

## Latin American (Biblical) Feminism(s)



This presentation helps you locate my scholarship within the Latin American Feminist Liberation Theology

Since the field is growing and diverse, I can't cover the whole L.A. feminist movement here.

# New or Old?



Is Latin American Feminist Liberation Theology new or old?

It depends on several definitions:

- Latin American: born in the continent? Grown here? «Adopted» (a L.A. country as home) and by a L.A. country as daughter?
- What about «indigenous»?
- Is «feminist» the same as «woman's (for instance, studies)»? «with a focus on women»? «female»?
- Problematic definitions!

Sor Juana (1648□ - 1695) joined the religious order of the Jerónimas in order to be able to study.

Although her feminism is contested, she contended publicly with her bishop for the right of women to study and to write theology.

Posthumous portrait of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by Miguel Cabrera (Mexico, 1750).



# Young also theologically



Not only feminism, but also autochthonous theology is young on this continent:

- 51 years ago, the first Latin American (Roman Catholic) Bishop's Conference was convened at Medellín, Colombia, and liberation theology was officially born.
- More or less in parallel, the first recognized Protestant theologians started their academic careers at about that same time.





According to Kerber, the name «liberation theology» first appeared in a book by a Protestant scholar:

«It is the PhD dissertation by the Brazilian Presbyterian Rubem Alves, defended in 1968, with the title “Toward a theology of liberation”».

Kerber adds in a footnote that the editor of the published version changed the title to *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1969).

Guillermo Kerber, “Teología de la Liberación y movimiento ecuménico: breve reflexión desde una práctica.” *Horizonte* 11 (2013): 1819.

“... reflection on faith from a particular social and cultural situation”



Latin-American liberation theologies are not “genitive” theologies, they are not theological reflections on the theme of liberation. As Ignacio Ellacuría puts it,

“Historically, theology has been reflection on faith from a particular social and cultural situation.”<sup>1</sup>

Or, as Kerber expresses it,

“Theology, then, is for the Latin American theologians a second moment. The first moment is reality, life, history.”<sup>2</sup>

# Ver-Juzgar-Actuar



Liberation Theology's most distinctive character is its methodology, based on a method called "Ver-Juzgar-Actuar". This means first VER, to look at reality from a particular standpoint (as you are aware of after this year, we always wear some lens when we read, both reality and the Bible). Thus, we read what's going on before we get to the Bible.

Then the second step is to get insight, encouragement, and direction from the biblical text (JUZGAR, make an assessment, judge a situation in the light of the biblical text).

And finally, the person or more appropriately the group, agrees on actions to be taken according to what they have found out in the two previous steps (ACTUAR).

# After Sor Juana, A Few Fathers

José Severino Croatto  
(Argentinean) published his *El hombre en el mundo I: Creación y designio. Comentario a Génesis 1* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora) in 1974; other publications:

- *Historia de salvación. La experiencia religiosa del pueblo de Dios* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 1995, 2nd ed. 2001).
- *Experiencia de lo sagrado y tradiciones religiosas. Estudio de Fenomenología de la Religión* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 2002).
- *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987).



George V. Pixley (a child of US missionaries, who grew in Central America) published his *Historia sagrada, historia popular: Historia de Israel vista desde los pobres* (San José de Costa Rica: DEI) in 1989

(<https://archive.org/details/historiasagradah00pixl>).



Milton Schwantes' dissertation was on *The Right of the Poor* in the prophetic literature (published in 1975).

I don't know of publications in English. He's published on prophets, Genesis, and wisdom literature, in German and Portuguese.





# The foremothers



- Apparently, not many women published in the 1970's – or their publications got lost. They held no academic positions in theology, but many were active in parishes, popular movements, etc.
- They were the first ones to bring up the issue of «woman» or «the feminine» in theology, at a time when «the poor» by whom theologians stood seemed to have been all male or, at best, undifferentiated.
- Generally, like also the men decades earlier, these first women were more generalists than specialists, who wrote using the Bible, theology, and their personal pastoral experience to argue for equality in the image of God and in the Church.

# Beatriz Melano, the first one after Sor Juana

Beatriz Melano (married to and later divorced from Richard Couch, deceased 2004) is the first Latin American woman to have earned a Ph.D. in theology (University of Strasbourg, France). She introduced Ricouer's hermeneutical approach (book published 1983).

