do not produce “gender” movements as such. Rather, our challenges come from the social, cultural, and religious structures and institutions that keep women in positions of subordination.

We realize that the category of gender was initially well received in certain academic spheres, above all where feminist theoretical and political practices had been rejected. We understand that in such spheres the category continues to be a strategic instrument for introducing the conceptual frameworks of feminist liberation theology.

Some women’s and feminists’ movements have found in the category of gender a utopian horizon for inclusion. A few male theologians have belatedly adopted this category, and it has helped to gain some allies for the feminist struggles. Some theologians, nonetheless, especially Roman Catholic priests, but also certain groups of women theologians, have used and continue to use this category for the purpose of invalidating and denying legitimacy to critical feminist positions. In certain theological and ecclesiastical spheres, this category has also served to promote a revision of an understanding of “masculinity.” Such conceptual approaches to masculinity are limited, however, not only because they perpetuate dualistic mentalities about differences between “feminine” and “masculine,” but also because they fail to contextualize these approaches in feminist analytical frameworks that reveal quite clearly the sexual relations of power.

We view with concern the fact that in some countries programs have been developed for studying and reflecting on masculinity. Such programs seem to assume that it is historically necessary to maintain models of thought about “femininity,” whose dualistic complement would be “masculinity.” In such cases, the category of gender proves to be counterproductive as a way of attaining new modes of thought that are free of essentialist dualism. We are likewise concerned about the depoliticization of other categories, such as race and ethnicity. We therefore recognize the importance of questioning ourselves about the significance of these categories and about the ways we are using them in our own theological activity. What type of mentality do they help to promote, one that is liberating or one that is patriarchal? What type of activity do they help to develop, one of transformation or one of cooptation for what already exists? What kind of social project do they

promote, a new world of justice or simply an entry into the system of power quotas? In examining these questions, we consider it fundamental to keep as a point of reference the historical contexts of poverty and dehumanization in which we live. Concentrating on the concrete reality that surrounds us helps us to focus our thought so as to discover what we wish to achieve in using these categories in our theological languages.

At the present time we see certain dangers in using the category of gender. A first danger is that the category can domesticate feminist discourse, insofar as it is used in some theological and ecclesiastical spheres as a strategy for minimizing critical feminist discourse. A second danger involves the depoliticization of feminism and the cooptation of the category of gender for the purpose of reducing feminism's political impact. We therefore believe it is necessary to rethink the epistemic and social function of the category of gender on the basis of the conceptual frameworks of critical feminism. A third danger is the risk of neutralizing the transformative effects of feminist thought, since the category of gender functions within kyriarchal thought patterns. This can result in a diminished understanding of how the feminist struggles contribute to a new world of justice and human rights for women.

Epistemological Frameworks

We start off from the premise that not every form of knowledge is valid or good for all women. There are forms of knowledge that, even if they are well intended and appear innocent, continue to maintain an intellectual hierarchy and a cognitive inequality. In many cases the modes of knowing practiced by peripheral cultures are considered inferior. Furthermore, we recognize the importance of words; there are words that engender life and words that engender death. Not every word spoken by a woman is liberating. We therefore seek to evaluate our own rhetorical practice and to face up to the epistemological challenge of continually developing a theological discourse of liberation. Our desire is to be able to find, by means of open communication and critical discussion, reliable orientations for the future.

For our epistemological discernment we propose to reflect on the relation that exists between thought and concept. Thought does not always produce liberating epistemological frameworks. In fact, hegemonic discourse justified the notions of nationality and pure theory and gave primacy to speculative, non-historical thought. From our viewpoint, it is precisely this monocultural, nationalistic discourse that has sought to invalidate all forms of thought that are not Western European. Our

own epistemological proposal must break with Western European academic courtesy and name things by their name. The desire for theological dialogue certainly does not mean avoiding contradictions or hushing up disagreements.

