

# FROM THE HEART OF OUR PEOPLE

Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology

Edited by

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Para Ricardo, compañero y amigo.  
Para Ramón, Jacqueline y mis nietos.

O.O.E.

Para Marian, compañera, amiga y esposa:  
*"la danza nupcial es nuestra comunión en la vida de Dios."*  
Para mis hijos Joshua, Ana y Emmanuel.

M.H.D.

**Errors in pages 32 and 35**

# Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology

*Toward an Intercultural Theology  
for the Third Millennium*



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*The unity of the one and universal communion seems to be dawning in the local churches with the beginning of the Third Millennium.*

—VIRGIL ELIZONDO, 1984

My contribution to the present volume deals with basic questions of theological epistemology, as these refer to the elaboration of a U.S. Latino/a systematic theology.<sup>1</sup> This chapter offers and discusses a number of perspectives that will allow the reader to better understand the identity, internal methodological structure, and purpose of our theology.

Open to critical dialogue and further development—as must be the case with every reflection that deals with human reality—I want to focus here on the epistemological and hermeneutic principles that underlie U.S. Latino/a theological activity, and which allow this activity to articulate the faith of our Christian communities in a reflective, methodic, and comprehensive manner.

Creating a complete system that would coherently explain and articulate the faith, beliefs, symbols, and formulations of the Christian commu-

nities throughout the world is an impossible dream for any contemporary theologian. The age of the *summae theologicae* is gone. The elaboration of systematic theology is increasingly a communitarian work that engages in critical dialogue and collective reflection. Two examples of this contemporary, collective approach to theology are the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS), and the several projects sponsored by the Center for the Study of Latino/a Catholicism at the University of San Diego. ACHTUS, for instance, understands its mission as seeking “to accompany the Hispanic communities of the United States, helping them discern critically the movement of the Spirit in their historical journey; thematize the faith experience of the people within their historical, socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts; encourage interdisciplinary scholarly collaboration . . .”<sup>2</sup> This chapter seeks to be consequent with that vision. Indeed, the very publication of the present volume is an example of theology done within that shared perspective.

In the first part of my essay I discuss a number of elements that will allow us to contextualize the work of U.S. Latino/a theology within its specific reality. These elements will raise for us a number of topics that will be treated later in the chapter. Consequently, the discussions of the first part must not be understood as sufficient in themselves but rather as integrally connected to the later thematic reflections, because both parts of this chapter respond to and are made possible by the reality within which our theologizing occurs.

In the second part of the essay I discuss the epistemological foundations, fundamental principles, and sources and loci which characterize U.S. Latino/a theology. The central proposition that runs throughout this chapter is that U.S. Latino/a theology is, from its very beginning, *an intercultural enterprise* that has no other route to theological knowledge but interculturality itself. Our theology elaborates its thematic reflection through an intercultural theological method, thereby offering the wider theological academy a workable and appropriate model. The social and religious relevance of theology in the third millennium will greatly depend on its ability to incorporate as methodological axis the *interculturality* that characterizes our contemporary world.

## LATINO/A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

In this first part I want to discuss the problems, limits, and possibilities that U.S. Latino/a theology faces in its attempts to articulate methodologically the lived, reflected, and celebrated faith of our communities. I am thinking here of different elements or aspects which can be understood as components of the historical and cultural milieu within which we do theology.<sup>3</sup> These elements bear significant implications for the self-under-

standing, and for the theoretical and methodological development of our theology, just as they also point to the latter's ethico-political characteristics, concerns, challenges, and options. Not claiming to be exhaustive, I propose to reflect here on seven of these problems and possibilities.

### ***The Weight of Western Theological Tradition***

There are many definitions and understandings of systematic theology, with varying degrees of conceptual sophistication.<sup>4</sup> Together with the great tradition of Catholic theology, I understand systematic theology as an attempt to coherently and in an orderly fashion examine and explain the lived and reflected faith of the Christian community. The task of systematic theology is not the mere repetition of dogmas or of old formulas but is rather an effort at making understandable the central contents of the faith in accord with Tradition and the present-day experiences of the community. Even if today we must recognize the limits of all systematic theologies, the preceding understanding of its task implies a number of difficulties for a possible formulation and construction of U.S. Latino/a systematics.

Arguably, the greater difficulty comes from the current definitions of what *is* systematic theology. Today, at the doorstep of the third millennium, it is not enough simply to admit the intrinsically historical character of all theological knowledge. It is no longer enough to acknowledge that this historical character prevents us from employing metaphysical or conceptualist approaches to the task of theologizing. The historicity of all theological knowledge makes us recognize that dominant understandings of what *is* systematic theology—understandings which have been held as normative and universal—are no more than the condensation of Western theological traditions which have predominated in Europe and among European-American theologians.<sup>5</sup> Today we must also recognize that, although this contemporary theology is undergoing important transformations in method and contents, these changes are still occurring within the horizon of dominant Western culture. Furthermore, even those theologies which adopt critical-constructive methods, and which may allow us to identify the theoretical limitations of modern and liberation theologies, still construct themselves through the incorporation of perspectives *unilaterally* created within the Western academy.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, Western definitions of revelation, faith, and theology continue to be considered as rules of truth which should be assimilated or “inculturated” by other (i.e., non-European or European-American) communities of faith. This is why we should acknowledge that dominant understandings of what systematic theology is or should be remain profoundly *monocultural*. We must also recognize that the way the hegemonic theological academy constructs knowledge remains deeply embedded in the *patriarchal ideology* which has

been so pervasive throughout the history of Christian theology. Consequently, Western understandings and definitions of what systematic theology is, or should be, are increasingly insufficient for a theological method—like U.S. Latino/a theology—that chooses to deal with the true historicity of faith.

### ***The Need to Historicize the Fact of Theological Diversity***

It is no longer enough simply to recognize, as an inevitable and established fact, the diversity of voices, faces, and knowledge which construct and articulate their own visions of God, of salvation, of the world, and of themselves. Every theological expression communicates the understanding it has of the Christian vision within the historic-cultural realities within which the faith is reflected upon and lived. Consequently, every theological expression bears the tensions embedded in the historicity of knowledge, thereby sharing historicity with all other theological expressions.

Every theological expression, as Fernando Segovia rightly points out, “is a voice in search of freedom, independence, and autonomy . . . a voice that wishes to lay claim to its own reality and experience, give expression to its own view of God and the world, and chart its own future.”<sup>7</sup> These voices come from everywhere—from the poor, from oppressed women, from marginalized races and cultures, from the countryside and the city. What we must now recognize is that these voices reject the dominant intellectual traditions underlying the contemporary theological academy. In fact, these dominant traditions sprang from economic, cultural, and intellectual centers of power, and have demonstrated their inability to eliminate the great divisions that affect today's world—especially the North-South geopolitical divisions, the sexual divisions between men and women, and numerous other racial, ethnic, and religious divisions.

The new voices that embody today's theological diversity demand that the dominant intellectual traditions acknowledge their own historicity, their own epistemological assumptions, and examine their contribution to the creation and preservation of this increasingly divided world.<sup>8</sup> Historicity—a characteristic equally shared by all theological expressions—allows us to suggest that it is now time to examine rigorously the impact our theologies have on our societies and cultures; that we have the possibility of exchanging that which underlies our understanding of Christian life by recognizing the provisional and open nature of all theological affirmations; and that we can move beyond the monopoly exercised by dominant understandings without falling into either reductive relativism or the rhetoric of abstract unity. The fact of theological diversity, characterized by historicity, challenges the worldwide theological community to revise the very foundations on which contemporary theology rests.

### **“Parcels of Reason” and Intercultural Theological Dialogue**

This third element is closely linked to the preceding one, although here I will underline the problem of communication among different rationalities. The emergence of many new theological expressions has generated new questions concerning the articulation of reason and rationality in contemporary theology.<sup>9</sup> For many theologians who are bringing forth new theological expressions, these questions have to do with their increased awareness that the current understandings of reason and rationality not only continue to bear a heavy monocultural and androcentric weight, but also that such notions have been used against them because of their refusal to work according to the univocal and unilateral rules that the dominant academy has given to these notions.

Leonardo Boff points out that “it is true that the pluralism of rational forms freed us from old hierarchies and totalitarian domination schemes, which used just one type of reason. But it gave way to another problem: how do the different rational forms relate between themselves?”<sup>10</sup> Roberto Goizueta raises the question: “Is theological pluralism possible?”<sup>11</sup> The possible answers must come not from prefabricated theories about knowledge in the abstract, or from nonexistent metaphysical realms. The answers to these questions must come from the historicity of the subjects of reason who know within their concrete reality. That is why I use the expression “parcels of reason,” because each subject assumes his or her human existence as such, from it constructs a personal mode of arriving at knowledge, and creates *conceptual frameworks for grounding visions of the world with valid claims to universality*. This is the context within which we should raise the possibility of communication among historical subjects who share the human condition, and the task of theologizing from within it.

