



Ada María Isasi-Díaz

1943-2012

Obituary

Dr. Ada María Isasi-Díaz died on May 13, 2012 at age 69 after having received the Holy Sacraments. Ada María was born in La Habana, Cuba, on March 22, 1943, the daughter of Josefina Díaz de Isasi and Domingo G. Isasi-Battle (RIP 2005). She lived her youth in Cuba, studying in La Habana where she graduated from Merici Academy in 1960.

She moved to the United States in 1960 with her family, and soon after entered the Ursuline novitiate in Santa Rosa, California. After finishing studies at New Rochelle College, NY, Ada was sent to Lima, Peru by the order to work among the poor in the “barriada de Miramar”. There she became passionate in caring for the dispossessed and building the “kingdom” of God.

After leaving the convent in 1969, she lived with her family in the United States. Realizing that she had a calling to be an educator and a voice for the underprivileged, Ada María moved in 1975 to Rochester, New York where she served in two inner city parishes and became involved in the Women’s Ordination Conference (WOC).

Ada María earned a Masters of Divinity and a Doctorate in Theology from Union Theological Seminary, in New York City in 1990. At Union, she started her lifelong engagement and leadership in the community of Liberation Theologians. Continuing her commitment to women’s issues, she coined the term *Mujerista* theology to make explicit the Latina voice in Feminist Liberation Theology.

In 1991, Ada María became a professor of Ethics and Theology at Drew University, Madison, NJ from where she retired in 2009. Students were very fond of her and described her as someone who was a demanding teacher, fair, honest and passionate. While at Drew University, she co-founded the Hispanic Theological Institute for training of Hispanic Theologians.

She was a prolific writer, completing eight books, and many scholarly articles. Her seminal work was “*Mujerista Theology: a Theology for the 21st Century*.”

In memoriam

*“In my understanding of solidarity
and compassion, it’s not in any way
about what I do or what I give others.
It’s the interconnections we create
with other, how we support
each other.”*

*Ada María Isasi-Díaz
In Soujourners, March 2012*



“Ada María was a great visionary and prophet who lived what she believed. A real champion of the poor and oppressed.”

Dr. Virgilio Elizondo

*Professor of Pastoral and Hispanic Theology;
Fellow, Institute for Latino Studies and Kellogg Institute,
University of Notre Dame*

“I am still dealing with the shock of Ada María's passing. She was known to the academic community for championing causes of inclusivity and justice within the church universal. But I know this from personal experience. I was living in Boston when she called to invite me to be a student of the Drew Graduate School. She told me there were very few Latinos/as and I would be made welcomed at Drew. To be sure, there was only a half dozen of us in the graduate school and about as many in the Theology School. She could be an intimidating presence, but always an advocate for the marginalized. In my longtime association with Drew I came to regard her as *familia*. The acute absence of her gifts and person grieve me deeply and will be felt in our extended community for many years to come. May she rest in peace.”

Dr. Daniel F. Flores

*President, Sociedad Wesleyana (Hispanic Wesleyan Society)
Adjunct Instructor, Perkins Youth School of Theology
Pastor, La Trinidad United Methodist Church, Fort Worth, Texas*

“I first met Ada María almost twenty years ago, in the early 80s. She was then a student at Union Theological Seminary, and we had opportunity to discuss her work and compare notes. Significantly, she had returned to the United States from Perú in the same year in which I returned from Puerto Rico. Therefore, much of our conversation focused on what we now found in this country and in its church – particularly the Latino church.

What we found was not very encouraging. But what most impressed me was her unflinching commitment to justice and to the wellbeing of the poor. While she was articulate when speaking on these issues, her commitment was not limited to talk. Indeed, much of our discussion took place on a very busy afternoon while she was working with underprivileged children, trying to improve their education and their self-esteem. Thus, even while sharing our discouragement this very act of sharing was quite encouraging.

From that day on, I never found Ada María remiss or slow in her advocacy and action for justice – justice for Hispanics in the United States, justice for Latinas within the Latino community and beyond, justice for women in the Church, justice for all women and for the poor throughout the world. On most issues we agreed. But even on those points where we disagreed, her commitment was undeniable and admirable. On those issues, as with many others, she was a valuable colleague who has left a mark in my life and thought, as she has in the lives and thoughts of countless others.

