

Theological and Liturgical Rantings

Claudio Carvalhaes

“My English is poor but my heart is better.” Fernanda Montenegro

Where was God on September 11th?¹

Shakespeare wrote in the last lines of King Lear: “Speak what we fell, not what we ought to say.” As I struggle with Shakespeare’s advice, I don’t know whether I should speak what I feel or what I ought to say. I may do both.

God was nowhere. God was neither on the planes nor in the Towers. God has nothing to do with September 11th. We do!!!! United States does! Maybe the right question to be asked then is: where were we? What did we do for this event to happen and what did we not do that allowed this event to happen? It is in us that we find the traces of where God was.

I believe that God sometimes, maybe most of the times, or even every time, *comes after*. God is like an ambulance, always after the events of our lives. God was in the air, God was in the debris, God could pass as *the* debris... God was fully there without being there. God was in the work of the firefighters, the paramedics and the volunteers. God was in the follow up of the event, consoling, giving people strength and wisdom to change our ways, to change our perceptions and to change our theologies. But I am not sure whether we were really changed. Today, I still don’t see God in most of what I hear. There are too many clouds of self-pity wrapped up in the pride of the patriotic icons such as the flag that somewhat prevents me from seeing God and experience God’s grace. Maybe it is because I am seeing war... And I don’t see God. Inspired by the singer Sting, I can only see *how fragile we are* and how difficult it is to be changed.

¹ A response given one year after the event.

God was at my home at September 11th, a home that I may never find again. God was flying high above spreading her wings over the earth and the universe. Flying so high above that for a second God forgot the world completely. As soon as God heard the explosions she came back to us and saw the damage. All the debris was still in the air and God was astonished to see it all. God couldn't believe it! Still apprehended by the shocking view of the spectacle of horror, God sat down and cried. God could not do otherwise. Sadness took over her chest and all the stars long gone could hear her weeping as a lonely whale in the deep sea. She remembered all the atrocities she saw throughout history. She saw people dying in Egypt; she saw the genocide in the *conquista* of Latin America, the genocide in Rwanda... She saw the black people of this country been beaten up, hanged and killed because of the color of their skin, she saw people been massacred by the dictatorship in Argentina, Brazil and many other countries, she saw the horrors of the war, she saw diseases killing people throughout the world, AIDS advancing in scary speed, she saw people gasping and despairing in their pain, she saw people stretching their hands to the skies crying for help but never receiving an answer, she saw faithful people having no money to buy bread and milk to their daughters and sons who were dying in front of their very eyes... She was tired of so much atrocity, of so much iniquity, of so much injustice. Still immersed in her thoughts, she stood up, wiped her tears away and tried to help as much as she could. She carried people out of the remains, she saved some lives, and she gave all she had to help people. And she knew that her presence would make a difference. After September 11th, God is quieter than ever. But that's not new...

In the Bible, since the New Testament, God hasn't talked much. Nowadays, we have to struggle because sometimes it seems that God is still mute. Each time an atrocity happens, each time life is unfair God loses few words. As a consequence, God is running out of words. God has tried hard to keep as many words as God could. But there is no much left... In the short run, God's eyes may well be all that God can offer to us: eyes, watered eyes, whipping eyes. If that is the case, we will be left with a negative or apophatic theology and we will call up the mystics to be our companions. One thing September 11th thought me: we are always aftering God...