Other publication:

- *La mujer y la Iglesia* (Buenos Aires: El Escudo, 1973)



# Ma. Teresa Porcile Santiso

María Teresa Porcile Santiso from Uruguay (deceased 2001) earned her Ph.D. (1991) from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) on an anthropological approach to woman's mission in Church.

Some of her publications:

- *La mujer, espacio de salvación. Misión de la mujer en la Iglesia, una perspectiva antropológica* (Ediciones Trilce, Montevideo 1991).
- *Despertar de Dios. Despertar de la mujer. Una lectio* (Gráficos del Sur, Monterrey 1999).

Picture: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/yearbook2002/obituaries.html>



# A Tension Not To Be Denied



Although we will see many examples of liberating hermeneutics, there is also an undeniable tension from colonial times on with regards to the use of the Bible:

“For women and for all native Afro-Brazilians the Bible was and is an instrument of massacre. It was the justification of the robbery of our land and the enslavement of our people. The Bible was an instrument of massacre because it was and still has been used to treat native religions as demonical, linking them with idolatry and superstition. The Bible was used to condemn native sacred dances, rituals and meals.”<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this quotation that this colonial heritage affects not only women, but everyone. Besides religious discrimination many women suffer the added burden of discrimination because of ethnic, social, or class condition.

<sup>1</sup> Nancy Cardoso Pereira, Changing Seasons: About the Bible and other Sacred Texts in Latin America.” In Silvia Schroer & Sophia Bietenhard (eds.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), pp. 48-58 (50).

# Feminist Liberation theologians



FEMINIST THEOLOGIANS STEMMING FROM  
LIBERATION THEOLOGY ARE BY FAR THE  
LARGEST CATEGORY, AS LIBERATION  
THEOLOGY HAS BEEN THE CONTINENT'S  
CRITICAL MOVEMENT SINCE THE 1970s.

# A Panoramic of the Last 30 Years



3 stages corresponding approx. to the three decades of 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s:

- The 1970s bubbled with left-wing movements. In terms of female production, these were the initial steps into consciousness, a complementary view (often essentialist, speaking of “woman”). However, the available bibliography from the 1970s is really scant, thus calling for prudence in our analysis.
- In the 1980s, many of our countries came out of cruel dictatorships and found themselves deeply wounded and financially indebted to the richest countries in the Northern hemisphere. This is the second stage or movement within liberation feminism. According to Tamez, it is the decade in which women’s and feminist movements are created within the churches and there are incipient dialogues with men in order to introduce gender injustice into the agendas as a social problem.
- And since the 1990s, neoliberal capitalism has reigned alone, killing local economies and, at the same time, allowing for much more international contact. Input from other disciplines such as gender theory and a larger body of self-identified-as-feminist trained theologians in the region start to allow for more diversity as well.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elsa Tamez, «El papel de ASETT en la teología feminista.» In *Construyendo puentes entre teologías y culturas* (Montevideo: Amerindia /Bogotá: San Pablo, 2011), 115-123; “Hermenéutica feminista latinoamericana. Una mirada retrospectiva.” In Sylvia Marcos, ed. *Religión y Género* (Madrid: Trotta, 2008, 2012), 43-66.





“Latin American feminist theology was born and matured within liberation theology, but today it would find itself in a critical dialogue with this theology. The evolution of the Latin American feminist theology takes more than thirty years, which may be divided into three stages, running parallel to the decades of the [19]’70, ’80 and ’90s. The feminist consciousness within the Latin American theology evolved from total identification of female theologians and biblical students with liberation theology (first stage) to an increasing awareness of—and discomfort with—the patriarchal mindset of liberation theology (second stage); and [it continued moving] into challenging the patriarchal anthropology and cosmology present in liberation theology, asking for a total reconstruction of this theology from a feminist perspective (third stage).”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mary Judith Ress, *Sin visiones, nos perdemos: Reflexiones sobre Teología Ecofeminista Latinoamericana* (Santiago, Chile: Colectivo Con-spirando, 2012), 15.