We shall miss Ada María. We shall miss her loving smile, and we shall miss her firm stance and her anger on issues she deemed to be of crucial importance. May we all prove to be worthy heirs and continuators of her work!”

Dr. Justo González

Former HTI Executive Director

Prolific Author

“When I was a doctoral student, I was concerned about the fact that there were no women scholars on my proposed dissertation committee. Ada reassured me with her wisdom, telling me that a scholar's gender was not the key, but rather how a scholar addressed gender issues in their work. There were many male scholars, she reiterated, who were strong feminists and whose alliance in working with women was most necessary. I continue to value this advice, especially because it came from Ada María, the scholar who first made me keenly aware of our community of mujeres and their incandescent and indispensable insights.”

Dr. Cecilia González-Andrieu,
Assistant Professor of Theological Studies
Loyola Marymount University

“I had the privilege of being Ada María’s colleague at Drew University for four years. In fact, I went to work at Drew because of her. I still remember the day she called me and told, in a very cordial but firm tone of voice: “Lety, there is going to be an opening in New Testament at Drew and I want you to come and work with us.” I knew there was a long process of application before I could aspire to getting the position at Drew, but I could tell that in Adita’s mind there was no doubt we were going to be colleagues! During my four years at Drew we shared many conversations during meals, meetings, visits in her office and at home. She was my neighbor at Drew, our offices were next to each other.

She was a mentor to me long before people were talking about mentoring. She was always interested in my scholarship and invited me to write and collaborate with her. When I was still a student she invited me to participate at an EATWOT meeting (Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians) in Miami. Later on, when I was already at Drew, she invited me to participate in a couple of AAR panels, one of them with Sandra Cisneros. She was one of our

mentors in the Latinas in Theology group. She was a special friend and mentor, a brilliant scholar and a committed theologian. What I admired most about her was her passion for justice and social transformation, which was the heart of her Mujerista Theology. She was a great human being.”

Dr. Leticia Guardiola

*Assistant Professor of Christian Scriptures
Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry*

“Ada was my professor at Drew University. During my Ph.D. course work, she taught me two required courses for my concentration in ethics, but the one I mostly thank her for was the methods class. She also supervised my work with the organization of Drew's(TTC VIII) Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, "Decolonizing Epistemology: New Knowing in Latina/o Philosophy and Theology", during which I met many of the most influential Latina/o philosophers and theologians. The time spent with the planning and organizing and then finally the actual event of the colloquium was also a personal time of getting to know each other, and of learning about each other's lives, and a space in which I experienced Ada's grace and solidarity toward me.

Particular to Ada was her strength, she certainly knew how to be strong, but also how to enforce her strength in all settings. Her teaching methods were sometimes overbearing with demands, but her intent was to make us the best at what we do. In the end, she taught through strength, but also emphasized that for each of us our strength comes from our lived experience. Ethical reflection for Ada was contextual, and it was driven by a strong sense of justice, and perhaps frustration. She taught us at Drew that taking time for meditation and reflection was also important, especially for those of us, who like her, suffer from extreme frustration with the injustices of this world. Her sharing after her trip to Santiago de Compostela

was most revealing of Ada's spirituality of doing with God, one which she also shared with the community of sisters outside the walls of the institutional church. Her demands, and those of her community, were to be taken into account, to be seen. This she also reflected in her academic work. In this way her life and work were interwoven.

Ada's unique contribution to theological and ethical education is making a strong point to the world that Latina/Hispana voices and experiences had to be taken into consideration, that strategies of organizing these women had to come from within the community, that religious praxis should not be divorced from ethical/religious faith, and that naming one's process is a tool of strength."

Matilde Moros

*Assistant Dean of Special Programs and Initiatives
Acting Director of Field Education
New Brunswick Theological Seminary*

"Ada and I met at Union Theological Seminary in 1983 when she came to do her studies there. From the very beginning she was an experienced and encouraging presence to the rag tag group of M.Div. students enrolled. We were so few that we sought each other out for support, encouragement and inspiration. And although I am sure she had her own challenges and stressors she was always an available ear for whatever was going on with us and always had a positive word.