As a liturgist, I must find ways in my body to gesture the pain, the doubts, the anger, the shame and the sorrow that go inside of me. This time I pray: “God, you who may be, you who may be watching over me, you who may heal my wounds, don’t you see that we are losing control that once we thought we had? Don’t you see that our actions seem too small before the grandiosity of the injustice? Don’t you see how often we are mistaken and our efforts are even forgotten and nobody pay attention anymore? Don’t you see how much far from home we all are? Have you seen what is left for us to celebrate? Haven’t you seen what we are celebrating? Self-pity, pride and arrogance. You God, who may be, may you look upon the poor that are so many, may you look upon those who die anonymously every day and are buried without a memorial, without a song, without a poem, without a name and without a history. May you look upon the world as we “celebrate” the first year of September 11th and the beginning of a new war. Help us, come and save us, for we are wounded, we are lost in a road that we cannot tell exactly where it is located and where it is going to lead us. We wait for you as we wait for the ambulance to rescue us and take us to places we wish we knew the names. Help us all to go through the shadows of our potentiality to do wrong, to hurt and to kill. Help us to cross the indecipherable sea of the human heart and overcome the fury of the righteous religious beliefs, even our own. Beloved God, won’t you carry me home? Help me find the way back home, for I am lost. Take me home, curl me up in your arms and let me finally sleep... at home.”

Shoe Shiner

It was a regular Service in a Sunday evening in an immigrant church in Fall River, MA. As I asked people to raise their joys and concerns for prayer, and a man stood up and mixing words and tears he said: “*Pastor I just came from the borders of Mexico, I just arrived and saw my wife and kids who are here since last year. I was trying to come from the border when I was caught up by the border’s police. They kept me in jail for two months. I am exhausted. Please pray for me.*”

After the service we talked at length and he told me that while he was running around the borders, he lost his torn shoes and arrived at the jail shoeless. He was totally embarrassed and ashamed. “Pastor”, he said “there is anything worse than not being able to wear our own shoes”. This man had worked all his life, he had a family, and along with his wife they raised their kids. Now, he was in jail because he wanted to come and see his family and try to work. He was feeling tired, humiliated and couldn’t look at his kids. Worse, now he had become dependent of a “friend” who borrowed him money to pay the court fees in the borders... We prayed and he went to another city where his family was.

Two months later he comes back to church and now he is with his family. As I ask people to offer their joys and concerns he stands up and say: *“Pastor, this is my family. Now I have a job: I am moving to Boston where I got a job as a shoe shiner in one of the Boston hotels. I am happy, I will be a shoe shiner...”*

That story reminded me of myself when I was 9 years old and was a shoe shiner in São Paulo, Brazil. So many things happen to me since that time... So many things will happen to this man and to his family and I wonder how much God gives us strength to to fight our worst situations and move on, one way or another.

There is something that moves us and we have a hard time trying to understand it. I quote Heidegger’s brother, Fritz Heidegger, to give us a hint about this something that moves in and around us everywhere we go. He said: ***“In all of us, in the most hidden part of our hearts, lives something that is able to overcome all the afflictions of life: It is the happiness, the last trace of the original craziness and passion that once abided in us fully but now, we are just a dim notion.”*** As we carry this dim notion of the happiness, craziness and passion, I dare say of God, we can move and go places, with or without our shoes. Where have your shoes taken you? What were the afflictions you overcame? When I look back to this shoe shinning boy wandering in the streets of São Paulo, I can’t help but keep saying and performing in the liturgies of the church that God is my strength, my craziness, and my joy! What about you?

Latina Feminist Theology - Responding to Daisy Machado

Panel and Conversation on *A Reader In Latina Feminist Theology*

Let me first thank Union, Su Pak and Maria Marta for giving us the opportunity to have this panel discussion and for the great privilege to have Daisy Machado with us this afternoon. Let me start by saying a few words about my work as a way to enter into the four questions I framed to ask you Daisy. For almost 5 years, I worked with a non-documented Portuguese speaking community in Massachusetts. For almost 5 years we witnessed the displacement, uneasiness, frustration, limitations, pain, fear and longing of this community which struggled daily to find a better life in this country, and the financial burden of supporting as many as four other families back home. Coming from this experience, I see the Latina feminist theology as a powerful tool that can revamp the stories, the souls, minds, spirits and the bodies of this and many other communities of immigrant, foreign-citizen and citizen-foreign people. During my work as a minister in this place, I knew how to work but I didn't know how to frame it, how to give words to the excess of "flesh, blood and pain" which I encountered daily in this ministry. What I see is that this book is a translation of the life of many people and specifically in your article, *Elena's Story*, I see the story of so many women with whom I lived and wept together. Considering my experience, other readings and this book, I would like to ask you a few questions that might appear superficially to be tangential points but for me they touch the heart of some of the issues that Latina Feminist theology encompasses. Here they are:

1) First, given the present situation in which the Latinas/os do not speak much outside of their boundaries, **how do we modulate the tone of our voices when we have to speak?** Or better said, **why do we scream every time we talk?** It seems to me that every time we speak we scream without knowing it. Is it because we don't know how to control the tone of our voices, is it because we think people are not hearing us properly or is it because in order to have our voices heard, even by ourselves, we must place our fractured being in our vocal cords? As an example, I remember when you were here at Union last

year at the Bonhoeffer conference. After you spoke, you were exhausted. So was I in the audience. At that time, you didn't have a lecture for us, you *were* the lecture. The transcript was not the notes you had in front of you but yourself, your body, your soul, your hands, the modulation of your voice and the fast rhythm of your heartbeat. We all know the pain of immigrant communities and there are many spaces available that allow us to ventilate the stories of our lives and the stories we carry within us. We end up carrying a heavy heart in search of a larger community, trying to speak and understand properly... Then my question for you is: how do we modulate the tone of our voice and get our message across?

2) My second question is about multiculturalism. How does the Latina feminist theology place itself within the debate of multiculturalism? I am suspicious of it. On the one hand it seems that the term multiculturalism was a white liberal term that tried to accommodate differences together, a nice *concession* from the hegemonic forces of the monolithic culture and the savage capitalism of our days, a sophisticated term to replace the famous *melting pot* that wanted to blend cultures by ways of assimilation, with its homogenization and neutralization. On the other hand, it has opened up spaces for minorities to raise important issues and questions for discussion, confrontation and dialogue. From a theological perspective, do you see multiculturalism as a way of erasing the borders, of blending/erasing differences into the *univocal* body of Christ, fading away identities in order to let the identity of the Colonizer be better assimilated? Do you see multiculturalism as a category to be employed in our theological task? Would the terms intercultural and transnational be more appropriate to foster dialogue and enhance equality?

3) My third question is: How do we go beyond the atomization of our differences? On the one hand, the discourses of identities offer spaces to reclaim ourselves, to expand our vocabularies, to have our voices heard, to develop ways of knowing and to construct our history and our settings, always in relation, and empower us to imagine and recreate ourselves. On the other hand, the multiplicity of our discourses can set us apart, with independent agendas can take away our common strength. So, my question is: how do we

get together with our differences in a common project within and beyond our differences? Do you see it as desirable, as needed, as unavoidable? If this is the case, how do we go beyond the atomization of our differences and discourses towards a common struggle without losing the crucial markers that distinguish us from one another?

4) My fourth question considers the issue of historical imagination in two sides: 1) Considering the Latina/o Protestant churches, how do you see the role of theological education in training ministers for our churches and in shaping our historical imagination? 2) How do we create agency to work on our historical imagination? *Guillermo Gomez-Pena* has done a great work on the theme of “border-crosser” through artistic performances. What are the tools and assets you see available today within the existing cultures, in this between-ness location, that we can use to work and rework our historical imagination?

