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BRAZILIAN WOMEN DOING THEOLOGY

Introduction

For quite some time already women theologians in Brazil form part of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), founded in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1976. At this meeting the theologians present, defined the aims of the association as "the continuing development of Third World Christian theologies which will serve the Church's mission in the world and witness to the new humanity in Christ expressed in the struggle for a just society". (In: The Emergent Gospel. Ed. by Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabello, 1978, 273). In the meantime within EATWOT a strong ecumenical and inter-cultural dialogue has got well under way. The EATWOT theologians construct their own model for theologizing in the context of Third World countries.

We have reflected from our life experience as belonging to the oppressed men and women of the human race. We seriously take cognizance of the cultural and religious heritage of the peoples of the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America ... As we are increasingly aware of the impact of the political, social, economic, cultural, racial, and religious conditions on theology, we wish to analyse the background of our countries as one point of reference for our theological reflection (259-260).

Within EATWOT the Women's Commission 'Theology from the perspective of Third World women' was created in 1983. It was the outcome of a process of reflection on what it means to do theology from Third World women's perspective that began in New Delhi, India, at the first EATWOT assembly in 1981.

The Association had assumed that by naming the structures that divide human beings, making some more powerful than others, and by taking a liberative stance, all was taken care of. We, the women of the Association, were just as concerned to name the demons and to have them exorcised. Sexism was one such demon, and it existed within the Association itself. Our voices were not being heard, although we were visible enough. It became clear to us that only the oppressed can truly name their oppression. We demanded to be heard. The result was the creation within EATWOT of the Women's Commission, and not a Commission on Women as some of the male members would have it. Rather than see ourselves solely as victims of male domination, we formed a sisterhood of resistance to all forms of oppression, seeking creative partnership with men of the Association. (V. Fabello and M.A. Oduoyye in their Introduction in: With Passion and Compassion. 1988, IX-X).
I. THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

Since 15th March 1985 the Federal Republic of Brazil with much difficulty tries to restore democracy, after a military dictatorship of twenty-one years firmly bent on accelerating the modernization of its economy, and making it the eighth industrial world-power. This at enormous social costs that cannot but increase. How, in fact, can one live with a monthly inflation of about 17.78% (May 1988) of which the accumulated worth of the last twelve months corresponds with 359.92% (June 1987–May 1988)? In spite of their successive readjustments, the salaries constantly lose in real value, and the productive investments are substituted by much more profitable financial speculation. A Constituent National Assembly, meeting since more than a year, makes every effort to draw up a new Constitution, between the revindications of all the sectors representing the people (including the women!) and the pressures of the executive power (Danielle Ardaillon, Organisation des femmes pour leur santé, 1988, 3, transl.).

The groups that formulated the revindications were spread all over the country and included many women, the latter especially coming from the labour movement and from the favelas (slums). Together with feminist groups they conducted a political campaign to secure their interests.

Also the churches, especially the basic communities, pressed the demands of social justice and political representation, inspired by biblical reflection and from the options of the poor. In these Basic Ecclesial Communities women were again strongly represented. Vindicating the rights of the most marginalized, they use their experiences in life to gain political insight and to discover the conditions for women to bring about changes.

Whoever takes interest in the social movements taking place in the city of Sao Paulo since the mid-seventies, either directly by following them daily in the outskirts of the town, or indirectly through the papers, knows that these movements are constituted and directed essentially by women. It is the women who form the 'Clubs of Mothers' and who constitute the majority of the clients of the Basic Ecclesial Communities and of the movements in support of claims like those of the day-care centres, of health care, of favelas, of squatters, etc. It is the women who scour the outskirts of the town in search for signatures for petitions. It is the women who have idealized, realized and for the greater part directed the Cost of Living Movement. It is basically the women who form the caravans of autobuses that almost every day leave the outskirts of the town heading for the townhall to put in a claim. It is the women who frequent the offices of the Regional Administrations of the townhall in order to press for and obtain some public service or other for their neighbourhood (Tereza Caldeira, Mujeres cotida-