18 Latin American Female Theologians You Should Know About

By Juliana González Nieves

“She studies, and disputes, and teaches,
and thus she serves her Faith;
for how could God, who gave her reason,
want her ignorant?”

~ Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Villancico [1]

In 1651, Mexico gave birth to whom is arguably the first female theologian in the Americas, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. [2] Throughout the decades a number of Latin American women have followed in her footsteps, defying stereotypes and socio-religious norms, and dedicating their lives to the monumental task of theology. However, for a long time an “invisible invisibility” rendered their voices silent and their presence unnoticed by many in the Anglo-European scholarship. As Cuban theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz writes,

“How more invisible than invisible can you be? And yet there is a quality of invisible invisibility… Invisible invisibility has to do with people not even knowing that they do not know you.”[3]

This kind of invisibility is the result of a multiplicity of factors. Including the fact that from the colonial period to the 21st century, some in the Minority World, [4] recognizing that other theologies look, sound and speak differently, have silenced, ignored or labeled those voices para-theological or even dangerous.

However, if Latin American and Latino/a theologians have taught us something is that theology is to be done en conjunto. That is, theology is a communal endeavor done by the church and for the church. A theology that dismisses the voices of Christians in the
Majority World and the margins of society is a theology that ends up denying the catholicity of the church. For this reason, we have decided to feature 18 Latin American female theologians you should know about.

18 Latin American female theologians you should know about. Click To Tweet

Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Ada María Isasi-Díaz was born in La Habana, Cuba in 1943. In 1960, due to the political realities of her country, she left the island to become a political refugee in the United States. There she entered the religious community of the Order of Saint Ursula. In 1967, Isasi-Díaz decided to go to Lima, Peru, to serve as a missionary for three years. About her time there she writes,[6]

“I often say that it was there that the poor taught me the gospel message of justice. It was there that I learned to respect and admire the religious understandings and practices of the poor and the oppressed and the importance of their everyday struggles, of lo cotidiano. It was there that I realized the centrality of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in the struggle for justice.”

A pioneer in Mujerista Theology, Dr. Isasi-Díaz holds several degrees, including a M.Div., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. She taught at several institutions, including Seminario Evangélico de Teología in Matanzas, Cuba; Ewha Women’s University in Seoul, Korea; and Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. It is at the latter that Dr. Isasi-Díaz became Professor Emerita of Ethics & Theology. She passed away in May 13, 2012.


Agustina Luvis Núñez

Agustina Luvis Núñez is a Puerto Rican theologian living and doing theology in the island. A life-long learner, she holds several degrees, including a M.Div. from the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, a Master in Theology and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Agustina currently serves as Assistant Professor and Director of the D.Min. program at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico.

Dr. Núñez’s areas of interest include Pentecostal and feminist theologies. She has contributed to multiple publications, including the book El sexo en la Iglesia (2015); which was edited by renown scholars Samuel Silva Gotay and Luis N. Rivera Pagán. Her book Creada a su imagen: Una pastoral integral para la mujer, was published in 2012 by Abingdon Press.

Beatriz Melano Couch

Beatriz Melano Couch was a Uruguayan Methodist theologian. She graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary and completed her doctoral studies at the University of Strasbourg in France. Committed to a life of teaching, she served at the Instituto Superior
Dr. Melano Couch’s publications are *La mujer y la iglesia* (1973) and “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” in *The Church and Women in the Third World* (1985). Dr. Melano Couch passed away in May of 2004 in Uruguay.

**Clara Luz Ajo Lázaro**

Cuban Anglican theologian Clara Luz Ajo Lázaro received her doctorate from Universidade Metodista in São Paulo, Brasil. She specializes in historical theology and teaches systematic theology at the Seminario Evangélico de Teología in Matanzas, Cuba.

Dr. Ajo Lázaro has contributed to multiple publications, including *Anglican Women on Church and Mission* (2012), *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology* (2010), and *In the Power of Wisdom* (2000).

**Dinorah B. Méndez**

Dinorah B. Méndez was born in Durango, México. She holds a degree in History and Theology from the Seminario Teológico Bautista Mexicano in Lomas Verdes, México; a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Forth Worth, Texas; and a Ph.D. in Theology from Wales University through the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Since 1998 she has served as professor of theology and Christian heritage at the Seminario Teológico Bautista Mexicano.

Dr. Méndez’s book *Evangelicals in Mexico: Their Hymnody and Its Theology* was published in 2008.

**Elaine Nogueira-Godsey**

Elaine Nogueira-Godsey is Assistant Professor of Theology, Ecology and Race at Methodist Theological School in Ohio. She holds a B.A. in Theology from Faculdade Teológica D’Oeste do Brasil, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Cape Town. From 2000 to 2005, she served at the Junta de Missões Mundiais, doing missionary work with Angolan and Mozambican refugees. In 2016 Dr. Nogueira-Godsey was appointed Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg. She has over 15 years of teaching experience, having taught at the Faculdade Teológica D’Oeste do Brasil and the University of Cape Town.