To conclude, when I think about the relation between the conquerer and the conquered, the colonizer and colonized, I have the impression that we are like dogs, always eating the crumbs of Jesus’s table like the women in the parable. If we are to follow this impression, I would say that

- * Americanos are the truth, we are a perspective;
- * Americanos have the highest level of Christian forms of expression and worship; we are the popular, eccentric, under-trained, the lesser and not yet developed forms of Christian liturgical and theological expressions;
- * Americanos are the mirror and we are the concave and hollow reflexive images;
- * Americanos are the mind and we are the body. Jennifer Lopez is hot;
- * Americanos are 4th of July, we are... we are?
- * Americanos are citizens, we are forever “aliens”. By the way, the dictionary defines alien as extra-territorial, space creatures, from another world. Isn’t that interesting that I carry with me an ID that says that I am an ALLIEN in this country?
- * Americanos pay income taxes, have real social security cards and will get their retirement. We also pay income taxes, but have fake social security numbers and will never get our retirement plans;

- * Americanos are pure and clean, we are polluted and dirty;
- * Americanos are right on time, we are always late;
- * Americanos are money, we are producers of their money;
- * Americanos are all about pride, and we... we are pure longing.

However, even though it is all true to me, I refuse to take the perspective of the victims as a way of breaking down the binary oppressed/oppressor. As Guillermo Gomez Pena says: “We are holders of a strong spiritual vision, not emerging voices, full citizens not exotic minorities.” We are and will be subjects of our own her/history. Without apologies or need for concessions. In this “in between-ness”, this book, I am sure, will help us to accomplish that. Thank you for your great work Professor Machado.

A Biblical Hermeneutical Tool: To See, To Judge, To Act

One thing among many other that can change our lives has to do we way in which we read things, be it books, articles, our stories, our history, our theologies and God. Prof. James Cone use to say to first year students at Union theological Seminary that in seminary they were suppose to learn how to become critical readers and read texts and reality critically. That applies to the Bible. When we read the Bible critically, it should be a challenging time when we learn and exchange, get consoled and outraged.

In this brief space, let me give you one hermeneutical possibility that may help us to approach the Biblical text. *Paulo Freire*, a famous Brazilian educator, taught us when doing any reading to go through 3 steps: *to see, to judge, to act*. In this process we can interact with the text and *update* the Bible in and for our lives and our time.

First step: To see. We start by seeing not only what is written but also what is happening around us. The power to see is the power that enables us to see beyond what everybody sees. There are forces that blind us, preventing us from seeing what is happening right in front of us and we do nothing. What Jesus helps us to do is to have open and freed eyes to

confront the ways we usually see not only the text but also ourselves and our reality. The Biblical text are always challenging us, always asking us to convert and repent our ways to God. On the other hand, to see is also to have eyes that are able to see our own reality. Our reality becomes a way into the Biblical text. It can inform the text, it might even change the text, that is, the ways in which we read the text. It makes the text come to life time and again as we bring our stories, relate contexts and situations to the Biblical world. It is something what the famous Swiss theologian Karl Barth used to say, that we must have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. He only forgot to say what kind of newspaper...

Second step: To judge. When we see, we have to make a decision, we have to judge, to struggle and to decide whether we go this way or that way. To read the Bible is to keepo this struggle open as we make continuous evaluations and observations about things in general. As we proceed, we change, we move and are moved by the spirit. This process is not so much about taking sides but being able to see the larger picture from a side that will not places us aside from it but within the whole system at work. The whole system also includes what does not belong to the system, the things and the people who are beyond the margins of what we do not like or what we disagree. We are always making decisions even when we think we are not making decisions. When we do not make deliberate decisions, other people will decide for us. One thing must be clear for all of us: we are not excused from the ways our world is moving. We are not excused from the existence of poverty. We are not excused from terrorism. We have to judge our world, our politicians and the ways in which they lead our lives and the life of the world. By making evaluations, judgments and observations, we have to take care to not judge people with the intention to exclude them.

Third step: To act. We are called to go through the whole program. We cannot avoid the third step. We must act. A life lived without action is a life settled in the neutral mode, a life lived without accomplishments, without the risks that life bring to us. The gospel calls us not to hide in our faith but to shine our faith through Jesus in our daily life. Only by acting can we demonstrate what we take our faith seriously. Through our actions, we

show as deeply as we can where our heart is. We say our creeds every Sunday in our services. However, what we really do during the week with this creed, our practical actions, gestures, words, and use of our money, is what really tell us where our treasures and beliefs are.