The contributions of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt to intercultural philosophy seem very pertinent to theology.<sup>12</sup> Instead of viewing the diversity of subjects who incarnate diverse rationalities as a problem without solution, Fornet-Betancourt proposes a first stage in which subjects and rationalities enter an *intercultural dialogue*:

We see, in the multiplicity of voices through which reason may express itself, the fundamental motive that should bindingly summon us to dialogue, in that those voices are not ordered *a priori* by a metaphysical unity . . . they are historical voices, contingent expressions that articulate themselves as such from within the irreducible background of different life worlds. They are thus loaded with context and culture . . . That is why they are also voices of reason, manifestations of intellectual autonomy or autochthony. They affirm their right to “see” things from within their context and culture . . . That load of contextuality and cultural historicity . . . becomes a first challenge or

problem for intercultural dialogue, since it indicates that in that dialogue rationalities will confront each other . . . carrying in themselves their own and specific historical load which in turn separates them; but which, on the other hand, represents precisely that which each (rationality) must transmit to the other. Therefore, far from seeing in that historical-cultural load—in that dimension of lived and projected history present in every form of rationality—an impediment to dialogue, we must assume it as the true possibility for non-dominant communication.<sup>13</sup>

With this in mind, I suggest that today we need to move beyond the mere recognition of the existence of “parcels of reason.” We must move to explore an intercultural theological dialogue in a consistent and systematic manner. For this dialogue to become a reality we must leave behind the notion that some rationalities are like darkened mirrors, bad copies, transplants, or partial “inculturations” of other rationalities held to be “superior.” The proposed dialogue is not a confrontation between theological positions, nor is it “about” specific topics or controversial theories; it is rather a theological dialogue “with” and “from” the limitations and possibilities opened by the historicity proper to each engaged rationality. This intercultural dialogue is done by “doing” it, by entering the process of interdiscursive communication as a condition for the possibility of creating new theological models that would do justice to the universal character of all parcels of reason.

### **The Critique of Dominant Intellectual Traditions**

This element has to do with the critique of the present situation that characterizes the dominant academy in the United States. Roberto Goizueta rightly points out that a theology that seeks to systematize the faith as reflected upon and lived by our people today has the duty of critiquing and superseding the two intellectual traditions prevalent in the dominant theological academy: *modern liberal individualism* and *postmodern deconstructionism*.<sup>14</sup> Both traditions operate with notions of reason and of the human person which are unacceptable to theologies linked to the faith of marginalized groups and are impediments to any possibility of theological pluralism.

The first of these two traditions, founded on theoretical reason, leads to reducing reality, truth, and knowledge to cold, quantifiable formulas:

The reduction of truth and knowledge to that which can be known with certainty and objectivity has a further corollary: that alone is true, and counts as knowledge, which can be universalized . . . thus . . . the particularity and uniqueness of each human life is sacrificed

to the abstract, universal concept or number . . . Consequently, the judgments reached by theoretical reason have often been astonishingly unreasonable: the desire to create a completely rational world has resulted in a world torn apart by conflict, violence, distrust, fear and anxiety.<sup>15</sup>

The second of these traditions, instead of advancing or supporting a theology that communally reflects on what may have primacy in the Christian vision of the world, in fact erects walls that prevent all possibility of interdiscursive communication. Furthermore, this second tradition represents a radical break in the conditions that would permit any possible basic consensus on the fundamental truths that ground human dignity, justice, or the integrity of the world. Goizueta further indicates that

for the postmodernist, "truth" and "knowledge" are always radically particular, radically contextual, radically relative, radically ambiguous, and always in flux. Differences are fundamental; similarities and unity are illusory. Indeed, everything is difference, or otherness. This includes the self, or the subject, who is also radically heterogeneous, an artificial pastiche of radically disparate and ever fluctuating relations, identities, and experiences. The self as such (as some coherent and relatively stable entity which unifies all these differences) does not exist; what we call the "self" is simply "social location" . . . Postmodern culture reacts to the modern sacralization of universal, theoretical truth by rejecting the possibility of truth altogether.<sup>16</sup>

The impact of these two traditions on the reality within which the U.S. theological academy exists has been dramatic. Furthermore, these traditions have strengthened the prevalent cultural context, which is distinguished by its insensitivity toward suffering peoples, its radical individualism, its personality cults, its absolute relativization of values, its immediatist pragmatism, and its reduction of nondominant rationalities to their particular racial or cultural territories. These two traditions have also strengthened the ideology assumed as evident by the majority of the country's population. This ideology accepts excessive social fragmentation and agrees with the ethical values of modern capitalism. As theologian and economist Franz Hinkelammert has shown, conservative Protestantism lent its cultural ethos and its theoretical paradigm to modern capitalism and to today's dominant ideology in the United States.<sup>17</sup> In fact, with rare exceptions U.S. theologians have shown great resistance against seriously incorporating into their work a critical analysis of the political-economic theories that accompany contemporary patriarchal capitalism.

In today's situation it is no longer enough to recognize that theology finds itself in a context marked by the confrontation of rationalities, each of these establishing its own validity rules. What we now need is to acknowledge that theology exists in a context in which rationalities confront each other from *unequal* positions of power within the same reality. We need to recognize that, in this confrontation, the dominant intellectual traditions were established by the elites of the Western academy, and these continue to judge as irrational the critical-liberating rationality of marginalized groups. For the dominant academy, the intellectual discourse coming from these groups lacks theoretical rigor, it has not yet reached the necessary maturity to establish the parameters of a theological epistemology that could claim to be valid and true for the whole Christian community, and, consequently, the intellectual discourse of marginalized groups is seen as applicable only to the "contextual," "ethnic," or "particular" groups themselves. In this way feminist, Latino/a, African-American, and Native rationalities are relegated to a position of structural disadvantage in the intellectual world.

Theologians must recognize that the critique of dominant intellectual traditions includes a further critique of all theories and theologies that ultimately serve to perpetuate the anthropological reductionism that supports sexism, racism, homophobia, implicit or explicit colonialism, and a world fragmented in radically autonomous "monoculturalities." It is important to understand that if we do not recognize this, and if we do not judge it to be an opportunity for devising a new theological discourse, the present situation will continue to lead us down the path to dialogical breakdown, to a crisis of ethico-religious references, to the demise of collective projects founded on justice, to the destruction of hope, and finally to the acceptance of death. The result could only reflect a social reality ruled by the dominant principle of "divide and conquer."

It is no longer enough to speak of theological pluralism, because present social and intellectual reality have closed most doors.<sup>18</sup> The only road still open for us is the creation of new ways of thinking founded not on abstract theories but on the real life of our faith communities. According to Fernet-Betancourt, "the task would then be to start reformulating our means of knowledge from within the dispute of the several voices of reason and/or cultures, within a context of open communication; and not to start rebuilding theories which are monoculturally established."<sup>19</sup> This suggested route offers us better intellectual alternatives for dealing with the situation that currently characterizes the dominant U.S. academy, as well as dealing with the social interests and needs of our own communities. Consequently, Latino/a theology does not adopt reductive notions of reality, of the human person, of truth, or of knowledge, which are still evident in the dominant theological academy. On the contrary, our theology searches for notions and meanings from within the world of the vic-

tims of injustice, from within their humanizing reason, from within their creative intellectual traditions, and from within their liberating praxis.

### **The Redefinition and Broadening of Terms in Theological Discourse**

Contemporary critical theologies, notably the various liberation theologies, exhibit great flexibility in their use of terms, concepts, and notions that, in most cases, have their roots in the conceptual constructions of the Western European academy. This intellectual "mobility" allows them to apply terms without greater precision, while at the same time abandoning many of the rigid conceptual rules of the several Western theoretical disciplines. Most of the time this flexibility applies to terms that name specific operations of knowledge within philosophy, logic, and theories of knowledge in general. The implied variety attends to not only the terms but also to the order and sense given in the development of discourse or argumentation, as in the case of such concepts as *principle, proposition, premise, assumption, presupposition, criterion, element, imperative*, and others. These terms are often applied without further explanation or justification. Furthermore, we can find in liberation theologies a number of discourses that propose to speak about the same reality or on the same subject employing these terms, and yet each of these discourses may use the same terms with different meanings, or perhaps employ different terms for the same meanings, or even apply them differently and for different purposes. Let me offer a few examples of what I mean.

