Inculturated Pastoral Planning, the U.S. Hispanic Experience

Michael Connors

The plethora of writings that has erupted among and about Hispanics these recent decades has brought about a new wave of thought and questions for Hispanic and non-Hispanic thinkers. With much work yet to be done in building the groundwork for Hispanic thought, there are myriad topics for reflection that scholars are choosing to consider, among which is the area of pastoral praxis. Because this area of pastoral praxis is in the minority of the topics selected, Connors' work on The National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (NPPHM) is a welcomed musing for both theologians and pastoralists. The hope is that among Hispanics both the pastoral and the academic disciplines will be complementary and intimate dialogue partners rather than the dichotomies and estranged partners these have often been in the North American academy.

There is much to commend in Connors' work on the NPPHM. He brings to the investigation the benefit of experience and a rich resource in studies of history, culture, and faith. He sets out to evaluate the NPPHM through a faith and culture lens and to critique the NPPHM from the perspective of modern inculturation literature. In this effort he succeeds in bringing forth some excellent scholarship to inform his analysis. He chooses the Mexican-American voices of Allan Figueroa Deck and Virgilio Elizondo to underpin his development in various significant areas of the study, scanning the group's values, popular religiosity, and social status. Connors bases the constructive component of his work on Robert Schreiter's thought and the criteria he suggests for evaluation of local theologies. For history he tends toward Rodolfo Acuña, Moisés Sandoval, Julian Samora, and Patricia Simon. He reviews and summarizes the content of Church documents treating culture and hones in on Gaudium et Spes and Ad Gentes, bringing in
cultural theologians Arij Roest Crollius, Gerald Arbuckle, and Aylward Shorter, to make a point of how culture scholars and Church leaders have taken the topic seriously. With a rich interdisciplinary methodology, Connors examines his question: Can the NPPHM be a local praxis for Mexican Americans?

Connors raises a number of observations and questions in his investigation that are extremely valuable to the issue of pastoral praxis. He begins with a goal of establishing the NPPHM as:

- Unique because it offers both reasoned guidance and concrete strategies
- The result of years of study with thousands of hierarchy, professional, lay, and grassroots leaders.
- Defining and promoting an authentically inculturated pastoral praxis. He does an internal examination of the document and an external examination through the theology of inculturation and the cultural data provided.

While affirming the document for its innovative character and its consultative and innovative method, Connors critiques the NPPHM for absences and shortcomings and he manages to find several lacuna. He notes the absences in the NPPHM concerning the issues of the Hispanic elderly, the Hispanic male, a development of spirituality, a development of Hispanic values, as well as the relatively minor reference to the significance of Mary, mobility, and urbanization. Nor are the major issues for migrants and immigrants adequately addressed. Besides the oversights, he observes how the NPPHM is more hierarchically driven than the Tercer Encuentro that initiated it; he further laments how the NPPHM fails to make use of the wisdom of Hispanic thinkers such as Virgilio Elizondo, Allan Figueroa Deck, and others.

Connors' work is excellent; I find only a few areas in which his work could have been improved. First, the use of Mexican-American women pastoralists would have helped. For example, in his discussion of Mexican-American spirituality, Rose María Icaza has described Mexican-American spirituality as delineated by the NPPHM in various sources which would have been useful to the study. Angela Erevia is another Mexican-American woman who has written extensively in the area of Hispanics and evangelization and her work would have enriched the study as well. Second, a notable absence is that of Orlando Espín's work, which has been groundbreaking in the field of popular religion. Other than a mention in a footnote, Espín's thought is missing in the development of the argument. Third, Connors faces the unavoid-
able challenge that all who have written for any Hispanic group encounter, that is, to use sources generically Hispanic and to apply the information to a specific group such as the Mexican Americans. Going from general sources such as census information and the Plan for Hispanics and particularizing the evaluation to Mexican Americans is difficult. The criticisms of the Plan sometimes are a little hard to accept when the criteria is particular to Mexican Americans and the Plan is general to Hispanics.

In conclusion, Connors is very thorough in examining the NPPHM as a local theology, as reflective of Hispanics, Mexican Americans in particular, and as relevant to Hispanics and to the Church in its pastoral questions, *Inculturated Pastoral Planning, The U.S. Hispanic Experience* adds to the corpus of Hispanic literature in an area that still needs further exploration; as such it is a welcome reflection.

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