To see, to judge and to act. When it is done we go back to the beginning and start it all over again. For the Christian believer, this is the work of a lifetime.

A Liturgical Service After the Tsunami²

God: Why have you forsaken us? Tsunami and the Interruption of Our Faith

Prelude – A Halting Song

Introduction – Claudio

Welcome everyone. Right after the beginning of the Iraq war, Prof. Janet Walton asked us all in a lecture she gave, what if we were to worship God with Iraq people? What would it change in our services? This is one question to be thought again today in this service: How to worship God after the Tsunami? How to make sense of our faith after this natural cause that has taken away the lives of 350 thousand people in Asia, and God knows how many more, who were left in despair and unspeakable loss?

It is amazing how much we have already forgotten about the tsunami. What did we do here at Union to help those who were affected by it? Lydia told me that our school has sent U\$ 2.000,00 to a relief fund managed by the National Council of Churches. Have you got any e-mail from any professor or even our president about this situation? Well, let's forget that.

The Tsunami challenges us in many ways and one of them is: What do we do with our wishy-washy eco-theologies that highly praise our mother earth who is so loving and has giving us abundantly for so long? What about this mother earth who kills 350 thousand of her daughters and sons without notice or apologies devastating the eco-system for the future generations?

The same question we asked when September 11th happened, we could ask it again today: Where was God during Tsunami?

Let us suppose for our chapel service today the following: the way we worship God has to do with the way we believe in God. Again, that the way we worship God has to do

² This liturgy was done at James Chapel – Union Theological Seminary

with the way we believe in God. If this is truth, and let us suppose it is, how to worship God when our lives are interrupted by the unexpected and we cannot get where we were thought we would? In other words, how to worship God when the lives of your loved ones are taken away before time? Or, when you discover a terminal disease? Even worse, how do you worship God when you lose all your family and your house and your job and you are left literally alone without anybody, without a place, without money, without a way out? How do we negotiate our faith when our lives are mercilessly interrupted? Let's try to worship God: ...

Hymn – Saranam – Lidya leads the congregation

'GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN US?' / Silence

VIDEO STARTS

Prayer - Story 1 - By Lydia

Cut Mytha

She lost her widowed mother, 2 sisters, 1 brother and her nephews and nieces. Pause

She asked: 'Can I still express 'alhamdulillah', praise be to God, in such a misery?'

Could anybody pray for her? Let us stand up and pray:

Silence – Then the piano makes huge and uncomfortable noises, people rush in and take some chairs away. Somebody cries out loud:

'GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN US?' / Silence

Prayer - Story 2 – By Claudio

Rev. Elisa Tambunan

He lost 15 members of his immediate family, including his mother, who were gathered in Banda Aceh for family Christmas gathering.

He asked: 'Should I simply accuse evil or nature as the cause of this devastation in order to rescue the image of a loving God, the Supreme Protector, as I have been teaching my congregation about?'

Can you pray for him? Let us stand up and pray.

Silence – Then the piano makes huge and uncomfortable noises, people rush in and take chairs away. Somebody cries out loud:

‘GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN US?’ / Silence

Prayer - Story 3 – By Christine

Cut Rosa

She lives in New York now. She lost her mother and all siblings and could not go back because she will not be able to return to the United States because of her immigration status.

She said: I’ve been trying very hard to pray, but whenever I started my brain refuses to do so, my head starts to tremble, and I just can’t ! I would rather ask you to pray for me.

Could you pray for her? Let’s stand up and pray

Silence – Then the piano makes huge and uncomfortable noises, people rush in and take chairs away. Somebody cries out loud:

‘GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN US?’ / Silence

Prayer - Story 4 – By Claudio

50.000 orphan nameless children in Banda Aceh who lost their entire family. They mostly asked: 'Why my parents are just taken away? Who will take care of us?' Some of them are now in the hands of traffic dealers, being abused sexually and they have nobody to protect them...