We realize that in some countries of Western Europe and North America women theologians and social scientists speak of *post-feminism* and advocate the adoption of post-feminist positions. The use of this term possibly allows them to indicate that they find themselves in a different conceptual situation, one that is beyond the limitations of patriarchal thought. Thus, the use of the prefix *post* would seem to indicate that feminism is no longer necessary because the patriarchal environment has been wholly superseded. We believe that these post-feminist scholars are right to take such a position, since the domination of the patriarchal mind set has indeed been overcome within their own thought. This overcoming, though, has taken place only there, in their own thought, and not in the crude, naked reality that is experienced by the great majority of women around the world. We women scholars of the southern hemisphere, who do not benefit from a welfare state, cannot afford to indulge in any such “post-feminist” speculation. The harsh reality of the world in which we live imposes upon us the imperative of waging with ever greater determination the feminist struggles for transformation and emancipation. As long as the kyriarchal systems of domination last, critical feminism is for us an ethical, political and religious imperative. Many of the post-feminist scholars could well benefit from using an epistemology that historicizes concepts and avoids the superfluous use of words that have no backing in historical processes.

With a view to intercultural communication that goes beyond a dialogue made up of mere “discourses,” we propose instead a dialogue among and with our bodies, our emotions, our flavors and aromas and colors. We must understand our bodies, though, within the context of struggle for a world of rights for women and of dignity and justice for all of humankind. We claim our right to think, to think incorrectly, to think subversively, to deconstruct and reconstruct concepts within theoretical frameworks that open up to us better roads for the present and the future. We believe that we can reinvent thought without fear of erring. In many circumstances the only option we have is to begin all over again. We propose a critical feminist epistemology because its grounding in social-change movements strengthens our hope that another world, one of rights and justice, is possible in this world. Such an epistemology infuses our visions of emancipation and human fulfillment with religious and political categories of hope.

We have also made an *epistemological break* with the kyriarchal epistemologies because these, besides being essentialist and monocultural, also prevent us from naming the sexual violence committed against women. We hold that a critical feminist epistemology of liberation is different from an epistemology of gender, since critical feminism proposes a type of knowledge that emanates from the historicity of the experience of struggle for a just world, not from the history of ideas or the definition of concepts. Such knowledge is sensitive to the human aspirations of emancipation and is therefore open to intercultural transformation. The perspective of intercultural feminism is not in need of someone else to legitimize it, for it is the very life of women, our bodies, our struggles, our sufferings, and our hopes that legitimize our theological practices.

We have also emphasized the horizon of justice and emancipation that orients our work and that leads us to recognize the ethical, political, and sacred dimensions of our religious discourse. Within this horizon we wish to lay claim to the legacy of wisdom of our foremothers. The women's voices that have been silenced and the women's presences that have been denied in the African American and Amerindian traditions challenge us to offer liberating alternatives for thinking. We wish to rescue and reconstruct all that the intercultural ethical proposals offer us in the way of feminist thought and practice.

In our own contexts, where sexual violence is extensive and the human rights of women are ignored, there is a need to rescue the history of women's suffering. In doing theology, we cannot leave out our own sufferings, or our joys and our hopes. Often we must ask ourselves: what is this body that is creating such a literary body of works? Along with other interpretative strategies, the hermeneutics of lament continues to be a liberating key to our bodies. If we cannot make public our laments, then who will know of our existence? With whom will we be in solidarity? Who will join us in our protest? For the good of all women who aspire after basic well-being, we need to make public our irritation and our cry for change. As an epistemological locus, our suffering is important and should be viewed in relation to our longings for peace and happiness.

REIMAGINING THE PATHWAYS OF FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

In a third stage of our work together we decided to compose a mosaic based on words. Spoken works, unspoken words, words at times blessed, and words often accursed. What were we to do with so many words?

We consider that reimagining the pathways of feminist experience and thought is the task we have before us. To that end we proposed creating a word mosaic that would reveal to us those pathways, oriented around four methodological axes: words, hermeneutical instruments, new paradigms, and theoretical knots that await future developments.

