

**IMAGINATIVE IDENTIFICATION AS A SOURCE OF LIBERATION: A CASE STUDY  
OF THE WOMEN CLERGY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF  
CHRIST) IN MEXICO**

by

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Personal Ministerial Experience

I grew up in Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world. In this metropolis, the vast majority of people are affiliated or at least have a connection with the Catholic Church. My parents were Christian believers who recognized the sacraments of the church but did not instill a commitment to the institutional church. For instance, going to church on Sundays was not a part of our family activities. In fact, my parents used to take us to church only on special occasions, such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. They were respectful of the church's teachings; however, they did not look at the church as a place to grow in faith. Home was where my parents nurtured our family's faith by celebrating popular and religious traditions with extended family members and friends. These celebrations included setting up an altar for the Day of the Dead, organizing *posadas* during Advent, and attending festivities dedicated to the patron or local saints. These celebrations always involved food, a parade of colors, and fellowship of people. By celebrating these traditions, I learned about the importance of building connections with one another and that God was present among the people of the community.

When I was a teenager, my faith grew thanks to the Teresian nuns at my middle school who taught me fundamental aspects of the Catholic Church's Catechism. Through the nuns' examples of service and devotion to prayer, I became interested in spiritual disciplines that nurtured my faith. One of these disciplines was the study of the lives of saints like Saint Teresa of Avila, the *patron* of the nuns' religious order. St. Teresa was a mystic, writer, and reformer of the Carmelite order. Through these spiritual disciplines, the nuns and Saint Teresa inspired me to look at their religious life as the model for women to serve in the church. Somehow, while my faith was growing, I was also unconsciously assuming that women could exclusively serve the

church as nuns and teachers. During this teenage period, I was unaware that in other Christian traditions women could serve as pastors and priests.

The nuns made such a long-lasting positive impact on my faith that after graduating from college, I considered becoming a nun. However, the mandatory celibacy of the Catholic Church dissuaded me because I wanted to marry and have my own children. I was interested in obtaining a formal theological education that unfortunately was not accessible to women. In the Catholic Church in my home country, men are the only candidates for seminary. But, while I was considering options on how to follow my vocation to lead in God's church, I met a few Protestant ministers who encouraged me to study theology in an ecumenical seminary in the United States. This was a very appealing option at the time. The seminary would provide me with the academic and spiritual space to discern my vocation. At the end, the decision I made to enroll in seminary has been one of my most transforming experiences.

As a seminarian, I met women who were working as senior ministers in their respective Protestant denominations. To my surprise, these women were the leaders of their churches and had the same authority as men. In the same manner that the nuns of my middle school influenced me, these women inspired me. In fact, my preconceptions about women's roles in the church changed completely because I became critical about the exclusion of women from leadership positions in some Christian traditions. Through reading theological scholarship, participating in class discussions, and completing research, I learned about the variety of theological feminist discourses that support women's roles. These discourses enhance women's historical and theological importance by positively representing women's abilities in all their capacities.

When I graduated, I went back to my home country where I had a fascinating ministerial experience among the people. For example, I worked as a lay interim rector for an English-

speaking community in my hometown. In this position, I met wonderful people; together we nurtured our faith by serving others with great joy. However, I experienced many of the difficulties that most women face while pursuing a non-traditional career as ministers of the church. The main struggle that I encountered was the rejection from the male clergy who did not recognize or accept women ministering in equal positions of authority. As a seminary student, I had learned about social and ecclesiastical biases about gender that designate women as inferior and exclude them from positions of authority in church. During my service to the church, I noticed that these sexist ideas translated into the practice of placing women in a position of greater scrutiny than their male counterparts. These sexualized preconceptions are extremely harmful to women's vocational aspirations because women ministering in the church constantly need to prove their qualifications and knowledge to gain places of respect in the community. As a result of these struggles among women ministers, women experience far more frustration and disappointment when compared to their male counterparts. In short, women end up performing an emotionally exhausting endeavor that makes their ministry in church a very challenging experience.

In my home country, I noticed that the settings where women could explore their gifts and vocation as ministers were few. For this reason, I decided to start an ecumenical ministry for women, which became a safe space for me and other women. This women's ministry expanded not only in Mexico but also in other places of Latin America such as Colombia and Argentina. I began this ministry because of the great need in the church to facilitate a contextualized ministry for women in positions of vulnerability like single mothers, widows, and divorced women. The ministry operated in a way that women from different church traditions would follow this ministry via online weekly Bible studies and a radio program. Some of these women suffered

domestic or social violence, others struggled financially to support their children, and others lacked formal education or opportunities to get a better job. Even though these women had different religious backgrounds and experiences, all of them were survivors trying to recover the broken pieces of their life stories.

From the women who participated in this ministry, I learned that their experiences of brokenness were legitimate sources for theology. I noticed an immediate compassion and empathy among the women when their stories of suffering and struggle intersected with others. I observed that women's sufferings made more sense when women connected with other stories of sufferings and supported one another because they believed that God was helping them through these connections. As the Latin American scholar Elsa Tamez writes: "Women hear the voice of God favoring them. Most men don't hear this because they come from a tradition that believes that they are chosen because of their masculinity."<sup>1</sup> In this statement, Tamez suggests that women have an epistemological and spiritual advantage over men to discern the divine love of God who consoles, transforms, and brings them hope because of their experience of suffering. In the suffering of the marginalized, God is present. Although, this way of thinking is not an exclusive reality for all men and women, it certainly attests to the fact that women who experience suffering are more receptive to the work of God in their lives.

### *Practical Approaches*

While I was doing ministry among women in Latin America, I was interested in constructing a practical theology that could provide women with resources to experience God and the church in a deeper and more loving way. The interest in finding theological resources for women came as a result of my awareness of the double burden that Protestant women in Latin

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<sup>1</sup> Elsa Tamez, "The Woman who Complicated the History of Salvation," *Cross Currents* 36, no. 2 (1986): 129-139.



America face: they live in a patriarchal society and are members of churches where men preach and practice ideas of domesticity and inferiority. As such, women need a practical theology to assist in their spiritual connection to God for liberation. The theological approaches that have informed my practical theology for this project represent my first attempts to elaborate a feminist theory that could bring more understanding and clarity to my contextual ministerial practices. For instance, one of my endeavors was to discover a common ground between the realities of women in Latin America in the twenty-first century with the life experiences and socio-cultural sufferings of women who lived thousands of years ago in the biblical texts. However, one of the problems of practicing theology in this way was the limited historical information that the biblical texts provide. To retrieve such information is not an easy task. However, approaching the biblical women stories as narratives reflective of their lives represents a better approach to discern their experiences. In short, I was trying to reveal how the experiences of biblical women could help women today.

To obtain more clarity about how to construct a feminist theory that could serve women in Latin America, I had to look for specific resources that could help me reach this goal. For instance, as a part of the doctoral of ministry program, I took classes about the history and the conditions of women in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The theological academic setting of the program facilitated critical reflections with professors and feminist scholars about women's struggles in the countries of the Global South. In the doctoral program, I also obtained a Certificate in Women and Gender Studies, which focuses on intensive investigations over issues related to women. All these academic resources gave me the tools to critically analyze the conditions of Hispanic women. They provided me with the academic and critical skills to describe and analyze the sexualized and "genderized" relations present in society, the church,

and their traditions. Thus, liberation feminist theologies inform this research project—an approach that draws on the faith of the people and reason to bring forth the reign of God to all, particularly women who are marginalized.

*The Problem at Hand: The Exclusion of Women from Leadership Positions in the Church*

This project emerged from my personal desire to know how other women propose ways to make sense of the struggles they face when they serve the church. Unfortunately, there are women with a calling to the Christian service who have also experienced harassment, rejection, and seclusion in their communities of faith. This situation highly affects their emotional health and self-esteem. For instance, “researchers have discovered that everyday sexist events, such as sexist language, gender role stereotyping, and objectifying commentaries lead to feelings of anger, anxiety, and depression in women.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, more recent studies suggest “the impact of daily, personal sexist interaction has an incremental effect that may result in the disturbing [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder] PTSD symptomology.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, unless women experience ministry in favorable environments, their mental health is at risk.

The problem of excluding women from leadership positions in the church is not recent. This exclusion has been a general accepted reality supported by influential church leaders like Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), who promoted negative sexist behaviors and prejudices about dualistic gendered roles for men and women. He wrote that a “woman was merely man’s helpmate, a function which pertains to her alone. She is not the image of God but as far as man is concerned, he is himself the image of God.”<sup>4</sup> These prejudices became rooted in the church

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<sup>2</sup> Derald Wing Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2008), 119.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity* XII:7:10.

tradition and in certain cultural patterns because people consider them as the norm. Church leaders have claimed absolute authority and the legitimate representation of God. According to their perception God is male. Therefore, only men can represent God in the church as bishops, priests, or deacons. In this worldview, men are superior as they obtain access to jobs and opportunities denied to women. These misconceptions, based on sexualized understandings of women, thus seriously damage the social conditions of women and other groups of people in vulnerable positions in society. In short, the issue of patriarchy and sexism is behind the problem of the marginalization of women in the church.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main objective of this project is to create awareness about the problem of exclusion of Latin American women from church leadership positions that creates a dualistic society along gender roles—between women and men of the church. This heightening of awareness hopefully will contribute to a positive transformation in the church in Mexico and elsewhere that eventually can produce more justice and inclusion for all. This research reveals how women clergy are proposing ways to bring healing and understanding to the struggles that women face while serving the church.

The potential benefit of this research is knowing the contributions that women clergy are making regarding “imaginative identification” as a source of liberation from patriarchal oppression. Imaginative identification is a strategy of feminist interpretation proposed by the scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza that provides for a re-imagination or alternative view of reality with God on their side as women leaders. These contributions are important because women clergy need more resources to affirm their human value and their contributions to the church. The analyses of this investigation can persuade society and the institutional church to

reflect on some of the struggles that women clergy face in a patriarchal church and society in Mexico and elsewhere.

### **An Interdisciplinary Approach**

I address the problem of women's exclusion from leadership roles in the church in Mexico from an interdisciplinary approach. I take into consideration fields such as feminist theology, postcolonial feminist theory, and sociology of religion. First, feminist theology provides women with the hermeneutical tools to deal with the invisibility of women in the Bible. Schüssler Fiorenza encourages women to draw on the liberative strategies—derived from feminist biblical interpretation—that reflect the struggles between the women of the Bible and the stories of women today.<sup>5</sup> The women in the Bible were vulnerable and lived in a patriarchal society that denied them the same rights and privileges that men had. The cultural contexts deprived these women of a legal status, and, at a certain point, they lacked or were at risk of not having the protection of their husbands. Women in the biblical contexts did not have voice and decision making about their destinies. Many stories of the Bible witness to this situation. For example, the woman suffering from hemorrhages (Luke 8:43-48), does not have a name or a voice in the story. In contrast, the men involved in the story have an identity and a voice. In this way, Jesus asks “Who touched me?”, and Peter says “Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.” However, the narrator of the gospel explains the woman's reason for her actions by writing the following: “she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.” This story attests to the reality that women and children were one of the most vulnerable groups of those days. Although women today have

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<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 28.

obtained more rights, they are still victims of exploitation, violence, and abuse. Unfortunately, the biblical stories continue to contribute to this marginalization of women through patriarchal interpretations and viewpoints.

Among these strategies of feminist interpretation, imaginative identification aims to create a space for women to read and interpret the biblical stories by themselves without the intervention of a male leader or the intervention of an institutionalized church.<sup>6</sup> Imaginative identification is important in this study because it reveals the powerful impact on the lives of women when they re-imagine biblical stories, taking into consideration the silences and the absences of women in the texts. Imaginative identification takes into consideration women's emotions and the different ways to communicate the stories and to express one's faith, such as: storytelling, visual arts, dancing, and music.<sup>7</sup> These forms of expressions have been important for the spiritual life of Roman Catholic women in Mexico. For instance, when women dance to the Virgin, when they sew the clothing to dress the saints, and when they create art in the form of paintings to show gratitude or request a favor from God, they participate in an alternative way of communicating with God. Schüssler Fiorenza comments that Protestant women have suppressed these forms of expressions because they have inherited the avenues to transmit and interpret the biblical stories according to the views of the white Protestant women missionaries from the U.S. who founded of Protestantism in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> An imaginative identification approach highlights new ways of experiencing God.

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<sup>6</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 26-28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Second, sociology of religion tries to explain, describe, and understand how religion operates and develops in a certain society.<sup>9</sup> Sociology of religion functions at the intersections of religious factors and the common aspects of social life such as arts, family settings, education, and sports.<sup>10</sup> In this case, sociology of religion helps to bring light and understanding to the complex process by which Mexico has become a country where its population has adopted and adapted Roman Catholic practices with Pre-Hispanic traditions. Even though the majority of its population has an affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church, people tend to practice popular religiosity, which is complex, and it is also an integral part of the culture. The spirituality and the religious rites are not exclusively confined to the worship service at church; people also experience spirituality in the daily life (*lo cotidiano*).<sup>11</sup> Scholars like Orlando Espín and Sixto García suggest that popular religiosity is all the set of experiences, beliefs, and rituals that oppressed people have created and developed in their search of the Divine.<sup>12</sup> In other words, people reflect such experiences as their way of being. Thus, sociology of religion is important in this research because Protestantism in Mexico interacts in cultural and religious contexts defined by popular religiosity. In order to understand Protestantism in Mexico, it is necessary to comprehend its relationship to popular religiosity. My work as an engaged researcher in this

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<sup>9</sup> Michelle Dillon, "The Sociology of Religion in Late Modernity," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michelle Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Wuthnow, "Studying Religion, Making It Sociological," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michelle Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28.

<sup>11</sup> Jeanette Rodríguez, "Mestiza spirituality: community, ritual, and justice," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 2 (2004): 333-334.

<sup>12</sup> Roberto S. Goizueta, "U.S. Hispanic Popular Catholicism as Theopoetics," in *Hispanic Latino Theology* ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 261-288.

project is to analyze this religious and cultural context in which the women clergy of the Christian Church (Disciples of Chris) in Mexico (CCDOCM) interact.

Third, a feminist postcolonial perspective is useful for my work because the Bible is a political text. In other words, the debate among those who support the ordination of women versus the ones who do not often employ the Bible to legitimate their political positions on women ordination. It is a political debate between the powerful (men) and the powerless (women). Unless people of the church address the ordination of women as a political issue, women will not have many opportunities to become equals in the church or in society. In fact, Kwok Pui-lan proposes that people need to study the Bible as a political text by taking into consideration the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power between the forces of the people colonized and the colonizers, and the reinforcement of patriarchy.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a feminist postcolonial perspective will reveal the binary power relationships inscribed in the narratives of the Bible that contribute to the view of women as inferior. At the same time, a feminist postcolonial perspective will reveal glimpses of God's liberation of the world in which women are equal partners.

Informed by these three combined critical perspectives regarding gender, social beliefs and practices, and issues of power, I examine cultural and theological issues affecting women clergy in the CCDOCM. I aim to explore alternative inputs, analyses, and conclusions that have been ignored or overlooked in the past by scholars and propose a new direction that leads to the inclusion of women in the church.

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<sup>13</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Jonh Knox Press, 2005), 8-9.

## Subject Matter: Project in Ministry

### *Research Question and Scope*

How do women clergy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mexico (CCDOCM) express and promote imaginative identification to find liberation from their oppressions? This specific question guides my research. This investigation focuses on five active, inactive, and retired women clergy of the CCDOCM located in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas (see table below). The research limits the geographical area to these three states of central Mexico because in 1914 American missionaries of the Stone-Campbell Movement established operations there. Since then, the denomination has not expanded significantly to other areas of the country.

Number of Active, Inactive, and Retired Women Clergy by Sections of the CCDOCM in the States of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas

Sections	A Brief Description	Number of Active and Retired Women Clergy	Number of Inactive Women Clergy
Alianza de Iglesias Cristianas Evangélicas (Discípulos de Cristo) (AICEDC) [Alliance of Evangelical Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)].	AICEDC is the oldest section of the CCDOCM. It is based in the city of Aguascalientes.	Two women clergy. <sup>14</sup>	At least three women clergy.
Confraternidad de Iglesias Cristianas (Discípulos de Cristo) (CICEDC) [Fellowship of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)].	In 1993, differences over church property resulted in a major division between AICEDC and CICEDC. It is based in the city of San Luis Potosí.	One woman clergy. <sup>15</sup>	At least one woman clergy.

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<sup>14</sup> Report of the 94<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Alliance of Evangelical Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), celebrated on August, 2014. Iglesia Cristiana Cristo Vive (Discípulos de Cristo), Paso de Hidalgo, Michoacán.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Smith, "Meet Rev. Lisania Sustaita Martínez," *Erasing Borders*, accessed June 10, 2015. <https://erasingborders.wordpress.com/?s=pastora+lisania>



Sections	A Brief Description	Number of Active and Retired Women Clergy	Number of Inactive Women Clergy
Iglesias Cristianas Discípulos de Cristo (ICDC) [Christian Churches Disciples of Christ] based in Aguascalientes.	ICDC is the section of most recent formation based in the city of Aguascalientes. It is a Pentecostal oriented group of urban churches.	Three women clergy. <sup>16</sup>	Information not available.

### *Methodology*

In order to answer the research question of how do women clergy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mexico express and promote imaginative identification to find liberation from their oppressions? I organized this investigation in three stages. First, I conducted historiographical research about the background of the foundation of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Mexico. I consulted primary sources dated from the late 1800s with an eye toward the American Protestant ideology of West-centric superiority inscribed in these sources and that motivated their missions abroad. Aligned with this ideology, the American missionaries promoted the conversion of the unsaved, the expansion of Christianity, and the establishment of a higher type of civilization among the “heathen” of different cultures identified as idolatrous, immoral, brutal, ignorant, superstitious, barbarian, demon-worshipping, and degraded.<sup>17</sup> During this stage of the investigation, I paid special attention to the role that American Protestant women had in missionary work. I specifically examined the monthly paper *Missionary Tidings* published by the Christian Woman’s Board of Mission (CWBM), which was a successful missionary organization that started in 1874. I was interested in the influences that the American women

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<sup>16</sup> Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Churches Disciples of Christ celebrated on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 20014, Los Nogales, Jerez, Zacatecas.

<sup>17</sup> William J. Lhamon, *Missionary Fields and Forces of the Disciples of Christ*, Bethany C.E. Reading Courses, (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1855), 68.

missionaries had on the local women they converted; for instance, the influence of the “cult of true womanhood” that consisted of the idealization of women regarding concepts of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Chapter two of this work contains the results of this historiographical analysis of the missionary arrival in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas.

The main problem I anticipated during this stage of my research was the lack of historiographical material from women who converted to Protestantism in Mexico. This lack of historiographical material is a common problem that the scholars from the Global South face when trying to study colonized women. Pui-lan experienced this issue with women in China; she writes: “I wished they had left behind books, diaries, documentaries, interviews, poetry, or their own interpretation of the events.”<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, the information that documents women’s own voices and interpretations of the events is nonexistent. Nonetheless, women’s silences do not mean that women did not have a voice. This silence suggests both the dominance of the male voice in forming gender relations and situates their place of privilege among the American women missionaries.

Second, I conducted an ecological analysis of two places of worship located in central Mexico: The Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. I visited these religious sites to observe the sanctuaries and their surroundings to gather information about the participation of women in the formation of these sites as prominent religious centers. I paid attention to the interactions taking place among women regarding their manifestations of faith. To include an ecological analysis was important because the religious setting and the experiences of Catholic women serve as a reference to understand other groups of

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<sup>18</sup> Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 31.

women. In this case, Protestant women and their interactions in society and church as they exist in relation to their environment. The observations from my ecological analysis appear in chapter three.

Finally, I identified the women clergy of the CCDOCM in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas to interview them. I consulted the public documents, such as the directory of the CCDOCM and the reports of the General Assemblies of the denomination looking for the contact information of the women clergy. Contact information included the minister's name, church of ministry, electronic mail address, and telephone number. I recruited women clergy through electronic mail which contained an attached a copy of the participation consent form (see appendix B). The electronic mail contained an invitation to voluntarily participate in a research study about the women clergy of the CCDOCM and their contributions to imaginative identification in the forms of visual art, storytelling, dancing, and music. If a woman clergy agreed to participate, she printed, signed, and forwarded the consent form back to me. As soon as I received the signed consent form, I replied to the participant to schedule an interview through Skype, phone, or in person.

### **Chapter Organization**

In chapter one, I explain the background and the purpose of my study. I define the problem of women's exclusion from leadership positions in the church and how I will address the problem by using an interdisciplinary approach that includes fields such as feminist theology, postcolonial feminist theory, and sociology of religion. I specify the population of this research that consists of five active, inactive, and retired women clergy of the CCDOCM located in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. I then explain the methodology that guides this project in this chapter.

Chapter two corresponds to the first stage of my investigation that includes the historiographical analysis of some events that took place in the formation of the CCDOCM. This analysis is relevant because women clergy conduct ministry in a denomination that laid its foundations according to theological beliefs of the Stone-Campbell Movement in the United States in the 1800s. In the first section of the chapter, I include a general analysis of the religious background of Mexico before the arrival of Protestantism. I incorporate a discussion of the theological beliefs supporting the missionary enterprise of the Stone-Campbell Movement that led to the formation of the first Protestant churches in Mexico. I address important theological aspects for Disciples of Christ such as: Christ alone, the restoration of the church, and the unity of the church. In the second part of the chapter, I pay special attention to the role of American women in missions.

Chapter three contains the results of the ecological analysis that documents the socio-economic condition of the women living in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas, which are the most religious states in the country. The historical event of the Spanish conquest and its consequences on the Indigenous people are important to understand why the people in these states developed such a strong identification with religious practices connected with the Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. Because storytelling and visual arts are foundational expressions of faith for the liberation of women, I provide examples of metanarratives and religious images that empower women.