A given liberation theology may state that its starting point is "the lived experience, the consciousness of oppression and of liberation, and the struggle for life," but this same affirmation(s) may then be variedly referred to (by the theology's several authors) as "methodological principle,"<sup>20</sup> "pre-condition" of the theological task,<sup>21</sup> "a common perspective . . . a challenge and an imperative,"<sup>22</sup> "'first stage' in the methodological process,"<sup>23</sup> or simply the locus where we may discover a "theological method."<sup>24</sup> Although these terms individually have their own meaning and function, they are indistinctively employed in the articulation of theological discourse to refer (without further explanation) to the same methodological element—in this case, the starting point of a given theology. Even the English translations of some works by Latin American liberation theologians have adopted this terminological "mobility": what Jon Sobrino calls *el presupuesto fundamental*, in Spanish,<sup>25</sup> is translated as "the basic premise"<sup>26</sup>; what Raúl Vidales calls *primer momento fontal*<sup>27</sup> is simply eliminated in the translation and another phrase put in its place, thereby changing the meaning and power of the Spanish original.<sup>28</sup>

Another example refers to concepts or notions central to the Christian vision of liberation. The use, explanation, or application of these concepts or notions allows for terminological and epistemological diversity. Such

is the case with *option for the poor*, which has been theologically referred to as an "epistemological category,"<sup>29</sup> a "global horizon, explanatory principle, practical and epistemic locus, theological and ecclesiological locus,"<sup>30</sup> the "content of God's revelation,"<sup>31</sup> that which has "radicality, primacy, and ultimacy,"<sup>32</sup> and as an "ecclesiological characteristic,"<sup>33</sup> a "theological insight,"<sup>34</sup> an "antecedent option,"<sup>35</sup> the "core of liberation theology,"<sup>36</sup> and the "starting point of theology."<sup>37</sup>

The point I want to make by mentioning these few examples is that contemporary liberation theologies have adopted an attitude of great freedom vis-à-vis the intellectual traditions of the dominant Western academy. Liberation theologies have not rejected the Western academy's contributions; rather, they *have dialogued* with them, and they have *changed the uses and meanings* of inherited terms *from within* liberation theologies' *own historicity*, language, and theological goals. This flexibility could be interpreted as an arbitrary transgression of the methodological coherence of hegemonic theories. In fact, it should be seen as a relocation—a conceptual redefinition of terms whose meanings are found in the structural whole of each theological tradition. I am thereby suggesting that this flexibility is revealing an important conceptual movement: the transition from monocultural hegemonic theories to critical theories, which in the very process of their constitution consciously adopt an intercultural character, and which, in that movement, enrich, correct, and broaden the prevalent ways of knowledge. Furthermore, as Fernet-Betancourt points out, this movement fosters "the broadening of our hermeneutical, methodological and epistemological resources, thereby introducing us into a dialogic process with other life and thought traditions."<sup>38</sup> That is why we can no longer claim that liberation theologies (especially those from the Third World<sup>39</sup>) are just incomplete or "babbling" versions of Western hegemonic theories simply because the former employ conceptual elements from the latter.

### **The Influence of Latin American Liberation Theology on U.S. Latino/a Theology**

Latino/a theology in the United States has always been aware of its intimate relationship with its sister, Latin American liberation theology. U.S. Latino/a theologians have clearly acknowledged this relationship: "As its grateful heirs and dialogue partners, U.S. Hispanic theologians have appropriated many of the key insights of liberation theology, especially its methodological insights . . . The dialogue and friendship between Latin American and U.S. Hispanic theologians are stronger and more fruitful than ever."<sup>40</sup> The theological visions of Latino/a theologians "reveal a clear option for the optic and methodology of liberation theology."<sup>41</sup> "The link between Latin American and U.S. Latino theology is strong . . . Latino theologians in the United States soon recognized their need for a theology

concerned with changing the lives of the exploited."<sup>42</sup> "[Latin American] liberation theology, especially its praxis-oriented methodology, was embraced by a new generation of U.S. Hispanic thinkers with enthusiasm and hope."<sup>43</sup> "Theology from the perspective of Latina women recognizes itself . . . within the arena or common inspiration of both *feminist liberation theology* and *Latin American liberation theology*."<sup>44</sup> As I will discuss later, Latin American influence appears mostly on U.S. Latino/a theology's method,<sup>45</sup> hermeneutic,<sup>46</sup> and overall intention.<sup>47</sup>

However, U.S. Latino/a theology very early understood that the best way to incorporate seriously the contributions of Latin American liberation theology was to develop a theology that would sink its roots in, respond to, and accompany the faith experience of the Latino/a communities in the United States.

Latino/a theology also exposed some of the lacunae of Latin American theology, not as conceptual insufficiencies but as significant limitations of a theological project that wants to be rooted in the faith of the people. In my view, there are four main critiques that U.S. Latino/a theology brings to Latin American theology. The first one underlines the unilateral and reductive character of the social analysis carried out by Latin American theology, especially when it seems to exclusively emphasize the economic-political dimension of reality, dismissing its cultural, aesthetic, and racial dimensions. The second critique has been amply discussed by Orlando Espín, who underlines that liberation theology "has tended to downplay popular religion's role in the Church"<sup>48</sup> and has disdained popular Catholicism in theological epistemology, in spite of its being the omnipresent expression of the faith of the people throughout the continent.<sup>49</sup> The third critique exposes the androcentric and sexist character of that theology, which ignores violence against women, dismisses critical feminist theories and theologies, and condones the patriarchal foundations of Latin America's societies, churches, and cultures. The fourth critique addresses the scorn (often more implicit than explicit) with which a number of Latin American theologians view U.S. Latino/a theology. Woefully ignoring Latino/a theology's basic perspectives, some Latin Americans judge Latino/a theology to agree with neocapitalism's hegemonic ideology. These Latin Americans often assume that Latino/a theology "sold out" to "the system," that it ignores what real poverty is, has reneged of its Latin American cultural identity, and "fools around" with the extreme rationalism typical of the dominant theological academy in the United States.

Anyone aware of U.S. Latino/a theology, and of its social, cultural, and religious reality, might be surprised at such simplistic and erroneous analyses. Paradoxically, this same group that so severely misunderstands and misjudges U.S. Latino/a theology seems oblivious to the institutional benefits it seeks and receives from universities and foundations of the First World in general and from U.S. Latino/a theologians in particular. It is

indeed interesting to note the fact that when U.S. universities and theological centers want to discuss third-world theologies, they seek out the "outside" (in this case, Latin American) dialogue partners while dismissing or ignoring the theologies and theologians of the Third World "within" their own borders.

Dismissing without a hearing the whole of U.S. Latino/a theological contributions, this Latin American group assumes that *because* Latinos/as *geographically* reside in the United States they *must* also share in the wealth and hegemony.<sup>50</sup> Evidently, these gross misunderstandings and unfounded judgments reflect a provincial and reductive attitude untenable in today's "global village."

On the other hand, just as there are limitations in Latin American theologies, there are also clear examples of very serious attempts at dialogue and elaborating replies to these and other critiques. For example, Juan Luis Segundo noted the scant self-criticism of Latin American theologies and the need for their engaging other contemporary theological and epistemological critical theories.<sup>51</sup> João Batista Libânio has responded to criticism coming from conservative and neoconservative theologies.<sup>52</sup> Diego Irrarrázaval acknowledges the impact of popular religion on theology,<sup>53</sup> as well as the theological contributions of native peoples, blacks, and women.<sup>54</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez has recognized the contribution of feminist theology and is increasingly interested in U.S. Latino/a theological contributions.<sup>55</sup> Latin American women theologians have themselves critically articulated feminist theology in the continent, thereby exposing the sexism and patriarchal ideology of much of liberation theology.<sup>56</sup>

U.S. Latino/a theology's criticism of Latin American theology is intended solely as a call to dialogue. It is an invitation for it to adopt a more comprehensive critical and analytic perspective, to assume a more realistic vision of concrete reality, to move beyond its oneness and its conceptual reductionism, and to help create a space where all Christian voices will be welcome. This invitation stands as a call to dialogue with our sisters and brothers of the Latin American theological community as all of us struggle in faith and hope.

