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## **Doing Theology in a Divided World, by Fabella and Torres**

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DOING THEOLOGY IN A DIVIDED WORLD. Edited by Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985.

The book contains the theological papers presented at and related to the Sixth International Conference of EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) held in Geneva from 5 to 13 January 1983. The first five conferences were for Third World theologians only. The sixth differed in that it sought to "initiate a dialogue with the First World Theologians" (p. ix). The main purpose of the gathering, as explained in the Preface, was "to examine what it means to do theology in our world and then to propose a new methodology for doing theology that starts from commitment" (p. xiii).

To achieve their purpose the participants of the conference used a special threefold methodology: (1) storytelling (contained in part II of the book); (2) social analysis (presented in part III) and a reformulation of the content and methodology of theology (part V). Efforts were to have the papers presented for each step of the methodology come from different regions of the world. The overall effect one gets in reading the book is that there was consensus at the conference on the presence of various forms of oppression throughout the world, and not just in the southern hemisphere, and agreement on a new way of doing theology.

The book also contains articles on a history of theology by European theologians Dorothee Sölle and J.B. Metz (part IV), liturgies, poems, letters presented at the Conference (part VI), the final statement of the Conference (part VII) and an assessment of the Conference by three theologians—an Asian, a North American, and an Orthodox East European.

The main achievement of the book is the clear portrayal of various forms of oppression and injustice suffered by different groups throughout the world. These include feminism (sexism), classism, militarism, capitalism, and racism (apartheid). Wil Blezer van de Walle and Rosemary Ruether speak strongly against sexism and the violations of women's rights. Van de Walle urges women to struggle against dominant male groups and against women who are satisfied with a stereotyped female image. She demands equal treatment for men and women in the Church, including positions in the ministry. Ruether decries the role of woman in preindustrial and capitalist patriarchy, where they are denied their civil or legal rights. She complains of double work load for women and of the double oppression they suffer—sexism within oppressed classes. Many of the articles mention the oppression of sexism within their cultures or experiences.

Frances Arbour explains what the Canadian Inter-Church Committee is doing to expose serious violations of human rights in Latin America. Several (Bonganjalo Goba, Julio de Santa Ana, Engelbert Mveng) talk of the oppressions suffered by the African people—the rifts among the blacks, the divisions among blacks and whites, the lack of international support to fight the

"demons of white racism." Bonganjalo Goba painfully tells his colleagues at the conference that no Western country supported the 1973 UN Resolution for an international convention on the suppression of apartheid (p. 56), and that Western countries continue to support regimes that uphold institutionalized racism. Julio de Santa Ana speaks of oppressions and meaningful struggles against them going on in (1) Southern Africa (e.g. against racism); (2) in Central America where people are fighting classism and sexism, and (3) among the Islamic people in Africa and Asia "as part of the general uprising of the poor of the world" (p. 62). Julio de Santa Ana points out that among the groups working for liberation from oppressive situations "there is a lack of clear inter-relationship and coordination" (p. 62), and concludes that radical changes will not easily come about in the present situations of domination.

While there is much in the book which is useful and informative, the perspective at times tends to suffer because of the seemingly one-sided presentation by some writers. Thus Pablo Richard's sharp attack on the Catholic hierarchy in Nicaragua is difficult to accept, especially when one compares this with other reports about the vigorous and praiseworthy denunciation by the church of the *injustices* of the Sandinista government. Instead of congratulating the church, Richard writes: "There have been revolutions that persecuted the church: in Nicaragua, the church persecutes the revolution—a revolution being carried forward, perhaps for the first time in history, mostly by Christians" (p. 30). Engelbert Mveng's article on a cultural perspective to dialogue also seems a bit too harsh and prejudiced against the First World and Western theologians. It is difficult to accept Mveng's contention that all through the centuries "there has never been dialogue" between the First World and the Third World and that "there has been only on the part of the First World, a monologue of arrogance, derision, and domination addressed to the Third World" (p. 73).

Another weakness of the book is that it does not contain critical assessments by non-liberation First World and Third World theologians. If dialogue is to be effective, it would be best to include the views of those who differ from the liberationists and can offer questions, objections, even corrections to certain perceptions and perspectives.

Of particular interest to the Third World theologians and among the more interesting articles in the collection are the ones by J.B. Metz and James Cone. J.B. Metz tells his audience that "we are standing at the end of the European-centered era of Christianity" (p. 85). He then presents six theses about the state of European/Western Christianity and proclaims that "the hour of reformation is the hour of the poor churches in our world" (p. 86). For him the most important change in the history of the Church is the present transition of the Catholic Church from a "culturally monocentric" European and North American church to a "culturally polycentric world church." He adds that this cultural polycentrism "must be based on cultures

of resistance to and liberation from all overt or covert forms of European colonialism" (p. 90).

In his article on "Black Theology," James Cone, of the Union Theological Seminary in New York, emphasizes the need for a reformulation of the methodology and content of theology. He believes that the first act in doing theology is *praxis*. "Praxis—a reflective political action that includes cultural identity—comes before theology in any formal sense" (p. 99). Many in the Third World will find reassurance in his assertion that "Our cultural identity and political commitment are worth more than a thousand textbooks of theology. That is why we do not talk about theology as the first order of business in EATWOT. Rather our first concern is with the quality of commitment that each of us has made and will make for those about whom and with whom we claim to do theology" (p. 99).

The whole emphasis on praxis, on commitment, on being involved in the transformation of the lot of the poor and marginalized are important reminders for one doing theology within an Asian setting. The process used in Geneva is worth learning from and imitating. There is much going on in Asia that can contribute to story-telling, to sharing of personal accounts about struggles and efforts for liberation from injustices. To this can be added a deeper and more thorough social analysis—something that is perhaps not being done sufficiently in Asia. These two will lead to the final process of theological reformation, where priority is given to commitment to changing the unjust structures in society, and where the Christian people and the agents of social change are seen as the doers of theology.

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A PRIEST TO THE WORLD AND OTHER PROSE WORKS. By Cesar T. Mella. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984. 77 pages.

Almost every young fiction writer begins with a thinly veiled semi-autobiographical account of his own quest for literary fame. First works are often a collection of literary reminiscences, allusions and laments on the difficulties of self expression, the lack of recognition. Cesar Mella's collection is no exception. "At that time I didn't like to work, for the devil of the literary itch was on my back, although no writer in our country, not even a national artist like Nick Joaquin, can make a living, much more support a family, from writing alone. It was an impractical and foolish decision, but I knew I had to write to keep my sanity and salvage myself from the wreckage of my dreams" (p. 10). "Wound," the second story in this collection, is the chronicle of a