In chapter four, I provide as example two Bible studies that incorporate a postcolonial critical methodology. I propose a step-by-step process of how women in Mexico can lead themselves to consciousness-raising employing of biblical narrative and other documents of the

church. I use tools provided by feminist theology and postcolonial feminist theory to explore biblical text and documents of the church that contribute to a liberating view of women.

In chapter five, I report the interviews of the women clergy and the evaluation of results. The information from the interviews helps to determine the specific resources regarding imaginative identification in the forms of storytelling, visual arts, dancing, and music that women clergy incorporate to find liberation. I classify the information into categories that facilitated to identify consistent patterns and intersections regarding the types of liberation that women clergy have experienced by incorporating these resources. For analyses purposes, I use a triangulation observation of the data from the ecological analysis with the interview data. The triangulation observation includes comparing the resources of imaginative identification that women clergy of the CCDOCM have incorporated to the resources that Catholic women have used in the same region of the country. This analysis will help to determine how the contextual religious culture of the Mexican society may have influenced the religious practices of the women clergy in the CCDOCM. Finally, I close with the final conclusions in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT IN MEXICO**

The subject of study in this project, the forms of expressions of imaginative identification of the women clergy of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mexico (CCDOCM), necessarily involves an analysis of historical events that shaped the formation of the churches of the Stone-Campbell movement in Mexico. The history of the Stone-Campbell movement in the country is relevant because women clergy do ministry today based on the theology and practices completed by the work that American Protestant missionaries performed between 1895 and 1960. The historical analysis in this chapter facilitate more understanding of the complexities that women clergy face today while doing ministry in churches influenced by patriarchal ideologies.

This chapter contains two sections. The first section incorporates a description of the events that promoted the arrival of Protestantism in Mexico that, before the end of the nineteenth century, was exclusively under the influence of the Catholic Church. I explain the transition that the Catholic Church experienced from having influence and power during the Colonization period to becoming an institution in crisis during the War of Independence. I discuss the strategies that the new government set after the war to limit the power of the Catholic Church and to create religious diversity. In this section, I also describe the roots of the Stone-Campbell movement in Mexico by analyzing the ideology that moved the American Protestant leaders to plant churches abroad.

In the second section, I explore the role of the American women in the missionary enterprise. I discuss the importance of the Christian Women Board of Mission (CWBM), the agency that guided women's work in Mexico and abroad. From a critical feminist contextual perspective, I address the issue of the dual perspective of the job of the women missionaries:

while they helped the local women to obtain education, they also spread ideas of domesticity that oppressed the local women more. Finally, I discuss the response of the local women to Protestantism by pointing out to evidence that supports that its message did not appeal the consciousness of local women.

### **A General Background of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Mexico**

#### *Mexico Before Protestantism*

During the time that Mexico was a colony of Spain, from 1521 to 1810, the Catholic Church was the most powerful institution at the service of the Spanish monarchy. The church gained power because it protected the economic and political interests of the monarchy by assuring the establishment of a complex socioeconomic and religious system, known as the *encomienda*. This was a system of agricultural exploitation that enslaved and abused Indigenous people who lived in extreme poor conditions and suffered from malnutrition and illnesses. Historians have documented that due to the deplorable living conditions, by 1608, 95 percent of the total population had already died.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to this reality of suffering, the Spanish landlords, or *encomenderos*, and the leaders of the church became the ruling class of the society, enjoying great privileges through their accumulation of wealth, land, and power.

The Catholic Church pursued the expansion of Christianity eliminating the native cultures and suppressed pre-Hispanic religious traditions. Although historians have documented that many missionaries were genuinely motivated by a sense of mission, in the context of slavery and death, the missionaries' message of love and salvation lacked credibility. In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail the process by which Indigenous people ended up converting to Christianity. A key aspect of their conversion to Christianity, relevant to the present discussion,

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<sup>19</sup> Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)*, trans. Alan Neely, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 42.

is that the Catholic Church became the official religion of the country with a dominance that lasted for almost 300 years. During this time, the church controlled the education of the people, the population-based registries like birth, marriages, and deaths, and the local financial system of the impoverished rural communities. However, under the influence of the ideals of the French Revolution, the economic privilege and political influence of the church would eventually diminish. The frustration of the people living in dire oppression would rise to challenge the powers leading to the War of Independence in 1810 between Spain and colonial Mexico.

During the War of Independence, the position of privilege of the Catholic Church changed. The lack of clergy contributed to this shift, as most of the priests died, others fled the country, and priests ceased to come from Spain.<sup>20</sup> After the war, the priest shortage in the country led to a church in crisis because there were neither bishops nor priests available to lead services in church. During this crisis, women played an important role in the transmission of the faith. At home, women taught their children the importance of traditions like the veneration of saints and the Virgin. In the community, women preserved the traditions by organizing the religious festivities of the saints and patrons and by leading prayers, like the rosary. In the convents, nuns continued with their role as educators and as the main promoters of arts. In this regard, Latin American historian Ana María Bidegain writes the following:

El catolicismo popular se mantuvo vivo; la vida religiosa se siguió celebrando en los conventos, particularmente femeninos, y estuvo viva en las familias porque las mujeres, en los oratorios domésticos, nunca dejaron que se apagara la llama de la fe religiosa.<sup>21</sup> (Popular Catholicism was alive; the religious life continued to be celebrated in the convents, mainly in the feminine ones, and it

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<sup>20</sup> Phillip Russel, *The History of Mexico: From Pre-conquest to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 162.

<sup>21</sup> Ana María Bidegain, *Participación y protagonismo de las mujeres en la historia del catolicismo lationamericano* (Buenos Aires, San Benito, 2009), 22.



was alive among the families because the women, in the domestic praying rooms, never let the flame of the religious faith to extinguish.)

After the war, while women continued caring for these religious tasks in their homes and communities, a group of men were organizing a new form of government that would effectively bring regulations to the nation.

President Benito Juárez was the political leader who proposed a reorganization of the sociopolitical structures of the country by establishing limits on the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church. Juárez's efforts concluded with the promulgation of the Laws of Reform on July 7th, 1859. These laws separated the Catholic Church from the State and declared the freedom of worship in the country. Prior to the promulgation of the Laws of Reforms, the Mexican Constitution of 1824 stipulated that the State belonged to the Catholic religion and prohibited public exercise of any other religion.<sup>22</sup> A significant step forward in dismantling the power of the church took place when Juárez and his political team encouraged the formation of the first non-Catholic church, that over time, developed into the Anglican Church of Mexico. The discontent of these liberal politicians with the Catholic Church guided them to use as a strategy the promotion of an alternative form of Christian worship. They wanted changes in the ideology of the Mexican people, who, according to their liberal perspectives, were extremely religious. The new church shared a similar liturgy to the Catholic mass, but Juárez and his ministers were pleased that at least it did not have an affiliation with Rome.

Although the State had laws in place that permitted other religions in the country, and the society had an alternative church to worship, these improvements did not have an immediate

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<sup>22</sup> Carlos Martínez García, "De la presencia ideológica a la presencia física del protestantismo en el México independiente," in *Ecos del Bicentenario: El protestantismo y las nuevas repúblicas latinoamericanas*, ed. Carlos Mondragón (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2011), 208.

change in the ideology of the people, who resisted to the idea of religious diversity. The people's lack of acceptance of different faith traditions created severe difficulties for the non-Catholic immigrants that began living in the country in 1822. Historical records document that members of the society requested the government to protect the Mexican people from the risks of adopting the religious beliefs of the non-Catholic settlers.<sup>23</sup> These first non-Catholic residents were Protestant merchants and diplomats whose main objective was not to gain converts. However, their arrival was a sign that more religious changes for the country would take place in the future. The support of the government in favor of a diverse religious country facilitated the arrival of more religious groups. By the late 1800s, American Protestant missionaries began establishing churches in Mexico.<sup>24</sup> Since then, the religious diversity of the country has had some changes. However, Roman Catholicism remains a majority, with almost 83 percent of the total population of believers.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Mexico is the second country in the world with more Catholics, 110.9 million, only followed by Brazil with 172.2 million.<sup>26</sup>

*The Roots and Motives for the Presence of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Mexico*

In the United States, the Stone-Campbell movement emerged in 1830 with the union of two groups: the Christians led by Barton W. Stone and the Reformers led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell. It started as a fast-growing movement whose leaders promoted the

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<sup>23</sup> Evelia Trejo, "La Introducción del Protestantismo en México: Aspectos Diplomáticos," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*, accessed April 2, 2018. <http://www.historicas.unam.mx/moderna/ehmc/ehmc11/140.html>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000, *La Diversidad Religiosa en México* (Aguascalientes: Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2005), 3.

<sup>26</sup> "The Pontifical Yearbook 2017 and the "Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae" 2015, 06.04.2017," accessed April, 05, 2017, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/04/06/170406e.html>

importance of evangelism and church growth. Through the conversion of believers by other Christian denominations, they sought the restoration of an original form of Christianity according to the profession and practice of the primitive church. This belief, known as the “restoration of the Christian church,” had as an objective the unity of the church based on the biblical faith as the only source of light. Also, the members of the movement professed that the authority of Christianity did not rely on the structured confessions of the believers in the forms of creeds. Instead, they promoted “No Creed but Christ” because they assumed that Christ alone was the only source of salvation and the authority of their faith.<sup>27</sup>

The leaders of Stone-Campbell movement joined other Protestant denominations in the United States that affirmed that the Protestant missions in Latin America were justified. They concluded that the Catholic Church had failed to expand the true Christian gospel. They did not agree with the world mission conference of Edinburgh, held in 1910, which concluded that Latin America, as well as any other territory of the world under the influence of the Catholic Church, was already Christian.<sup>28</sup> According to their theological views, the Christian expansion consisted of the accomplishment of the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:19-20, when Christ sent his disciples to spread his teachings to all nations of the world. These leaders wanted to establish higher standards of moral condition, to educate the people, and to establish Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Their general assumption was that the non-western cultures were condemned, in need of salvation, and

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<sup>27</sup> Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship*, (Missouri: Chalice Press, 1997), 55-61.

<sup>28</sup> Paul M. Blowers, et al., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 115.

<sup>29</sup> Carlos F. Cardosa-Orlandi, “Facing the Dilemma: The Case for Latin America as a Mission Field,” *Apuntes* 16, no. 1 (Sep 1996): 24-25.

needing forgiveness of sins.<sup>30</sup> The following statement from Archibald McLean, who was the secretary and then the president of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, serves as an example of such perspectives: “Every year thirty millions from whom Christ died go down to a hopeless grave unsaved.”<sup>31</sup>

The Stone-Campbell movement arrived in Mexico in 1895. The first American missionaries began evangelistic work and church planting in the northern cities of Ciudad Juárez, Monterrey, and Piedras Negras. They were committed workers who wanted to influence society with their life of service. For instance, Miss Elma C. Ireland worked as a missionary in Mexico for over forty years.<sup>32</sup> These missionaries had as a priority the conversion of the unsaved and the expansion of western protestant Christianity that, according to them, was a superior ideology. To accomplish the conversion of the unsaved, the missionaries initially delivered Bibles to the people, opened their houses for Bible studies, and lead worship on Sundays. Eventually, they also opened schools, hospitals, orphanages, and social centers for the youth. They disbursed a significant amount of money to accomplish social work because they wanted to establish a civilized society whose members were middle class and educated. In this regard, Jasper T. Moses, a leader of the movement, commented the following: “A sane, right thinking middle class is the hope of any nation. This is what Protestantism and general education are building up today in Mexico.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lhamon, *Missionary Fields and Forces of the Disciples of Christ*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> A. McLean, *Missionary Addresses*, (Saint Louis: Christian Publication Press, 1895), 62.

<sup>32</sup> Elma C. Ireland, *Fifty Years with Mexican Neighbors*, (The Bethany Press, 1944), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Jasper T. Moses, *Today in the Land of Tomorrow: Sketches of the Life in Mexico*, (Indianapolis: The Christian Woman’s Board of Mission, 1907), 18.

The missionaries' expectations included not only the conversion of the people but also the change of people's cultures. They believed that a prototype of the American culture could suit everybody in the non-western world. Their goal was the creation of a more civilized society that included more education for people. In this case, the missionaries of the Stone-Campbell movement recognized the problem of illiteracy that existed in Mexico when they arrived: "only 16 per cent of her population are able to read and write."<sup>34</sup> To address this situation, the missionaries opened schools, like, for example the "Christian Institute" in Monterrey that operated from 1902 to 1913 and the school "Colegio Morelos" in Aguascalientes that operated from 1920 to 1934. These schools were low-cost institutions opened to the public where students received regular classes in English and Spanish and Bible training.<sup>35</sup> The missionaries also created reading and debate clubs in cities like Saltillo because they had in mind to convert the educated members of the community, the middle and high classes of the society.<sup>36</sup>

To promote a civilized society, the missionary enterprise considered as important the incorporation of commercial trade on the international markets. Archibald McLean claimed that the missionary work was one of "a great commercial value."<sup>37</sup> McLean spread the idea that "for every man that goes out as a missionary to savage people, a trade worth \$50,000 a year is created with the home country."<sup>38</sup> He believed that 'savage peoples' had the resources in the form of raw

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<sup>34</sup> Inman, "Mexico's Pleading—Our Plea," *Missionary Tidings* XXVII, no. 3 Indianapolis December 1909, 343.

<sup>35</sup> Ireland, *Fifty Years with Mexican Neighbors*, 23-67.

<sup>36</sup> Inman, "Mexico's Pleading—Our Plea", 343.

<sup>37</sup> McLean, *Missionary Addresses*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

materials; however, he also assumed that they lacked the abilities to utilize these resources because they did not know how to offer these in the world market. Unfortunately, a point of view like McLean's was common. The exploitation of natural resources from the global south economies resulted in a Christian religious domain and economic exploitation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The missionaries of the Stone-Campbell movement who came to Mexico were hard workers in pursuit of the progress of the local people. In this sense, scholar Ashis Nandy from India identifies these missionaries as part of the second wave of colonialism in the world. The first wave would correspond to the rapacious and atrocious genocides of the Spanish conquerors.<sup>39</sup> Nandy identifies the workers of the second wave as well-intentioned people. However, even though they pursued the wellbeing of the people, they “released forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, they came to change the culture and the popular religious practices of the people because they strongly believed that these were wrong.

In a limited worldview, the authenticity of the assumption that God was exclusively at work through the missionaries' specific ways of perceiving the Christian faith was problematic. The missionaries' main mistake consisted on ignoring the different cultural and religious experiences of the people they wanted to convert. Rather than accepting that God is universal and works in different ways through human experiences, the missionaries were confident about

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<sup>39</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., x-xi. Quoted in Namsoon Kang, “Constructing Postcolonial Mission in World Christianity: Mission as Radical Affirmation to the World”, in *Postcolonial Mission: Power and Partnership in World Christianity*, ed. Desmond van der Water (Upland: Sopher Press, 2011), 111.

their own version of interpreting God, the gospel, and God's activity in the world. In fact, they were unaware of other people's realities and assumed that by preaching the gospel of Christ, people would convert. According to Mark Toulouse, "For most of Disciples history, Disciples left unexplored the important theological questions to world mission."<sup>41</sup> In other words, the missionaries did not make a connection between their theological beliefs with their practices in the setting of a cross-cultural experience by not addressing a more serious theological reflection about the nature of their work in the world. Therefore, some of their practices among the people became offensive, inappropriate, and many times meaningless to others.

The language that the missionaries employed referring to other people's cultures and traditions is an example of the missionaries' lack of cultural understanding. When describing people's religious traditions, they used derogatory terms such as "ignorant practices," or "lacking of religion." The speech of the missionary S. G. Inman addressing the centennial Disciples of Christ gathering supports this analysis:

If we, with our plea to make Jesus supreme and unite all His followers in one all-conquering army, if we are debtors to all men, how much more so are we to the countries of the south of us known as Latin America, where more than anywhere else in the world Christianity has been distorted from its original form, and so wrapped on the worship of saints and images, so saturated with pagan superstition, as to be scarcely recognizable as the religion of Christ... listen to the pleading of Mexico for the simple Gospel you preach. Save her from darkness and despair. Raise her from where she has fallen blindly at the feet of the saints and images.<sup>42</sup>

Another example of the missionaries' lack of cultural understanding took place when they introduced Protestant practices for the sacrament of baptism. For this ceremony, the missionaries practiced the re-baptism by immersion of believers already baptized as babies by

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<sup>41</sup> Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship*, 194.

<sup>42</sup> Inman, "Mexico's Pleading—Our Plea", 343-345.

infusion in the Catholic Church. The main problem was not necessarily in their theology behind their practices but on their omission of the cultural practices of the local people. These cultural practices, as explained below, included the celebration of a party after the ceremony of baptism and the establishment of family connections of *comadres* and *compadres*. These relationships are unique to the Latin American people. As a matter of fact, English does not have an equivalent word that may reflect the true meaning of this type of familial relationship, but the closest English word might be godparents.

When the Latin American community joins to celebrate a family member who has received a sacrament in the Catholic Church like baptism, first communion, confirmation, and matrimony, they do it in the context of a family gathering and a *fiesta*. According to the economic means of each family, these celebrations can be as magnificent as wedding receptions. Guests enjoy a family gathering with food, music, and dancing. However, when the missionaries did not consider a family gathering like this, they missed the opportunity to become more influential in the community. Another omission of the missionaries was that they did not take into consideration important Latin American familial ties and customs around the rite of baptism. For instance, before the baptism of a baby, parents choose among their closest friends a married couple as the godparents of their baby. These two couples enter in a familial relationship of *compadres* and *comadres*. By becoming *compadres*, both couples cherish a special lifelong connection, stronger than friendship, because they have adopted one another as family members. The baptized baby will receive the spiritual guidance of his/her *padrinos* as supporters during his/her life span. In my case, growing up as a Catholic, my *padrinos* were like second parents to me. Before they passed away, they walked next to me during every important event of my life.



*The Division of the Country*

In 1914, members of eleven protestant missionary boards active in Mexico met to develop a strategic plan that would facilitate the evangelization and the allocation of economic resources in the country. Representatives of the Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Episcopalians, Baptist, and Disciples of Christ gathered and agreed to divide the country in strategic regions. They signed the Plan of Cincinnati that considered the relocation of denominational missionary efforts to specific pre-established regions. The strategy included an exchange of properties among the denominations, such as church buildings, schools, and orphanages. Although, in theory, the plan appeared to be a positive agreement for the missionaries, a problem arose among the church members because the missionaries did not invite the Mexican adepts to the meeting. As a result, some church members did not agree with the strategic plan and refused to change parties by not surrendering their church buildings to a different denomination. When the missionaries did not consider the native believers during this important process, they missed the opportunity to hear alternative solutions that could have benefited their mission objectives in the country. Up to this day, Protestant believers identify the Plan of Cincinnati as *el plan asesino*, which means ‘the killer plan.’<sup>43</sup>

The Plan of Cincinnati resulted in the relocation of the missionaries of the Stone-Campbell movement from the north to the central area of the country. The new area of operations included the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. The Disciples of Christ transferred the majority of their properties to the Methodist Church. At the same time, Disciples of Christ received properties from the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church.

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<sup>43</sup> Gustavo Vasquez, “Una reflexión sobre el Plan de Cincinnati,” *Mexican American and Hispanic-latino/a Church Ministries Program at Perkins School of Theology SMU*, accessed April 04, 2018. <http://hispanic.umc.org/news/una-reflexion-sobre-el-plan-de-cincinnati>

Since then, Disciples of Christ have been working in the states with the strongest Catholic influence in the country. I contend that such a strong Catholic influence in central Mexico has influenced the low growth of Protestantism in the region. In contrast, the denominations that established operations in the north and south regions of the country, like the Methodists and the Presbyterians, have grown more. Some reports estimated that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) had 350 members in 1924, 800 in 1959,<sup>44</sup> and 1,142 in 1965.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Role of Women in Missions**

The spread of Protestant Christianity in Latin America and in the world was possible because of the involvement of women. The history of Christianity attests, that before the nineteenth century, the work of missions was the responsibility of single men; however, by the end of that century, Protestant women challenged traditional gender roles by pioneering new paths of service in the church. Influenced by the colonial enterprise of the momentum, women determined that they also wanted to be a part of the imperial agenda that consisted of the expansion and victory of the Kingdom of God by converting the people of the non-western cultures.

Protestant women were aware that the conversion of the women of the non-western cultures mattered to assure the Christianization of the world. They recognized that women play an important role to transmit the faith to their children and to influence their husbands and friends. Therefore, an important number of married and single women committed to the

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<sup>44</sup> Juan E. Huegel, *Apacenta la grey de Dios: Vivencias pastorales a lo largo de medio siglo*, (Bloomington, 2012), 986, Kindle.

<sup>45</sup> Ruth Rebecca Leslie and May Ella Wilson, *Historia de la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos) en México* (Mexico City, 1971), 97.

missionary enterprise as teachers and nurses in the foreign fields; at home, women organized the logistics and the funding of the missionary work. According to McLean, who wrote the following report in 1895, “Women are doing now more than ever to evangelize the world. There are now seventy-five missionary societies representing the women of Christendom, and 2,700 unmarried women in the fields. The societies receive and disburse about \$2,000,000 a year.”<sup>46</sup> The numbers in these statistics are nothing else but impressive. As a matter of fact, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Protestant women were involved in an enterprise that historians consider to be the largest organized women’s movement of Christianity in the world.<sup>47</sup> In the case of Mexico, historians report that by the early 1900s, twenty different protestant missionary societies were already operating. These Protestant societies belonged to the Methodist, Presbyterians, Baptist, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, and Episcopalians.<sup>48</sup>

*The Christian Woman’s Board of Mission*

In 1874, women of the Stone-Campbell movement were venturing into a new religious terrain when they organized the Christian Woman’s Board of Mission (CWBM), which functioned until 1919 when it merged with other boards to create the United Society. The main motto of the CWBM was “The love of Christ constraineth us.”<sup>49</sup> The objective of the society was “to maintain preachers and teachers for religious instruction, to encourage and cultivate a missionary spirit and missionary efforts in the churches, to disseminate missionary intelligence,

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<sup>46</sup> McLean, *Missionary Addresses*, 139.