### ***The Temptations to Which U.S. Latino/a Theology Is Exposed***

Although there are arguably more temptations than we may be aware of, for our purposes here I will indicate only three. The first one is the temptation to construct theology according to the vocabulary and methodological canons of the dominant Western academy. In his work on the conditions and criteria for *intercultural theological dialogue*, Virgilio Elizondo points out that third-world theologians, "in their effort to successfully create a new theological reflection faithful to their particular cultures, may frequently feel constrained by their own and constant dependence on the

theological and philosophical works<sup>57</sup> that predominate in first-world churches and theologies. We must recognize that this temptation is still here for us, even after U.S. Latino/a theology's claim of autonomy—as expected of any theology conscious of its historicity. To confront this temptation we must further explore the Christian vision to which our communities witness through their daily resistance and struggle for liberation, as well as through their practical, spiritual, and intellectual resources. Because our theology is born out of multiple and complex expressions of faith, we can (a) accompany the Latino/a communities' journey with conceptual lucidity, (b) authentically dialogue with other theologies, (c) critically appropriate and creatively reformulate the best contributions of the Western academy, and (d) establish norms of academic excellence, of theoretical quality, and of political effectiveness in accord with the identity and goals of our theologizing.<sup>58</sup>

The second temptation is linked to the first. In opposition to dominant theology, U.S. Latino/a theology, from its very beginning, refused to be imprisoned in the university world. Our theology has always recognized its necessary and intimate connection to the religious and cultural reality of marginalized U.S. Latino/a communities. From the very beginning, our theology also recognized that these communities are traditionally excluded from the academic world and its production of knowledge. "We stand against a-historical, rationalist and conceptualist epistemologies,"<sup>59</sup> which only reinforce this exclusion from the hegemonic academy. This recognition, however, carries with it the temptation to think that our theology should merely or mainly address catechetical or "pastoral" concerns, and/or that Latino/a theology's academic language is "too sophisticated" for "the people," and/or that the popular religion which so permeates the daily lives of our people does not require "theoretical elucubrations." To fall into this pluriform temptation would imply the denial of the epistemological statute of popular religion, and it would tear apart our communities' power to define knowledge. This temptation would invalidate and reject the intellectual rigor required by the study of popular religion. In fact, the construction of a theoretically solid theology implies the rejection of dominant ideology in culture, society, and church—the very dominant ideology that still regards Latino/a communities as "not good enough" and as only deserving and capable of mediocre theologies. As Roberto Goizueta points out, "If the best, most sophisticated scholarship is not placed in the service of our communities, then it will continue to be used against them."<sup>60</sup> That is why we must continue exploring new ways to deal creatively with the existing tensions between the university and pastoral action, between the classroom and the parish, between the academy and the *barrio*. In the U.S. context we cannot afford the luxury of establishing false dichotomies or claims of autonomies between or among these contexts.

The third temptation derives from dominant society's ideological and cultural context. Latino/a theology does not accept any monocultural version of reality, and it rejects those ideologies which fragment persons and cultures. Nevertheless, our theology finds itself immersed in a social context that moves toward the economic and cultural homogenization of the world. This movement seeks to impose, on a global scale, the model of society promoted by neocapitalism (in its U.S. form) and a vision of the world founded on the dynamics of the marketplace. By imposing the dominant, exclusive vision of culture and society, this movement deepens the marginalization of those peoples and cultures without equal power to communicate to the world their alternative vision of reconciliation through justice, of human dignity, and of earth's oneness. It is in this context that U.S. Latino/a theology must deal with the temptation which claims that, in order to oppose the homogenizing avalanche of dominant ideology, Latino/a theology should entrench itself exclusively within Latino/a cultures. In other words, our theology may be tempted to articulate its religious vision of the world by appealing only to our own communities' spiritual or wisdom resources. This route, however, would inevitably lead to the imprisonment of Latino/a theology "within its own house." In order to confront this temptation we must underline our theology's understanding of the tension between the "universal" and the "particular."

Latino/a theology rejects the pretensions to abstract universality on which U.S. dominant ideology and society operate. At the same time, our theology believes that it cannot give up its liberating religious vision. It cannot give up the spiritual strength found in the historical experience of peoples and theologies that have created counter-hegemonic visions—against dominant homogenization, against the fragmentation of peoples, and against the assimilation of their distinct cultural world. U.S. Latino/a theology recognizes its fundamental connection with the worldwide movement of peoples and theologies which—from within their own realities, from within their own articulation of the believing word, and from within their own particularity—seek to strengthen a vision of worldwide solidarity as today's only possible alternative to the neocapitalist hegemonic avalanche. Only here, within the interrelatedness and interdependence of the several efforts to save our common home, can we question the tension between the universal and the particular. Only here can we utter and understand the expression so dear to Latino/a communities: *mi casa es su casa* (my home is your home). In "my" particular home "your" struggles for justice also find a home, because they are my struggles too, because the struggle is universal. In this sense, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt points out,

The question now is not how to integrate the particular in the movement of the universal. Rather, the question is how to graft the diversity of the world in the particular. We should thereby break the dia-

lectic circle of conflict between the “universal” and the “particular,” and leave behind, as a false question, the difficulty of recognizing the “particular” without prior justification vis-à-vis the “universal.” We would then see that we only have universals. The trunk proper to each culture is a concrete universal. There are no “particularities” and no “universality,” only historical universalities. And it will all depend then on whether these universalities empower themselves, or not, for the solidarious encounter among themselves.<sup>61</sup>

In this same sense, U.S. Latino/a theology understands that, by articulating its theological word, it is denouncing the message of death contained in the dominant ideologies. It is also giving up any participation in the neocapitalist hegemonic movement which produces and reproduces so much dehumanization and violence. As articulation of the believing word of women and men who live and work in the midst of this world's powers, U.S. Latino/a theology understands its vocation as the cultural and spiritual empowering of our people in order to infuse a vision of justice and hope in our “common home.” Latino/a theology's universal dimension is grounded in this vision.

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF U.S. LATINO/A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

In order to understand the foundations and principles of knowledge in U.S. Latino/a Catholic systematic theology, it is important to remember that we are speaking of a discipline that bears the weight of older, pre-established, unilateral definitions. That is why it seems prudent to raise the question of the prior conditions necessary to a theological method that would allow a knowledge of the faith lived in and by U.S. Latino/a communities. The very act of raising the question is an acknowledgment that Latinos/as in the United States do not form a monolithic or homogeneous block but a *dynamic historical reality* formed by diverse communities, traditions, and cultures. The internal differences within this reality range from rituals and beliefs proper to each community, to the several ways in which U.S. governments and society have accepted and dealt with particular Latino/a communities and cultures. Religious practices and social acceptance play an important role in determining the U.S. Latino/a theological agenda, given that not all communities have received the same degree of acceptance, opportunities, or resources to empower some of their members' incorporation into theology. Nevertheless, the common dynamic historical reality Latinos/as share may be described as follows: (a) it was born out of a double conquest—first European, and then European-American; (b) it is articulated religiously and culturally by popular Catholicism;

(c) it is marked by a history of struggles for socioeconomic, political, and intellectual emancipation as well as by struggles for self-determination, for liberation, and for human dignity; d) it is immersed in an adverse social context which is also diverse and conflictive; (e) it bears ethical and religious values that defend the dignity of the human person in community, although it also reproduces patriarchal modes in human relations; and (f) it demonstrates an extraordinary wealth of resistance, joy, and hope.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, from within this dynamic historical reality I am writing on a theology that, because it is “U.S. Latino/a,” seeks to articulate itself in a new way: within the perspective of intercultural thought.

What prior conditions would make possible this new way of systematizing Christian faith from within this concrete historical reality? A consideration of these conditions is important because they affect the method this theology adopts in order to arrive at knowledge of the faith. Following the directions suggested by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, I will indicate five of these prior conditions.<sup>63</sup>

1. *To free our own word.* This is the first and arguably the most important condition for the construction of a U.S. Latino/a systematic theology. Its importance arises from the fact that, as a colonized people, we must find our own voice in the midst of a theological ambience already weighed down by “rigorous” discourses which would lead us to silence. The liberation of our own word implies that we not abandon our criticism of colonializing theories and dominant theologies, that we continue the work of theological and cultural decolonization, that we strengthen the development of a liberating hermeneutic, and that we give up those ways of thinking which diminish our dignity or distort our intellectual capacity.

2. *Solidarity.* This is the intercommunicative platform on which we must establish relations with other voices. This platform is not “ready made”; rather, it is a process which allows us to interweave several discourses from a perspective of mutual recognition and respect. Solidarity forbids the reduction or instrumentalization of other theological voices, while it empowers the debate among differences without ever closing off communication. In this process we learn to recognize the profiles of situated universals and their interrelational character.

3. *The “whole” as culturally plural truths.* This prior condition lets us understand that the “whole” of truth occurs in the very process of exchange among culturally plural “truths.” As explained by Fernando Segovia, we give up the idea that a single theology or a single culture “represents the sole and superior embodiment of the Christian tradition.”<sup>64</sup> That is why we must move beyond the notion that the “whole” implies “the truth,” or that “the truth” exists in an abstract “whole.” In this sense, we must understand truth not as a condition or situation but as a process. No theology and no culture can give us the truth but only the possibility of seeking it. The process of interdiscursive communication, in equality of

conditions, is the means of turning into a whole the diverse voices that actively participate on the way to truth.

4. *Respectivity*<sup>65</sup> of reality. In his explanation of the unity of all historical reality, Ignacio Ellacuría pointed out that “the whole of intramundane reality constitutes a single, complex and differentiated physical unity, in such a way that unity does not cancel differences nor differences cancel unity.”<sup>66</sup> To understand respectivity as a prior condition in the construction of a U.S. Latino/a systematic theology implies that we choose to know, not by imprisoning reality in a closed conceptual system, but by affirming that reality as a foundational “opening” that is “respective” to other modes of reality. Because respectivity forbids a totalitarian conception of reality, it allows us to affirm plural versions of reality without fragmenting or isolating them. Respectivity also moves us beyond intellectual or historical relativism, opening formal spaces for a reflection on reality’s substantial inner connection.

