

5-3-2019

Ideas to Disrupt: A Theology of Ministry

Cindy Gonzalez

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, cgonzalez001@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta>



Part of the [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

ISSN: 2472-2596 (print)

ISSN: 2472-260X (online)

Recommended Citation

Gonzalez, Cindy. 2019. Ideas to Disrupt: A Theology of Ministry. *Obsculta* 12, (1) : 138-144.

<https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta/vol12/iss1/13>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Obsculta* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

Cindy Gonzalez

Cindy Liliana Gonzalez is a College of Saint Benedict alumna where she graduated with a Bachelors of Arts in Asian Studies and a Chinese minor. Before coming to the Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary, she spent some time in the Silicon Valley tech industry. Cindy is a Los Angeles native and proud of both her Mexican and Huichol identities. Cindy and her family currently live in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

IDEAS TO DISRUPT: *A theology of Ministry*

I came to Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary with an end goal in sight. Therefore, I was to fulfill the requirements needed to obtain a Master of Divinity degree and immediately after graduation begin a chaplaincy residency. I recall being extremely stern with myself concerning there not being room or time for me to be hospitable to other possible vocational discernment. Such sternness came from societal and interpersonal pressures of not leaving graduate school without a direct career plan; a plan that would be a direct pipeline towards a lifelong career. I should mention that I am a woman of color, Chicana to be exact, and such a mindset, not entirely, of course, stems from intergenerational trauma. I carry the trauma of vividly remembering that a lack of a steady income led entire households going without enough to eat.

Given that I am now married and a mother myself intergenerational trauma has led me to idealize my parent's immigrant mindset of prioritizing a job that regularly pays regardless of my passion for social justice. My parents often choose to omit that their dangerous journey to America was in the revolt of poverty, oppression and political uncertainty. Not only that, but their time in the states has led to continued pain as victims of structural oppression, unethical political legislation, and racism. Their pain only doubles to hear of my experiences as a woman of color in a very polarized nation. Their constant advice is for me to stop putting myself in spaces where I am a minority.

During my time at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary, I was one of very few students of color. I spent a lot of my time advocating for the need of inclusion in our classrooms, formation, and community as a whole; such passion came from knowing that many of my classmates are heading into ministerial roles in a very polarized nation and in a Church where racial demographics are rapidly changing. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) states that "there are approximately 30.4 million people in the United States who

self-identify their religion as Catholic and their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino/a. Some 16.4 million are native-born (54%) and 14.0 million are foreign-born (46%).”¹ On the contrary, CARA also states that only “about 3% of U.S. Catholic priests self-identify as Hispanic or Latino.” In addition, CARA also notes that only “about one in ten Lay Ecclesial Ministers, professional lay ministers working in parishes self-identifies as Hispanic or Latino/a (9%).”² This data does not only illustrate the exciting changes happening in the Church in terms of diversity but also notes a lack of diverse representation in leadership roles. The question is who will teach the Church and her leadership, clergy, ministers, seminarians, and faith believers how to be an inclusive community? My answer is simple: wisdom, called upon by faith, sought through a life-long learning commitment towards multicultural competency.

In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, Gloria Jean Watkins, also known as bell hooks, her pen name, writes “segregation simplifies; integration requires that we come to terms with multiple ways of knowing, of interaction.”³ On the contrary, social activist bell hooks also writes “white people who want people of color to do the work for them, who want us to draw the map and then carry them on our back down the road that ends racism are still playing out the servant/served paradigm.”⁴ Her words speak volumes concerning that wisdom concerning inclusion should not solely be demanded by those who are marginalized. The words of bell hooks calls for recognition that, historically, people of color have been used to fit a servant/served paradigm and although they hold many answers concerning inclusion they are not called to hand over those answers to those choosing to not co-seek wisdom with them. Wisdom, in my opinion, is the avenue that will lead entire congregations to advocate towards a more socially just world. In the biblical book of Wisdom, Proverbs 8 to be specific, we learn of Woman Wisdom, a character with feminine

1 Fact Sheet: Hispanic Catholics in the U.S., CARA, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/staff/webpages/Hispanic%20Catholic%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

2 Ibid.

3 bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 78.