Dr. Nogueira-Godsey has published various journal articles, and is currently turning her Ph.D. dissertation, titled *The Ecofeminist Theology of Ivone Gebara*, into a book. She is also writing a chapter titled “Pedagogy of Decoloniality: Teaching and Learning in the Intersection of Race, Ecology and Theology” for an edited volume.

**Elizabeth Conde-Frazier**

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier was not born in Latin America, but in Brooklyn, New York. However, when asked about how she identifies herself, she replied, “I identify as Newyorican. I am second generation. But I function as a 1.5, since I lived part of my life as a child in Puerto Rico as well.” Being a Puerto Rican is to live between two realities, U.S. citizenship and...
our puertorriqueñidad. We inhabit liminal spaces. We build bridges between cultures. This is the kind of complexity that Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier embodies. Before being appointed Dean of Esperanza College, Dr. Conde-Frazier served as professor of religious education at the Claremont School of Theology. Moreover, Dr. Conde-Frazier founded the Orlando E. Costas Hispanic and Latin American Ministries Program at Andover Newton Theological School. She holds a Ph.D. from Boston College and a M.Div. from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She is also the recipient of an honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Palmer Theological Seminary (2010).


**Elsa Tamez**

Elsa Tamez was born in Victoria, Mexico in 1950. She holds a doctorate in Theology from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, a Licentiate in Theology from the Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano, and a Licentiate in Literature and Linguistics from the National University of Costa Rica. She is Professor Emerita and former director of the Latin American Biblical University in San Jose.

Dr. Tamez’s publications include *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (2017), for the Wisdom Commentary series; *Struggles for Power in Early Christianity: A Study of the First Letter to Timothy* (translation, 2007); and *Through Her Eyes: Women’s Theology from Latin America* (1989, reprinted in 2006).

**Geraldina Céspedes Ulloa**

Catholic theologian Geraldina Céspedes Ulloa was born in Fantino, Dominican Republic. She holds degrees in Theology and Philosophy from the Universidad Rafael Landívar in Guatemala and the Instituto Filosófico Pedro Francisco Bonó in Dominican Republic. Geraldina also holds a doctorate in Theology from the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, Spain. Dr. Céspedes Ulloa is a member of the Congregation of Dominican Missionaries, and has been serving marginalized communities in Guatemala City since 1992. She is also a founding member of the Núcleo Mujeres y Teología de Guatemala.

Dr. Céspedes Ulloa’s publications include *Las teologías de la liberación ante el mercado y el patriarcado* (2014) and “Sources and Processes of the Production of Wisdom,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World* (2007).

**Ivone Gebara**

Ivone Gebara is a Brazilian Catholic feminist theologian and nun. She holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, and a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. For 17 years, Dr. Gebara taught at the Instituto de Teologia de Recife; until it was closed down by order of the Vatican. She also taught at Auburn Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary in New York. A prolific writer, she is a leading voice on ecofeminism and liberation theology.

**Loida I. Martell-Otero**

Loida I. Martell-Otero is Professor of Constructive Theology at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University in Pennsylvania. A bicoastal Puerto Rican, she does theology between the island and the mainland. Dr. Martell-Otero holds several degrees, including a B.S. from the University of Puerto Rico, a M.Div. from Andover Newton Theological School, and a M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Theology from Fordham University. She is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches/USA and has taught in various institutions of higher education in the USA mainland and Puerto Rico. Some of her research focuses on Taino spiritualities and their relation to theological anthropology, eschatology, and globalization.

Dr. Martell-Otero’s publications include *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology* (1997), and *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (2013).

**Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer**

Brazilian theologian Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro. Dr. Bingemer holds several degrees, including a master’s degree in Theology from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro, a doctorate in Systematic Theology from Pontifícia Universidade Gregoriana in Brasil, and a post-doctorate from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium. She has served in several institutions and organizations, including the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, Instituto Superior de Estudos da Religião, and Centro Loyola de Fé e Cultura.

A prolific author, Dr. Bingemer has significantly contributed to theological discourse. Her publications include *Latin American Theology: Roots and Branches* (2016), *Simone Weil: Mystic of Passion and Compassion* (2015), and *A Face for God: Reflections on Trinitarian Theology for Our Times* (2014).

**María Pilar Aquino**

Catholic theologian María Pilar Aquino was born in Ixtlán del Río, Mexico. She holds a S.T.D. from the Pontifical University of Salamanca in Spain, and a S.T.L. and S.T.B. from the Instituto Teológico de Estudios Superiores of Mexico City. Since 1993, Dr. Aquino serves as professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego. Aquino was also the first woman president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, of which she is also a co-founder. In 2000, the University of Helsinki in Finland awarded her an honorary doctorate in theology.

Dr. Pilar Aquino’s publications include *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World* (2007), co-edited with María José Rosado-Nunes; *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (2002), co-edited with Daisy L. Machado and
Jeanette Rodríguez; and Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America (1993).

Nancy E. Bedford

Nancy E. Bedford is an Argentinian evangélica systematic theologian. Since 2003, she serves as the Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Illinois. Dr. Bedford holds a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a D.Th. from Karl-Ludwigs-Universität Tübingen, where she studied under the mentorship of Jürgen Moltmann. Before her current academic post, Dr. Bedford served as Profesora de Dogmática at Seminario Internacional Teológico Bautista de Buenos Aires, and Profesora Titular del Departamento de Teología at the Instituto Universitario ISEDET, where she continued to teach as Nonresident Professor until 2015.