5. *Radical broadening of the sources*. In the context of U.S. Latino/a theology, this prior condition assumes that we take seriously into account the historical and cultural experience of our people as bearer and transmitter of divine revelation. This experience is especially clear in the constellation of practices and thoughts mediated by religion, with its rituals, symbols, and language, and also in the daily relations among genders and races, as well as in the myriad musical, literary, scientific, philosophical, and political forms that gather the “utopic soul” of the people. The broadening of the sources implies that we bear in mind all that constitutes and expresses the people’s interests and experience, precisely because it affects theological knowledge. It is part of theology’s hermeneutic role to interpret that experience as it may empower or obstruct justice, freedom, compassion, solidarity, and human dignity according to God’s saving intent.

Having reflected on these prior conditions, and in view of the next section of this essay, I want to indicate briefly what I understand by *theological epistemology* and by *theological method*. First, I understand that theological epistemology has as its object the discernment and exposition of the cognitive moment of theological activity. As such, it shows the categories and principles that theoretically ground a concrete mode of theological thinking, as well as the operations that intervene in the intelligence of the faith. As an academic discipline, theological epistemology certainly has its proper autonomy, but as a human and Christian activity it constitutes a moment in human knowing, subject to unavoidable historical conditionings as well as being inevitably “respective” to the reality within which it finds itself.<sup>67</sup> In this way, theological epistemology necessarily involves interpretive horizons and directions as it brings about the knowledge of the faith. In this sense, a theology that seeks to articulate the liberating hopes of oppressed groups requires a hermeneutic that is critical,

popular, feminist, and intercultural, as well as a method that is congruent with that theology’s aims.

Second, and to specify the theological method, we must begin by stating how U.S. Latino/a theology conceives of what is specific to theologizing. Latino/a theology understands the specificity proper to theologizing as intelligence of the faith, understanding this intelligence as critical reflection on the praxis of the faith. As such, therefore, it refuses to view theology as a merely theoretical, speculative activity, affirming instead that the intelligence of the faith is an activity centered primarily on the apprehension of lived reality in order to confront and deal with it. Together with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), U.S. Latino/a theology understands that “our methodologies are not principles to be applied to reality; they are a guide to clarify our commitment and praxis. Our aim is not new doctrines, but new relationships and lifestyles. Method implies a direction, and liberation is the direction.”<sup>68</sup>

Theological method is referred to the horizon that embraces the whole of theological activity, as it also embraces the global direction of thought within which that activity occurs and the critical road which that activity travels in the very dynamic of traveling it. This is why method cannot be viewed as separate from theological contents, or as free from an ethical, political option. In order to determine which is U.S. Latino/a theology’s option and which principles intervene in its method, it is first necessary to look into the explicit self-understanding that U.S. Latino/a theology has of itself.

### ***In the Tradition of Culturally Plural Christianity***

U.S. Latino/a theology, as all Christian theologies, knows that its ultimate foundation lies on divine revelation. It understands that revelation is its foundational principle and the primary hermeneutic rule of theological knowledge, its universality residing therein.<sup>69</sup> Revelation “discovers” for humanity God’s saving intentions. Orlando Espín rightly points out that the *Christian* experience of God is due to revelation: “Divine revelation allows us to glimpse the being of the one God as lovingly relational . . . and it is this relational God that Christians also and consequently encounter in the human experience of grace.”<sup>70</sup> However, U.S. Latino/a theology—as any liberation theology would—underlines that revelation always occurs and is apprehended within the historicity of the believing community.

From the perspective of critical feminist theology, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza indicates that “the [Second Vatican] council takes seriously the principle of incarnation when it asserts that divine revelation is only given in human, cultural, and societally conditioned language.”<sup>71</sup> According to

Espín, both revelation and the experience of grace are necessarily mediated by human cultures in the way the latter are experienced in and through daily life. That is why “there is no acultural Christianity, just as there is no acultural option for God, love, and salvation.”<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, if the aim of revelation is to incorporate the human person and the world into the process of divine salvation, this salvation acquires its historical form in liberation. As we learned from Ignacio Ellacuría, “liberation is a concept that represents the very essence of the revealed message, God’s saving gift” to women and men of all times.<sup>73</sup> That is why we understand our participation in God’s saving work as a struggle for liberation from sin and injustice—a struggle whose ultimate origin can be no other but revelation. This participation is made possible by the power of divine grace, since through grace we accept and respond in faith to the mystery of God in our lives—a mystery that urges us to eliminate the oppression and darkness that weigh heavily on women, men, and indeed on all of creation.<sup>74</sup>

Consequently, U.S. Latino/a theology “discovers” and apprehends revelation and salvation from within the historical, religious, cultural, and bodily context of Latino/a communities. The particularity of this historical context, as would be the case with any other faith community, is what makes possible our people’s participation in God’s universal saving plan. It is from within this context that we can reach knowledge of the faith, as well as grasp the implications of revelation and salvation for our communities’ concrete lives. In this respect, Alejandro García-Rivera (herein) can suggest, through the comparison of a European and a Latino/a Christmas devotion, that Latino/a metaphysics is best conceived of as cosmology; as such, it constitutes a “whole” of aesthetic values founded on God’s love for the particular. The several available articulations of the contents of revelation are necessarily contextual, given the historical character of revelation and of human knowledge. These articulations clearly demonstrate the plural character of Christianity. That is why we can also speak of the reality of revelation as a culturally plural reality. U.S. Latino/a theology sees the need to move beyond the monocultural and patriarchal perspectives found in many of the available articulations of revelation, which we too inherited from Western Christian tradition. We should readily recognize that Latino/a theology must still develop a more consistent and explicit systematic reflection on revelation and salvation.

### **U.S. Latino/a Theology’s Self-understanding—Its Intercultural Cradle**

U.S. Latino/a theology may not renounce its intercultural cradle. This is a theology born within a reality where a number of religious traditions and several theological formulations converge. European, Latin American, European American, Afro-Latin and African American, Native American, and feminist traditions and elaborations have been welcome and criti-

cally embraced. And yet, U.S. Latino/a theology acquired its own personality because its cradle lies within the concrete and complex reality of the Latino/a communities of the United States, which in turn constitute an intercultural community. This community is the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population as well as of the Catholic church in the United States. As Jeanette Rodríguez points out, “The most recent census estimates a Latino/a population of 29.3 million, with a projected increase to 40.1 million by the year 2009. We come from many different lands of origin, representing no less than twenty-one Latin American countries.”<sup>75</sup> Allan F. Deck says that “fully one-third of today’s U.S. Roman Catholics are Hispanic and, if the trends persist . . . Hispanics will constitute the majority of Roman Catholics sometime in the first decade of the next millennium.”<sup>76</sup> Sociologist Gilbert Cadena also asserts that “by the year 2010 Latinos will constitute over one-half of the (U.S. Catholic) church.”<sup>77</sup> Given its demographic composition, the Catholic church in the United States has begun to have a predominantly Latino/a face, and this reality requires a rethinking of ecclesiology that can inspire and organize *all of the church’s life* in the United States. The chapter by Gary Riebe-Estrella in the present volume explores the characteristics and challenges of an ecclesiology elaborated not so much around “topics” that might interest Latino/a culture but through the methodological perspectives of U.S. Latino/a theology.

The starting point of Latino/a theology’s reflection is faith as lived by our communities; from this cradle our theology establishes its connection with the larger society and with the worldwide Christian church. In one of the classics on liberation theology—the collective book *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*—Virgilio Elizondo writes that “we feel that this type of theological reflection is not only more honest but even more universal . . . We are convinced that the more universal one tries to be, the less one has to offer to others. Conversely, the more particular a thought is, the more its universal implications become evident.”<sup>78</sup>

U.S. Latino/a theological reflection, then, starts from the lived faith of the community, which welcomes God’s presence in its midst; celebrates it in its popular rituals, ceremonies, and prayers; and witnesses to it through the community’s words and deeds. This reflection unveils and reveals—to our community and to the world—the encounter between the mystery of God and the mystery of human experience. In this way, if theology speaks of the deeper meaning of our being and our doing under the light of revelation, then theology needs, demands, and implies an anthropology. In fact, the strength of any theological project greatly depends on the theological anthropology it subscribes to. Similarly, the relevance of and reception given any theology depends on the theological anthropology it proposes. There can be no theology without a corresponding anthropological foundation. This explains the importance of theological anthropology for U.S. Latino/a theology. Two articles in the present volume ap-

proach two major components of this anthropology, both of them within an organic-relational anthropological model. Through his interpretation of the *fiesta* in U.S. Latino/a cultures, Roberto Goizueta points to the implications the notion of aesthetic praxis has for a theological anthropology. Miguel Díaz explores Latino/a popular narrative as source for a theological anthropology.