4 Ibid.

pronouns who calls out and delivers a message of the importance of fearing the Lord for fearing the Lord is denouncing evil.⁵ The Woman Wisdom character expresses loving those who love her, and those seek to find her.⁶ Continuously, the Woman Wisdom character exposes having in Her possession wisdom which is much more precious than rubies.⁷ Insights of such wisdom are learnable, not wisdom in its entirety as we are humans after all, only after accepting the invitation given by Woman Wisdom. Part of that wisdom, in accordance with words of theologian Howard Thurman, would mean acknowledging how the Church, historically, has been a structure of oppression for many. Howard Thurman, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, writes “It cannot be denied that too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and the powerful and against the weak and oppressed—this, despite the gospel.”⁸

When I think of minority figures who died in search of inclusion I think of Jesus Christ. Jesus was persecuted and crucified for his vocal preachings that advocated and protected those on the margins.⁹ In John 15:20 we read “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.”¹⁰ Joseph and Mary fled Egypt with a then-newborn Jesus based on the persecution of King Herod and his army of small children.¹¹ Mary watched, powerlessly, as officials killed her only son in a very dehumanizing way.¹² All of these examples illustrate oppression. The Bible is filled with stories of oppression and unethical violence. Faith believers know these stories yet because of a lack of fully accepting the call to wisdom

5 Proverbs 8 (NRSV).

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

9 John 15:20 (NRSV).

10 Ibid.

11 Matthew 2:13-17 (NRSV).

12 John 15:20, (NRSV).

continue on cycles of oppression, even if as mere spectators, who do nothing as people of color suffer in atmospheres where they are subconsciously and sometimes consciously treated as less-than. God is a God of the oppressed in accordance with theologian and the father of black liberation theology James H. Cone.¹³ Cone writes, in his book *God of the Oppressed*, “Heresy is the refusal to speak the truth or to live the truth in the light of the One who is the Truth.”¹⁴ The heresy lies, in my opinion, in subconsciously and even consciously living as a Christian and choosing to not acknowledge a Jesus who was indeed an oppressed man of color, persecuted and crucified. The heresy lives on by allowing those on the margins to suffer from relentless inequalities that can be transformed through immediate moves into the mindset and lifestyle of radical inclusion.

In Matthew 25:35-40 we read

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”¹⁵

Matthew 25:35-40 indeed denotes a tone of the importance of charitable acts, a tone that is present in Catholic Social Teaching as preferable option for the poor¹⁶. Nevertheless, in terms of inclusion, I am left wondering if the stranger ever become a neighbor and acknowledged as someone with equal dignity outside of someone in need of charitable acts? Inclusion and social justice, in my opinion, asks

13 James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

14 *Ibid.*

15 Matthew 25:35-40 (NRSV).

16 Catholic Social Teaching, USCCB, accessed March 15, 2019, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>.

of us to turn strangers into neighbors as opposed as subconsciously leaving a stranger to a lifetime of marginalization. I beg of the Church and all of its clergy, leadership, lay ministers, and congregations to take a good look around their friend circles. A question that needs to be raised is are my friends fitting the diverse demographic of our modern nation? If the answer is no, the question then becomes what I have done to contribute to my lack of an inclusive social circle? Scholar, bell hooks, speaks out strongly about how geographic location is not a strong enough response for the lack of an inclusive social circle and that it is privilege to be able to live a life without acknowledging the need to foster relationships across gender, race, and sexual orientation.¹⁷ Lastly, making friends with someone simply because they are a ‘stranger’ or a person of color does not make for authentic friendship.

The difficulty lies in unlearning the subconscious teachings we have all inherited about the importance of self-segregation and the subconscious protection of one’s privilege that promotes a culture of exclusion. It is in helping others unlearn their biases where my ministry lies. I am called to co-work with other leaders in advocating for a more inclusive Church through the transformation of individual biases. I am called to remind others of Woman Wisdom and her invitation that asks faith-believers to seek knowledge as it is more precious than jewels. Such knowledge, I strongly think, will transform our Church to be a space that not only welcomes the stranger but is proactive about advocating for the diverse needs each stranger will bring.

Saint Anselm is often quoted as defining theology to mean faith seeking understanding. I, on the other hand, subconsciously, came to seminary with a disinherited Catholic identity seeking understanding. CARA estimates that “43% of students currently enrolled in U.S. lay ministry formation programs self-identify as Hispanic or Latino/a”.¹⁸ I hope to meet some fellow Chicanas who pursued ministry formation programs one day and foster ideas to disrupt, in the words of theologian Traci.

17 bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 78.

18 Fact Sheet: Hispanic Catholics in the U.S., CARA, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/staff/webpages/Hispanic%20Catholic%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

C. West, the lack of regard for people of color, specifically women of color in our Church.¹⁹ In community with fellow Chicana ministers, I also hope to co-work on finding some understanding of our own identities as women of color who identify as Catholic. Although I am now leaving Saint John's School of Theology without a Master of Divinity; I go with a Master of Ministry and an irrepressible vocational fire as a Chicana woman seeking inclusion for people of color in the Church and beyond. I will start a second Masters program in the Fall on education and pedagogy centered on social justice. My decision was not exactly a popular one with both my parents and husband, but as a first-generation American feminist who believes in a God who calls us to listen I know that continuing my studies will further help my efforts in co-creating a more inclusive Church. My chaplaincy calling remains, but it has transformed into a much louder calling that is now requiring of me to take the time I need to seek the further tools I need to be better equipped in educating others on the immediate need to internally recognize our duties as Christians to be radically inclusive.



19 Traci West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).