Thanks to Ada María I was able to participate in a trip to China as part of a group organized by Letty Russell. A group of theologically trained women from Asia, the United States and Sweden participated in dialogues with both secular and theologically engaged women in China in 1990. Afterwards a conference with a wider group of participants met in Hong Kong to discuss the learnings from

the trip and the issue of women and feminists from our various countries of origin. Ada María and I were reminiscing about this trip when last I saw her at AAR in San Francisco in 2011. We laughed as we remembered the looks we got from people in China as we walked by in a group of 10-12 women of all shades, shapes and sizes, wearing a variety of styles of dress. But for me what I will always remember most about that trip was how Ada María could and would engage me on issues of politics although we came from very different experiences and therefore often had very different conclusions about what would be the best strategy for addressing injustice, especially economic injustice in the world. I was a young revolutionary minded "*independentista*," and she was woman who had lived through the challenges and disillusionment of her own revolutionary ideals. But unlike the others on the trip she did not dismiss my heartfelt critiques of U.S. policies that left families in poverty and silenced or dismissed voices of protest with slogans and patriotic ideals that did not include or reflect the reality and dreams of all. She had more reason than any of the other U.S. women for dismissing me as idealistic and instead she engaged me in a way that gave me a clearer perspective and a sharpened critique. This was how I experienced her gifts as a teacher and a thinker. Knowing her has made me a more nuanced intellectual, and has made me more open and engaging of people who do not agree with my political/theological commitments. She taught me how to engage difference with respect and to grow from my conversations with those who think differently from me. For this I will always love Ada and feel the loss of my big sister, hearing her voice calling me Altita, her *hermanita por siempre*."

Altagracia Pérez

Ph.D. Candidate

Claremont School of Theology

“Ada María was a model of an organic intellectual/theologian. She had deep roots in the various communities she gladly served, and from that communal experience her Mujerista theology was born. I first met Dr. Isasi-Díaz in 1999, at the HTI Summer Workshop. As a first year M.Div. student at the time I was moved by her availability and her friendliness. That remained a constant throughout the years. One of my fondest memories of her was at another HTI Summer Workshop when she joined our writing session as a participant and openly shared with us her own struggles in writing the book she was working on at the time. She did it because she knew it would be liberating for us, and it was. Her legacy lives on in her writings but also in the impact she made in so many of us. I hope she is now enjoying the kin-dom that she so faithfully served when she was on this side of eternity.”

Dr. Carmelo Santos

Professorial Lecturer

Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Associate Pastor, St Mark's / San Marcos Lutheran Church,

Springfield, Virginia

“One of the things I'll remember most about Ada is how open she was to hearing new perspectives and ideas. I first met Ada when I was in a master's program at Harvard Divinity School, where we organized the school's first conference on Latino/a theology. As we were getting to know each other, she asked about the kind of work I was doing. I mentioned a couple of recent term papers I had written, and I was completely taken aback when she told me that she would like to read one of them. Wow, what an honor! And even in the last few months of her life, before her health started to take a turn for the worse, what a privilege it was to still be able to get her feedback, which was always honest and critical. I know I am not alone in saying that I appreciated her tough love. She made us all better thinkers, and through her own scholarship, courage, and

conviction she inspired us to be better human beings. Thank you for being you, Ada.”

Dr. Christopher Tirres

*Assistant Professor of Religious Studies
DePaul University*

“What a scholar, what a human being! Ada María was one of the most dynamic forces I have known in the academy (and beyond). Her passion and commitment to justice-making and justice-speaking carved a large place within the academy as a place of respite and creativity for so many folks across the racial ethnic spectrum who knew that so many of the orthodoxies we have in theological thinking should be held suspect when they promoted the devaluation of peoples. Her clear-headed vision for the church as a place of transformation and healing rather than one of relentless dogmatism. She was a scholar activist/activist scholar *par excellence*. As a radical voice for equality, she had little patience for unjust structures and the people who maintained them—but she never treated these people as objects. She saw them as human and deeply flawed, but refused to demonize their humanity. Ada held herself and the rest of us accountable to the demands of the gospel message to open our hearts wide and let our spirits soar into a new creation. Like so many others, I shall miss her fierce persistence and soul deep laughter. What a blessing she was and continues to be for all us way down here under the sun. *En la Lucha.*”