Within this very brief discussion of Latino/a theology's self-understanding, I want to quickly highlight five Latino/a perceptions of our own theology in order to indicate the latter's identity, how we understand our theological task, and what we see as our theology's contribution to the broader theological community. (1) Virgilio Elizondo points out that spirituality is a constitutive element of U.S. Latino/a theology because "[this theology] is a joint enterprise of the believing community, which is seeking the meaning of faith and the direction of its journey of hope lived in the context of charity."<sup>79</sup> (2) In an earlier text I have indicated the formal specificity that defines Latino/a theology as a discipline founded on faith:

"Theo-logy" is the proper language through which we seek to permanently, critically and systematically understand the faith which the community lives, celebrates and proclaims. Insofar as it is a reflective effort (*logos*) about God (*theos*) and about the experience of God, it is carried out from within the richness of the believing experience. In fact, more than a *science of the intellect*, theology is the vocabulary of *affectus*—of love aimed at the full manifestation of God's activity in human history. Theological reflection starts with the experience of faith, while it is also a fruit of the latter. Theological reflection is a permanent dynamism which again fertilizes and interweaves the same experience of faith that is informed by the *living word of God* in past and present history . . . The act of theologizing neither precedes nor follows the experience of faith—between the former and the latter there remains a fecund and creative tension.<sup>80</sup>

(3) In yet another text I indicated that U.S. Latino/a theological activity, as a discourse rooted in our *mestizo/a* condition, "presents itself as a critical reflection on the lived experience which our people have of God in their daily struggles against suffering, oppression and violence. The *object* of Latino/a theology is God, but a God discovered within the native worldview of the Latino/a communities."<sup>81</sup> (4) Roberto Goizueta underlines the distinctive emphasis of U.S. Latino/a discourse: "As critical reflection on praxis, the theology being developed by U.S. Hispanics is informed by the methodology of Latin American liberation theology," but due to the fact that this praxis is necessarily historically situated, "the concrete historicity of U.S. Hispanic communities will furnish new insights into the very meaning of historicity, or praxis itself . . . by emphasizing

the popular religious character of historical praxis."<sup>82</sup> (5) Arturo Bañuelas points to the communitarian and committed character of our theology: "U.S. Hispanic theologies are the result of a process called *pastoral de conjunto*"; but because this process involves active participation in and the analysis of reality, it "assures that Hispanic theologizing is grounded in human experience, especially the experience of oppression," just as it also requires a new kind of theologian—committed, and with a conscience—"since their common project, their *teología de conjunto*, is the liberation of Hispanics as part of God's salvific plan for a new humanity."<sup>83</sup>

Based on these understandings, I want to return to two earlier points. It is only now, within the context of reality as assumed by Latino/a theology and theologians, that we can situate those two earlier points. First, with respect to the influence of Latin American theology on U.S. Latino/a theology: it is evident that U.S. Latino/a theology also declares its self-understanding as critical reflection on the praxis of faith under the light of revelation; it is equally committed to the option for the poor and marginalized as fundamental principle; and it seeks to actualize salvation—within personal and social processes of liberation—as participation in God's salvific act. Second, with respect to the theological method U.S. Latino/a theology shares with other third-world theologies: I already indicated that method implies a direction and is not free from an ethical, political option; consequently, the horizon and aim of Latino/a theology is the achievement of integral humanization, of liberation, of a better quality of life for all, and of social justice—especially for those whose suffering is caused by any form of injustice or violence.<sup>84</sup> This theological method allows Latino/a theology to give better account of God's mystery in the religious complexity of U.S. Latino/a communities.

I now want to reflect on the fundamental hermeneutic-epistemological principles of U.S. Latino/a systematic theology's method, aware that we are and have always been within culturally plural Christianity.

### **Fundamental Hermeneutic-Epistemological Principles**

I want to underline here the three foundational principles from which U. S. Latino/a systematic theology starts. I speak here of fundamental principles because these are the propositions admitted as starting points by this theology, constituting the bases which its practitioners share in the process of constructing the knowledge of faith. These propositions—as fundamental principles—establish the formal nucleus of U.S. Latino/a systematic theology; since they intervene in the process of theologizing, they radically determine the internal structure of the theological method as well as the very identity of this theology. That is why, methodologically, none of these principles can be understood separately from the others; rather, each acquires its cognitive consistency and its intellectual mag-

nitude in relation to the others. Together, these principles govern faith's *epistemic locus* by granting theology its methodological coherence; because they are rooted in the *sociocultural locus* of Latino/a communities, these principles also determine the selection and interpretation of theological contents.

*First principle: The faith of the people.* The centrality of the "faith of the people"<sup>85</sup> lies in the conscious option, made by U.S. Latino/a theology, to take *this* faith and not another as the starting point for theological reflection as organizing principle of our theologizing. It could be argued that, as understandings of the faith, all theologies presuppose and imply faith. But what Latino/a theology emphasizes is that the faith of the people is the faith lived and expressed primarily and fundamentally within the concrete reality of popular Catholicism. In this sense, any theology can say that its starting point is the experience of faith, but most theologies do not take seriously—as fundamental principle of theological knowledge!—the faith of the people lived within popular Catholicism.<sup>86</sup>

In order to justify *this* faith's priority in Latino/a theology, it is important to first reflect on the subject of this faith—the ones who bear and share this faith. In this sense, Roberto Goizueta points out that the bearers of this faith are "men and women of Latino/a descent, who are victims of a marginalization based not only on culture but on language, social class, gender or race."<sup>87</sup> We are speaking of concrete persons, of men and women who identify their history "with the history of violence and suffering made visible in Jesus' grimace of pain on the cross . . . The blood and the wounds are the visible memories of his and our suffering. To erase them is to erase those memories and, with them, our very identity as persons, without which there can be no liberation that arises out of our own history as subjects."<sup>88</sup> Orlando Espín confirms that "Latinos/as have no doubt about the reality of suffering . . . It is true that some in our communities are not poor, but they are clearly the exceptions . . . Poverty and marginalization still shape the more frequent context of Latino/a life in the United States. And this context is diversely experienced as and through suffering."<sup>89</sup> U.S. Latino/a theology, consequently, has chosen to give high priority to the faith of these people who seek to be liberated from suffering; it also chooses to take very seriously the pervasive reality of suffering among our people, trying to accompany the people in their confrontations with that suffering. In this sense, the cry of the suffering people is the "pre-comprehension" for Latino/a theology. To choose to see and listen to *this reality* is prior to any other option. To seriously take into account the faith of the poor and suffering means that one recognizes that in this people the self-manifestation of God takes place, and that this people is at the same time the privileged *hermeneutic locus and the horizon* for apprehending and interpreting the whole of revelation.

It is undeniable, as Virgilio Elizondo rightly points out, when discussing intercultural theological dialogue, that "poverty and suffering, because they are universal, are above the Church, doctrine and theology, and may yet become the foundation for an authentic dialogue aimed at a common Christian struggle."<sup>90</sup> Consequently, U.S. Latino/a theology does not opt for a theological concept per se, which may operate as an organizing or systematizing principle of its reflection—as *hope, suffering, reign of God, discipleship* could be. Rather, Latino/a theology opts for a reality that brings together the object and the subject of theology. All theological concepts find their proper locus in the faith of the people, even though we still face the task of continued exploration of this faith's fabric. This fundamental reality, therefore, radically determines both the mediations of theological knowledge as well as the contents of the faith.

*Second principle: The option for the poor and oppressed.* This is the identifying mark of all theologies that belong to the wider family of liberation theology. In U.S. Latino/a theology, this option is "the most important *epistemological precondition for Christian faith*: to know God we must first opt for the poor . . . To turn a deaf ear to the cries of the poor is implicitly to identify God's voice with that of the status quo and, hence, its established power structures."<sup>91</sup> The option for the poor and oppressed has special relevance for Latino/a theology not only because of the situations I described in the first part of this article, but more fundamentally because this theology is born from and develops in the heart of a societal model rooted in the markets and ideologies of globalizing neocapitalism. Dominant intellectual traditions and contemporary theologizing also occur within that context. According to Franz Hinkelammert, the neocapitalist model of society—also called neoliberalism and globalization—is capitalism's new face,

[The neocapitalist model] was introduced in the decade of the eighties under the guise of "structural adjustments," and for the globalization and homogenization of the world through the marketplace . . . Neoliberal economic theory doesn't speak about reality. It only speaks of markets, without the least reference to the concrete realities within which the markets operate . . . The market is the *societas perfecta* that achieves its perfection through its own globalization . . . When today we search for alternatives, we do so within a market economy which has transformed the marketplace into the sole and complete criterion for social decisions.<sup>92</sup>

Neocapitalism comes dressed in the neoliberal ideology that presents economic efficiency and market competitiveness as supreme and exclusive "reasonable" criteria for society's life, although these criteria cover

up the real consequences of the global market in the real lives of real people. The neoliberal ideology is deaf to the cries of the ever-growing segments of the world's population denied access to means of living. This ideology is blind to the serious ecologic destruction produced by the global marketplace. This ideology presents global capitalism as the practical fulfillment of all utopias, and as the final achievement of human aspirations. It refuses, however, to take responsibility for the new and very serious human holocausts the markets have produced. While global neocapitalism announces a heaven on earth, its neoliberal ideology hides the hells that markets produce on earth, often calling on the name of God to justify neocapitalism's founding theoretical paradigm. In its utopian pretension, the neoliberal vision of the "totalized society" through "global markets" embodies a mystique of collective suicide—a rationalized spirituality of the irrational—which denies the status of rational to any alternative vision of justice, of human dignity, or of the earth's wholeness which might seek to subvert neoliberalism's own irrationality.<sup>93</sup> In reference to this, the chapter by Jeanette Rodríguez in the present volume emphasizes the need to revisit our native religious traditions in order to search for new theological answers to the challenges posed by the current social model.