# L.A. feminist theology gets diversified

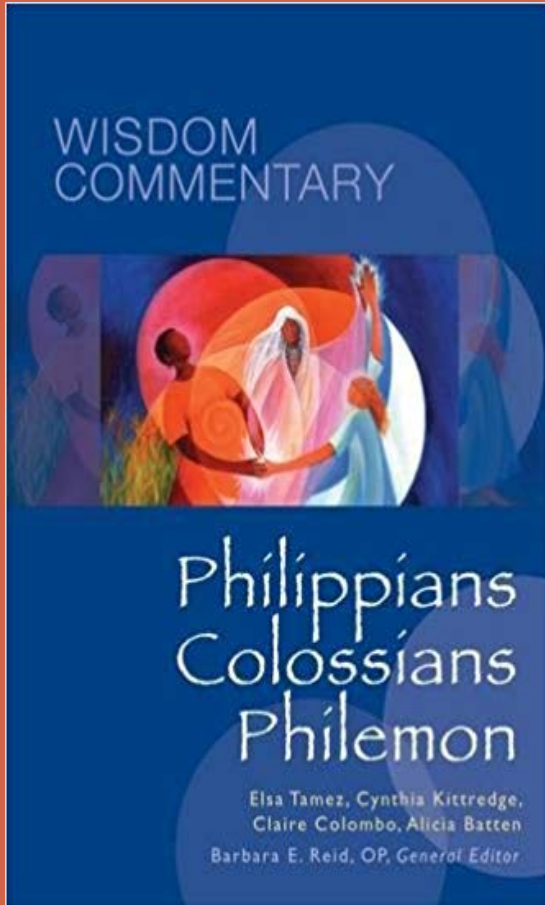


The biblical feminist movement in L.A. gets diversified in at least the following movements:

- Liberation theologians
- Black theologians
- Ecofeminist theologians
- Indigenous theologians

At times, however, I find it hard to classify a theologian within one only category, especially in these latter decades. One reason: «option for the poor» means option for women within those «poor» and black, homeless, landless peasants, and indigenous women are even poorer within the poor. Liberation theology cannot look only at middle class gender oppression (which nonetheless exists, of course).

## One of her latest publications:



Elsa Tamez, Mexican, has worked in Costa Rica and Colombia. She earned her Ph.D. with a dissertation on justification and inclusion in Romans.



Some of her publications:

- *Struggles for Power in Early Christianity: A Study of the First Letter to Timothy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007).
- *The amnesty of grace: Justification by faith from a Latin American perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).
- *The Scandalous Message of James : Faith without Works Is Dead* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

# Greed and Structural Sin in Paul's Romans



Paul, after announcing the wrath of God because of the injustice (*adikia*) of human beings that suppress the truth in injustice (*adikia*), continues explaining in a slow rhythm from Romans 1:19 to 3:9 how sin is conceived. In 1:13,24 and 25, humans change, invert reality by evil, and in verses 1:24,26 and 28 God "gave them up" meaning "left them at the mercy" of "the lusts of their hearts" v. 24, "degrading passions" v. 26, or "a debased mind" v. 28. [...]

Wisdom literature sees the inversion in the fact that while the ungodly do very well, it goes very badly for the just. For Paul, following the wisdom tradition (Wis 13:1-9) and the prophetic tradition (Jer 22:13-16), this inversion is a rejection of knowledge of the true God and is the veneration of idols (1:23)." As we can see, there is a relation between the practice of inversion and human greedy desires. The practices reveal a false knowledge of God because these practices are oriented toward egoistic and greedy desires.

# God's Grace and Human Dignity



Today, more than ever, it is necessary to underline the close relationship between God's grace, "the image of God" and human dignity. When we experience God's grace we feel like sons and daughters of God, the image of God is restored and the dignity of the person reappears. This is not only valid for each of us personally, but also for the other. When we recognize God's grace in someone else, we also recognize their human dignity.

Grace is not only experienced in a passive way. Grace is a gift that invites us to radiate it from our spirit, mind and body, to manifest it through our attitudes and practices and not just through what we say. Grace is not limited to emotions or fleeting moods, but profoundly transforms and renews our conscience, our body and the way we live.



# Some examples: Tânia Mara Vieira Sampaio

She earned her Ph.D. from the Methodist University in San Paulo, Brazil, working on prostituted bodies as clue to reading Hosea's prophecies (1997).

Some of her publications:

- "Hosea." In Daniel Patte *et alii*, eds. *The Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004)
- "Encuentros y desencuentros del amor: aperitivos de la vida. Un debate sobre referenciales de lectura del texto bíblico." In Carlos Mesters, ed. *Hermenéutica bíblica latinoamericana: balances y perspectivas* (Bogotá: Dimensión Educativa, 2002).





# On Hosea 1 and Prostituted Bodies



The power that the state strives to acquire is in the procreating body of the woman. Children are important in the tribal structures of Israel. They are needed both as laborers in the field and as soldiers on military fronts, the two basic structures of the tribal economic system. Either the children's bodies, marked by prostitution, are sacrificed for the sake of the national power structure, or this tribal system is destroyed, and the children have the possibility to live.