<sup>47</sup> Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 17-18.

<sup>48</sup> Dinorah B. Méndez, *Evangelicals in Mexico: Their Hymnody and Its Theology*, (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2008), 102.

<sup>49</sup> Lhamon, *Missionary Fields and Forces of the Disciples of Christ*, 69.

and to secure systematic contributions for such purposes; also to establish and maintain schools and institutions for the education of both males and females.”<sup>50</sup> Before merging with other boards, the CWBM functioned as an autonomous institution led exclusively by women.

The creation of the CWBM facilitated flexibility on views regarding traditional gender roles that before had helped maintain the male balance of power in the Protestant churches. However, when the American women began to participate in the missionary enterprise by creating the CWBM, the status of Protestant women in the United States had a positive change. At first, these women were married to middle-upper-class professionals like bankers or businesspersons who allowed their wives to volunteer for the agency. While the men were busy working, the women took charge of promoting and leading the missionary work. With this opportunity at hand, women had a place to work outside of their homes. According to Douglas A. Foster, “For the first time women were gaining training and experience to plan, administer, and be responsible for organizations and wide-ranging programs.”<sup>51</sup> Even though these women did not have the professional experience to manage an organization, they became successful leaders. For instance, they managed the businesses of the CWBM, such as recruiting and employing men and women as missionaries, choosing the field of service, raising and administering funds, owning property, and founding graduate schools to train missionaries, like the College of Missions in the city of Indianapolis in 1910.<sup>52</sup> In the foreign field, they planted hospitals, orphanages, schools, and churches.

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<sup>50</sup> Lhamon, *Missionary Fields and Forces of the Disciples of Christ*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Douglas A. Foster, “Feminism vs. Feminization: The Case of the Christian Woman’s Board of Mission,” *Discipliana*, 64 1 Spr (2004), 21.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Relevant to the discussion about how Protestant women benefitted from their involvement in missions is the fact that the first ordained women in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) were among those women who used to work for the CWBM.<sup>53</sup> This advance for women was possible because the CWBM provided the space that women needed to lecture from the church pulpits promoting the missionary work. Likewise, women had access to activities such as writing in the monthly periodical of the CWBM called *Missionary Tidings* that was in circulation between 1883 and 1919. This periodical had a broad circulation of over 54,000 papers among the churches all over the country.<sup>54</sup> This broad coverage allowed women to expand and express their goals and thoughts. Women also documented in this periodical the financial reports of the CWBM giving accounts about the disbursement of funds among missionaries all over the world. In this way, women proved how valuable their work was because they were performing an outstanding job handling the administration of the organization. For thirty-six years, *Missionary Tidings* served as the main channel of communication among the churches, the missionaries, and the mission board.

*Women Missionaries: A Dual Perspective of Their Job*

Even though American Protestant women were well-intentioned believers motivated by a sense of Christian duty, who were performing an outstanding administrative job at home and were gaining position of authority in their churches, they were also contributing to spread the values of the imperial worldview. These values were characterized by the colonialist and religious myths which assert that all the societies should be measured by the Christian religious norms and practices of the western societies. The link between the imperial missionary enterprise

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<sup>53</sup> Douglas A. Foster, "Feminism vs. Feminization", 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

and the participation of women has been studied by scholars such as Gulnar Eleanor Francis-Dehqani, who has addressed the complex dynamics that British women missionaries played between 1869 and 1934 with Iranian women. Francis-Dehqani writes that most of the British women missionaries had values and beliefs according to the imperialistic agenda; however, the scholar recognizes that they attempted a feminine version of ‘benevolent imperial social reform.’ In other words, the scholar believes that the missionary women had a dualistic approach in performing their duties. While they were challenging traditional gender roles in their western culture, they were also present in the foreign field spreading a Christian ideology to the Indigenous women of Iran who, according to the missionaries, were needing their protection.<sup>55</sup>

Pui-lan is another feminist scholar who has studied the involvement of women in the mission field and their impact among the Chinese women. Pui-lan has analyzed how Protestant women reproduced the theological agenda of domesticity that includes concepts such as piety, purity, and submissiveness. Pui-lan considers that the work of the women missionaries was a mixed blessing for the women they tried to convert. On the one hand, the missionaries established girls’ schools and Sunday school classes that addressed the problem of illiteracy among women. For example, historians have reported that the Protestant missionaries established up to 50 schools in Mexico.<sup>56</sup> However, on the other hand, the curriculum presented promoted the domesticity of women that oppressed native women even more.<sup>57</sup> Women missionaries did

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<sup>55</sup> Gulnar Eleanor Francis-Dehqani, “The Gendering of Missionary Imperialism,” in *Women and Christianity: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume III, Religious Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2010), 179-193.

<sup>56</sup> Dinorah B. Méndez, *Evangelicals in Mexico*, 102.

<sup>57</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 62.

not address women's realities of colonization, poverty, violence, immigration, and their secondary roles in the society and in church.

In this sense, the scholars Francis-Dehqani and Pui-lan agree in regard to the ambiguous role that the Protestant missionaries had. In terms of gender relations, they were inferior; but in terms of race, class, and education they were superior. Missionary women were white, middle class, educated, and supported by their families and churches. In contrast, the women in Mexico were indigenous or mestizas, poor, farmers, mine workers, and illiterate. According to the categories of class, race, and education, the missionary women had perceptions of the world according to their position of privilege. However, the missionary women were not aware of the local women's condition and forms of oppression because they were not natural allies with the women they tried to convert.<sup>58</sup> Instead of cultivating new perspectives and ideas during their cross-cultural experiences, missionary women did not challenge their approaches by incorporating more flexible norms and standards of their ideal religious beliefs. Therefore, the result was that they could not become more influential in the society by reaching out larger groups of people, as Pentecostalism did. They did not appeal for a permanent change on the socio-religious conditions of oppression of the women they converted. Overall, the results that the work of the Protestant missionary women produced in the mission field remains questionable.

#### *Women's Response to the Protestant Message*

From a feminist perspective, it is imperative to analyze the response that the local women had to the Protestant message. As mentioned before, the documents that record the experiences

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<sup>58</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, "Gender, Colonialism, and Christianity," in *Women and Christianity: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume I, Religious Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2010), 62-74.

of the local women in Mexico do not exist; however, other evidence can lead to important analyses. In this regard, there are three main factors that matter in this discussion. First, the slow growth of Protestantism in Mexico suggests that, despite of the multiple missionary efforts of the past, its message did not appeal to the needs of local women. Therefore, women did not convert in greater numbers. In the year 2000, there were 599,875 members affiliated to the historical Protestant churches that include the Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Anabaptists, Anglicans, Congregationalist, Quakers, Lutherans, Salvation Army, and Disciples of Christ. This number represents less than 1 percent of the total population.<sup>59</sup>

Second, Mexican women had the historical memory of the Spanish conquest that allowed them to create coping mechanisms of cultural and religious resistance in the middle of abuse and extreme oppression. Hispanic scholar María Pilar Aquino analyzes the coping mechanisms by which women endured the distribution of their humanity. In this regard, Aquino attests that, during the conquest, women were subjects of a distribution by means of marriage, distribution of women for the domestic service, distribution of women as gifts given by the indigenous men to the Spanish conquerors, and finally, distribution of women by rape.<sup>60</sup> These women, continues Aquino, “seasoned in memory by suffering and hope, who selected and kept what was best in the gospel message together with the best elements in their own ancestral cultural symbolic world.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, in the middle of much suffering, Indigenous women developed a historical memory that functioned as their point of departure to reimagine their faith and religious practices

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<sup>59</sup> XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000.

<sup>60</sup> María Pilar Aquino, “Women in the Church of the Poor,” in *Women and Christianity: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume III, Religious Leadership, Mission, Dialogue, and Movements*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (London: Routledge, 2010), 93.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



that, at the end, became their main source of empowerment. In addition, local women were already rooted, at least for four hundred years, in their faith and religious practices when the American missionaries arrived in Mexico. Therefore, local women were not leaving their main source of empowerment to convert to Protestantism, an ideology that included their domesticity. On the contrary, they would resist even more to hold on to their faith.

Third, historical records attest that Indigenous women resisted the presence of male priests during the colonial period. Scholar Maximiliano Salinas has conducted research that proves that Indigenous women rejected the role of the Catholic priests because women made the clergy responsible for the abuses of colonial Christianity. In order to come up with these conclusions, Salinas analyzed Latin American folk literature of colonial times that specifically criticizes the role of male priests in the community.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, if research supports the local women's resistance to the presence of male priests, then the suggestion that local women may have also resisted the presence of Protestant male pastors is not out of place. In this sense, the women missionaries were not the leaders of the churches they planted. These women ruled out themselves from the role of leaders of the church by assigning male missionaries or local male leaders as their pastors. While Protestant women gained in some ways when they became missionaries abroad, their ideology of domesticity did not permit them to advocate for a permanent change.

### **Conclusion to Chapter Two**

In this chapter, I discussed that during the time Mexico was a colony of Spain, Catholicism was the official religion in Mexico. The Catholic Church was the most powerful institution in the country; its dominance lasted for almost 300 years. However, in 1810, the

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<sup>62</sup> Maximiliano Salinas, "Christianity, Colonialism and Women in Latin America in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *Social Compass* 39, no. 4 (1992): 534-535.

position of privilege of the Catholic Church started to change when the War of Independence took place. In the following years, the State set new laws that permitted other religions in the country. These laws facilitated the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries. In fact, the Stone-Campbell missionaries arrived in 1895. They were hard workers in pursuit of the progress of the local people.

An important aspect addressed in this chapter is the objective of the work that the Protestant missionaries conducted among the people, as well as the results obtained. In this sense, the missionaries had as their priority the conversion of the unsaved and the expansion of western protestant Christianity that, according to them, was a superior ideology. Women missionaries also participated in this enterprise. They became successful leaders who managed the business of the CWBM. Through this missionary agency, women raised funds and planted hospitals, orphanages, schools, and churches in the foreign field. However, women missionaries did not address local women's realities of poverty, violence, and their secondary roles in the society and church. I concluded that the presence of women missionaries in the community did not provide local women the resources to create alternative ways for their liberation. The results of the work of these women in Mexico remain questionable because local women converting to Protestantism experienced and adopted ideas of their feminization that cultivated moral values of domesticity, such as sacrificial love, servanthood, and altruism.

## CHAPTER THREE: ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I report my observations of the ecological analysis gathered during my visit to the cities San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco and Plateros, Zacatecas. To organize the outcome of this analysis, I divide the chapter into three sections. The first section provides a general economic and religious background of the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. I explain the past and current condition of women living in these states by looking at aspects such as population, education, and emigration. The second section includes an analysis of the process of conversion of the Indigenous people to Christianity during the conquest. This was a historical time when people developed such a strong identification with the Virgin and with the religious practices of prominent sites of worship in central Mexico. This analysis helps to understand the reasons why the people living in these states became very religious. The last section highlights the importance of the Sanctuary of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha in the formation of women's faith and contextualized religious practices. Finally, I analyze the resources that Catholic women have incorporated in relation to storytelling and visual arts as expressions of faith.

### **Geographical Area of Study: Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas**

Although the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas cover only 7.25 percent of the total territory of Mexico, they contribute significantly to the economic growth of the country. In fact, almost all economic sectors are present, including mining, farming, ranching, manufacturing technology, automotive industries, and commerce. This economic diversity is possible due to the states' strategic geographical location and a diverse topography consisting of rolling hills and broad valleys, an arid and semi-desert climate in the north and a warm and mild climate in the south.

The 1980s was the beginning of an increasing influx of multinational companies where small family craft workshops have also been operating since the first settlements of the sixteenth century. This area has been important for the commercial route called *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* (King's Way in the Inner Land) or *Ruta de la Plata* (Silver Route). In the past, it was the only route connecting Mexico City with Texas and New Mexico. Today, due to the growing infrastructure, this region connects the commercial activities between Mexico and the United States. These three states are also strategically located at the west of the Sierra Madre Oriental mountain range that separates it from the coastal plain of the Gulf of Mexico. The Sierra Madre Occidental separates the region from the coastal plain of the Pacific. In the south, these states border with Jalisco, Guanajuato, Queretaro, and Hidalgo.



Map of Mexico: geographical location of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. It shows the three most important religious sites in the country: The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos, and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha.

Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas are the most religious states in the country. In 2010, 92 percent of the total population was Roman Catholic. This number was higher than the national percentage of Roman Catholic believers, which was 83 percent. Although Protestants and Evangelicals are the second largest religious groups, believers affiliated with these Christian traditions do not represent more than 3 percent of the total population in these states.<sup>63</sup> These statistics attest to the fact that Protestants and Evangelicals are

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<sup>63</sup> XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000, *La Diversidad Religiosa en México* (Aguascalientes: Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2005), 134, 157, 165.

a small minority in central Mexico where the people have remained faithful to their popular religious traditions and affiliation with the Catholic Church.

*Condition of Women in Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas*

The socio-economic condition of the women living in Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas has changed significantly since the last century. In the early 1900s, women lived in rural communities and had limited access to education. Women were married as teenagers, and they had numerous children.<sup>64</sup> In addition to the work performed at home, women also helped farming the land or working as seamstresses, housekeepers, and midwives.<sup>65</sup> In general, women lacked agency and rights. In 1953, women's conditions started to improve when they gained the right to vote. Since then, women have obtained more participation in the public sphere. Today, the women in these states represent 51 percent of the total population and have an average of 1.8 children.<sup>66</sup> By having fewer children, women have more control of their professional careers. Yet, they still face challenges to get education as many women are immersed in family settings with limited economic resources that prioritize the education of men over women. They also struggle with gender role stereotypes that assign women the role of mothers and housewives. However, in spite of these challenges, an increasing number of women have been able to graduate from high school and college.

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<sup>64</sup> *Estadísticas Históricas de México*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Aguascalientes: Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 1990), 3-6.

<sup>65</sup> Ma. de la Luz Parceró, *Condiciones de la mujer en México durante el siglo XIX*. (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1992), 73-89.

<sup>66</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, accessed July 25, 2017. <http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/zac/poblacion/vivienda.aspx?tema=me&e=32>

Another major challenge for women is the growing number of households headed by a woman. According to the official statistics, in 2015, women led 26 percent of the total households in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas.<sup>67</sup> Emigration to the United States is a main reason why men are absent from their households. For instance, Zacatecas is the state of Mexico with the largest emigration rate to the United States. In 2013, it reached out almost 6 percent of the total population. In that year alone, 20,727 men left Zacatecas to find better opportunities in the United States.<sup>68</sup> In fact, some rural towns of Zacatecas have become communities without men because men living in rural areas are more likely to emigrate.

More problems emerge when women face the responsibility to serve as the primary breadwinners. When the men leave their households, women become agricultural producers which is an activity that increases their workload. In addition to raising their children and performing the household duties, women work long hours farming the land. Only the families receiving remittances from family members who work in the U.S. experience some economic relief. Another difficulty is that the members of a family living in a female-headed household are more likely to live in poverty due to a lower earning power for women compared to men. As a result, children become at risk of dropping out of school to help financially at home by working in low-paying jobs.

### **The Conversion of the Indigenous People to Christianity**

The context surrounding the conversion of the Indigenous people to Christianity embeds suffering and genocide. From the time the Spanish soldiers arrived into the New World, they

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<sup>67</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática.

<sup>68</sup> Lorena, Gutiérrez. *Destaca el estado... en migración*, NTR Periodismo Crítico, 12 Julio 2017, accessed July 10th, 2017. <http://ntrzacatecas.com/2017/06/12/destaca-el-estado-en-migracion/>

gained control and dominion by spreading death and fear among the population. Although the Indigenous people resisted their colonization by fighting in war, their efforts were not sufficient to defeat their enemies. Indigenous people were at a disadvantage because they were dying fighting the war against the Spaniards, but most of all, they were not immune to the diseases that the conquerors brought. Indigenous people were perishing due to mortal diseases such as smallpox, measles, typhus, mumps, and tabardillo that killed half of the population in the New World. In the midst of death and suffering, the Indigenous people were vulnerable. Although the missionaries tried to convert the Indigenous people by changing their native names to European names and by baptizing them, they resisted conversion to Christianity.

The contributions of anthropologists and historians provide evidence that helps explain why the Indigenous people resisted conversion to Christianity and how eventually they embraced Christianity as their new faith. In this sense, there are at least three aspects that matter in the discussion. In first place, Indigenous people were reluctant and suspicious about Christianity because it had a deity, God-Father, disconnected from their reality of oppression. They did not want to adopt the “love” of a Christian God-Father based on the example of the Spanish soldiers, who became the fathers of a new race, the Mestizos. These children were not the product of loving and mutual relationships. On the contrary, Mestizos were born out of violence, rape, and slavery.<sup>69</sup> The mestizo children lacked a loving and a caring father in their lives; therefore, God-Father, a “loving” deity, was a violent and angry divine figure.

In second place, the Indigenous people rejected Christianity because their women were the ones experiencing the worst sorts of oppression. Andrea Smith has analyzed the dynamics of

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<sup>69</sup> Octavio Paz, *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (Distrito Federal: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950), 32-34.



hierarchy and physical abuse on the part of male conquerors over the Indigenous women. Through horrendous forms of oppression, including the exploitation of the land and the murder of the Indigenous men, the conquest eliminated women's identity. Men forced women into submissiveness. According to Smith, this violence represents patriarchal gender violence by which Spanish men dominated and colonized Indigenous women.<sup>70</sup> The extreme aggressions against women supported serious misconception about the supremacy of men over women and originated psychological and social effects that are present today in the Mexican culture characterized as patriarchal. As a result of this oppression, the women in the community were not converting to Christianity. They could not function as the main transmitters of this new faith.

According to the writer Octavio Paz, the Spanish fathers transmitted to the Mexican culture their patriarchal oppression of men over women. Paz expresses that the Spanish conquerors brought into the New World their "machismo," which includes the most aggressive expressions and violent abuses of the "other," who in this case are the women. The dysfunctional machista system of the Spanish conquerors traces back to the European society before the conquest when Europe was facing "mass poverty, disease, religious oppression, war, and institutionalized violence."<sup>71</sup> The Spanish men who conquered the New World belonged to societies identified as misogynistic.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, the machismo became the patriarchal system which dispossessed the Indigenous women of their traditional identity based on their relationship to the land, their religious expressions, and their sexuality. Indigenous women became servants, slaves, and mothers of an entirely new people with a violent ancestry.

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<sup>70</sup> Andrea Smith, *Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide* (Cambridge Ma: South End Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

In third place, Indigenous people rejected Christianity because they experienced shame and pain caused by an unprecedented cultural genocide. A cultural genocide deals with the systematic destruction of symbols, objects, traditions, and values that characterize a group of people. A cultural genocide is “any deliberate act committed with the intent to destroy the language, religion, or culture of a national, racial or religious group on grounds of the national or racial or religious belief of its members.”<sup>73</sup> In this regard, the conquerors did not receive the Indigenous people as intelligent human beings living in developed and complex civilizations. Instead, the Spanish soldiers destroyed indigenous architecture characterized by its splendor and perfection. The conquerors committed cultural genocide when they burned codices and demolished ancient religious sites to replace them with cathedrals and churches. For example, the conquerors built downtown Mexico City and its Cathedral on top of Tenochtitlán, the capital of the empire, a site for religious worship and the symbol of the political power of the Aztecs over the Mesoamerican cultures. The conquerors established large church buildings in every emerging community and major city with the financial support of the monarchy in Spain which had obtained gold and silver from the conquered lands.

Even though there were major reasons why Indigenous people rejected Christianity, the missionaries had set up their goals. Disregarding their failure to convert people, the missionaries developed different strategies to accomplish their success. The strategy that worked well was the introduction of Christianity through the cult of the Saints and of the Virgin.<sup>74</sup> Contrary to the

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<sup>73</sup> David M. Smolin, “Will International Human Rights Be Used as a Tool of Cultural Genocide? The Interaction of Human Rights Norms, Religion, Culture and Gender,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (1995-1996): 149.

<sup>74</sup> Ondina E. González and Justo L. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6-7.

angry image of God-Father, the tradition suggests that the Virgin communicated to the people divine love and tender care. The Virgin created the connection with the widespread perception between God-strong-white-man with the social and marginal reality of the Indigenous woman. She "is a female representation of the divine, bearing attributes otherwise excluded from mainline Christian perceptions of God as Father, Son and Spirit."<sup>75</sup>

Indigenous cultures were matrilineal, which partially explains the acceptance of the Virgin. Matrilineal means that the women determined the place in the genealogical tree of the Indigenous people.<sup>76</sup> With this assertion in mind, it was the Virgin, according to tradition, who introduced the Indigenous people to their new Christian family. The Virgin facilitated a connection between the Indigenous people and Christianity: "Much as the Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance to Juan Diego created the space in which indigenous communities in Mexico could claim Christianity as their own."<sup>77</sup> In this sense, the Virgin claims her role as the spiritual mother of a nation and a birthing Church. The oldest source containing the story of the appearance of the Guadalupe Virgin is a document dated around the year 1649 written in Nahuatl, known as *Nican Mopohua*, which means "Here, this is the story."<sup>78</sup> The tradition narrates that the Virgin appeared to the Indian Juan Diego saying: "Am I not here, I, who am your mother?" With this statement, the Virgin introduced herself as a mother to all.