Can you pray?? Let’s stand up and try!

Silence – Then the piano makes huge and uncomfortable noises, people rush in and take chairs away. Somebody cries out loud:

Sermon

‘A New Wake’ by Meghan Deans (USA) – (An Edited Version)

I don’t know you at all.....

Still I want to touch you to tell you I understand you, even though

I don’t

Even though I’ve barely learned to name all the parts of your disaster...

We know that it rains very hard, snows very hard, winds blows strong...

but do we really understand that sometimes the land we believe to be steady,
the one we build foundations on it, we brace ourselves against, can slip ?
I feel a little crazy trying to be mad at nature, even on your behalf,
but it does not argue back...
I feel ridiculous when I realize I'm actually upset at 'something' that does not act with intent, or 'act' really, at all...
We are secretly crossing our fingers, unless someone is planning a coalition against gravity and the ocean floor...
we choose the songs, the words, the settings, and we hope that we are doing right by you
and all we don't know about the way you lived.....

Indonesian Song – Lidya

Benediction - Claudio

Today we will not make any sense out of this tragedy. In the Greek tragedy, Oedipus blinds himself because he could not see the look of the others upon him. Albert Camus used to rage against God for God's unattended absence. And we today, masters of making meaning out of literally everything, today we are going to leave the chapel without making any sense out of our faith.

Moreover, what to do when yesterday news says the following: "Three months after a tsunami devastated the city of Banda Aceh, vast areas remain a flatland of rubble, mud and stagnant water where only palm trees and the stumps of broken buildings break the low horizon. Tens of thousands of bodies from among more than 126,000 reported dead in Aceh Province have been cleared away and nearly half a million homeless people have found other places to live. But among the ruins here, and for many miles along the coastline of barren fishing villages, almost nothing seems to have been done to begin repairs and rebuilding..."

This benediction will send you forth with the following question: “Why God: Why have you forsaken so many of our brothers and sisters? Why?”

And we will leave our chapel without an answer, just for today. We will postpone the meaning, at least for now. Meanings seem to fail us when we are in the midst of an interruption...

Book Review³

Out of Depths. Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation,

Ivone Gebara.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. 211 pp.

Ivone Gebara is one of the leading feminist theologians from Brazil and Latin America. She has given most of her life to the cause of the poor, especially to poor women. She is known for her eco-theo-feminist analysis and her creative understandings of transcendence and immanence. In her most recent book, Gebara offers a feminist perspective on evil and salvation, which no reader not have a strong reaction to her argument, whatever the reaction may be. She proposes to work with a broad understanding of evil by focusing in the evil that occurs within the limits of the household of poor women, a central place in their lives and where evil goes unnoticed, silenced and forgotten. From this location, she deals with unsurpassed paradoxes and utter contradictions of life reaching out for women in various places of the world. In order to do that, first she has to dismantle the evil that is purported by a patriarchal society that fiercely dominates women's discourses and practices by using: a) universal philosophical and metaphysical binary categories understanding women as a subsystem of male dominance, as a dependent *device* of men's *natural/essential* condition; b) theological concepts and doctrinal dogmas that always understand women in a subservient role within the binary category of prostitute/saint, where male categories of

³ This book review was published at *USQR: Union Seminary Quarterly Review* Volume 58 Numbers 1-2, (2004): 216-218.

evil control their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, bodies, and sexualities; c) social/economical categories that places women in powerless locations and associate them with lesser values; and d) cultural predicaments that diminish not only their potential but their dignity as well.