Words

Words that jump, that skip and that play
 Words with body, everyday words
 Words that sparkle with experiences, biographies,
 realities
 Contextualities, movements, rhythms
 Women, life, wisdom

Words that lament and that shout
 Words weighty with suffering and complaint
 Word: protest
 Empire, poverty, Babylon
 Women, life, wisdom

Words that flow, that evoke and that name
 Indian, black, white, *mestiza*
 Foremothers. . . .
 Words that cross borders
 De-northing: *Nepantla*, *Chacana*
 Women, life, wisdom

Words that disrupt and disturb
 Ambiguity, deconstruction, obscurity, clarity
 Word: feminism
 Women, life, wisdom
 Words that embrace, that convoke, that defy
 Word: silence
 Liberty, empowerment, community
 Women, life, wisdom

Words that jump, that skip and that play
 Creativity, poetry, imagination
 Dream, demand
 Celebration, feast
 Women, life, wisdom

Hermeneutical Instruments

The daily life of women; their negated, silenced, gagged bodies; their struggles, resistance, survival, and unfulfilled hopes oblige us to speak of the broader context that is empire. For the empire, those bodies have value only insofar as they are reserves for the laws of the market. Women's lives are inserted in the context of imperial capitalist globalization and impel us to view the exclusionary nature of its space, its place, and its geography. On all sides we find evidence of the growing feminization of poverty, and its countenance is notably black and indigenous. Considering the ambivalence and conflictual nature of the globalizing process and feeling its tentacles of centralization and poverty, we denounce the use of resources that benefit only privileged social groups. In our geographic contexts, exclusion and poverty are the most evident aspects of reality.

Before such a scenario, we are called to envision alternatives to empire. The present dominating globalization endangers women's lives, their millennial cultures, and their religious universes, because it does not offer spaces for them to organize their lives according to their community interests. The hyper-technology of globalization is of benefit only to a minute part of the world's population. More than two-thirds of the world's people receive no benefit at all. Geography has for us both a social and a political value. In our work we strive to connect the geographic context of earth with the geographic context of our bodies. For that reason we must think not only about where we are, but also about how we are.

We affirm that women's bodies are privileged spaces for our theological labor. They are sacred bodies, where divine Wisdom becomes manifest through their stories, their music, their liturgy, their religions, their celebrations. We are also challenged by the ambivalence of those bodies: they are bodies that become sick with myoma, with cancer, with HIV/AIDS, with depression, with cataracts, with exhaustion, with psychosomatic symptoms of so many problems that have no solutions. We ask ourselves: how is medicine treating the bodies of women, especially those who are black and indigenous? We are challenged also by those aesthetically beautiful bodies, with their liposuction and plastic surgery, that correspond to the patterns of beauty imposed by the dominant North Atlantic culture. We find on all sides the bodies of girls and young women, often malnourished, sexually abused, and prematurely pregnant. We find many bodies that are consumed by drugs, and many that are maltreated and aged beyond their years. We see that the repressed bodies of homosexual women have begun to come out into the open, and for that

they are doubly punished. We find also the bodies of a migrating humanity, bodies persecuted and criminalized for the simple fact of seeking work “in the North.” Many of these bodies have remained in silence, in anonymous graves. All these bodies deserve the attention of our theologies. In some ways, our epistemology is also itinerant, because it allows us to see the diversity, the plurality, and the inequalities of our reality. For that reason our epistemology requires us to undertake systematic analyses, which expose the interactions of racism, classism, religion, sexual orientation, and intergenerational relations. But it also requires us to recover disputed words, in order to affirm the conceptual force of our perspectives.

The hermeneutical instruments that support our labor are diverse, but we have recourse to feminist theological, political, and ethical categories in order to interpret our experience within the ambivalence and complexity of our contexts. The diversity of our interpretative instruments and categories has allowed us to make manifest in critical fashion the polyphony of voices and the wealth of meanings that we find in our reality. Nevertheless, we also find that we need to develop much more the theme of hermeneutical instruments, in order to clarify the nature of our own contribution to them.

New Paradigms and Pending Theoretical Knots

Intercultural perspectives require a dialectical intellectual praxis that allows social and cultural subjects to speak as equals and to forge alliances, on the basis of their real conditions and their diverse contextualities, for the purpose of achieving a common future of justice. An intercultural epistemology requires that we move beyond mere recognition of differences toward designing common spaces for affirming the common emancipative interests of the voices that the dominant culture wishes to suppress. Intercultural thought arises as a theoretical political proposal aimed at strengthening the search for new forms of living together (*convivencia*), where differences do not produce social and cognitive inequalities, but rather serve to unite together the diverse contextual wisdoms in order to achieve just alternatives for humankind and the world. Feminist intercultural theology seeks to participate in these perspectives and so adopts this same proposal. For us, the inclusion of the intercultural paradigm means renouncing the dogmatic absolutism affirmed by the present kyriarchal religions and denouncing the evils produced by the kyriarchal monotheisms and monocultures when they identify the divine presence with men. The tasks we see for the future are the following:

- The concept of cultural Mestizaje should be revised, since it is generally understood as a synthesis that represents a unitary and global cultural context. Such an understanding is inadequate because it suppresses the cultural diversity intrinsic to the cultures and religions of the indigenous and African American peoples. Furthermore, it also encourages the idea that these religions contain elements of witchcraft and idolatry and therefore should be censured and avoided.
- The feminist critique of kyriarchal reason continues to be an important connective theme in the development of our theologies. This critique should assist in the undoing of the universal organization of the existing dominant knowledge. We believe that this can be one of the most valuable contributions that intercultural thought can make to a critical feminist epistemology.
- In order to think interculturally, we need to “relearn” our thought by critically interpreting our own ways of life and thought within our concrete contexts. This relearning means entering into a process of suspecting our own suspicions and of allowing our hermeneutics to be reorganized in relation to other hermeneutics. It is not enough to affirm hermeneutical diversity; we must also recognize the partial and relative character of our own interpretations.
- In the process of producing theological knowledge, we find it necessary to repoliticize our bodies, since they are situated within an ethical, political, and sacred horizon. We hold that conditions of equality between women and men are a theological, ethical, and political imperative in our religions and our churches.
- In order for intercultural dialogue to come to be a reality, we consider it important to take account of the mobility and the transitory character of the knowing subjects. Nobody possesses absolute truth, but a common future of well-being and justice is something that should be shared by all humankind. A commitment to interculturality means that our theologies will build roads that join together to make the future possible.
- The invitation to establish intercultural dialogue does not mean covering up or ignoring the realities of racism and sexism that are present in our social and cultural environments. Rather, it means joining forces to bring about a radical transformation of those environments. The notion of dialogue among cultures requires of us greater consciousness of the visions and elements of emancipation that the different cultural traditions can contribute to the new realities that are already coming into existence.

Finally, among the various theoretical knots that have been insufficiently treated in our theologies and that still remain as challenges, we have tried to highlight the following: (a) the reinterpretation, from within our contexts, of concepts that communicate values such as truth, beauty, and personal security; (b) our activity and progress in academic institutions, and their relation with knowledge and authority; (c) an explicit theological approach to “dangerous” and controversial topics, such as the sexual and reproductive rights of women, abortion, homosexuality, and ordination of women to the Roman Catholic priesthood; and (d) the relation of our theologies with the organizations of civil society that work for human rights.

CONCLUSION

The dialogue proposed by this symposium has not ended, nor has it exhausted the wide field of our concerns and aspirations, but it has begun a process of dialogue that gives us joy and hope. In this process of production and exchange of wisdoms, we recognize that we drink from different fountains a variety of liquids, with the flavors of diverse fruits and the pleasures our work arouses. We drink with pleasure the juice of our labor, which is the product of our medicinal plants for restoring health. We savor the fruit of our healing plants among ourselves, and we offer it to other women, to those who joined us in our memories, to those who did not arrive but with whom we communed by the art of imagination, and to those whom we do not know but who still inspire us to transform our reality. Their frontier presences, their movements, rhythms, songs, and prayers have come to give life to our feminist spiritualities. We offer that fruit also to our male theological colleagues and to other men who likewise seek healing for their kyriarchal infirmities. With gratitude we celebrate the support that we receive from many other persons, and we give thanks for the transforming action of the divine Wisdom in our lives, who is present as *aché*, as fount of energy, as liberating goodness.

Notes

¹ For the significance of these terms, see the Introduction by Maria José Rosado-Nunes and the chapters in this collection by Daisy L. Machado and Nancy Elizabeth Bedford.

² By way of preparatory reading for the symposium discussion, the whole group received the following works: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's*

Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology (New York: Continuum 1994); Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación Intercultural de la Filosofía* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001); and *Antología de Teoría y Análisis Feminista*, selected by the organizers of the symposium, which included articles written by Virginia Vargas, Sonia E. Alvarez, and María José Rosado-Nunes.