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<sup>75</sup> Jeanette Rodríguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe, Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 153.

<sup>76</sup> Smith, *Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide*, 18.

<sup>77</sup> González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> María del Carmen Servitje Montull, "María de Guadalupe ¿Icono de liberación o imagen de opresión?," in *Teología Feminista Intercultural*, ed. María Pilar Aquino, María José Rosado-Nunes (Ciudad de México: Ediciones Dabar, 2008), 323.

In 1531, the Guadalupe Virgin appeared, only ten years after the fall of Tenochtitlán. The Guadalupe Virgin appeared to advocate for the needs of her children as she promised perpetual fidelity because she would be with them until the end of the world.<sup>79</sup> She appeared looking as a brown-skinned, pregnant woman wearing an indigenous dress. Among all her virtues, purity was the most important. The Virgin's purity contrasted with the burden of shame that the Indigenous women carried when the Spanish men dishonored women's bodies and traditions. The Virgin appeared on the hill of Tepeyac, the most important center of pilgrimages of Mesoamerican cultures where people worshipped the goddess called Tonatzin.<sup>80</sup> She was the goddess of the earth and the mother of the gods and of humanity. The worship of the Virgin at the hill of Tepeyac facilitated a form of expression of faith that allowed the Indigenous people to hide certain continuity of the worship of their gods in a more discreet way. Even though scholarly work has paid much attention to the worship of the Guadalupe Virgin and her role as an agent of liberation for the oppressed people, after the conquest, other expressions of the faith to the Virgin became prominent too. The following section contains an analysis of two important religious sites of Mexico.

### **The Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha**

In the remainder of the chapter, I shall analyze the importance of the Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. My purpose is to analyze these sites from a feminist theological perspective by paying closer attention to the

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<sup>79</sup> Francisco Raymond Schulte, *Mexican Spirituality: Its Sources and Mission in the Earliest Guadalupan Sermons* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 114-126.

<sup>80</sup> Servitje Montull, "María de Guadalupe ¿Icono de liberación o imagen de opresión?", 323.

participation of women in their formation as prominent places of worship in Mexico. During my visit to the cities of San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco and Plateros, Zacatecas, I walked and drove the streets paying attention to the sights and the commercial activities of the surroundings. I heard the popular stories circulating in the community. I looked at the paintings, images, and sculptures in the sanctuaries and on the streets. The purpose of these activities was to identify, from a feminist analytical perspective, the signs of imaginative identification that could communicate a message from women to women. In short, a disposition to see beyond the surface opened my eyes to a reality of possibilities for women. In fact, although I grew up worshipping in Catholic churches in my home country, I had not recognized certain traditional elements of the faith. However, with a disposition to be very analytical during my visit, I could identify several aspects by which women have incorporated imaginative identification, and that before, I was unaware. Just by changing my perspective and looking at these religious places from a feminist point of view, I obtained more clarity about the importance of the popular religious practices in connection with women's liberation. In brief, I am surprised about my findings and how much I learned while I visited and closely observed these religious places.

The Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos is located only 48 miles south of the city of Aguascalientes. After the Shrine of the Our Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City, the Sanctuary of San Juan de los Lagos is the second most important religious site in Mexico. This sanctuary operates as a diocese by itself. Millions of pilgrims visit it every year. The economic activity in town is the religious tourism that provides accommodations to the millions of pilgrims that visit the site every year. The main religious festivity takes place on December 8<sup>th</sup> when the sanctuary receives visitors from all over the country and abroad.

The Lady of San Juan de los Lagos is a small statue that represents Mary in the representation of the Immaculate Conception. People identify the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos as the one who performs great miracles. The first miracle attributed to the Lady took place in 1623 when the Virgin performed a miracle and helped women in vulnerability. The young daughter of acrobat-parents who were performing at a circus in town died from an accident. Her parents brought the dead child's body to the Virgin, who in those days used to be at a small chapel in town. There, the custodian, identified as a 78-year-old lady named Ana Lucia, exhorted the parents to gain confidence in the Virgin who could raise the girl from the death. The elderly woman brought the Virgin's statue from her altar and laid it on the child's body. The miracle took place when the Virgin resurrected the girl.



*El primer milagro de la Virgen de San Juan en 1623, Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos*  
Author's photo

The second miracle attributed to the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos took place in 1653. A mysterious girl pointed to a new spring so much needed in times of drought. The miraculous waters of the spring helped to relieve the thirst of the entire town; and provided the water to build the new church for the Virgin. The walls of one of the rooms of the cathedral portray these two

stories, the resurrection of the girl and the spring that brought water to the people in town. In this way, these murals represent the foundation of the worship to the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos.



*La Virgen en su segundo templo, 1653, Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos*  
Author's photo

The Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha is in the city of Plateros, Zacatecas, 40 miles northwest of the capital. This sanctuary is the third most visited religious site in Mexico. Although historians have not exactly identified how the worship of the Santo Niño de Atocha emerged in Mexico, oral tradition suggests that women had an active role in promoting it. This tradition goes back to the original statue of the Virgin of Atocha in Madrid, Spain. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when Spain was under the Muslim rule, Muslim soldiers incarcerated men from the community for their religious beliefs and affiliation to the Catholic Church. The women requested the Virgin of Atocha who sent her son, Jesus, to bring water and food to the men in jail helping them survive thanks to the prayers of the women and the miracle of the Virgin.

This oral tradition has its counterpart in Mexico. After the Spanish conquest in the city of Fresnillo, Zacatecas, the mining industry boomed. According to the stories told by Indigenous people, an explosion in the mine left the miners trapped and hurt. The miners' wives decided to go to church to pray to the Virgin of Atocha, who was on the altar at the local church, for their husbands. The Virgin heard the women's prayers and answered them by sending her son to feed and to guide the men out of the mine. Although the official church has not confirmed the story of the Santo Niño de Atocha helping the miners, local people continue to pass the tradition to this day. The official version of the church acknowledges that the origins of the worship of the Santo Niño de Atocha are uncertain, but the church does claim that in the 1800s the owner of the mines in the city of Plateros donated a copy of the Virgin of Atocha that included the boy in her hands to the sanctuary. Eventually, the priests removed the boy from the Virgin and the worship of the boy gained supremacy because people and the church officials began attributing great miracles to him.<sup>81</sup>

### **Imaginative Identification: Storytelling and Visual Expressions of Faith**

What these traditions provide is an opportunity to analyze the storytelling and the visual expressions as forms of imaginative identification of the Catholic women in Mexico. Bringing to bear a feminist perspective to these verbal and visual expressions, the agency and the legitimization of women's voices and experiences in their process of liberation are highlighted. According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, feminist theology provides the tools that help women obtain liberation by promoting change and transformation because it takes into consideration all the sorts of oppression that women encounter.<sup>82</sup> The concept of imaginative identification deals

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<sup>81</sup> Santuario de Plateros, *El niño de Santa María de Atocha*, accessed July 01, 2017. <http://santuariodeplateros.com.mx/santuario/historia>



with the impact on the lives of women when they re-imagine biblical stories and when they communicate and express these stories in unique ways like storytelling and visual expressions. On the one hand, storytelling has functioned as a foundational tool in the formation of popular religiosity, which is an integral part of the Hispanic culture. On the other hand, religious visual expressions of faith take place in *lo cotidiano*, which deals with the space that women face in their daily life.<sup>83</sup> In this sense, *lo cotidiano* becomes a “source for theology because it is through their daily lives that women find strength and support for their actions as leaders in the community.”<sup>84</sup>

### *Storytelling*

Storytelling has helped Hispanic Catholic women in their process of liberation. First, storytelling has contributed to women’s liberation because these stories are means by which women have obtained a voice in the formation of their faith. The stories of the Virgin de San Juan de los Lagos and of the Santo Niño de Atocha have become metanarratives of transformation of the women’s oppression and marginal role in the patriarchal church and society. The patriarchal church and the society have silenced women in the community; women are absent from the theological formation of the institutional church. However, these metanarratives have functioned as powerful liberating tools because these have shaped the religious practices and beliefs of the women themselves and the religious community. My research does not focus on the process by which women or men created these stories. Instead, I

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<sup>82</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 10-11.

<sup>83</sup> Jeanette Rodríguez, “Mestiza spirituality”, 333-334.

<sup>84</sup> Theresa Torres, “Who is Our Lady of Guadalupe? Guadalupana Testimonials,” in *Perspectivas: Occasional Papers*, ed. Ulrike R. M. Guthrie (Princeton: Hispanic Theological Initiative, 2009), 50-68.

take for granted that women have adopted, embraced, and transmitted these stories as part of their process of liberation.

Second, in the storytelling women find agency without the intervention of traditional agents in power like the male clergy, the institutional church, or the male God-Father. In fact, God is omitted from these metanarratives. The omission of the male God-Father helps women in vulnerable life circumstance to obtain a prominent role in the story. The women in these stories were vulnerable according to the categories of gender, race, age, and economic status, for instance, a dead child, an elderly woman, an unknown girl, and a group of poor women who lack the strength to remove the rocks under which their husbands were trapped. These stories communicate that women have direct access to the Divine regardless of their marginal role in society. They also affirm women's identity because vulnerable women are the protagonists of the formation of the faith.

Third, the stories of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and of the Santo Niño de Atocha omit the biblical narrative, thus these stories do not include the male rhetoric or point of view of the biblical text and its politics. In these stories, the women of the narrative are the agents of change and of activation of the faith. In contrast, the biblical text omits women's reality in their protagonist role in history and in the formation of Christianity. The biblical text marginalizes women by omitting their names and their identities, while the metanarratives of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and of the Santo Niño de Atocha place women at the center of the story. Therefore, when Hispanic women transmit these metanarratives, they do it without the need to assert a male voice nor provide a revisionist interpretation of the story centering on a male perspective. Those Hispanic Catholic women embracing these stories are already using a feminist rhetoric, perhaps unconsciously, that allows them to find elements in favor of their

liberation. These women may not employ a direct critical suspicious strategy to read and interpret the biblical texts. They also avoid directly the suggestion that women should interpret the silences of the texts, yet they understand the church politics that alienates women to the normative church's agenda.

Fourth, the formation of these stories took place in a context prior to the arrival of a strong influence of the male perspective reflective in the theological tradition of the church in Europe. This gender bias tradition in the church says that males are superior and more intelligent while women are inferior and not made in the image of God (Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 CE). In the dichotomy women/men, prominent Christian theologians have considered women as misbegotten males (Thomas Aquinas, 1224-1274), evil (Tertullian, 155-240 CE), punished by God after the Fall (Luther, 1483-1546).<sup>85</sup> Therefore, Indigenous women had more freedom to incorporate their religious experiences into their new faith, avoiding to a certain degree the misconceptions attributed to women and men.

Fifth, the Virgin affirmed and approved women by liberating them from the Christian theology that argues that suffering is redemptive. Theologians, like Anselm, have explained that God required the death and the sufferings of God's son at the cross to redeem the sins of humanity. Such perspective of the crucifixion encourages the sufferings of vulnerable and oppressed people. However, a feminist argument against this perspective is that the glorification of the suffering as salvific portrays God as a tyrant and one who does not work in support of women and children.<sup>86</sup> It is remarkable how the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos solved the

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<sup>85</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God so Loved the World?," in *Christianity Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 8.

problem of suffering by simply performing a miracle by answering an elderly woman's prayers, and the Virgin of Atocha affirmed women by sending her son to help the men. According to the biblical text, God sent Jesus to suffer and to die on the cross; but according to the popular storytelling, the Virgin of Atocha sent her son to bring life and hope, avoiding the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

### *Visual Expressions of Faith*

Visual expressions of faith exist in every Catholic Church. They include the images of God, the Virgin, and the Saints. In places where the center of attraction is a religious image, like the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos or the Santo Niño de Atocha, the visual expressions of faith crosses the line of the sacred and the secular. As mentioned before, visual expressions of faith take place in *lo cotidiano*. For instance, even though the Mexican Constitution legislates that the government is secular, the coat of arms of the city of San Juan de los Lagos contains imagery related to the worship of the Virgin.



*Escudo oficial de la Ciudad de San Juan de los Lagos,*  
Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco. Accessed July 21, 2017. [www.jalisco.gob.mx](http://www.jalisco.gob.mx)

According to the government of the city of San Juan de los Lagos, the colors silver and blue represent the purity and the nobility of the Virgin. The cross in the middle is a symbol of the Mother of God. It contains the phrase: *Salvete O Peregrini Beatu Civitas Sancti Iohannis* that means *Greetings to you, Oh pilgrims, from the Holy City of San Juan*. The coat of arms

represents the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos as the Queen, the Mother, and the Lady of the city.<sup>87</sup> The government uses it as a stamp in official documents, the flag, and public buildings.

Another remarkable example of a feminine visual expression of faith is the silhouette of an Indigenous woman carrying in her hands the Virgin of San Juan. The silhouette is located on a main street in town. It is a piece of art of approximately 26 feet high.



*Indigenous woman and our Lady*, Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco, San Juan de los Lagos  
Author's photo

Visual expressions of faith in the public sphere, such as the coat of arms of the city and the silhouette of the Indigenous woman, promote the liberation of women by facilitating them the access to do theology. In other words, women find on these images that the Virgin becomes their point of reference to imagine a different reality. Even though, women's realities speak of oppression in the form of poverty, lack of education, excessive load of work, domestic violence, and exclusion from the construction of knowledge in the official church, the Virgin creates a new symbolic order that empowers them.

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<sup>87</sup> Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco, accessed July 05, 2017.  
<https://www.jalisco.gob.mx/es/jalisco/municipios/san-juan-de-los-lagos>

The altar of the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha is a remarkable piece of art. Although the sanctuary, built in the 1800s, is not a complex structure, the altar by itself contains elements of art that represent the prominent role of the Virgin and the pre-Hispanic understanding of the divine. The Holy Trinity statue at the top depicts a classical image of God the Father, Jesus Christ holding a cross, and the Holy Spirit represented by a dove. Below, there are three angels holding the world. This sculpture is influenced by the European Renaissance when the imaginary of the Holy Trinity became more popular among artists.

The main figure of the altar is the crucifix of the Christ of Plateros. In this image, Jesus appears as the suffering Christ hanging on the cross. Representing Jesus in this way is not unusual in older churches in Mexico. In fact, people can observe these pieces of art in chapels and oratories where they offer their prayers. For instance, in the Sanctuary of San Juan de los Lagos the suffering Jesus is dead, lying in a crystal coffin. The reason for these bloody representations goes back to the understanding that Indigenous people had. According to anthropologists, the Aztecs believed in three principal gods: Quetzalcoatl, Huitzilopochtli and Coatlicue. The latter identified as female and as the mother of the main god Huitzilopochtli who was a young and strong deity. He was the god of war and of the sun to whom people offered human sacrifices. For example, in the dedication of the new temple of Huitzilopochtli people offered more than twenty thousand sacrifices.<sup>88</sup> During these rituals, the priests removed the hearts of the victims and offered and sprinkled their blood. At the same time, warriors ingested pieces of meat as a sign of victory. Indigenous people identified Jesus with their god Huitzilopochtli because, just like their god, Jesus was the light of the world. He was God's

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<sup>88</sup> González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 15.

sacrifice. Believers could eat his flesh and drink his blood as a sign of the victory of good over evil.

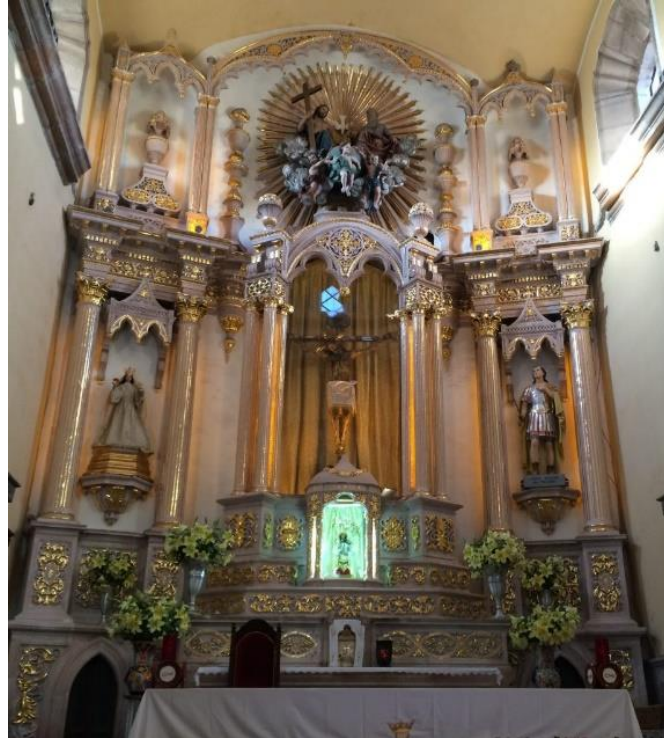


*Jesús en su tumba,*  
Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos  
Author's photo



*El Cristo de Plateros,*  
Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha  
Gallery of pictures of the Sanctuary of Plateros, Zacatecas.  
Accessed July 21, 2017. [www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx](http://www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx)

The Virgin of Atocha is located on the right of the Christ of Plateros. As mentioned before, this image arrived the church as a donation in the mid-1800s. In the past, Jesus-boy was on the Virgin's arms, but when people identified Jesus-boy as the one performing great miracles, they placed him below the Christ of Plateros in a crystal box. St. Demetrious is located left to the Christ of Plateros. St. Demetrious is a saint of the church. In 1566, people dedicated the foundation of the city of Plateros to him. Back then, the city's name was Real de Minas de San Demetrio.



*Altar en el Santuario del Santo Niño de Atocha*  
 Gallery of pictures of the Sanctuary of Plateros, Zacatecas.  
 Accessed July 21, 2017. [www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx](http://www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx)

Joseph is absent from the altar of the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. Even though Joseph appears in the biblical narrative of the gospel of Luke when Jesus was a twelve-year-old boy, the designers of the altar placed the image of St. Demetrious instead. The omission of a statue of Joseph suggests that, for the community, a representation of the Holy Family at church does not communicate the message people are looking. In other words, people are less attracted by the figures of the Holy Family, but they are driven by the divine intervention of the Virgin and her son. Specifically, people visit the Santo Niño de Atocha looking for a miracle, or to give thanks for a miracle receive in the past. The patios and corridors around the main church are testimonies of the miracles people have received. The space is insufficient to hold all the altarpieces that reflect the gratitude of the believers when the Santo Niño has granted them a miracle.





Walls of an adjacent patio outside church,  
Gallery of pictures of the Sanctuary of Plateros, Zacatecas.  
Accessed July 21, 2017. [www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx](http://www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx)



Altarpieces showing gratitude to the Santo Niño de Atocha for a miracle women have received,  
Gallery of pictures of the Sanctuary of Plateros, Zacatecas.  
Accessed July 21, 2017. [www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx](http://www.santuariodeplateros.com.mx)

### Conclusion to Chapter Three

In this chapter, I discussed the importance of storytelling in the formation of the religious beliefs and practices of the people in Mexico. I specifically analyzed the metanarratives that were the foundation of two of the most important religious sites in Mexico: The Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. I pointed out that these metanarratives have been theological resources that Hispanic Catholic women use to obtain liberation because women have found a voice in the formation of their faith without the intervention of traditional agents like the male clergy or the institutional church. I explained that when Hispanic Catholic women embrace and transmit these stories, they uplift vulnerable women who typically would not have a voice in their communities. The stories of the poor, the forgotten, and the sick women, empower Catholic women because these stories reflect daily women's realities and struggles. Catholic women can identify with the stories of the most vulnerable women in the community.

I also analyzed visual expressions of faith like the official coat of arms of the city of San Juan de los Lagos, the silhouette of the Indigenous woman located on a main street in town, and the altar of the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. I discussed that these visual expressions of faith promote the liberation of women by facilitating women the access to do theology in *lo cotidiano*. Through their daily life experiences Catholic women find the strength and support to create communities that place women at the center in order to bring healing from their different sources of oppression.

An important aspect to consider, before moving forward to the next chapter, is the fact that Catholic women have been for centuries the promoters and the sustainers of the popular religiosity of the people in Latin America. By transmitting these metanarratives and by creating

these visual expressions of faith, Catholic women have embraced religious practices that transform and redeemed them and their communities. Yet, even though Catholic women have been the pillars that preserve the faith and the religious traditions among the people, they have not achieved complete liberation from the church's practices and traditions. For example, Catholic women cannot attain access to the hierarchy of the institutional church by becoming ordained as bishops, priests, and deacons. Their main struggle lies on the fact that they have not been able yet to obtain a position of recognition and authority in the institutional church. Although some Protestant women have apparently solved this issue by obtaining access to ordination as ministers of the church; in the next chapter, the discussion centers in the challenges that Protestant women face and how they can construct a feminist theology in favor of their liberation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL THEOLOGY IN A BIBLE STUDY**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide as example two Bible studies that incorporate elements of feminist postcolonial biblical interpretation that can help Hispanic Protestant women clergy to find liberation from patriarchy and its negotiations of power between the powerful and the powerless in the biblical text and in the traditions of the church. While in the previous chapter I discussed some of the elements of imaginative identification that Catholic women embrace to find liberation, in the first section of this chapter, I address particular challenges that Protestant women clergy in Latin America face, and discuss the importance of a feminist postcolonial theology. In the second section, I present two Bible studies. One that incorporates the discussion of the patriarchal structures of power involved in the formation of the canon; the other that facilitates the reflection on the gender relations of power and the inclusion of women and other people in vulnerability in the church.

### **Advances for Protestant Women Clergy in Latin America**

Contrary to the history of five centuries of religious experiences of the Catholic women in Latin America, the ministerial practice of the Protestant women clergy dates from the 1970s.<sup>89</sup> Because women clergy have been practicing their faith and ministry in the continent for a shorter time, they are still espousing a contextual feminist theological rhetoric. This rhetoric is necessary because women clergy are shaping their own identity while they struggle to obtain equal acceptance by men in their communities. These women are constantly fighting the expected silence and powerlessness that women have faced in the Christian tradition for centuries.