Dr. Emilie M. Townes

*Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American
Religion and Theology
Yale Divinity School*

*Visiting Scholar in Residence and the Center for the Study of
Black Faith and Life Visiting Scholar (2012-2013)
Chicago Theological Seminary*

“I had the distinct pleasure of knowing Ada María Isasi-Díaz in dual capacities—first, as teacher and dissertation adviser/reader and then as a colleague and friend in the academic profession. During my years at Drew University’s Graduate School, from 1995-2000, she served as my teacher for a course and then as third reader of my doctoral dissertation. After completion of my doctoral degree we worked on a few book projects together, and on various conferences and academic initiatives. I must admit that at times it was not easy to work with Ada María. She was an activist at heart, and a woman of unflinching conviction. At times this activist spirit and tenacity could veer into the territory of unyieldingness. But that was part of what made Ada María great and successful. And what could never be doubted was that she was a caring woman of great heart. I will remember and miss Ada María for many reasons. But among these will be those famous words that she set down in her iconic work [*En La Lucha/In The Struggle*] and that she would often cite in life—“*la vida es lucha*.” Ada María’s *lucha* may have come to an end, but for those of us who remain in this world is left the responsibility of taking up Ada María’s “*lucha*” for social justice. ¡*Gracias Ada por tu lucha, tu esfuerzo, y tu ejemplo!* We shall never forget you!”

Dr. Benjamín Valentín

*Professor of Theology and Culture, and
Director of the Orlando E. Costas Lectureship in Latino/a
Theology and Religion
Andover Newton Theological School*

Palabra de Mujer



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Dedicó su vida a la justicia social para las mujeres

Ada María Isasi-Díaz: en lucha contra el patriarcado

Con la muerte de Ada María Isasi-Díaz el pasado 13 de mayo se ha apagado una de las voces más lúcidas e influyentes del feminismo latino y de la teología feminista en Estados Unidos y América Latina.

■ Juan José Tamayo *

Nacida en 1943 en La Habana (Cuba), se trasladó con sus padres a U.S.A. en 1960 y se graduó en el College of New Rochelle de Nueva York en Historia Europea. Durante la década de los 80 del siglo pasado estudió teología en Union Theological Seminary en Nueva York, donde obtuvo el doctorado en la especialidad de Ética Cristiana, disciplina que explicó a lo largo de dos décadas en la escuela de Teología de la Universidad de Drew (New Jersey), junto con otras asignaturas relacionadas con la cultura hispana y la religión en los Estados Unidos, como Cultura hispánica, Ética del poder, Teoría de la justicia, Ética social, Ética ambiental, así como una excelente formación interdisciplinaria, que se reflejaba en sus libros y en sus conferencias, cargadas de referencias históricas, antropológicas y filosóficas.

A su formación interdisciplinar hay que sumar su profundo conocimiento del mundo entero: América Latina, Estados Unidos, Asia, África, Europa, de sus tradiciones culturales y religiosas, de las diferentes cosmovisiones. Lo que le permitió experimentar la diversidad étnico-cultural y el pluriverso religioso de los pueblos, y pensar la realidad histórica y la naturaleza no dual y dicotómicamente, y menos en términos de confrontación, sino en clave de pluralismo, respeto, diálogo y convivencia. Nunca se desligó de su Cuba natal, que llevaba en su mente y en su corazón.

El Evangelio: su punto de partida

Varios fueron los renaceres que tuvo a lo largo de su vida, según su propio testi-

In memoriam

"Es mi modesto homenaje a una persona cabal, a una amiga entrañable, a una mujer coherente, a una teóloga feminista de la liberación." (Juan José Tamayo)

monio. El primero sucedió en Lima (Perú), donde trabajó como misionero de 1967 a 1969. Fue allí donde vivió en su propia carne la realidad de la pobreza, tomó conciencia de que la justicia era el mensaje central del evangelio y practicó la solidaridad con los pobres y excluidos como condición necesaria del trabajo por la justicia. Aquella experiencia la marcó de por vida y se convirtió en su principal sede de identidad a la hora de vivir un cristianismo comprometido con los sectores más vulnerables de la sociedad.