We are at the doorstep of the third millennium. Instead of rejoicing at the progress made in the quality of life of all peoples, we must witness everywhere in the world the widening and deepening of poverty and exclusion. In a 1998 pastoral letter, Brazilian bishop Pedro Casaldáliga amply describes the effects and global consequences of contemporary neocapitalism. Casaldáliga also points out what the church and theology can do to confront the latter.

Some believe that it is time to change our paradigms. They are uncomfortable with martyrs in postmodern or postmilitant memory . . . Meanwhile, neoliberalism, the global market, the "geopolitics of chaos" . . . the "economic horror" . . . are still here, murdering the world . . . In this end of century and end of millennium, 15% of the world's population owns 79% of the wealth, while 85% of the population are left with the remaining 21%. Absolute poverty punishes more than one and a half billion people, who must live with less than a dollar per day. The number of the poor is being tripled . . . *Hunger* is today, more than ever before, the "silent bomb," and most deadly. Twenty-five of the world's children die of hunger every minute—thirteen million every year. Eighteen percent of humanity consumes 80% of all the available energy. In just two years there would not be a tree left on the planet if the rest of the world consumed the same amount of paper as the United States (which barely represents 6% of the world's population). The First World invests some 50 billion dollars per year in the *underdeveloped* world, but every year it

takes out more than 500 billion dollars from those same countries—not counting the interest on the latter's debt . . . *Migration* is quickly becoming an "itinerant nightmare," a kind of world war between desperation and lockout . . . Speaking on the First World's resistance to immigrants, Vivianne Forrester has rightly defined this "witch-hunt of the foreigner" as really a "witch-hunt of the poor." It will prove a useless hunt . . . *Discrimination against women* continues growing at an alarming rate at the end of this supposedly democratic century. That wall has not fallen . . . *Our governments are turning "globalitarian;"* but the fact remains that just 200 transnational megacorporations control a fourth of the planet's economic activity . . . In the midst of this neoliberal night, [we can see] the new shine of many stars of alternative creativity throughout the world. [These stars] are the reply of life to a system of death which cannot be humankind's destiny.<sup>94</sup>

Given this description, we must reaffirm that the option for the poor and oppressed does not belong to a past theological paradigm; rather, it remains a fundamental Christian imperative—a required norm for the protection of our rationality. This option is a "scandal" for modern theoretical reason, and "madness" for postmodern theoretical reason, but it is still strength and wisdom for Christian liberating reason. For U.S. Latino/a theology, the option for the poor and oppressed demands a rigorous critique of neocapitalist political economy, of its corresponding neoliberal "utopization" of the laws of the marketplace, of its pretended globalization of a culture of exclusion, of its patriarchal and racist roots, and of its rampant ecological destruction.

Our theological reflection would become a rhetorical discourse about marginalization, unable to explain the latter's systemic causes if we do not contextualize our concrete reality within the above framework; if we do not localize all religious, social, cultural, racial, and sexual marginalization in that context; and if we fail to see the relationship between marginalization and the ecological crisis. As Hinkelammert has pointed out, the option for the poor and oppressed lets us determine the *concrete and historical locus* wherein God's revelation occurs, while at the same time it obliges us to historicize our theological contents through a critical and ongoing analysis of the hegemonic system understood as "totalization" of all personal and social life.<sup>95</sup> This kind of analysis enables us: (1) to expose all the dimensions and potentialities of the "faith of the people," as it is lived in Latino/a popular Catholicism; (2) to recognize the specific profile of the *bearers* of the faith of the people as embodied, racial, sexual, and interrelated beings; and (3) to establish more clearly practical and conceptual networks with other Christian communities throughout the world who are also engaged in confrontation with global-

izing neocapitalism. That is why the option for the poor constitutes today a privileged space for intercultural communication, and that is why it is more important today than ever before.

*Third principle: Liberating praxis.* Latino/a theology is internally articulated by the principle of liberating praxis. Under this light, U.S. Latino/a theological reflection understands itself as a praxis of accompaniment *with, within, and from* the Latino/a communities in the latter's struggle for a new reality free of violence, dehumanization, and exclusion.

The praxis of accompaniment is seen as a category that grounds theological activity. It is a criterion which determines methodological method, as well as a criterion with which to search and verify the truth of the faith. This praxis is also a principle of theological interpretation and a principle of articulation for the knowledge of faith. Lastly, the praxis of accompaniment is both imperative of liberating reason and privileged locus for the acquisition of a liberative mode of knowledge. Hence, this praxis has an epistemological privilege.

We understand human praxis—both personal and communitarian—to be constitutive of reality's historical process as a whole: complex and plural, rational and aesthetic, dynamic, concrete and transcendent, open and innovative, respective, structural and individual, transforming and constructive, ethical and political. That is why human praxis cannot be reduced to a single process or a single dimension of reality.<sup>96</sup> Praxis is not an "object" which may be taken or left behind; rather, it constitutes historical reality *within daily life*. It is in *lo cotidiano*<sup>97</sup> of existence where we live, understand, and give direction to human praxis. Roberto Goizueta points out that Latino/a popular Catholicism helps us comprehend human praxis more adequately: communitarily, aesthetically, ethically, politically, and rationally. Popular Catholicism helps us understand that "human action, or praxis is 1) sacramental; 2) essentially and intrinsically communal, or relational; 3) an end in itself; 4) empowering; and, therefore 5) liberating."<sup>98</sup> Therefore, U.S. Latino/a theology must be rooted in a notion of human praxis that harmonizes beauty with justice. More specifically, it shows the connection that exists between the aesthetic dimension and the ethical, political dimension of human action.

### **Sources and Loci of U.S. Latino/a Theology**

In the Catholic theological perspective, the concept of *locus theologicus* refers to the sources of theological knowledge.

When explaining the theological teaching of Melchor Cano (1509-66) on the *loci theologici*, Evangelista Vilanova says that for Cano "theological loci are not fundamental or controversial doctrines; rather [they are] the *domicilia argumentorum*, that is, the *tituli fontium* from which theological argumentation must proceed."<sup>99</sup> Both Vilanova and Yves Congar regard

Cano as the creator of modern theological methodology because of his clarification, reformulation, and systematic organization of the concept of locus.<sup>100</sup> U.S. Latino/a theology holds that the privileged locus of theological reflection is the *popular religious experience* of the Latino/a community, because that experience is the context of revelation and of its consequent reception, interpretation, and transmission. Insofar as it is the context of revelation and of its interpretation, this locus is also *source* of theological knowledge—because it carries the contents of the faith, and offers both the material and the interpretive principles for a coherent formulation of theological discourse. In this sense, the sources of theological knowledge are not restricted to the written texts of the past, which may have documented certain contents of the faith—the apprehension and documentation of which may contain certain interpretive codes which correspond to a specific historical and social place.

Both U.S. Latino/a theology and Latin American liberation theology reject any abstract separation between sources and theological loci. Sixto García indicates that "the sources and foundations of Hispanic theology can never be divorced from the privileged locations . . . These locations qualify, shape, and condition the identity of the sources for such a theology."<sup>101</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría points out that, although "locus" and "source" may be methodologically distinguished, "the distinction is not strict and, much less, exclusive; because in some ways *locus* is *source* insofar as the former makes the latter give from within itself this or that, in such a way that thanks to locus and because of its specific contents may be actualized and made really present."<sup>102</sup>

With the above reflection in mind, I want to make a further conceptual distinction on our understanding of theological locus. U.S. Latino/a theology is elaborated from within popular religious faith, thereby acknowledging this experience as its formal *locus theologicus*. As the context which contains revelation and grounds theological knowledge, this locus functions as the *epistemic locus* of faith. The theological locus, however—and *because* it is situated within historical coordinates—implies the option for a specific *sociocultural location* within which the deliberate selection of theological material, its interpretation, and its presentation take place. The theological locus of U.S. Latino/a theology is clearly determined by the *sociocultural location* constituted by marginalized men and women who seek justice, solidarity, and human dignity. This conceptual distinction, however, does not indicate or accept that the epistemic locus be separated from the sociocultural location. Rather, both loci intervene in the same process of knowledge as components of the one theological method. The relationality between both loci is clearly explained in the chapter by Jean-Pierre Ruiz in the present volume. In this text Ruiz critically examines, interculturally, the place of the Bible in Latino/a communities.

theological

theological

The above reflections and observations allow me to contextualize the three sources and loci we are discussing in this section.