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<sup>89</sup> For instance, Candita Bauzá-Mattos, was the first Hispanic woman ordained in the Evangelical United Church of Puerto Rico in 1972, accessed October 20, 2018. [http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy\\_url/13178/Microsoft-Word-Finding-Voice-Candita-English.pdf?1418439461](http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/13178/Microsoft-Word-Finding-Voice-Candita-English.pdf?1418439461)

Although they represent an extremely small minority group, they must confront patriarchy in the church and in society. At the same time that they must reformulate a non-traditional concept of authority of the biblical text because Protestantism lies its foundations on the inherent authority and dominance of the Bible that supports the hierarchical authority of men and the submissiveness of women. Their task is not easy, and the advances will be slow.

In this sense, the Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gebara has precisely traced the development and the gradual slow advances of women in the continent in recent years. For instance, the scholar recognizes three phases of development that started in the 1970s by which women in Latin America have created awareness of their struggles in an attempt to produce a positive change. The scholar provides this analysis inspired by the women liberation theologians who emerged in the Catholic Church in the 1970s after the Vatican II, held between 1962-1965. As a Catholic nun and a pioneer in the movement of liberation which was in favor of the poor and emerged in Latin America as a form of political resistance against the oppressive systems of militarist, Gebara has tracked the advances of these women.<sup>90</sup> According to the scholar, the first phase began when women recognized that the Bible and the church were the most important sources of women's oppression. The second phase took place when women discovered God's maternal side by avoiding exclusively male images of God that did not contribute to their liberation. However, the scholar perceives that both of these stages did not reveal the hierarchical patriarchal structures in which women and men interact because male theologians dominated these first stages of Latin American feminist theology. Regarding these phases, Gebara states that "More radical gender critiques of society, the church and theology were muted to stay within

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<sup>90</sup> Elaine Nogueira-Godsey, "A History of Resistance: Ivone Gebara's Transformative Feminist Liberation Theology," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26, no. 2 (2013): 89-106.

the limits of the ‘woman’s voice’ that male liberation theologians were willing to hear.”<sup>91</sup> In short, the scholar recognizes that only the third phase has incorporated the dismantling of the basic patriarchal paradigm that has shaped the relationships and interactions of women and men in church and society.

Although Gebara identifies these three stages in the advance of liberation for women in Latin America, this advance does not reflect the reality in the liberation process for all the Hispanic women in the continent. Each group of women has to encounter its own contextual reality. In particular, the Hispanic Protestant women clergy must first reconceptualize the concept of authority of the biblical text because they must deal with the deployment of gender in the Bible because the Bible omits women’s names and their identities. In order to communicate a new reality in their communities of faith, Protestant women clergy must first recognize that the Bible and the church can serve as the main sources of oppression for women and other groups in vulnerability. The Bible does not consider women’s reality in their protagonist role in history and in the formation of Christianity because the Bible is a male book in the sense that men—most likely—wrote the Bible, historically men have interpreted the Bible, and unfortunately, men have used their patriarchy and privileges in society and in church to control women’s access to and interpretation of the Bible. In other words, men have employed the Bible to reinforce patriarchy as an ideology that serves the interests of men who control institutions like the church where women lack a voice and full participation. Therefore, Protestant women need a feminist postcolonial perspective to reveal the forces that impose their submissiveness, forces appearing as the natural order of gender in society and the church.

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<sup>91</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminist Theologies in Latin America.” *Feminist Theology* 18 (Sep 2000): 23.

### **The Importance of a Feminist Postcolonial Theology**

A feminist postcolonial perspective helps women to reveal a genuine perception of the world and its realities. This type of theological interpretation has at least three main characteristics. First, it promotes transformation by seeking socio-ecclesial equality because it incorporates a critical methodology that addresses the problems and realities that women face in their communities and in the church such as poverty, lack of participation in the church, and social exclusion. This transformation is possible because a feminist postcolonial theology promotes a change of mindset by providing women with the elements to interpret the Bible in a more responsible and inclusive way. This theology considers the marginal context of the women in the Bible, their lack of voice, and the silence of the texts.

Second, a feminist postcolonial theology encourages women in two important aspects: to create awareness about women's particular way of interpreting God and to align the church's mission according to their own perspective. Latin American feminist scholar María Pilar Aquino claims that more Catholic women are emerging as actors and subjects in the church because "there is no longer the question of speaking for women or instead of them, reducing women themselves to mute and passive objects or simply recipients of the church's activity."<sup>92</sup> Aquino notices that Catholic women have a new way to do theology that eventually will lead to considerable historical consequences for the church and for theology. Aquino specifically speaks for the Catholic women in Latin America who are poor but are working in favor of their liberation by incorporating their creativity in the practices of the church. The scholar believes that these women are enacting the church's mission by embracing the practice of preaching the

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<sup>92</sup> Aquino, "Women in the Church of the Poor", 94.

gospel. For example, they are the catechists of the church, visit the sick, and celebrate religious festivities.<sup>93</sup>

Third, a feminist postcolonial theology considers the work of feminist scholars from the Global South who make contextual theological contributions based on common experiences of domain, exploitation, and poverty. In this sense, the contributions of Kwok Pui-lan encourage women and men to formulate their theology by studying the Bible as a political text and by taking into consideration the deployment of gender in the narration of identity and the reinforcement of patriarchy. Pui-lan promotes studying the Bible by analyzing the political forces between the people colonized and colonizers.<sup>94</sup> Pui-lan supports the idea that the canon of the Bible is a colonial text because of the imperialist ideology of orthodoxy among the male leaders of the Early Church. These leaders authorized and legitimated the final formation of the canon out of an ancient colonial and patriarchal context. Pui-lan claims that the politics of truth were involved during the formation of the canon because the church leaders demarcated the limits between orthodoxy and heresy. In addition, during the process of formation of the canon, these leaders left behind the texts that included women's voices and texts that demonstrated that women were also leaders of the church. According to Pui-lan, the canon has been supporting the marginalization of women for almost two thousand years. However, at the same time, the scholar perceives that the canon is also an alternative liberative force because some texts in the Bible include the voices and stories of vulnerable people that have the potential to challenge the imperialistic domain.

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<sup>93</sup>Aquino, "Women in the Church of the Poor", 94-96.

<sup>94</sup> Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 8-9.



Another scholar whose contributions are important in the construction of a feminist postcolonial theology is Nancy Bedford from Argentina. She invites women and men to explore a Christian spirituality from a gendered perspective. Bedford works in favor of equality and dignity for women and men because a feminist theology is in favor of all human beings. From a gendered perspective, the scholar analyzes the reasons why, in the Christian tradition, there has always been an overrepresentation of men versus an invisibility of women. Bedford demonstrates this dichotomy by identifying the occasions in the New Testament text when Jesus did not abide by certain gender roles and cultural expectations of his time. For example, even though it was not acceptable for men to interact in public with women unless it was family-related, Jesus decided to speak to the Samaritan woman in public (John 4). Additionally, Jesus accepted the arguments of the Canaanite woman who was requesting him to heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). These two situations exemplify that Jesus was flexible regarding sociocultural gender roles. However, this flexibility “was one of the most difficult elements to incorporate by his disciples.”<sup>95</sup> Therefore, Bedford concludes that the disciples could not follow Jesus’ example of inclusion of women and opportunity for all.

In addition, Bedford discusses the theological exile of the women in the Bible since the hermeneutical tradition has not identified these women as teachers, as theologians, or as Jesus’ disciples. For example, Bedford argues that Martha from Bethany and Peter formulated almost the same Christological confession, as indicated in the following chart. However, the Christian tradition has completely ignored Martha’s confession as foundational for the church’s development while Peter’s has been a cornerstone of the Christian tradition.<sup>96</sup> Due to this

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<sup>95</sup> Nancy Bedford, *La porfía de la resurrección: Ensayos desde el feminismo teológico latinoamericano* (Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2008), 72.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

omission of women from the Christian tradition, women today face the critical task to envision and formulate alternative theologies that produce justice and inclusion for all.

Martha's confession of John 11:27	Peter's confession of Matthew 16:16
"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."	"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

### **Bible Studies**

In this section, I provide as example two Bible studies that incorporate a feminist postcolonial critical methodology. This methodology facilitates to women the tools they need to interpret the biblical stories and other texts by themselves and according to their own perspective. I take into consideration legitimate elements of doing theology such as women's emotions, their personal gifts and experiences, and their preferences of faith expression that the Christian tradition has widely ignored. The incorporation of imaginative identification in the forms of visual arts, storytelling, music, and dancing is essential as well. These are avenues that women can adopt to construct a theology that can help transform the church and its practices of exclusion.

These Bible studies are participatory. This means that the knowledge is constructed in community. The role of the instructor is as a facilitator of the class setting; she is not the primary source of the knowledge shared during the sessions. The participants interchange personal experiences and keep confidentiality when required in order to provide a safe space for everybody. At the same time, the participants commit critically to read the Bible and other texts to discern the work of God in the community and the plan of action that leads to personal, social, and communal transformation.

### **Bible Study: The Formation of the Canon: A Necessary Discussion**

This Bible study incorporates the discussion of the patriarchal structures of power involved in the formation of the canon. This study creates awareness that the Bible was not a given book; instead, the canon of the Bible came as the result of human activity, inspired by the Spirit (according to tradition), and out of various cultural and historical contexts. This Bible study helps women to find liberation from the common beliefs and practices in many of the protestant and evangelical churches in Latin America where people insist on the inherent authority and dominance of the Bible that supports the hierarchical authority of men and the submissiveness of women. Contrary to these common assumptions of superiority of men and subordination of women, women need to incorporate the belief of authority of the Scriptures in partnership where interdependence, mutuality, and participation exist. To accomplish this partnership in the church, women need to come up with their own reasoning and conclusions about the origins of the authority of the Bible in the church. Women need to formulate a different narrative.

**Themes:** The formation of the canon of the Bible, the influence of the gnostic movement, and the role of women in the Early Church.

**Objective:** In this session, the participants will obtain general knowledge about the formation of the canon. The participants will integrate the information regarding the formation of the canon, with the influence of the gnostic movement, in relation to the exclusion of women by the church. The participants will obtain their own conclusions about the authority of the Bible in the community of faith. The problems addressed are the abuse of the authority of the Bible and the lack of participation of women in the church. The participants will practice imaginative identification in the form of visual arts.

**Needed materials:** poster board paper, markers, colored pencils, highlighters, and reading assignments. There will be a total of three reading sections.

### Bible Study Guideline

Section	Instructions
Prayer (5 minutes)	The participants will begin with communal prayer.
Reflection (15 minutes)	The facilitator will instruct the group to split into small groups. Each small group will receive one of the three reading assignments. The participants will read and highlight essential information from the text. When they finish reading, they will discuss the questions attached to their reading assignment.
Imaginative identification in the form of visual arts (20 minutes)	The facilitator will instruct the group to create one poster in their small groups that illustrates the most valuable information from the reading. The participants will avoid using sentences. Instead, they will draw and create symbols that illustrate their best understanding from the reading. The facilitator will encourage the participants to reflect their emotions, feelings, and personal experiences in the posters.
Formulate (15 minutes)	Showing one poster at the time, the facilitator will guide the group discussion asking the following questions: What are your first impressions of the poster? What do you think this poster reflects? Then, the facilitator will write a summary on a board that reflects the group's preliminary conclusions.
Conclusion (10 minutes)	The group will come up with final conclusions that reflect the most important aspects of the dialogue.
Final Prayer (5 minutes)	The facilitator will lead a final prayer addressing the needs of the participants.

*Reading 1: Good Teachings vs. Heretical*

In the beginning of Christianity, according to higher criticism, followers closely associated with Jesus, wrote different documents that were circulated among the communities of faith that ranged from Egypt to Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. Even though Jesus did not write his teachings, his personal biography, or the journal of his travels while doing ministry, male followers of Jesus recorded (from oral tradition to written sources) some of Jesus' sayings and actions at least twenty-five to thirty years after his death. Such is the case with the Gospel of Mark, considered by scholars to be the first gospel written, presumably before or shortly after Peter's death (according to tradition), around the year 60 CE.<sup>97</sup> However, this is not the earliest Christian document preserved. There are enough elements to conclude that other writings circulated in the Christian communities such as the First Letter to the Thessalonians that is considered the oldest complete document in the New Testament, which can be dated as early as 50 or 51 CE.<sup>98</sup>

Among Jesus' disciples, Paul was the apostle who developed his ministry with non-Jews or gentiles. His writings reflect the variety of problems he faced during his ministry because of false teachers and doctrines that infiltrated in the churches that he established in places such as Galatia (Turkey) and Corinth (Greece). During his ministry, Paul confronted some of the practices of the people that worshiped the Greco-Roman deities like Diana of the Ephesians in Acts 19:23-40, or the offering and sacrifice of foods to gods in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. The calling of this apostle was to obtain knowledge and good judgment in order to discern pure and irreproachable faith (Phil 1:9-10). In several instances, Paul called the believers to follow the

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<sup>97</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 163.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 457-465.

true gospel (Gal 1:6-7) and the good teachings of God. As Paul wrote with the authority of an apostle, he set the foreground for the church to seek the truth, avoiding the false teachers and their apostasy and heresy. The leaders of the Early Church followed this same pattern while discerning the “good teachings” from the “heretical teachings.” The Early Church selected the books and texts that, according to them, best represented the good teachings or the orthodoxy, of the emerging Christian church.

The emerging Christian church faced many counter movements. Among all the mysterious practices and variety of religious movements and beliefs during the time of development of the Early Church (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE), the Gnostics (in Greek, *gnosis* means “knowledge”) represented a danger for the orthodoxy precisely because the leaders of church considered them as heretical but of enormous influence. At the time of the emergence of the Early Church, the Gnostics were a diverse group located in the eastern part of the empire, in places like Babylonia, Egypt, and Syria. The origins of the gnostic movement are disputed and uncertain, though some scholars trace “its origins to Greek philosophy, astrology, mystery religions, magic, and even Indian sources.”<sup>99</sup>

For instance, the gnostic writings portray Jesus speaking of illusion and enlightenment instead of sin and repentance. These portrayals of Jesus as a spiritual guide rather than as Lord and Savior came into question by the proto-orthodox leaders. Such gnostic ideas challenged ideas such as Jesus’ bodily resurrection, suggesting that it was merely a symbol or a ghost and that it really did not occur. Because all of these teachings were an important theological discrepancy with the orthodoxy of the church, the leaders of Early Church decided to leave these writings out of the canon.

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<sup>99</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), XXIX.

The importance of the gnostic writings in this discussion is that these writings reflect the practice of groups that were inclusive communities. They accepted women participating in leadership positions in the Early Church. The gnostic movement included women as prophets and priests serving the Eucharist together with men. Women also were teachers and administered the sacrament of baptism. Marcion, a known heretic of the Early Church, appointed women not only as priests but also as bishops in the community.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the gnostic writings portray God with masculine and feminine attributes; this perception of God is an important aspect for a feminist theological discussion. However, with the elimination of these documents from the canon, the orthodox side of the church supported the exclusion of women from leadership positions. This exclusion has been the reality for women for almost two thousand years.

*Questions for Discussion Reading 1*

Who wrote the documents that were in circulation during the time of development of the Early Church? How and why did Paul address popular practices of the people? Who were the Gnostics and how did they practice the inclusion of women? What is your opinion about the exclusion of the writings that present women as leaders of the church? How does this text inform your perspective about the authority of the Bible?

*Reading 2: Other Gospels Circulating*

Gnosticism was a movement of major influence in areas like Babylonia, Egypt, and Syria during the time of development of the Early Church. The leaders of the Early Church in charge of the formation of the canon believed that the gnostic movement was heretical and a dangerous widespread influence for the community. Although the movement had many followers, scholars agree that its beginnings are difficult to trace. However, the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts

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<sup>100</sup> Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 60.

in 1945 has provided scholars with more resources to study Gnosticism and its influence in Christianity.

One of the most remarkable scholars who has studied the gnostic movement is Elaine Pagels. Her most important contribution has been the preparation of the first complete edition in English of the Nag Hammadi text. She first learned of these discoveries in 1965 when she was a student at the graduate program at Harvard University. One of her professors, George MacRae, had received mimeographed transcription; he encouraged his students to learn Coptic to begin their research on these precious materials. Pagels' first works consisted of the study of early Christian Gnosticism, but eventually she moved to Cairo to study the manuscripts at the Coptic Museum in Egypt.

The Nag Hammadi collection includes more than fifty documents, including early Christian gospels that were previously unknown. Some of the titles are: *The Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of the Truth*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, the *Secret Book of James*, and the *Testimony of the Truth*. Scholars are unanimous on dating these documents considered as ancient texts because of the external and the physical evidence of the materials and the Coptic script printed on them. These documents are dated between 350 and 400 CE. However, some scholars suggest that if Irenaeus, bishop of the city of Lyon in 180 CE, wrote that there were more gospels circulating in Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor, these were precisely the gnostic gospels known already in those days.<sup>101</sup> In addition, some scholars have suggested that the *Gospel of Thomas* dates from 140 CE, while others trace its sayings back to gospels in the New Testament that are dated between 50 to 100 CE at the latest.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, XVI.



Pagels discusses that during the development of the Christian Church, the orthodox or pro-Orthodox leaders considered the gnostic writings to be heretical.<sup>103</sup> The gnostic writings present Jesus speaking of illusion and enlightenment instead of sin and repentance, portray Jesus as a spiritual guide rather than as Lord and Savior, question Jesus' bodily resurrection, and doubt Jesus' crucifixion because he was not a human being. Furthermore, these writings represent God with masculine and feminine attributes. The Gnostics accepted women as the religious leaders of their communities. All these teachings, though popular at the time, were against the main line shaping understanding of the orthodox Christian faith. Eventually, the church leaders—as scholars have reconstructed—decided which documents were sacred and authoritative based on their apostolic origin, the importance of the addressed Christian communities, and the conformity with the rule of faith. Around the year 200 CE, the church began gathering the canon of the New Testament that resulted in the books that are accepted in the Christian Church worldwide still today.

### *Questions for Discussion Reading 2*

Who were the Gnostics? What was the contribution of Elaine Pagels to the study of the gnostic movement? What was the criteria that the leaders of the Early Church used to create the canon of the church? What are the characteristics of the gnostic writings and why they are important in this discussion? What is your opinion about the exclusion from the canon of the writings that present women as leaders in the church? How does this text inform your perspective about the authority of the Bible?

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<sup>102</sup> Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, XVII.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII.

*Reading 3: Feminine Images of God*

Contrary to the Christian tradition that has portrayed God as a male, the Gnostics, an influential religious movement during the time of the development of the Early Church, were believers who recognized God as a father and as a mother.<sup>104</sup> They offered prayers to God who was both masculine and feminine: "From Thee, Father, and through Thee, Mother, the two immortal names, Parents of the divine being, and thou, dweller in heaven, humanity, of the mighty name...."<sup>105</sup> The Gnostics professed God's maternal side because the Holy Spirit was the Divine God Mother. This motherly figure attributed to the Holy Spirit relates to the Hebrew term for *spirit* that is *ruah*, a feminine word, while the Greek word for Holy Spirit is the neuter asexual term *pneuma*. With this comprehensive gender perspective of God, the Gnostic professed the trinitarian formula as the Father, the Son, and the "Mother of Many."<sup>106</sup> This divine mother is the Wisdom, or Sophia, a very important figure in the wisdom literature in the Old Testament, in books such as Psalms and Proverbs.

In the gnostic communities, women were prophets and priests serving the Eucharist together with men. Women were also teachers who administered the sacrament of baptism. In fact, Marcion, a known heretic of the church, appointed women not only as priests but also as bishops in the community. One of the reasons that explains why the gnostic communities practiced the inclusion of women in church is precisely their view of God as male and as female. This perception of God helped the gnostic communities incorporate women as equal as men. However, this inclusion was contrary to the practices of the orthodox leaders of the church,

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<sup>104</sup> Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 49-50.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 52

known as the Early Fathers, who eventually gained the control over other religious groups. These leaders spread the idea that women were inferior to men and that women did not have a place in church as leaders.

Unfortunately, in the history of Christianity, the exclusion of women has been the norm. Influential male theologians have promoted exclusionary teachings and practices. Tertullian (155-240 CE), considered one of the Early Fathers, believed that women were evil and eliminated them from any participation in the church. He wrote the following: “It is not permitted for a woman to speak in the church, nor is it permitted for her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer [the Eucharist], nor to claim for herself a share in any masculine function—least of all, in priestly office.”<sup>107</sup> The New Testament pastoral letters of Paul such as 1 Timothy and Titus reinforced teachings of exclusion of women; these letters established the requirements for male bishops, elders, and deacons. Early Fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch, who died in 110 CE, compared the figure of the bishop with one of a father as the one representing God on Earth.<sup>108</sup> Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), considered one of the most important theologians of the church, understood that males were superior and more intelligent while women were inferior and not made in the image of God. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) considered women as misbegotten males, Martin Luther (1483-1546) believed that God punished women after the sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) promoted that women should be subject to their husbands, and Karl Barth (1886-1968) supported the idea of subordination of women.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Tertullian, “De Virginitate Velandis 9,” in *The Gnostic Gospels*, 60.

<sup>108</sup> Fernando Rivas, *Desterradas Hijas de Eva* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2008), 37.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 3.

With the closing of the canon and the elimination of the gnostic writings that interpreted God as female, the church discarded the possibility for women to take leading positions. By the middle of the second century, the leadership of women in the local orthodox churches disappeared completely. Ever since that time, the Church has marginalized women by negating the inclusion into the three forms of ministry as bishops, priests, and deacons. The assumption is that if God is male-gendered, then women cannot be priests; only men can represent God.