Gebara advocates a *theological anthropology* as essential “to establish relationships of justice and solidarity” (8). Her theological anthropology is formed into phenomenological lenses, understood mainly from Paul Ricouer’s works. The tools she uses to approach reality phenomenologically are “the concept of gender, literature, testimonial evidence and certain contemporary theological interpretation” (11). She believes that women’s experiences of evil are different from men’s experiences, which reflect directly the way any normalization and categorization of the concepts of evil are constructed. Men’s evil is monolithic, universally considered and never pay attention to the many faces evil has in different realities and situations. For Gebara, evil has to be thought of in the plural. There are *evils*, not a single evil that *appear* in multilayered and multi-structured realities.

As a consequence of this notion of evil, the notion of salvation that has also to be redefined in feminist perspectives. Knowing very well the reality of poor women and their situation of daily lack and of unspeakable voids, Gebara knows how a simple action or a small object can vividly transform the life of a woman. She boldly affirms that a radio or even a dress can become *salvation* for these women. Her notion of *mini-salvation* will prompt strong reactions against her and she might as well be accused of reductionism, of aiming higher with the Christian message, and of confounding transcendence with immanence. It is a hard concept to grasp, especially in the opulent and obscenely wealthy countries of North America. Gebara’s notion of salvation is, for poor people not a reduction at all, but instead, an irreducible approach to the concrete love of God in a reality combined in a contradictory way, with a deep sense of gratitude. Thus, salvation becomes irreducible by means of reduction.

A key word for Gebara is *relatedness*. Human life is not a set of isolated compartments but a whole system interconnected, interdependent, interwoven, where one thing is

related to the other and nothing stands outside of this web of interrelatedness, reminding us of Hegel's notion of an integrated system reconciled with its opposites. From this perspective, evil is related to good, and evil, connected with salvation, just as social evil is related with domestic violence, ecology, grace and human possibilities. This point can raise many questions and her perspective runs the risk of conflating evil with good without the marking off of its boundaries and differences, by possibly reifying one in the name of the other. On the other hand, she does not let evil go unnoticed or unnamed in her book and by mentioning evil's many names she does not let it simply be the flip side of good without any ethical assertion, that is, a continuous call for transformation.

She is again controversial when she says that women are not only victims of evil but also perpetrators of evil. Evil is in all of us, and we all reproduce it in every sphere of our lives. Nonetheless, she makes clear the differences of the consequences of evil perpetrated by women and by men. Another controversial issue she addresses is the uniqueness of the cross of Jesus, with a fierce critique, she admonishes us to interpret the cross in the plural sense, as crosses, since there are so many people dying on the cross of humiliation, poverty, and powerlessness every day around the world. At the end, she offers us a God who is relational not totally other a God who she defines through a new metaphor, namely, "*esse-diversity*." A God/mystery defined by its *esse-diversity* functions through a plural discourse in the richness of our lives, a God *in* the world and the world *in* God.

My main critique with this book is the lack of a detailed analysis of sexual violence in the domestic milieu that is a shocking evil committed daily against women by men, and unfortunately, Gebara does not engage such evil in a serious analysis, recognizing the deep marks it leaves on the lives of so many women around the world.

To finish, let me propose a hermeneutical tool to read Gebara's book: the notion of *excess*. Excess can be too little or too much. In her book, we are constantly reminded of the abusive control of men's authority over the lack of possibilities/decisions of women. Men always have too much and women always live in lack. Men's excess (too much) is

women's lack (too little). No wonder Gebara sees in a dress, the excess of gratuity in the midst of an unspeakable lack. Moreover, by letting the cross of Jesus carry too much meaning, women's suffering becomes meaningless. She claims a relational God, a God who is neither too much nor too little, a God of diversity, a web God, a God who connects us all together. By exposing us to the excess (too much) of violence, we are faced with the lack of grace (too little). This binary excess also blows up when we listen to the daily experiences of poor women. Reality becomes too real, almost a *simulacra*. Evil and salvation live in raw, nuanced and confused ways in this too real reality of excess and our task as theologians and religious thinkers is to figure out the measurements of the *excessive*, deconstruct its predicaments, discover their pseudonymous names and see both its possibilities and impossibilities.

