

WOMEN: THEOLOGICAL BIBLICAL REFLECTION FROM LATIN AMERICA

Background

In the context of the last Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference, held at Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Africa in 2003, to which delegates of the Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ churches attended from fifty-four countries, a group of African women theologians shared their pilgrimages and a desire to see similar opportunities for women in other regions. Afterward, some of us Latin American women pastors and theologians took part in a workshop they offered and decided to organize an evening meal in order to facilitate sharing between the African and the Latin American women who were there.

Our sisters Linda Shelly, Latin American Director of Mennonite Mission Network USA, and Janet Plenet, Facilitator for Latin American of Mennonite Church Canada Witness, supported the organization of the meeting which took place August 15.

Historical Summary

The vision of creating a group of women for theological Biblical thinking, as well as other matters concerning African women, was born through the Sharing Gifts Globally workshops that our brothers Pakisa Taminska and Tim Lind started to give in that region. Hayalume Kadi, a sister from the Congo, carried out an inter-Mennonite meeting in that country. She also invited women from other African countries including persons from rural areas. Women from Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Congo participated. There were presentations concerning "The Pastoral Role of the Woman and her Mission in Society." Tim Lind showed his interest and asked if they were organized. Although they were not organized, it was mentioned that in order to be able to do it, they first needed to learn to know each other within their own country. They needed to know what themes were important to later extend themselves to all the continent of Africa and then learn to know women throughout the world.

They were not mistaken. Some time later in the conference assembly we, women from many parts of the world, sat around them in order to listen to them with deep interest.

The Dream is Contagious

In this meeting that various of we women of Latin America had with them, we could ask several questions in order to become acquainted with the process they used to organize themselves as women theologians and the situations they had to face: What motivated them to form this group? What is the situation of women in Africa? What is involved for African women to be a theologian? What challenges do they have in their churches and how do discern their context and create theology?

After having listened to their answers with expectation and after having shared our own national and personal experiences, we prayed for one another asking God that this step that the women have taken very intentionally would be extended to other continents where ever there would be women interested in continuing to build the Kingdom of God from the perspective of women.

And Here We Are

After these conversations, our sister Alix Lozano, Director of the Colombian Mennonite Biblical Seminary and Ofelia Garcia, pastor and current moderator of the Mexican Conference of Anabaptist Evangelical Churches, along with other Latin American sisters put ourselves to the task of taking the first steps in beginning to construct our dream:

1. We have presented the proposal of continuing to advance with this project under their coverage and support to Mennonite World Conference's Global Gifts Project . We received a positive response from them.
2. We are conscious that this dream would not be possible to construct without you women that have struggled in your own contexts to bring freedom and health to other men and women and that we have learned to make theology from our daily nature. We want to do an extensive project and invite you first to share your preoccupations and questions concerning it with us.

The Process

1. Take an inventory of Latin American women with theological training. The categories to include are as follows: a) Women with theological training. (This includes women that have taken Biblical or theological courses, but have not finished a degree program.), b) Women currently studying theology, c) Women who have had significant roles as pastors or in leadership in the church although they don't have theological training.
2. Bring these women together in each conference, country or region in order to converse about roles of women in the church in their specific contexts. These meetings will take place according to economic and geographical possibilities. For example, they could be within the framework of already existing regional meetings. (CAMCA, South Cone, Andean Zone)
3. Carry out the Latin American Women Theologian's Encounter within the framework of the Latin American Anabaptist Consultation meeting in Costa Rica in 2005.

Ofelia Garcia and Alix Lozano

Mennonite World Conference's Global Gifts Project Facilitators

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