*Questions for Discussion Reading 3*

Who were the Gnostics? Why do you think that the Gnostics could see God with masculine and feminine attributes? What have been the consequences for Christianity by perceiving God as male exclusively? If an important theologian like Tertullian was alive, what would you tell him about his perception of women? What is your opinion about the exclusion of the writings that present women as leaders in the church? How does this text inform your perspective about the authority of the Bible?

**Bible Study: Women in the Bible: The Canaanite Woman and Anna the Prophet**

This Bible study is based on the text about the Canaanite woman and Anna the prophet according to the gospel of Matthew. This study helps women to incorporate feminist strategies of biblical interpretation that facilitate the reflection on the gender relations of power and the inclusion of women and other people in vulnerability in the church. This study creates conscientization about the importance of opposing traditional practices in the society and in the church that oppress women and other people in vulnerable states. Through the unfavorable conditions of the Canaanite woman and Anna the prophet, women can see in their faith and persistence examples of endurance during the difficulties in life. The example of these women

invites women to reflect on the accessibility they have to God through Jesus who works in favor of people who are vulnerable.

**Themes:** Gender relations of power, exclusion of women, and God’s blessing and inclusion available for all.

**Objective:** In this session, the participants will compare the story of the Canaanite woman according to the gospel of Matthew with a creative narrative of the same story that incorporates feminist strategies of biblical interpretation. The participants will obtain their own conclusions about the effectiveness of using these strategies when they study the Bible. The participants will practice how to create a narrative inspired by a story of a woman of the Bible. The main problems addressed are gender relations of power and exclusion of women and other people in vulnerability. The participants will practice imaginative identification in the forms of storytelling and dramatization.

**Needed materials:** Worksheets and pencils.

### **Bible Study Guideline**

Section	Instructions
Prayer (5 minutes)	The participants begin with communal prayer.
Reflection (25 minutes)	<p>The facilitator will instruct the group to first listen to the story of the Canaanite woman according to the gospel of Matthew, then to listen to the dramatization of the story that incorporates feminist strategies of biblical interpretation.</p> <p>After listening to these narratives, the facilitator will invite the participants to reflect in silence for a few minutes about the following questions:</p>

	<p>What are the main differences between these stories? Which one speaks closely to my personal experience and why?</p> <p>What are the elements of biblical interpretation in the second narrative that can help women and other people in vulnerability to identify more with Jesus and with the women in the Bible?</p> <p>The facilitator will guide a group discussion and will take notes on a board reflecting the participants' opinions.</p>
<p>Imaginative identification in the form of storytelling (25 minutes)</p>	<p>The facilitator will guide the participants to work with a partner to write a short narrative inspired by Anna the prophet of Luke 2:36-38. The facilitator will encourage the participants to use feminist strategies of biblical interpretation, such as looking at the silences of the texts and the incorporation of firsthand experiences in the narrative. Women can use the following guide to write their narratives:</p> <p>Anna the prophet reminds me of _____ because Anna was _____.</p> <p>Anna's life was _____ because _____. In the same way, I think that my life is like Anna's because _____.</p> <p>Anna's father was a _____ and her mother was a _____.</p> <p>Anna's husband died; however, she _____.</p> <p>I wish that _____.</p> <p>The facilitator will request women to read their stories to the group.</p>

Conclusion (10 minutes)	The group will come up with final conclusions that reflect the importance of using feminist strategies of biblical interpretation.
Final Prayer (5 minutes)	The facilitator will conclude with a final prayer addressing the needs of the women of the group.

*Dramatization Inspired by the Canaanite Woman*

This dramatization includes three characters: a woman dressed as a Palestine woman in the first century, Jesus, and a narrator.

**Woman:** What is happening to my daughter? She sometimes doesn't eat, doesn't sleep at night, she feels pain and suffers a lot. She has fallen unconscious several times for hours at a time; the other day she fainted in plain daylight in the street. We have already seen doctors, fortune-tellers, and we have consulted the oracle and the prophetess. They tell me that she is a hopeless case, and there is nothing that can be done. Perhaps a potion prepared with herbs could lessen her crisis; I drink something for depression and tiredness because my work is hard. Even though she is no longer a little girl, she still depends on me; she always requires my help to bathe her, to eat, and to dress up. I have offered plenty of sacrifices to the gods so that my child improves her health since she has suffered from this ailment since childhood.

For a long while, it's been told that a prophet who preaches in the Jewish synagogues and among the crowds has lots of followers. I just heard of him a few days ago again; they say he performs miracles and wonders, they speak about his kindness, and that he heals and saves the people who draw near him. Perhaps he may see a foreigner and a woman like me. They say that boys and girls can come near him because he is good to them, even when some are abandoned like my daughter. Her father, not wanting to dissolve his matrimony, did not marry me and he has not taken responsibility for her. Sometimes, parents abandon unwanted girls at public

squares to their fate, but I rescued her and took charge of her. I did not want my child to starve to death or freeze nor wanted her to be sold to any passerby and turned into a slave or prostitute. I have decided to go and find the prophet; I can no longer see my daughter suffer this pain. I can't bear it anymore; I am afraid to lose her. I don't want her to suffer any more. I was told he would be teaching around here. I must find him, speak to him to ask for help. For all the gods of my ancestors, I must find him!

I'll go right now. I can see him. There he is far yonder. I want to speak to him. I must make haste. Maybe he'll listen to me. But, there are other people with him; it is not accepted for a woman to meet a man in public, even worse if he is a prophet or a teacher. But that doesn't matter; I am resolved. My daughter is so sick. I can't tolerate to see her suffer like that. He is the one who can help me only.

"Jesus, Lord! Listen to me, please, I beg you, I beseech you. Stop for a moment to speak to me, have compassion on me and my daughter."

He can't hear me; he is not turning. The others who are with him have noticed that I am calling him; but he seems not to listen. These men see me with disdain; they want me to leave. They are asking me to leave. I don't care what they think of me. Nobody will silence me. I must speak to him.

"Lord I beg you! You have helped everybody, I have seen it. I have spoken with them. I know that you and you alone can help her, please. Jesus, have mercy on us. Jesus, stop for a few seconds. My daughter ails from seizures. Please help her! Lord have mercy! Help my daughter!"

**Narrator:** Jesus stops at last, turns, and sees the woman and says:

**Jesus:** "I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."



**Narrator:** The woman, now without strength, falls on her knees on the grey soil, stony, and dusty. With blurred sight because of her tears, in her great desperation, begs with an agonizing groan coming from inside her.

**Woman:** “Lord, help me!”

**Jesus:** “It is not right to take away the bread of the children and throw it to the dogs.”

**Woman:** “Yes, Lord, I am Greek. I am not Jewish like you who come from the only God of Israel; but in the same way the dogs eat from the crumbs that fall from the table, I also can be satisfied with the leftovers you will to give to me. I know you are Lord, while I am just a poor woman who has a daughter terribly tortured by the evil one. I am nobody. I do not possess riches. I am poor; but with the little I can have. With the crumbs of your kingdom, with that which you may want to give me; that will be enough for my daughter to be healed!”

**Narrator:** Jesus answers marveled:

**Jesus:** “Woman, how great is your faith! Let what you request be granted to you.”

**Narrator:** Then, she cleans with the edge of her dress her sweaty and grimy face. Looking straight on the eyes of the teacher, she listens again that her daughter has been healed.

The Canaanite woman, unable to articulate her thoughts, or her words, gets home and she finds her daughter completely healed. Since then, the woman and her daughter believed and praised the one true God, the God of Israel and Jesus the Messiah.

### **Conclusion to Chapter Four**

The Bible studies of the formation of the canon and the women in the Bible are only examples of how women clergy can incorporate a feminist postcolonial critical methodology together with the tools of imaginative identification in the forms of visual arts, storytelling, music, and dancing. These resources can help women in general to study the Bible and any other

document or book relevant to the formation of the Christian faith and its tradition. The objective is to foster critical theological thinking among women that brings understanding to the context of how the canon developed or how the biblical narrative opens up different ways of interpretation. Women can also translate such skills to their own lives. This is a strategy that postcolonial feminist interpretation aims to do.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF DATA, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

As mentioned before, the marginalization of women and other groups in vulnerability in church and in society is a serious problem. In a culture identified as patriarchal, people are unconscious about specific beliefs and behaviors that promote systemic marginalization. People consider these beliefs and behaviors as normative and inherent in culture and religion. However, a shift is imperative to create a present and a future in which women and men participate together to shape the mission of God for the church. In order to meet the calling to solidarity in working with men, women need more tools to challenge current oppressive human traditions that damage their emotional health and self-esteem. Therefore, the construction and promotion of feminist contextual theories and alternative practices that produce positive changes in church and society is the main objective of this project. As a matter of fact, this research promotes the inclusion and participation of women in church because it creates awareness of the main struggles of women clergy in the CCDOCM. It also attests the new dimension of the prophetic ministry of women clergy by documenting their contributions of imaginative identification in the forms of storytelling, visual arts, music, and dancing. Thus, the specific research question that guided the methodology aims to answer the following question: How do women clergy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mexico (CCDOCM) express and promote imaginative identification to find liberation from their oppressions?

This chapter presents the analyses of research data obtained during the interviews of the women clergy. It starts with the discussion of the limitations and the unexpected challenges I faced while conducting research about the women clergy of the CCDOCM. I explain the reasons why I delimited the group of study to five women clergy (active, inactive, and retired) in central Mexico. I discuss the risks and opportunities I encountered when conducting qualitative research

with such a small group of participants. I present the evaluation of results from the interviews by organizing the data according to the sequence of the questionnaire. First, I show the results of questions one to three which relate to general information about women clergy, such as position in the church, length of time in ministry, and type of ministerial formation they obtained. Then, I report the results of question four that focus on the main struggles that women clergy face. Finally, I present the rest of the information according to the categories of expressions of faith: storytelling, visual arts, dancing, and music.

In another section, I discuss the triangulation analysis that includes comparing observational data with interview data. This analysis incorporates the observations of the ecological analysis of chapter three that resulted from my visit to the Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. The report of the ecological analysis identifies the resources of imaginative identification that Catholic women in these religious sites promote and the type of agency these women have found. Then, I present the comparative analysis of the results obtained in the ecological analysis with the information gathered from the interviews of the woman clergy of the CCDOCM. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I provide the conclusions of the project, and I discuss further implications.

### **Research Limitations**

During the design stage of this research project, I opted for a qualitative direction that involved the collection of data from a possible target group of study. In 2014, I gathered the information about the size of the target group which resulted in a total of ten active and retired women clergy in the CCDOCM. For analysis purposes, I also gathered the information about the number of women clergy in other Protestant denominations in the country that promote women as leaders in the church. For instance, in the same year, the Anglican Church reported seventeen

women clergy,<sup>110</sup> and three out of the six annual conferences of the Methodist Church reported a total of twenty-nine women clergy.<sup>111</sup> By comparing these numbers, I immediately noticed that the population of the target group of study was significantly lower than the population of women clergy in other denominations.

The number of women clergy in the CCDOCM also was lower than the number of women clergy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico (CCDCPR). The CCDCPR reported forty-four women clergy; twenty-three of these women were active in the church.<sup>112</sup> I looked at the number of women clergy in the CCDCPR because the first missionaries from the Stone-Campbell movement started the mission work in both countries almost at the same time, in Mexico in 1895 and in Puerto Rico in 1899. Despite the fact that the CCDOCM began four years earlier, CCDCPR retain a higher number of women clergy. This research provides insights about possible reasons for the shortage of women clergy in the CCDOCM.

As I already mentioned, the possible target population of study consisted of ten active and retired women clergy in the CCDOCM. From this group of women, the research project originally targeted six active and retired women clergy serving in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. These states concentrated most of the women clergy and was where the denomination Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been operating since the agreements made during the Plan of Cincinnati of 1914. However, the plan to study these six

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<sup>110</sup> “Mujer Sacerdote de México Celebra Apertura Anglicana.” *Excelsior*, July 16, 2014, accessed June 10, 2015. <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2014/07/16/971130>

<sup>111</sup> Directorio 2014-2015 de las Conferencias Anual de México, Anual del Noreste, y Anual Norcentral. Iglesia Metodista de México, A.R.

<sup>112</sup> Report of the 106 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico. Celebrated on February 11<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Buena Vista, Bayamón.

active and retired women clergy did not work as expected due to the low response during the recruitment of these participants. In fact, the recruitment of these six potential participants was the main challenge to overcome while conducting this research project.

The reasons for the low response from the active and retired women clergy to participate in a formal research study about women intrigued me. Innumerable circumstances could be at play. One reason could be the unfamiliarity of an interview with a researcher who these women did not know in advance. Although scholars suggest that a researcher cannot take the place of a friend to enhance the reliability of the responses, in a Hispanic cultural context, friendship and familiarity during the recruitment process could have created openness and trustworthiness. In other words, I consider that more women could have been interested in participating using a personal and friendly approach. However, a formal research project like this one follows compliances according to the professional, regulatory, and university requirement of Texas Christian University. The IRB protocol, attached in the appendix section of this work, complies with and follows procedures to ensure that the interview questions avoid coercion and reinforce voluntary participation. Therefore, attempts that could have involved a friendly and personal approach during the recruitment process were not a part of this study.

In addition, during the recruitment process, I noticed the presence of certain patriarchal ideologies that may have also influenced the lack of participation of the women clergy. As mentioned before, the patriarchal settings established in church and in society limit women's aspirations and opportunities to propose alternative ways that produce the necessary changes to the full participation and inclusion for all. For example, when I was trying to obtain a valid electronic mail address of a female member of the clergy, I called the church listed on the directory as her place of ministry. The man who answered the phone identified himself as the

senior pastor. He informed me that the woman clergy I was trying to contact did not work for that church anymore. However, he said that he knew the family of the woman, and that I could send the information about the research to his electronic mail because he could do me the favor to pass it to the father of the woman.

My short encounter with this male pastor over the phone clearly revealed one of the main problems addressed in this research project related to the struggles that women face when obtaining a voice in their communities and a position as leaders of the church. The idea of involving the father of a woman clergy and a male pastor in authority in church as channels of communication between this research and the woman clergy, strongly suggests the presence of sexist influences affecting women. In this regard, the information available about the church position of the active women clergy of the CCDOCM can also support the presence of sexism in church. For example, many of these women clergy serve in churches where the father or husband serves as the senior minister of the church. The information identifies some of these women as the pastors' wives. However, ideologies in church that identify women exclusively in function of their husbands or fathers do not necessarily challenge the sexist hierarchical paradigms in place.

Unfortunately, the problem of women serving in secondary roles and facing male resistance in church is a common struggle for women in Latin America. The scholar Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that when women from the Global South gather to discuss issues related to feminist theology, social analyses, and church inclusion, they face resistance from the men in their communities of faith. In this sense, the scholar discusses the male theologians' reactions when women from the Global South have gathered to propose changes in church and in society: "This [an international dialogue for women held in Geneva in 1983] brought further resistance

from some of the male Third World theologians who wanted ‘their women’ to stay ‘in their place’; that is, behind the agenda of the men in the area.”<sup>113</sup>

To address the problem of lack of participants, the Doctor of Ministry Committee and I discussed some possible solutions. One option consisted of expanding the participant list to include women clergy outside of the CCDOCM. Although initially this suggestion seemed doable, it did not progress due to the extremely low number of women clergy across denominations in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. For example, the Anglican Church reported only one woman clergy in the area, and the Methodist Church also reported one woman clergy. Therefore, I had to consider other possibilities to deal with the problem.

The solution that successfully addressed the problem of the lack of potential participants, consisted of the expansion in the criteria for the selection of the target group of study by incorporating the inactive women clergy of the CCDOCM in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. Originally the target group of study in this research consisted exclusively of the active and retired women clergy. However, the category of inactive women clergy is broader because, for the purposes of this study, it includes those women clergy who are not serving the church anymore, who used to serve in any of these three states but moved to another, or who transferred to another denomination. Although the records of the three branches of the denomination do not report the exact number of inactive women clergy at the moment of writing this project, this lack of information does not represent a limitation to obtain information about the contributions regarding the imaginative identification that these women have employed in the past. Their contributions could certainly bring more light to the findings of this study.

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<sup>113</sup> Radford Ruether, “Feminist Theologies in Latin America” 19.



In order to obtain representative voices, I delimited the group of study to at least five active, inactive, and retired women clergy in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. In short, although I had foreseen some challenges in conducting research with such a small group of study, I had also considered these challenges rather than limitations to obtain positive outcomes that could contribute to the field of feminist theology in Latin America and to the church in Mexico and elsewhere.

#### *More Challenges to Overcome*

In addition to the problem described in the previous section, I also faced at least three other challenges while conducting this research. First, the research plan included working with a very small entire population of study of five active, inactive, and retired women clergy in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas. As a researcher, I was aware that unless five women participated in the research, an important piece of the puzzle would be missing. In this regard, the risks still existed that not all of them would participate. Yet, one of the benefits of conducting a qualitative research is to obtain deep insights into the research study even with a small size of the studied population. To overcome the challenge of lack of participation of more women clergy, the research methodology for the data analysis had to be flexible according to the number of women interviewed. In other words, if most of the women clergy participated, the methodology aimed to classify the information from their interviews into categories that facilitated the identification of consistent patterns and intersections. However, if fewer women participated, the methodology required that the data obtained could also represent a total population sampling.

Second, the information available was outdated, and there was a lack of electronically available information to the public regarding church settings and ministers' profiles. My research

methodology considered looking for contact information in public documents, such as the directory of the CCDOCM and reports of the denomination's General Assemblies. Contact information included the minister's name, church of ministry, electronic mailing address, and telephone number. I recruited participants through electronic mail. During this initial stage of the investigation, I detected that some of the information was outdated. For example, various directories led me to churches where the women no longer worked, included disconnected phone numbers, or listed incorrect electronic mail addresses. To deal with these unexpected challenges, I looked up the current contact information of the women clergy in the web pages of churches. However, websites were not a good source to obtain information. In this case, I could only identify the web page of one Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in central Mexico, and its minister was a male pastor. The ministerial profile of only one women clergy was available to the public on other websites. My experience conducting research with women clergy in the past had been in the United States where information is accessible via church web pages. For example, websites usually include pastor profiles and a list of church ministries. However, churches in Mexico do not readily use electronic resources and technology as an important channel of communication.

Third, there is a lack of documented historiography that could bring a clearer understanding of the track that women clergy have had in Mexico. As mentioned before, even though women represent half of the population, historians have not recorded women's voices and contributions to church and society. This lack of information about women is an endemic challenge for any investigator in search of the testimonies of women in any field of study. Therefore, as a researcher, I did not have any control over the lack of historical documentation, or any other challenges I faced.

## Evaluation of Results

I had the opportunity to visit central Mexico during the time of this study. My visit facilitated scheduling some of the interviews in person which was a surplus for the success of this research. The result of having incorporated the active, inactive, and retired women clergy of the CCDOCM in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas was satisfactory. At the end, I interviewed five women clergy. These women's responses reflected great interest about nurturing the faith, and their gifts and talents for the Christian ministry were evident. In short, I am deeply honored and privileged for having the opportunity to know some of their stories in ministry.

This section starts by documenting the general information about the women clergy which includes position in the church, length of time in ministry, and ministerial formation. It continues with the analysis of the struggles that they have identified in their ministries; and concludes with the contextual information along with descriptions about their contributions to imaginative identification in the forms of visual arts, storytelling, dancing, and music. At the end of each category analysis of imaginative identification, a summary chart outlines the information obtained. Because the research protocol keeps the women's identities anonymous, the following analyses identify these women by the pseudonyms of Sonia, María, Jacinta, Veronica, and Ana.

### *The Interviews: General Information*

Out of the five women clergy who participated in this research, three were inactive in the church: these women were Sonia, María, and Jacinta. In a local coffee shop of central Mexico, I interviewed Sonia who served the church for three years as a part-time associate pastor. She received her theological formation from a non-accredited inner-city biblical institute; however, the church accepted her education as valid formation for ministry. During my visit to Mexico, I

also met with María who served the church for eighteen years as a director of a non-profit organization dedicated to assist children in vulnerability. María obtained a bachelor's degree in sociology and received her theological formation at a local church. Out of the three inactive women clergy I interviewed, Jacinta was the minister who served the church for a longer period of time, sixty-two years. Although she has been inactive in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in central Mexico for only a few years, Jacinta expressed great motivation to continue with her ministry in a small rural community in south Mexico. She received her theological formation from a local non-accredited seminary.

Another woman clergy I talked to was Veronica who still preaches on different occasions when churches invite her. She was the only retired minister with whom I spoke. Veronica served the church for thirty-nine years. After concluding high school, she enrolled in an ecumenical seminary in Mexico City where she obtained a bachelor's degree in theology. I had also the privilege to interview Ana who has served the church for five years. After graduation from the seminary, she worked for a church as an associate minister. She is currently an itinerant pastor. Ana obtained a bachelor's degree in nursing and a master's in divinity from an interdenominational graduate school of theology outside of the country. Since the closing of the *Seminario Evangélico Unido*, an ecumenical seminary located in Mexico City which provided rigorous undergraduate theological education from 1917 to 1980,<sup>114</sup> candidates of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) needed to look for alternative schools of theology to receive education.

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<sup>114</sup> Juan E. Huegel, *Apacentad la grey de Dios*, Kindle Edition.

*The Interviews: Struggles Women Face in Ministry*

The majority of women clergy addressed two major problems when discussing their struggles in ministry. First, they talked about the gender role stereotypes preconceived in church and society that assign women secondary roles. In this sense, people assume that women should function exclusively under assigned and specific gender roles. For instance, women should become mothers and wives performing household duties. In general, these women mentioned that the Mexican society is not used to the leadership of women in church. The women interviewed expressed their struggles saying:

Even though I was the senior minister, when two members of my church were getting married, they called a male minister to officiate the wedding. Sonia.