Book Review⁴

The Poet, The Warrior, the Prophet

Rubem Alves.

Norwich, UK: Scm Press, 2002. 175 pp.

With this review, I have two purposes: first, I want to bring to the English-speaking audience, a rather important piece of a forgotten history of theology in Latin America, lived by one of the main names and one of the precursors of liberation theology in Brazil/Latin America, Rubem Alves. Second, I'd like to offer some words on the re-print of this rather unknown book *The Poet, The Warrior The Prophet*, by Scm Press. Prof. Rubem Alves is a Brazilian theo-poet, educator and storyteller, a former Presbyterian minister that has deeply shaped the history of Protestantism in Brazil, both by his own history in the last fifty years of the twentieth century and by his diverse writings - his book "Protestantism and Repression. A Brazilian Study Case", published in English by Orbis Books, for instance, is still a landmark in the analysis of the Protestantism in Brazil. In 1963, Alves joined the Advanced Religious Studies at Union Theological

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Seminary in New York City and then got his masters degree in sacred theology at the same school. In 1964, when he went back to Brazil to be a pastor of a church in the countryside of his own state, Minas Gerais, Brazil, he was taken by the military dictatorship and Alves became an enemy of the government, mainly because his beloved church, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, denounced him to the dictators as a dangerous thinker. The church leaders at that time were aligned with the military and helped the government to get rid of the dangerous minds. Notwithstanding, helped by the Presbyterians of the North side of America, he came exiled to US where he did his PhD at Princeton Theological Seminary. His dissertation's title was named: *Towards a Liberation Theology*. He tells us in the preface of the Brazilian publication that this idea of liberation was totally unknown at that time and the dissertation committee asked him to rewrite it all in one more year. It was Richard Shaull, his mentor, who did not let it happen. Later, a Roman Catholic editor was interested in his dissertation and wanted to publish it. His only condition was to change the title because nobody would know what liberation theology would be. Influenced by Moltmann's theology of hope, the book was then published with the following title: "A Theology of Human Hope", which had the germs of the agenda of liberation theology. Harvey Cox wrote the preface of his book and said that theology in the north should from now on, do theology *with* theologians from the south part of America and not *about* them anymore. It might be a surprise for many people to know that it was a Protestant theologian who started the whole movement of the Latin American liberation theology. His book was written before Gustavo Gutierrez's "Liberation Theology" and set the tone for what would be developed later. Later, Alves became a good friend of professors James Cone and Walter Wink, forming, in professor's Alves own words, the "three musketeers" of Union. Since he went back to Brazil, Alves walked many paths in his academic life and now is actively working with education, having several books published, including children stories. Regarding "The Poet, The Warrior, the Prophet", this book is Alves exhilarating work on the border where theology and poetry meet. When you see the re-print of the book, don't judge it by the cover, which could not be worse. In this book, Alves pursues a theo-poetics, freeing theology from any attempt to be locked within the cages of the orthodox discourses. He draws freely from the works of Gabriel Garcia Marques, Albert Camus, Freud, M. C. Echer,

Octavio Paz, Saint Augustine, Bonhoeffer, Feuerbach, many poets and Brazilian writers to weave his understandings of the word made flesh and love through a wide range of sources, such as poetry, politics, cooking, beauty, theology, alchemy, memories and desires. Theology for him takes the form of playing with words as the attempt to understand the mystery of God, this unnamable name. Alves's book opens up the horizons of the general reader and the theologian in special and takes us all into unexpected places, offering us exciting possibilities for curious dialogues and unpredictable results. From the hand and heart of one of the first and main Latin American liberation theologians, we receive this passionate account on God and life, an account that still carries an utopian horizon for a new world, a world of poetry, of magic, of beauty and of liberation.