Su segundo renacer fue durante la Primera Conferencia para la Organización de las Mujeres en Detroit (Michigan), donde se despertó en ella la conciencia feminista que, unida a la opción por los pobres, constituyó el horizonte de su intensa actividad intelectual, que desarrolló en Estados Unidos, América Latina, Asia y África. Fue allí donde empezó a tomar conciencia de que dos de las principales raíces de la opresión a la que se ven sometidos los pueblos son la pobreza y el sexismo, lo que pudo constatar de manera más acusada en el Tercer Mundo. Pobreza y sexismo no coexisten en paralelo, sino de modo de rizoma y se refuerzan mutuamente.

Defensa de las mujeres latinas

Su trabajo tenía por objetivo un fin definido: la lucha contra las raíces y las manifestaciones del sexismo presente en la sociedad, en el mundo de las religiones, en las iglesias cristianas y en la teología, incluida la de la liberación latinoamericana, como sensible, en sus orígenes, a la discriminación y las desigualdades de género. La lucha centró su manera especial en la defensa de las mujeres latinas dentro de los Estados Unidos, que sufrían una múltiple opresión: por ser mujeres, por ser inmigrantes, por pertenecer a las sectores empobrecidos, por el desconocimiento del inglés y, en el caso de la población negra, por el color de la piel.

A partir de esa experiencia cultivó la teología feminista en diálogo con otras teologías de la liberación, incorporando las categorías del pensamiento feminista y reubicándolas en el mundo de las mujeres latinas. Su principal y más original aportación fue la teología mujerista, que expuso en conferencias, artículos y libros, entre los que destaca *Teología mujerista. Una teología para el siglo XXI*.



Ada Maria Igasi-Díaz

Teología mujerista

Dos son las claves de esta teología. Una, la constatación y el análisis de los estrechos vínculos que unen las diferentes formas de marginación de las mujeres: sexismo, clasismo, etno-racismo y marginación social. Otra, la propuesta ética de una justicia de género con sólidas bases evangélicas. Ada María creía, con razón, que el movimiento feminista euro-americano o no tomaba en cuenta "el prejuicio étnico/racial que sufrimos las latinas en Estados Unidos" o no reconocía la "importancia masculina".

Esa es una de sus
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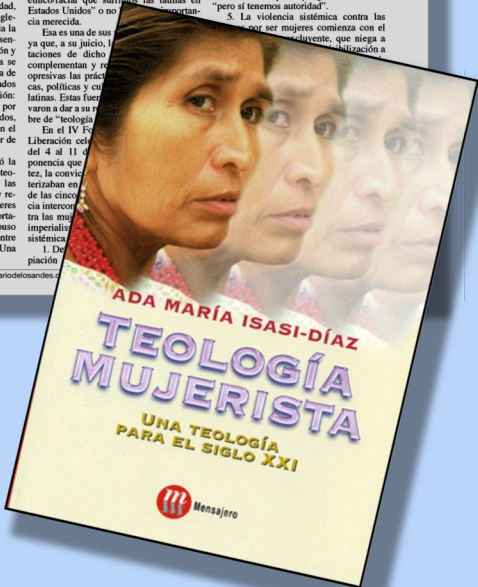
nuestro beneficio o provecho. En su aplicación a las mujeres tiene el nombre de "feminización de la pobreza", que consiste en el aprovechamiento de lo que las mujeres producen en beneficio de los varones. Por ejemplo, las mujeres ejercen la mayor actividad agrícola en el mundo y solo se benefician del 10%.

2. Calificó la marginación como de la más peligrosa forma de violencia e injusticia por la minusvaloración de las mujeres que implica, ya que cuando estas son marginadas se justifica con expresiones como "ustedes no valen", "ustedes no merecen nuestra consideración". O, más sibilinaamente todavía, "hablemos primero de la pobreza, luego de las mujeres", "resolvamos primero el problema de la pobreza, después nos ocuparemos de resolver lo referente a las mujeres". Y lo más grave es que las mujeres terminan por internalizar lo que la sociedad piensa de ellas.