When I graduated from seminary, women could only become deacons. However, I served one church for fifty years as the pastor's assistant. Only when the senior pastor of that church died, I could take a position as the minister of the church. Jacinta.

During a local assembly of the denomination, some male leaders analyzed my situation and concluded that women should not be ministers in the church. That day, they dismissed me and thanked me for my services. Veronica.

The social and cultural bias is that women should occupy secondary roles and that men should occupy primary roles. People identify a woman as the pastor's wife. Ana.

The second main struggle these women identified was that some male ministers and leaders in a position of authority in the church discriminate against women clergy. These men reject women's critical approaches and their ministerial practices because they do not validate women's gifts and talents. In these circumstances, women expressed the following:

The male pastors did not believe that I was able to make decisions about the administrative aspects of my ministry. They did not welcome my contributions and ideas. María.

During a special celebration of a congregation, I was the preacher of the day. When I finished delivering my sermon, the worship leader also requested me to lead the communion and to say the final blessing. That day two male pastors of

the denomination were also present. After worship, one of these pastors approached me; he was complaining because that church had not requested them to participate as well. He was demanding an explanation from me of the reasons why that church was giving me much importance. Veronica.

The senior minister and I had different theological perspectives. For example, I used to talk about the importance of inclusion in the church. Some people considered that my perspectives were wrong and that I was insane. In particular, maybe for being a young and educated woman, the pastor had specific expectations from me. At the same time, I could perceive certain professional jealousy on his part. This represented an issue to continue working together. I had to leave that church. Ana.

In addition to the struggles of gender role stereotypes and rejection identified by the majority of the women, Ana constructed an elaborated response addressing other struggles that she faced in ministry. First, she mentioned that people in church use a non-inclusive language of God by making references exclusively to the masculine aspects of God. Therefore, people assume that the gender of God is male, so they infer that a pastor must also be a male. Women, thus, cannot represent God. Because of this patriarchal viewpoint, a woman constantly needs to validate her position as a female minister of the church with the community. Second, Ana explained that the category of marital status of a woman clergy matters in the church setting because some members of Protestant denominations struggle with the idea of married women with children working as clergy. These people believe that women who serve the church should be single and celibate because they have taken as an example the Christian service of the single women missionaries who founded the Protestant churches in Mexico. In fact, these people may have reinforced such perspectives by taking as an example the ministry of Catholic nuns. By doing so, they deny the right to freedom that women ministers have to make decisions about their private life. However, such cultural assumptions regarding the marital status of women who serve the church tend to disappear among younger people. Third, Ana considered that many members of Protestant churches in Mexico have criticized her ministry due to her participation in

the ecumenical and the interreligious dialogue. In this case, Ana explained that people tend to reject the ministry of clergy involved in the ecumenical movement because it includes collaboration with the Catholic Church. Contrary to this negative perception of the ecumenical movement of some Protestant believers, Ana described her participation in the movement as a rewarding experience.

Furthermore, Sonia affirmed that one of her struggles was the amount of time she invested in church ministry. Her ministry did not allow her to spend more time with her family. She could not identify the boundaries between her dedication to the church and her family. Finally, Jacinta addressed the fact that when she was pursuing a career as a minister, she was in disadvantage in terms of the education. While her seminary offered five years of theological formation to men, it allowed only three years of study to women. However, Jacinta mentioned that she overcame this situation by pursuing further studies after graduating from seminary at her local church.

In conclusion, women clergy addressed the following struggles:

1. People assume gender role stereotypes that assign to women secondary or inferior roles.
2. Male ministers and leaders of the church reject and discriminate women clergy.
3. People use a non-inclusive language in church which identifies God as a male; therefore, they believed that only men can represent God.
4. Some Christian believers maintain that the marital status of women clergy should be as single persons.
5. A great majority of Protestant believers do not support women clergy's involvement in the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

6. Women clergy find difficulty in balancing duties and responsibilities between family and ministry.
7. Women are at a disadvantage to obtain equal opportunities as men do to access theological education.

*Women's Contributions of Imaginative Identification in the Form of Storytelling*

The five women clergy who participated in this study mentioned that imaginative identification in the form of storytelling was important to their ministries and personal faith. During preaching and teaching activities in church, these women have used storytelling which incorporates personal testimonies and the stories of women from the Bible. Personal testimonies have been a great tool to illustrate their sermons because people in church can identify with the life experiences of other believers. In other words, people can connect with the joys, sufferings, and struggles of others in order to find the strength to overcome difficulties. The stories of the women from the Bible have served as a source of inspiration because without the service of women, Jesus' ministry would not have been possible. For example, Sonia highlighted the fact that the gospel of Luke showed the importance of women during Jesus' ministry because women traveled with and supported Jesus (Luke 8:1-3), were present at the crucifixion (23:27), and were the first to find Jesus' tomb empty (24:1-3). However, only Sonia and María mentioned the stories of female saints as another form of storytelling. They talked about Catherine of Siena and Mother Teresa as good examples of devotion and service.

In particular, Veronica and Ana incorporated personal testimonies and stories of women from the Bible from a critical feminist perspective to grow in their faith, to find avenues in favor of women's liberation, and to validate their ministries. Most likely Veronica and Ana acquired such critical feminist thinking during their theological formation in seminary or perhaps, like in



Veronica's case, during the years of ministerial experience. Thus, important to this analysis is the fact that both Veronica and Ana were the only women who obtained formal theological education. Therefore, they could articulate subversive feminist perspectives in their ministerial practice. Veronica obtained a bachelor's degree in theology and Ana a master's in divinity. This reality highlights the importance of women to pursue higher levels of education. At the end, education for women has been a cornerstone in favor of their empowerment and liberation.

One of the aspects that revealed Veronica's and Ana's critical feminist thinking was the rhetoric that they have employed to empower women. For example, during our conversation, Veronica described some experiences of marginalization and rejection that she has experienced in church. However, in the midst of conflict, her eloquence and deep conviction validated her ministry and the identities of the women in the community. In particular, Veronica started her ministry in the 1970s when the ordination of women was not yet a reality in the local church. Then, taking into consideration Veronica's socioreligious context in central Mexico, her accomplishments have been nothing but impressive. Examples of Veronica's rhetoric in favor of women have been her responses to the forces that wanted to eliminate her calling, gifts, and talents. For instance, when the male leaders of the church wanted her to resign, she said, "I told them that I was sorry for their decision, but I was not going to leave. I had my mind set on following my Christian calling from God. This is why I continued with my ministry against their approval." Veronica defended her vocation as a minister when she said to a male pastor, "The rejection of my ministry comes from the male leaders of the church, but my church welcomes and accepts the ministry of a woman." Veronica explained the following experience which also reveals how her ministry helped other women to find a voice in their community. In this case, the women were searching liberation from the forces that wanted to oppress them:

At a certain point of my ministry, conservative male believers of the Church of Christ, which had a strong connection with the Disciples of Christ, were using the authority of the Bible to say that women should remain silence in church [1 Corinthians 14:34.] They were telling women not to speak or express their opinions in church. If the women had a question or concern related to their faith, they needed to go home to ask these questions to their husbands. However, women protested saying: “the majority of churchgoers are women. Then, if we are ignorant in faith matters, our husbands are even more ignorant because they neither come to church, nor are members of the community.” Then, these men had to admit that they were indirectly addressing their claims to me because they were pursuing my resignation as the senior minister of that church. However, the women of the church supported my ministry saying: “we are going to resist your criticisms because we want a woman as our minister.” Women defended their desires to keep me as a minister. They explained that their husbands did not have any problem when a woman pastor would visit them at home. However, their husbands would have a lot of issues if a male pastor visited them.

In reference to the use of the stories of women from the Bible, Ana has adopted an alternative feminist reading of their story. In fact, she has rewritten the biblical stories of the unworthy women from the Bible, those who have questionable reputations whom the Christian church does not consider saints. In this sense, Ana has employed the *hermeneutics of suspicion* because she has eliminated the prejudgments and prejudices that the biblical texts reflect. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, hermeneutics of suspicion seeks to explore the oppressive values inscribed in the biblical text and its interpretations.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, Ana has avoided the androcentric historical model of biblical interpretation that has been predominant in church and in the biblical scholarship. By dignifying and liberating these biblical figures from any negative stigma, Ana has created a rhetoric that liberates women. In other words, Ana has taken the side of Jesus by reaffirming that, for instance, the crippled woman of Luke 13:10-16 was a daughter of Abraham worthy to receive healing on the Sabbath day. Furthermore, Ana preferred to identify Rahab as an entrepreneur and not a prostitute.

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<sup>115</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 57.

The benefits that Veronica and Ana have obtained through the incorporation of critical feminist perspectives into their ministerial tasks refer to the liberation from the cultural stigmas that have limited their careers as ministers. According to Ana, ministers are public figures, and people attribute moral standards of perfection to them. However, all human beings are fallible. Both Ana and Veronica have understood that liberation from the criticism that ministers receive when they do not meet the standards of the people is important. Therefore, they have claimed the right to continue with their ministries and, in the case of Ana, to have privacy from the public sphere as a way to delimit her own space apart from the negative aspects of performing a challenging profession. At the same time, these women clergy have proclaimed that shame or fear do not have a place in their ministry because they are performing a genuine service to others. In one sense, when they have used personal testimonies and the stories of the women from the Bible, they have created a space in which God reaffirms their identities as women and as ministers. Through these stories, God has given Ana and Veronica the strength to follow their Christian callings. God has also given them the wisdom to recognize their vulnerabilities as human beings because even though they have faced rejection and criticism they have been aware of their commitment to serve the church.

The Imaginative Identification in the Form of Storytelling That Women Clergy of the CCDOCM Express and Promote to Find Liberation

Storytelling	Activity	Benefit and/or liberation obtained
Personal testimonies	Preaching and teaching activities in church. Appealing in favor of the ministry of women.	To connect with others. To find strength, wisdom, and inspiration. To validate women's ministry. To find the voice of women.
Stories of women of the Bible	Rewriting the biblical stories of unworthy women of the Bible.	To reaffirm women's identity. To claim that shame and fear do not have a place in women's life and ministry. To be freed from the criticisms and stigmas that limit women as ministers of the church.
Stories about female saints	Adopting female saints as an example and inspiration.	To be inspired by the example of other women.

*Women's Contributions of Imaginative Identification in the Form of Visual Arts*

When I analyzed the women clergy's descriptions of their contributions to imaginative identification in the form of visual arts, I noticed two types of answers in juxtaposition. On the one hand, I detected that two out of the five women expressed their curiosity and creativity to explore non-traditional forms of faith. These women provided responses that highlighted the importance of visual arts in their ministries and personal faith. On the other hand, the other three women did not consider the visual arts, such as paintings, murals, images, and sculptures, as important expressions of faith. Instead, these women showed more interest in the use of personal testimonies and stories of women from the Bible. In fact, their responses reflected the ideology and influence of the founders of Protestantism in Latin America. In this sense, as I discussed on chapter two, the American Protestant missionaries transmitted to the people that the practice of popular religious traditions was illegitimate. As a consequence, local Protestant converters did not incorporate the religious arts with the practice of their faith. Protestant missionaries considered these religious expressions as pagan and idolatrous traditions. According to the missionaries, people in Latin America had to practice the religion of Christ based exclusively on the reading of the Scriptures. Consequently, the women's responses reflected these Protestant influences as a reality today.

Regarding the incorporation and/or promotion of paintings and murals, Ana and Sonia were the ministers who expressed great fascination with these forms of arts. For instance, Ana held the principle that the arts can liberate the spirit because the arts have allowed its practitioners to experience catharsis. During her professional experiences, she has noticed how the arts have helped the human mind visualize God. For instance, Ana defined doing theology as the production of a discourse about God, a practice that all human beings do one way or another.

Then, during the endeavor of producing theology, Ana has incorporated visual arts, not only religious arts, but all sorts of arts to create a sense of peace and to find identity. To facilitate the connection between arts and theology, Ana has projected paintings and murals on a large screen during worship services. Thus, in a similar manner, Ana has used images and sculptures during youth activities. She has projected these images and sculptures to inspire the youth to paint or to write a story. Then, she has also shown the drawings the youth create that are inspired by the displayed images. After having incorporated this practice at church, Ana has noticed that the Christian faith makes more sense. In fact, Ana considered the use of images and sculptures as a necessity for her ministerial practice.

During our interview, Ana described two forms of liberation that she obtained through the incorporation and promotion of the visual arts. First, Ana has found the liberation of the body because the visual arts have connected people with their life experiences and with their bodies. Although certain Christian traditions have promoted that the human body is cursed, Ana's opinion was the opposite. She attested that the body is sacred because it is not the opposite aspect of the spirit. Second, Ana acknowledged that the human imagination is extremely talented to produce religious arts. The construction of a theological discourse from the arts represented another form of liberating experience to Ana. By incorporating the arts, people could find God during the daily life because God is present in common daily activities. People could also hear other voices of God in addition to the ones from the Bible.

In this sense, Sonia emphasized the importance of paintings and illustrations as visual expressions of faith because she has incorporated religious paintings that illustrate biblical stories into her spiritual practices. In particular, she mentioned the painting *the Annunciation* by Pedro Berruguete. It illustrates a passage from the New Testament (Luke 1:26-38) in which the

Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she was going to become the mother of the Messiah. This painting has been important to Sonia because it has helped her to imagine a different reality for the women of the Bible. In this case, Berruguete portrayed Mary in a standing position with a book in front of her as if she had been reading it before the Angel interrupted to deliver his message. Because Sonia has related books to education, this painting has guided Sonia to meditate about the possibilities and advances that women could have obtained if they have always had access to education. She has been fascinated by this painting because it portrays a woman of the Bible in a non-traditional way. Sonia's critical reflections have helped her to dream of a different reality for women because she is deeply convinced that God supports women's needs and desires to obtain education and serve the church. Then, Sonia's critical thinking, inspired by a painting, has helped her to heal from the criticism experienced while she was an active minister performing a non-traditional role.

Regarding the use of images and sculptures, Sonia mentioned the importance of having a cross located at the altar in church as a reminder to the believers of the love of God for all. She mentioned the fact that some churches, for instance neo-Pentecostal and evangelical churches, have replaced the cross with other elements such as the worship band, a pulpit, or a plain scenario. However, Sonia said that she needed a cross not only at church, but also during the practice of spiritual disciplines at home, like prayer and meditation, to grow in her faith. When Sonia has had a cross near to her, she can see Jesus by her side. In short, Jesus has been her main source of liberation from the misfortunes in life.

In reference to the use of dramas and performance as visual expressions of faith, María mentioned that these were useful resources. During the time she was the director of the non-profit organization dedicated to help needy children, María saw the advantages and the impact

that the dramas and performances had on children. María expressed that children could learn more from a biblical story when the older kids represented a drama to their younger peers. For this reason, dramas and performance became a regular practice in her ministry. At the same time, Veronica mentioned that she promoted dramas and performances during vacation Bible school or on special occasions, like Easter or Christmas. However, neither María nor Veronica provided specific examples about how they employed these resources as a personal forms of liberation.

In relation to the incorporation of any other practices related to imaginative identification which have informed a sense of liberation, Ana used the projection of short cartoons or scenes from a television show. She has developed a theological thinking or analysis of a biblical text out of the projection of short cartoons. In short, the use of these resources has reaffirmed Ana's point of view of finding God by performing activities in daily life. In this way, María expressed that the projection of certain films like the *Cross and the Switchblade*, the life story of Nicky Cruz, appealed to the special circumstances of children in vulnerability. She witnessed the positive reaction and influence on the children who could identify with the characters of this movie. In short, when María played this type of movies, children could easily see the dangers of being involved in gangs using drugs.

The Imaginative Identification in the Form of Visual Arts That Women Clergy of the CCDOCM  
Express and Promote to Find Liberation

Visual Arts	Activity	Benefit and/or liberation obtained
Paintings and murals	Projection of paintings and murals in a large screen during worship services.	To liberate the spirit. To visualize God.
Images and sculptures	Projection of images and sculptures to inspire others to paint or to write a story.  Seeing a painting of a biblical story.  Having a cross at home and at church.	To create peace and find identity. To facilitate the connection between arts and theology. To find God during the daily life. To find other voices of God. To imagine a different reality for women. To find liberation from the belief that the human body is cursed. To construct a different theological discourse. To find liberation from the criticism that women clergy experience.
Dramas and performances	Promoting dramas and performances in certain occasions like Easter and Christmas.	To have ministerial support.
Other	Projection of movies and short cartoons.	To have ministerial support.

*Women's Contributions of Imaginative Identification in the Form of Dancing*

Regarding contemporary, sacred, and regional dances, only one women clergy reported using contemporary dancing regularly as an expression of faith in her ministry, while two more women clergy mentioned promoting dancing in their churches just a few times. María expressed that contemporary dancing to Christian music was a common practice among the needy children of her ministry. The children used to learn Christian songs by creating choreography themselves. According to María, singing and dancing were fun activities that the children enjoyed. From better physical and mental health, to thriving in emotional health and well-being, dancing benefitted these children in multiple ways. Contrary to María's support of contemporary dancing, for Ana and Veronica dancing was not a common practice in their ministries. Ana mentioned that only on one occasion she supported the performance of a sacred dance in church. Yet, she noticed that people in church were interested in this type of dance. Likewise, Veronica promoted regional dances in church to show the Mexican culture to the foreign missionaries during their



visit in the country. Although, both Ana and Veronica had a positive experience with sacred and regional dances in church, they did not mention using dances as a personal expression of faith to obtain liberation.

The Imaginative Identification in the Form of Dancing That Women Clergy of the CCDOCM Express and Promote to Find Liberation

Dancing	Activity	Benefit and/or liberation obtained
Contemporary dance	Dancing Christian songs with choreographers.	To help others grow in their faith.
Sacred dances	Inviting a dancer to perform a sacred dance in church.	To explore alternative ways of expressions of faith.
Regional/folk dances	Having regional dances in church.	To promote the Mexican culture.

*Women's Contributions of Imaginative Identification in the Form of Music*

The incorporation and promotion of the expressions of faith in the form of music was important for almost all the women interviewed. These women placed more emphasis on contemplative music and choral music than on contemporary music. They mentioned that contemplative music stills the mind from the daily problems. It has helped them to connect with God during their prayer. For example, Ana has practiced the Taizé prayer which includes contemplative music and the silence of the surroundings. In addition, Sonia has included the communion with nature and contemplative music while she prays. However, according to Ana, Protestant churches in Mexico tend to be conservative and struggle to accept non-traditional forms of prayer. But in other settings, Ana has led the people contemplative prayer with guitar arpeggios. In fact, music has helped Ana to express herself because music facilitates unique expressions of faith that affirm her personality. María has enjoyed the lyrics of certain hymns and praising worship songs that are poems speaking of to the love of God. Through these hymns and songs she has found God's healing and consolation.

The Imaginative Identification in the Form of Music That Women Clergy of the CCDOCM  
Express and Promote to Find Liberation

Music	Activity	Benefit and/or liberation obtained
Contemplative music	Listening to contemplative music while praying.	To still the mind and connect with God.
Choral music	Listening to hymns.	To find God's healing and consolation.
Contemporary music	Women clergy did not provide comments about contemporary music.	

### Triangulation Analysis

The purpose of using triangulation in the qualitative data analysis of this project is to identify the common aspects of the contributions of imaginative identification of the Catholic women and the woman clergy of the CCDOCM. This triangulation analysis compares and contrasts the resources of imaginative identification in the forms of storytelling and visual arts that the Catholic women express in the Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha with the resources of imaginative identification of the woman clergy of the CCDOCM. This analysis provides a detailed review of the observational data that I obtained while I visited these religious sites, with the data I gathered during the interviews of the women clergy. Triangulation analysis of observational data with interview data provides the elements to examine in detail and in depth the problem of exclusion of women from leadership positions in churches addressed in this investigation. In addition, it facilitates the discussion about the forms of liberation that these two groups of women have obtained when they incorporate the resources of imaginative identification. The expected results of the analyses of the experience of women and their faith are powerful and compelling to produce a desire change in church.

*Triangulation Analysis of the Imaginative Identification in the Forms of Storytelling*

One important aspect in the triangulation analysis of imaginative identification between Catholic women and women clergy is that both employ forms of storytelling as main resources to construct theology. However, according to their own understanding of God and Christian tradition, Catholic women and women clergy formulate different theological approaches using specific resources of storytelling. On the one hand, during my visit to the Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha, I observed how Catholic women create their theology from the stories of divine intervention of the Virgin. These women have adopted and transmitted stories that attest to the miracles that the Virgin has performed in favor of women in vulnerability. For example, when an elderly woman named Ana Lucia laid the image of the Virgin on the body of a girl who had died in an accident, the Virgin resurrected the girl; and when a group of miners were trapped in a mine, the Virgin heard the plea of the women in town and sent her son to feed and guide the miners out. In this way, Catholic women construct a feminist contextual theology that is not the result of an everyday academic praxis. Instead, it is most likely an unconscious elaboration that emerges among women and their need to connect with God.

On the other hand, women clergy place at the center of their theological discourse storytelling in the forms of personal testimonies and stories of women from the Bible. In the previous section of this chapter, I described in detail how women clergy incorporate these resources of storytelling to obtain liberating worldviews. In particular, I documented how Veronica and Ana use these resources from feminist critical approaches to elaborate theological discourses that reaffirm their identities and validate their ministries. For example, when the male leaders of the church wanted Veronica to resign, women's testimonies validated her calling to

ministry; and when Ana looked at the biblical story of Rahab from a dignifying perspective, she reaffirmed her identity. The ministerial experiences of Veronica and Ana are examples of their theological feminist rhetoric applied to their ministerial settings. However, the feminist critical approaches that Veronica and Ana employ to construct their theologies are not the general practice of all the women clergy interviewed.