Dr. Bedford’s publications include Teología feminista a tres voces (2016), Galatians (2016), and a compilation of theological essays, titled La porfía de la resurrección: Ensayos desde el feminismo teológico latinoamericano (2008).

Regina Fernandes Sanches

Regina Fernandes Sanches is a Brazilian theologian serving and doing theology in her country. She holds two master’s degrees, one in Theology and Praxis from the Faculdade Jesuita de Filosofia e Teologia (FAJE), and one in Missiology from the Faculdade Teológica Sul Americana. She also has an advanced degree in Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture from the Universidade Luterana do Brasil. During her career, Regina has served in various institutions and organizations. Until last February she worked as the Executive Secretary of the Latin American Theological Fellowship (FTL) chapter in Brasil. She has also taught at various institutions, including Faculdade Nazarena do Brasil, Faculdade Evangélica de Teologia de Belo Horizonte, and Faculdade Refidim.


Ruth Padilla DeBorst

Ruth Padilla DeBorst is a Colombian Protestant theologian serving as provost of the Centro de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios (CETI) in Costa Rica. She holds a B.Ed. from Lenguas Vivas “Juan Ramón Fernández” in Buenos Aires, Argentina; a MA in Interdisciplinary Studies from Wheaton College Graduate School; and a Ph.D. in Missiology and Social Ethics from Boston University. She is a leading voice on misión integral, and for several years, she has been involved with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students and the Latin American Theological Fellowship.

Virginia Raquel Azcuy

Catholic theologian Virginia Raquel Azcuy is Profesora Extraordinaria Titular de Teología Espiritual at Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina. It was from this institution that she received her Licentiate in Theology and doctorate. Dr. Azcuy is also one of the founders of Teologanda and since 2010 has been serving at the Centro Teológico Manuel Larraín. Where she currently works as Director of the program “Signos de los tiempos.”

Dr. Azcuy’s publications include Teología feminista a tres voces (2016) and La figura de Teresa de Lisieux: Ensayo de fenomenología teológica según Hans Urs von Balthasar (1996).

Wanda Deifelt

Since 2004, Lutheran Brazilian theologian Wanda Deifelt has served at Luther College as professor in the Religion department. Dr. Deifelt holds a B.A. from Faculdade de Teologia, Escola Superior de Teologica in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil; a Masters in Theological Studies from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary; and a Ph.D. from Joint Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Northwestern University Doctoral Program in Illinois. Her areas of interest include Luther and Lutheranism, Creation and Christology. Dr. Deifelt has taught in India, Brazil, Canada and the United States. In 2005 she was awarded a Th.D. Honoris Causa from the University of Olso in Norway.


Tearing Down the Wall of Invisible Invisibility

Women make up more than half of the church. As Philip Jenkins writes, “If you want to think of the average Christian in the world today, then think of, perhaps, a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a favela [in Brazil]...”[7]

It is due time for the wall of invisible invisibility to fall down. It is time that we get to know the faces and hear the voices of the women doing theology across the globe.

Further Reading and Resources: Juliany González Nieves offers “A Reading List on Latinx and Latin American Theologies” HERE and downloadable HERE. Also see “A Latinx Theology Reading List” by Santi Rodriguez, HERE. Also see Juliany González Nieves’ article “Caribbean Christian Theology: A Bibliography.”
Juliany González Nieves is an evangélica Puerto Rican student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois. Before beginning her Master in Divinity, she earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology at the University of Puerto Rico. Born and raised in the island, Juliany started serving the church in Puerto Rico at a very young age. She has also participated in short-term mission trips to Dominican Republic and Ecuador. Her areas of interest include systematic theology, discipleship, narrative theology, Latin American theology, feminist theology, and missiology. She hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology and become a professor one day, serving in Latin America and the United States. You can follow her on social media and read her blog De vuelta a lo básico.

Cover Image: Painting “Flower Portrait” by Tamara Adams. See more of her artwork HERE.

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[1] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Villancico, or Carol, in celebration of St. Catherine of Alexandria (1692), quoted by Theresa A. Yugar, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Feminist Reconstruction of Biography and Text (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), vi.


[4] I use the term Minority World to refer to Western cultures. The use of this term (1) decentralizes the West as point of reference and (2) points to the fact that the majority of the world’s population (and the church) is not found there.


A READING LIST ON LATINX AND LATIN AMERICAN THEOLOGIES

Theology.


Méndez, Dinorah B. *Evangelical in Mexico: Their Hymnody and Its Theology*. Peter Lang, 2008.


**Church History.**


**Old Testament.**


**Christian Ethics.**


**Homiletics.**


**Missiology.**


**Ministry.**


**Identity.**


**Spanish-reading people:** Keep an eye out for the *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo: Estudio de toda la Biblia desde Latinoamérica*, edited by C. René Padilla, Milton Acosta, and Rosalee Velloso.