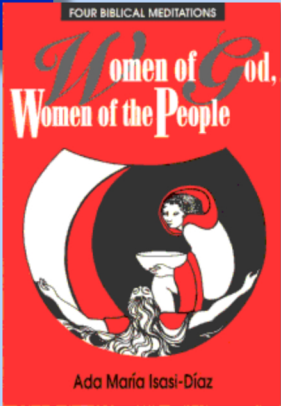
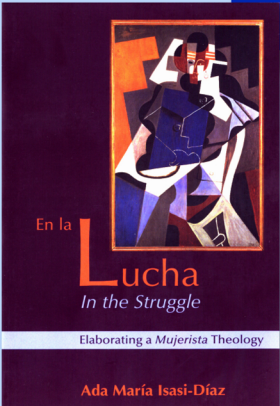
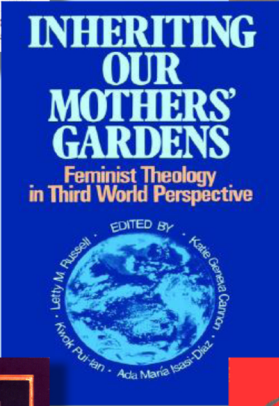
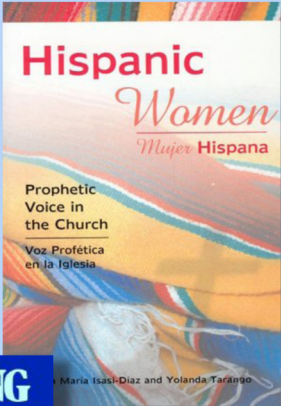
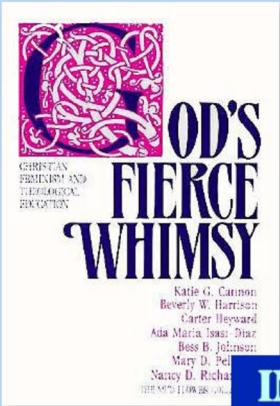
3. Imperialismo: los poderosos imponen sus prejuicios como normativos. Por ejemplo, los prejuicios de los hombres sobre las mujeres; los de los heterosexuales sobre los homosexuales. Los prejuicios se revistan de objetividad y terminan por imponerse como verdades incuestionables.

4. Falta de poder. Ada María distingue muy certeramente entre autoridad y poder. La autoridad es interior. El poder es exterior y se ejerce sobre otra persona en beneficio de quien lo detenta. Las mujeres rara vez han tenido poder y siguen sin tenerlo, "pero sí tenemos autoridad"

5. La violencia sistémica contra las mujeres por ser mujeres comienza con el embarazo, que es excluyente, que niega a las mujeres su propia sexualidad y su capacidad de decisión sobre su propia vida.



Legacy

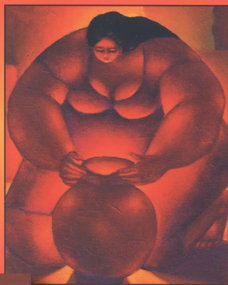


Hispanic/Latino Theology

Challenge and Promise

Edited by Ada María Isasi-Díaz
and Fernando F. Segovia

Mujerista THEOLOGY



by Ada María Isasi-Díaz



Camino a Emaús

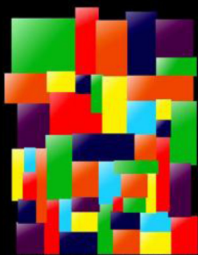
Compartiendo el ministerio de Jesús

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La Lucha Continues

Mujerista Theology

Ada María Isasi-Díaz



DECOLONIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES

Latina/o Theology and Philosophy

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- To increase the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Latina/o Ph.D. students across the nation by uniting and leveraging institutional resources (human, financial, and infrastructural).
- To increase the presence of Latina/o faculty – especially tenured faculty – in seminaries, schools of theology and universities.
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