Although Catholic women and women clergy employ different forms of storytelling to construct unique theological approaches, at the end, both groups of women create theologies that are empowering to women. Because Catholic women and women clergy have found avenues to express their own perspectives of the Divine, God or the Virgin, they have created powerful theologies that highlight women's dignity and equality. Hence, these theologies are compelling to women in two important aspects: they are provocative as well as redemptive. First, the theologies produced by Catholic women and women clergy are provocative because they go against the church tradition of silencing women. In this sense, Catholic women and women clergy prioritize their theological insights of the acts of God among them. When women place their sacred stories at the center of the theological discourse, women change the pattern of marginalization that the church has imposed to them. As a consequence, women are also switching the established traditional order of the church to construct its theology. Therefore, in the case of Catholic women, neither God-father nor the priest-man directly help women, instead the Virgin-woman assists women in their need. Thus, this type of feminist contextual theology has been the most effective elaboration to empower Catholic women. In this way, Catholic women are the meaningful agents who end their imposed silence and obtain a voice in the construction of their faith.

The main problem for women clergy is that in order to produce a significant change about the exclusion of women from church leadership positions, or to promote a positive transformation from the sexist structures in church and society, women clergy must articulate a subversive contextual feminist theology as a result of a planned communal effort. Such theology must have as objective to criticize and dismantle the patriarchy in the biblical texts and church traditions. Because the biblical texts portray God as a male figure such as God-father, Jesus-man, and the Holy Spirit-male (*Espíritu Santo* is a male pronoun in Spanish), the use of epistemological feminist hermeneutical tools must become a reality for all women clergy. These resources can help women clergy to propose alternative perspectives to the traditional doctrines about God, the church, and Christology. In this sense, Catholic women have solved, up to a certain degree, the problem of patriarchy in church. Their theological elaborations omit the biblical text and the intervention of traditional agents in power like male clergy, the church, or God-father. However, due to the nature of their job, women clergy can benefit in great manner from the fundamentals of feminist biblical interpretation. Women clergy would be better equipped to confront the hierarchy and power of the institutional church and its male leaders.

Second, the theologies produced by Catholic women and women clergy are redemptive for women because these have the potential to connect women with God. In this case, the theology of Catholic women contains stories that highlight the restoration in the relationship of brokenness between God and women that the institutional church has promoted. For instance, Tertullian (155-240 CE) believed that women were evil and should not have any participation in the church with God; and Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) assumed that women were inferior than men because God had not created women in the image of God. The connection between women and God takes place through the Virgin who encounters women in vulnerability. In a

similar way, the theology that women clergy produce is also redemptive for women but only when women incorporate alternative readings to the stories of the women from the Bible. In this case, women clergy need to avoid androcentric models of biblical interpretation.

Additionally, the theologies of Catholic women and women clergy differ from each other because the theology of Catholic women facilitates the practice of popular and religious traditions among people; meanwhile, the theology of women clergy emphasizes the religious practices of the believers but avoids the promotion of popular religiosity connected with Catholicism. Therefore, the theology of Catholic women has a broader impact in the society. As mentioned before, popular religious practices are such an important component of the Mexican culture and folklore. In short, popular religiosity involves the set of experiences, beliefs, and rituals that oppressed people have created and developed in their search of the Divine. People reflect such experiences as their way of being in *lo cotidiano*. In this manner, the contextual theology of Catholic women creates more spaces for people to practicing a great variety of popular rituals. For example, every year thousands of cyclists from different states in Mexico organize pilgrimages to the Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos. These pilgrims travel by bicycle for days as they combine the sport of cycling with contextual religious traditions. In sum, this example points out to how the theology of the Catholic women has led to the creation of sacred spaces in which many people practice religious traditions with great creativity. In contrast, the theology of women clergy does not have yet the potential to influence more people because women clergy are still such a small minority. The fact that none of the women clergy interviewed, except for one, is active in the church attests to this reality.

Finally, the theologies that Catholic women and women clergy produce are also different because the metanarratives that Catholic women transmit have trespassed the limits of the sacred

space by impacting the society in other aspects like the economic. For example, the religious tourism is the main economic activity of the cities of San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco and Plateros, Zacatecas. The commercial activity in these cities is very impressive. Faith-related businesses have contributed to the development of these communities as pilgrims obtain the services provided by hotels, restaurants, and stores that commercialize goods produced locally. Meanwhile, the stories that the women clergy employ stay in the context of the local church.

*Triangulation Analysis of the Imaginative Identification in the Forms of Visual Arts.*

The results of the triangulation analysis of visual arts such as paintings, murals, images, and sculptures demonstrate that the visual arts are more meaningful expressions of faith for Catholic women than for women clergy. The Protestant Reformation in Europe helps to understand the difference in the use of visual arts between these groups of women. During the Council of Trent (1545-1563), that took place to counteract the ideals of the Protestant Reformation, Catholic bishops reiterated their support for the primacy of religious arts in the church. The bishops concluded that the arts were a useful tool to evangelize people. They reiterated the priority of visual arts to communicate the teachings and traditions of the church. However, Protestants challenged many core beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. According to the ideal of supremacy of the Bible, the protestant understanding was that God prohibited images (Exodus 20:4-6). As a consequence, Protestants opted for a reduction in the visual arts as expressions of faith. Since then, visual arts have played a pivotal role in the development of Catholicism, but Protestantism has limited the production of religious arts.

During my visit to the Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha the type of visual arts that I observed were the pieces of art that could communicate a message from women to women. In other words, the visual arts that I paid

attention to were exclusively those in connection to the context and experience of the local women. Examples of this type of arts are the murals of the miracles of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos, the silhouette of the Indigenous woman carrying in her hands the Virgin of San Juan, and the altarpieces that women create. For Catholic women, these visual arts represent a point of reference to imagine a different reality in which the Virgin creates a new symbolic order that empowers them.

Moreover, I noticed that Catholic women do not have restrictions that limit their imagination because they enjoy freedom of expression of their faith through the use of visual arts. From painting an altarpiece, to having an image of the Virgin on a main street or at home, these women have the power of decision-making regarding their production of visual arts. In contrast, the fact that only two women clergy consider as important the incorporation of visual arts such as paintings, murals, images, and sculptures as resources of liberation, attest that the protestant traditions set up limits to the creation of visual arts. Along these lines, Ana and Sonia are the women clergy who promote visual arts and obtain benefits. While Ana incorporates paintings, murals, images, and sculptures to create peace and find identity, Sonia likes to look at the paintings of women from the Bible to reimagine a different reality for women. In summary, women clergy have plenty of possibilities to promote more visual representations aligned with their religious traditions. The production of visual arts requires also a communal effort to help women clergy to reaffirm their worth to ministry by emphasizing the struggles and strengths they face.

### **Final Conclusions and Further Implications**

Marginalization is one of the realities that women face in patriarchal cultures and in church. My experience as a Christian lay minister in my hometown of Monterrey, a city in



northern Mexico, testifies about the discriminatory actions against women. During the time I served the church, I experienced feelings of confusion, distress, and loneliness. Unfortunately, I was not the only one. I knew women clergy across denominations affected by similar circumstances. Although I could establish meaningful connections with these women, due to constraints of geographical distances and our limited time, we did not create an organized alliance of women in ministry. A group of women in ministry could have provided very positive support to each other in our critical discernment of what it meant to serve God and the church. In particular, we could have established an agenda addressing important issues like those related to the religious institutional protection of women's integrity; for instance, the establishment of formal procedures to denounce harassment in our denominations.

When I started the doctoral of ministry program, my goal was to conduct intensive investigations over issues related to women. I desired to obtain more clarity about how to construct a feminist theory that could serve women in the church. Among the different populations of women to study, I decided to critically analyze the conditions of the women clergy in the CCDOCM. The low number of women as leaders in church in this denomination triggered me. I wanted to obtain possible answers that could inform the reasons why a historical denomination that ordains women in larger numbers in countries like Puerto Rico had a lower number of women clergy in Mexico. In short, after conducting research, I conclude that women in positions of authority in the church have the potential to influence traditional worldviews that affect women and other groups in vulnerability. However, for personal well-being, some women have given up their service to the church. Then, the lack of institutional and social acceptance that limit women to pursue a career as ministers and the retention of women clergy are also main causes affecting the low number of women clergy in the CCDOCM. This is why heightened

awareness of the problem of the exclusion of women from leadership positions of authority in the church can produce a positive impact on the future of women clergy in Mexico and elsewhere.

To address the main problem of exclusion of women from leadership positions of authority in the church, I formulated the research question of how do women clergy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mexico (CCDOCM) express and promote imaginative identification to find liberation from their oppressions? To find answers, I took into consideration an interdisciplinary approach using fields, such as feminist theology, postcolonial feminist theory, and sociology of religion. These fields of study informed the theoretical framework of my work. In particular, I considered imaginative identification, one of the hermeneutical tools of feminist theology, as essential in this research project. Imaginative identification aims to create spaces for women in which they can create their own theologies without the intervention of a male leader of the church. It enables aspects, such as storytelling, visual arts, dancing, and music, as essential for women in their expressions of faith.

In addition, the research methodology of this project had three stages in the organization of the study. First, I conducted historiographical research about the Stone-Campbell movement in Mexico, paying particular attention to the role that American Protestant women had in the missionary work among the local women in Mexico. Second, I incorporated an ecological analysis of two prominent religious sites in central Mexico: The Sanctuary of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha. Finally, I interviewed five active, inactive, and retired women clergy of the CCDOCM in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas.

The findings of the historiographical research highlight that the missionaries of the Stone-Campbell movement who came to Mexico in the 1900s were well-intentioned people dedicated to facilitating the progress of the local population they sought to convert. They opened hospitals, orphanages, schools, and churches. However, they were unaware of their cross-cultural experience, and some of their practices were offensive and meaningless to others. In a similar way, the presence of Protestant women missionaries in the community did not provide local women the resources to create alternative ways for their liberation. On the contrary, women missionaries promoted an ideology of domesticity that cultivated moral values, such as sacrificial love, servanthood, and altruism. This ideology ruled out local women from religious, political, and economic concerns. It did not appeal for a permanent change in the socio-religious conditions of oppression of local women. Although in their home country, women missionaries were creating positive changes, in countries like Mexico, they did not influence the women and their communities with more opportunities to find new avenues of liberation against the forces of patriarchy. As a result, local women who were well established in the practices of popular religiosity did not convert in larger scales to Protestantism. Therefore, the shortage of women involved in church explains, in part, the slow growth of Protestantism in Mexico. In sum, the connection established between the low participation of women with the slow growth of Protestantism in Mexico warrants further studies and self-examination within the church.

The second stage in the organization of this study was the ecological analysis of two prominent religious sites in central Mexico. Ecological analysis points out the importance of storytelling in the construction of Catholic women's faith. A remarkable contribution from Catholic women is that the metanarratives of women have been cornerstones in the foundation of the most important religious sites in Mexico. Although feminist scholarly research emphasizes

the story of the Lady of Guadalupe as an icon of identity for Latinas, the study of the origin of other religious figures and sites offer more possibilities and resources for women to construct their contextual theologies. In this case, the metanarratives of the Sanctuary of the Lady of San Juan de los Lagos and the Sanctuary of the Santo Niño de Atocha reveal that Catholic women have a prominent role in the formation of their faith and popular religious practices that define their identities. In times when women did not have access to other sources of empowerment, like education or suffrage, faith became women's main source of strength. In brief, the study of these metanarratives is an example of the multiple possibilities for women to explore their past in more depth to understand the present and influence a better future for all.

Furthermore, ecological analysis also addresses the creativity of Catholic women and their power of decision making in regard to visual arts. Paintings, murals, images, and sculptures provide Catholic women with unlimited resources that facilitate their access to do theology. In fact, at a certain point of this project, I looked at the specific visual arts of the religious sites I visited for my own spiritual growth. My purpose was to explore alternative sources of spirituality that I had not considered in the past. In particular, the silhouette of the Indigenous woman holding the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos in her hands inspired me. This woman is an example of faith and trust regardless of adverse circumstances. The silhouette reflects the realities of one of the most unprivileged, poor, and marginalized women in society. Yet, the woman looks content. She communicates to me a message of ownership of the many blessings that the Virgin can produce in the life of women. Her faith makes me feel humble and grateful. In a certain way, I can identify with her because I am also a Hispanic woman in search of spiritual resources that can help me to find wisdom, peace, and strength. In short, my critical perspective of the

silhouette of the Indigenous woman is just an example of the many possibilities for women to employ visual arts in their practice of theology.

The final stage consisted of conducting interviews of five women clergy of the CCDOCM which provided the necessary information to answer the research question. In this case, the women clergy express and promote storytelling in the forms of personal testimonies and stories of women from the Bible to obtain benefits, such as strength and inspiration to overcome difficulties. In particular, two women clergy use these tools from a critical feminist perspective which allows them to articulate subversive perspectives in their ministerial practices. These women employ rhetoric and discourses which are critical for women to obtain benefits, such as reaffirmation of their identities, freedom from the stigmas that limit women as ministers of the church, and autonomy from shame and fear.

In regard to visual arts, women clergy hold opposite perspectives. Two women clergy promote and express visual arts, such as paintings, murals, images, and sculptures, as important expressions of faith. In contrast, the other three women clergy do not consider visual arts to express their faiths. Because visual arts facilitate the space for women to become more critical of traditional viewpoints of God, the women clergy who employ visual arts have more resources at hand, a multitude of possibilities, for their empowerment. For example, when Ana incorporates visual arts, she sees God in common daily activities. Visual arts have reinforced in Ana the belief of the human body as sacred. Although Ana's positive opinion of the human body is contrary to the point of view of some Christian traditions, she is confident in the liberation she has obtained. Hence, women clergy should revise adopting the traditional point of views of Protestantism regarding visual arts because these beliefs limit women's liberation.

As a final reflection, I would like to point out that some Protestant churches have advanced in the recognition of the ministry of women because women have gained access to the holy orders of ministry. However, women clergy lack representation in the decision making in the Protestant churches in Mexico. Although Catholic women enjoy increased freedom in terms of the resources of imaginative identification that help them to visualize their liberation, Catholic women have not obtained yet a path to ordination. Both women clergy and Catholic women struggle to obtain recognition in their churches. Then, the Bible studies of the formation of the canon and the women in the Bible provide women with tools of feminist postcolonial theology that promote transformation by seeking equality between women and men in church. The feminist postcolonial theology in these Bible studies encourage women to participate in the construction of mission of the church according to God's mission of Christ's love and inclusion to all.

Now that I am concluding this research, I am deeply grateful for the hours spent on academic activities that have helped me to find my own liberation. My hope is that this research project can help women and men in creating a church of equals in which the God's love is present because everybody is included.

## APENDIX A: RESEARCH DOCUMENTS

**Text to the Electronic Mail**

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Claudia Moreno and I am a Doctor Ministry student working with Dr. Stephen V. Sprinkle at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University (TCU).

We are conducting a research study about if and how the women clergy of the Disciples of Christ Church in Mexico use resources identified as imaginative identification in the forms of visual art, storytelling, dancing, and music as resources of liberation from sociocultural beliefs and church practices that do not promote women as part of the clergy of the church in Mexico. I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in an interview that will take about 40 minutes. Participation is completely voluntary, and your identity will be anonymous.

If you are interested, read the attached consent form. If you agree to participate, please print, sign, and forward the form to me. Once I receive your consent, I will contact you to schedule the interview. There will be a compensation for participation in this research of \$15 dollars. Additionally, there are no known risks involved in this research,

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me [c.moreno@tcu.edu](mailto:c.moreno@tcu.edu) or Dr. Sprinkle [s.sprinkle@tcu.edu](mailto:s.sprinkle@tcu.edu)

Thank you for your time,

Claudia Moreno

Investigator and Doctor of Ministry Student

Brite Divinity School

## Questionnaire

The information gathered in this questionnaire will inform the investigator about the resources such as visual art, storytelling, dancing, and music that women clergy of the Disciples of Christ Church in Mexico practice to make sense of their different sources of oppression.

The information that you provide is completely anonymous and confidential. The research outcome will not include reference to any individuals. Thank you for your participation.

1. What is your position in the church?
2. How long have you been a minister of the church?
3. What type of ministerial formation did you receive to become a clergy?
4. What are the main struggles that you have faced as a woman clergy?
5. Do you incorporate and/or promote the expressions of faith listed on the chart below?
6. If yes to question 5, how do you incorporate these expressions of faith? Provide a brief description.

Expressions of Faith		Answer Yes/No		Brief Description
<b>Visual Arts</b>	Paintings and murals	Y	N	
	Images and sculptures	Y	N	
	Dramas and performances	Y	N	
	Other:			
<b>Story Telling</b>	Personal Testimonies	Y	N	
	Stories of women from the Bible	Y	N	
	Stories about female saints	Y	N	
	Other:	Y	N	
<b>Dancing</b>	Contemporary dances	Y	N	
	Sacred dances	Y	N	
	Regional/folk dances	Y	N	
	Other:	Y	N	
<b>Music</b>	Contemplative music	Y	N	
	Choral music	Y	N	
	Contemporary worship band	Y	N	
	Other:	Y	N	



7. In your opinion, how have you benefited from incorporating these expressions of faith? What type of liberation have you experienced?

Expressions of Faith		Opinions
<b>Visual Arts</b>	Paintings and murals	
	Images and sculptures	
	Dramas and performances	
	Other:	
<b>Story Telling</b>	Personal Testimonies	
	Stories of women from the Bible	
	Stories about female saints	
	Other:	
<b>Dancing</b>	Contemporary dances	
	Sacred dances	
	Regional/folk dances	
	Other:	
<b>Music</b>	Contemplative music	
	Choral music	
	Contemporary worship band	
	Other:	

8. Are there any other practices not listed that have informed a sense of liberation? If yes, provide a brief description.

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM



**Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**Title of Research:** Women Clergy in the Disciples of Christ Church in Mexico

**Funding Agency/Sponsor:** N/A

**Study Investigators:** Principal Investigator, Dr. Stephen V. Sprinkle; Doctor of Ministry student, Claudia A. Moreno

**What is the purpose of the research?** Mexican women constantly face unfavorable socio-cultural circumstances in traditional familial settings and churches that do not facilitate the conditions for women to pursue professional careers as religious leaders. Mexican women lack the same opportunities as men to make decisions on how they can better serve the church based on personal interests, talents, and gifts. Facing socio-cultural adverse circumstances, the women clergy of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Mexico (CCDOCM) serve their communities of faith. The investigator seeks to know if and how the women clergy of the CCDOCM use resources identified as imaginative identification in the forms of visual art, storytelling, dancing, and music as resources of liberation from sociocultural beliefs and church practices that do not promote women as part of the clergy of the church in Mexico.

**How many people will participate in this study?** The researcher plans to recruit five participants for this study. The participants are representatives of the active, inactive, and retired women clergy in the CCDOCM who serve or used to serve in the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas.

**What is my involvement for participating in this study?** If you choose to participate in this research, the investigator Claudia Moreno will interview you. The interviews will follow the format of a questionnaire. The investigator will record the interviews to facilitate the gathering of data and the analysis of information. The interview will take place via skype, or by phone, or in person.

**How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?** The interview should not last more than 40 minutes.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will they be minimized?** The research project will keep in private your identity and your church setting. However, due the small target total population of study, your identity may be inadvertently disclosed or discoverable with the use of quotes, or in the report of information.

There are no known risks associated with this interview. However, it is possible that you might feel distressed in the course on the conversation. If this happens, please inform the investigator who will make the necessary accommodations that may include, but are not limitative, to skip a specific question. In addition, you can skip any question you do not wish to answer, and you can stop your participation at any time.

**What are the benefits for participating in this study?**

Your participation will inform about the contributions that women clergy are making regarding imaginative identification in the forms of visual art, storytelling, dancing, and music as resources of liberation from sociocultural beliefs and church practices that do not promote women as part of the clergy of the church in Mexico.

**Will I be compensated for participating in this study?**

An incentive of \$15 (fifteen dollars) will be offered for participating in this study.

**What is an alternate procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?**

No alternate procedures are available to participate in this study.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

Your name and church setting will be kept confidential in all the reporting of information of this study. However, owing the small target total population of study, your identity may be inadvertently disclosed or discoverable with the use of quotes, or in the report of information. In this consent you authorize to the use of quotes in the final report, and you understand that your identity may be inadvertently disclosed or discoverable with the use of quotes, or in the report of information.

The investigator, Claudia Moreno, will be the only person conducting the interview and the only person who will listen to the audio. The researcher will assign a pseudonym. If you wish to select your own pseudonym for this research, please indicate the name on this line: \_\_\_\_\_.

**Is my participation voluntary?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You can stop your participation at any time.

**Can I stop taking part in this research?**

You can withdraw from this study at any time.

**What are the procedures for withdrawal?**

Simply communicate that you wish to withdraw by sending an e-mail to the researcher.

**Will I be given a copy of the consent document to keep?**

You will keep one copy of the consent document.

**Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?**

You should contact the researchers Claudia Moreno, [c.moreno@tcu.edu](mailto:c.moreno@tcu.edu) or, Dr. Stephen Sprinkle, [s.sprinkle@tcu.edu](mailto:s.sprinkle@tcu.edu)

**Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?**

Dr. Michael Faggella-Luby, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-4355, [m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu](mailto:m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu); or Ms. Lorrie Branson, JD, TCU Research Integrity Officer, (817) 257-4266, [l.branson@tcu.edu](mailto:l.branson@tcu.edu).

Your signature below indicates that you have read or been read the information provided above, you have received answers to all of your questions and have been told who to call if you have any more questions, you have freely decided to participate in this research, and you understand that you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

**Participant Name (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator Name (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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