Similar critiques of the monarchic power structures of Israel are found throughout the book of Hosea, especially in passages regarding political issues concerning the kings, economic issues related to the harvest, and the use of religion for political and economic manipulation in the turmoil in the last twenty years of the northern kingdom.

# Some examples: Nancy Cardoso Pereira

She earned her Ph.D. from the UMESP. For many years has worked with the movements of landless peasants in Brazil.

Some publications:

- “The Immobile Dance: The Body and the Bible in Latin America.” In Regina Ammicht-Quinn & Elsa Tamez, eds. *The Body and Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2002)
- “Paper is Patient, History Is Not: Readings and Unreadings of the Bible in Latin America (1985-2005).” In Roland Boer & Fernando F. Segovia, eds. *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012).

See also her at: <https://vimeo.com/159974700>.



# Some examples: Nancy Cardoso Pereira:



Who today knows how or is able to produce such theology and prophecy?

Who is able to condemn and combat this spiritual aura conferred on a social phenomenon, this illusion that things, that economic systems are natural or eternal? The dominant economic system becomes before our eyes no longer a historical social phenomenon: rather the world and its beings, personal relationships and human creations become commodities; business takes on an impetus and existence of its own that cannot be questioned, a movement that sweeps us along to perpetuate inequality and violence, without our even realizing it. The economy and economic relationships rule humankind, instead of being seen and appreciated as the product of humankind in history, and for that reason capable of being overcome, criticized and reinvented.

Our theologies and pastoral policies are tired and exhausted. The economic system has taken over Western religious language, leaving more or less generous margins for the churches that have before them the easiest option, which is to become an integral functional part of the whole package presented by capitalism, offering religious goods as commodities, and services in the form of powerful fundamentalisms and charismatic spectacles of marketing and prosperity.

(cont.)



(cont.)

We need to choose the difficult option and learn to say again, □By your many sins and dishonest trade, you have desecrated your sanctuaries' (Ezek. 28:18). The world and its living beings, peoples and their cultures, the earth, water and seeds - everything that moves is sacred! And no economic system that produces injustice and dishonest dealing can be blessed or legitimized or tolerated in the name of God.

The gospels, the Law and the prophets, which are accepted in our Christian tradition, demand that we confess God throughout the inhabited world - the oikoumene - but that we give that confession concrete form, in the struggle for law and justice as the full accomplishment of the world and our humanity.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nancy Cardoso Pereira, presentation, WCC Porto Alegre Assembly, Feb 16, 2006. Plenary on economic justice, <https://www.oikoumene.org/es/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/2-plenary-presentations/economic-justice/nancy-cardoso-presentation>.

# Ecofeminism



**MOST ECOFEMINISTS HAVE STEMMED FROM  
OTHER AREAS OF THE THEOLOGICAL RANGE  
OTHER THAN BIBLE.**

# Some characteristics



Mary Judith Ress and other theologians speak of a fourth stage, in which many women have found new ways to live their spirituality. This fourth stage is still developing or it is too close for us to evaluate it as the three previous ones.

She notes as characteristics:

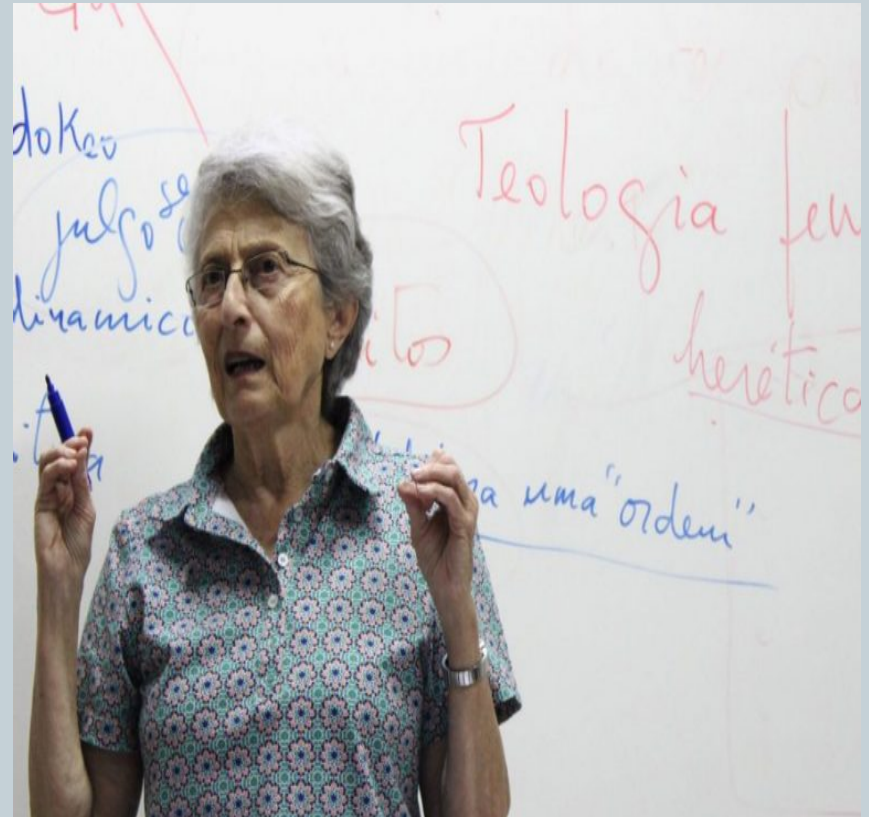
- an increasing autonomy on the part of women regarding, for instance, issues of sexuality and guilt,
- new forms of liturgy,
- prayer no longer addressed only to a male deity,
- connectivity with the universe and with other women,
- awareness of interconnection between oppression of women and other human groups and expoliation of nature.



# Some examples: Ivone Gebara

Ivone Gebara, Brazilian, a Roman Catholic nun, is the leading ecofeminist. Some of her publications:

- *Out of Depths: women's Experiences of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis : Fortress, 2002).
- «A Feminist Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Perspective with a View toward the Future.” In Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza & Fernando F. Segovia, eds.. *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003).
- Plenary address at the American Academy of Religion, “Knowing the Human, Knowing the Divine for the Human: Perspectives from Vulnerable Corners of Today’s World.” (2012), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u-w0k\\_tn50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u-w0k_tn50).





“For her [Gevara], God is not a fixed being beyond creation and sufficient in itself, as male theologians insist so as to control both the knowledge of God and people. This understanding of God is used by the patriarchal leadership to claim that they alone hold the truth of God. This control and tutelage shuts down the voices of women, and those who do not operate with that understanding of God. Instead of considering God as an essence, a self-enclosed being to whom we go to find wisdom, she sees God as a mystery that permeates the lives of men and women and the whole creation.

In her short book ‘What Is Theology?’, Gebara writes that theology is the cloth we wear on top of our experiences and deep feelings. The problem is that we wear only one piece of cloth and we never take that off. Instead, she says, we should take off our religious clothes often so we could discover our bodies, our feelings and then experiment with different cloths so we can learn other ways to talk about our experiences with God.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cláudio Carvalhaes & Fábio Py, “Liberation Theology in Brazil: Some History, Names and Themes.” *Cross Currents* 67 (2017): 157-179 (164). doi:10.1111/cros.12229

# Black Theology(ies)



**BLACK THEOLOGIES ARE NOT NEW. WHAT IS  
NEW IS RECOGNIZING THEM AS VALID  
THEOLOGIES, ALONGSIDE OTHER  
LIBERATION MOVEMENTS**



“Black Feminist Theology in Latin America was born out of a twofold challenge. On the one hand, to question and deconstruct the patriarchal theology that in the Latin American and Caribbean continent has a male, white, elitist face, fostering a chauvinistic, ethnocentric and classist theology. [...] still collaborator and participant of the current domination systems.

The other challenge this Black Feminist Theology has taken up is to reflect on the faith experience as lived by black women. We think of theology as a new place where black women can meet each other to share, to think, and to proclaim their liberating experiences-presences of God.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Silvia Regina de Lima Silva. “Abriendo Caminos, Teología Feminista y Teología Negra Feminista Latinoamericana.” *Magistro: Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras e Ciências Humanas* – UNIGRANRIO Vol. 1 Num.1 (2010), 82-95 (90-91), [www.unigranrio.br](http://www.unigranrio.br).

# Some Examples: Silvia R. de Lima Silva

She is “a Roman Catholic feminist theologian who has worked with Brazilian Base Christian Communities and Afro-Brazilian religious/cultural movements.”

(<https://sedosmission.org/old/english/silvia.htm>).

She teaches at the Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, UBL (Costa Rica) and is researcher at DEI, the ecumenical department for research, also in San José de Costa Rica.

Her area of interest lies more in cultural studies than in Bible.





“We believe that black theology, in the broadest sense, has been present since the arrival of the blacks, with their experience of God, to this Latin American continent. This experience is transmitted in codes different from that of Western theology. It is a religious system where oral tradition is the basic principle for the initiation and transmission of knowledge.”

Silvia Lima da Silva, ‘Black Latin American Theology: A New Way to Sense, to Feel, and to Speak of God.’ In Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk. Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 195.



# Some examples: Maricel Mena López

- She is Colombian. She earned her Ph.D. from the UMESP on the Afro-Asiatic roots of Israel's origins (2002).
- She's been working also on women as war victims in the Bible and her country.





“Black feminist hermeneutics presents itself as the act of understanding and interpreting ourselves and in order to do so, we take texts as mediation. The text is a pretext to speak of our own historic reality. Memories of these ancestresses tell us that women were not utterly vanished... [T]hey are important not because they were more ethical, but because they reveal to us that our historic and mythic referents are also part of the biblical tradition.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maricel Mena López, “Hermenéutica negra feminista: De invisible a intérprete y artífice de su propia historia.” *RIBLA* 50 (2005), pp. 130-34 (134).

# Some examples:

## Ma. Cristina Ventura and Denisse Pichardo:



This woman in this text [Cant 1:5-6] feels beautiful and gracious. She challenges us to feel not only physically beautiful, but beautiful from a more fundamental standpoint; understanding “beauty as the being’s epiphany and proof of one’s being at its utmost originality.” Therefore [the Shulamite] also challenges us to strive to possess the vineyard. A vineyard that for us means having all the rights necessary to live with dignity, with the dignity God wants for God’s daughters and sons: The right to a dignifying job, health and education; the right to own land, so that we can live on it; the right to be ourselves, to laugh, to cry and to sing without suffering from prejudice; the right to value what is ours. And with all these, we will have the right to be really beautiful.

Just as the Shulamite had to neglect her own vineyard to tend someone else’s vineyards, we also often feel tending another vineyard. In order to survive we have to look down at ourselves and to those of our own race. We have to consider ourselves inferior and to assimilate as normal a racist society’s prejudices.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> María C. Ventura & Denisse Pichardo, “Experiencia de lectura bíblica desde la perspectiva de la mujer negra” *RIBLA* 25 (1996): 83.

# Indigenous theology(ies)



**I DO NOT KNOW OF ORGANIZED FEMINIST  
INDIGENOUS GROUPS PUBLISHING  
ACADEMIC BIBLICAL PAPERS.**

# However ...



Young theologians are being trained at different schools (in Latin America and beyond), so there will eventually be publications on biblical hermeneutics from an indigenous feminist perspective.

At present, however, indigenous feminism is hard to trace in paper. *RIBLA* includes only three articles by women on 'Indigenous hermeneutics', namely:

- Nelly Arrobo Rodas, «Lectura de la Biblia desde y con el indio» *RIBLA* 9 (1991), 135-48,
- Victoria Carrasco A., «Antropología indígena y bíblica. Chaquiñan andino y Biblia.» *RIBLA* 26 (1997): 24-44, and
- Graciela Chamorro, «María en las culturas y religiones amerindias.» *RIBLA* 46 (2003): 74-81.

# Also:



In 2002, a brilliant student at our seminary at home, María Chávez Quispe, finished her M.Div with a thesis entitled

“Let *Šadday* respond. Exegetical and structural analysis of Job 29-31 and its re-reading from the text’s holes”.

She shows that Job’s theme is not suffering but the search for justice.

There is a contrast between Job’s justice while he was rich and God’s injustice in his present condition (chapters 29 and 30). In chapter 31, Job throws a challenge to the Divine in the form of oaths: «If I ... (then) ...»

Chávez calls attention to «the female and male Jobs» who are part of our societies and who, unlike Job, never manage to live a life of abundance.

Job calls upon *Šadday*, not Yahweh (29:5; 31:2.35). *Šadday* is a divine name usually translated “Allmighty.” Its most probable etymology is that of breasts and thus it may have been originally that of a female deity.



# Latin American (Biblical) Feminism(s)



**STILL NECESSARY?**

**YES!**

**In the face of:**

- **#METOO**
- **INCREASINGLY CONSERVATIVE AND MISOGYNOUS GOVERNMENTS,**
- **LARGE NUMBER OF FEMICIDES, etc.**