#### *Latino/a Popular Catholicism*

In U.S. Latino/a theology the centrality of popular Catholicism as source and locus of revelation and theology is simply undeniable.<sup>103</sup> There are three basic reasons which justify this centrality. First, popular Catholicism is the most distinguishing, most pervasive, and omnipresent reality in the religious life of *Catholic* Latino/a and Latin American communities throughout the continent. It is the privileged space wherein the people live and celebrate their faith, and it has special relevance in the lives of the women of marginalized races and groups. It is in the popular Catholic space that the Word of God happens as an event. Second, and as Orlando Espín asserts, "Latino/a popular Catholicism is a religion. More concretely, it is the religion of those treated as subaltern by both society and Church in the United States."<sup>104</sup> As such, this religion contains, offers, and transmits the theological contents and principles that ground a hermeneutic of the faith. Third, according to Virgilio Elizondo, "the popular expressions of the faith . . . are the ultimate foundation of the people's innermost being and the common expression of the collective soul of the people."<sup>105</sup> In this sense, Latino/a popular Catholicism guides the elaboration of a theological discourse which connects and illuminates the community's religious life to *lo cotidiano* of its existence.

The above three reasons—which justify the evident centrality of popular Catholicism in Latino/a theology—also justify the use of the adjective *popular*, which we attach to Latino/a Catholicism in order to more correctly name the people's religion. Furthermore, as Miguel Díaz clearly demonstrates in the introductory part of his chapter in this volume, popular religion has generated numerous narratives which are popular *because* they first came from socially marginalized persons and were later appropriated by equally marginalized communities.

Another reason to understand Latino/a popular Catholicism's centrality is the type of rationality that operates within it. Popular religion displays a thought structure based on participation, incarnation, and reciprocity. Because of this, it adopts a "logic of vital synthesis" within which knowledge is acquired through affective participation, and in which the criterion for determining "what is true" is that which sustains dignified living. Consequently, U.S. Latino/a theological epistemology has consciously opted for the *praxic* character of knowledge, so as to correspond to Latino/a popular Catholicism's rationality, which is communitarian, aesthetic, rational, critical, liberating, ethical, and political.<sup>106</sup>

The option for Latino/a popular Catholicism in theologizing has diverse functions and meanings. In *epistemological* terms, the multiform, dif-

ferential, and consistent character of the material that actualizes the faith brings about a truly Catholic theology. In *hermeneutic* terms, Latino/a popular Catholicism embraces the faith of the people and thus constitutes the locus and central code for interpreting the tensions inherent in human life and caused by human action in the world; this includes "the meaning of life, personal and collective destiny, the origin and destiny of the universe and of history, and the end, origin and meaning of evil, of pain, of death, of the mysterious and the marvelous."<sup>107</sup> In *methodological* terms, the whole structure of the faith finds rationality, order, and coherence in popular Catholicism's contents, symbols, rituals, and languages. In *theological* terms, the contents of theology cannot be determined from pre-established discourses but only from the lived and reflected historical expression of the faith of the people; that is, Latino/a popular Catholicism offers us the material to discover and name the present and always challenging mystery of God, and on this foundation to redo and rewrite every other central topic in systematic theology. In *ethical-political* terms, because it articulates the whole of personal and communal relations, Latino/a popular Catholicism is the appropriate space within which to deconstruct dominant social relations and to build new ones free of violence and oppressive patriarchal power. In *soteriological* terms, Latino/a popular Catholicism is the religion within which people construct a complex and dynamic vision of the world, connect their religious experience to other ecclesial traditions of life and thought, resist the avalanche of dominant religions and ideologies, and confront historical reality's present contradictions and future possibilities. Popular Catholicism has salvific value because God dwells therein, among the scorned of the earth. The poor and oppressed are the body of Christ, and this body shows the world the meaning of sin and grace, of perdition and salvation.

#### *The Reality of Mestizaje*

interculturality

There are a number of readily available books and articles that explain *mestizaje*<sup>108</sup> as central category, as fundamental epistemological-hermeneutic principle, and as *locus theologicus* of U.S. Latino/a theology.<sup>109</sup> Here I only want to highlight its particular relevance to a *theological method* which consciously opts for *inculturality* as central methodological axis. → *interculturality*

U.S. Latino/a theologians are aware of the current debates on such issues as diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism. They are also well aware of the ongoing discussions on the question of how to deal theologically with the excessive monocultural character of Western Christianity, and with cultural and theological diversity. We are familiar with the several European alternatives proposed as answers to this question. Perhaps the best-known alternative was initially offered by J. B. Metz. He advocated a culturally polycentric church which would parallel the cultural and theo-

logical polycentrism already evident in Christianity.<sup>110</sup> Echoing this proposal, Spanish theologian Juan José Tamayo also suggested that “to a cultural polycentrism, like the one which irrevocably characterizes today’s civilization, must correspond—also irrevocably—an ecclesial and theological polycentrism.”<sup>111</sup> For his part, Roberto Goizueta suggests that U.S. Latino/a theology must take part in the emergence of a polycentric church: “What kind of theology is appropriate to a polycentric church? . . . A polycentric church demands a new theological subject, or, more properly, new theological subjects.”<sup>112</sup> These alternative proposals, although well intentioned, are nevertheless insufficient. In fact, the very idea of theological polycentrism is untenable and undesirable in the context of today’s global neocapitalism. Furthermore, polycentrism cannot even exist because it is today impossible to think that theology’s *interdiscursive* dynamic could take place within some sort of “self-centered” dynamic in every religious-cultural system. In today’s world, even if we were to admit the existence of many epistemological “centers,” these cannot dialogue under *equal* conditions. The fact is that any theological discourse that takes seriously into account the plural fabric of reality and of knowledge must deal also with the asymmetric character of social power relations at all levels. Theological discourse must critically confront the ethnocentric tendencies of all cultures, including its own, as well as avoid romanticizing its notions of family, community, and people. These notions, because they are founded on and structured along patriarchal gender relations, often cover up violence against women and children. Theological discourse should explore the possibilities opened by the intercultural sensitivity that today guides many Christian communities throughout the world.

Raúl Fornet-Betancourt argues that “what is radical in this perspective is not, therefore, that we have a polycentric Christianity today, but, rather, a culturally plural Christianity . . . Intercultural dialogue radicalizes the program of a polycentric Christianity; more precisely, it supersedes it,” because, while it recognizes the irreducible value of the many theological discourses, it leads to the recognition “that the question for ‘Christian identity’ can no longer be posed but from the perspective of intercultural exchange.”<sup>113</sup>

In this sense, I believe that *mestizaje* offers a more adequate and more realistic theological answer to the questions emerging from our own historical reality. I mean here not only the biological *mestizaje*, which created a new race, but especially the cultural and intellectual *mestizaje* that created a new *intercultural reality* and, consequently, an *intercultural theology*. In the words of Virgilio Elizondo, “*mestizaje* is simply the mixture of human groups of different makeup determining the color and shape of their eyes, skin pigmentation, and makeup of bone structure . . . Biologically speaking, *mestizaje* appears to be quite easy and natural, but culturally it is usually feared and threatening.”<sup>114</sup> This definition admits the mixture

of blacks and whites too—a process commonly referred to as *mulataje*. Evidently, *mestizaje* is a historical fact that still opens up old wounds, just as it is also the opportunity to build an intercommunicative platform with other voices who speak from their own irreducible cultures. As Elizondo notes, *mestizaje* occurs in several ways, although it emerged as a massive reality only through conquest and colonization, “giving rise to a new people . . . and in them begins a new history.”<sup>115</sup>

Precisely because *mestizaje* has been portrayed by dominant cultures as carrying a social value only worthy of exclusion, a *mestizo/a* theology will highlight the vital syntheses which “new peoples” have interculturally created in order to explain their own vision and their own identities. The *mestizo/a* biological condition does not automatically lead to intercultural consciousness. It is not a necessary requirement to arrive at truth. It is, however, the opportunity for recognizing the intercultural character of our origin, of our being, and of our identity. As such, the reality of *mestizaje* also implies a conscious option for intellectual, cultural, and theological *mestizaje*. Incorporated as fundamental principle of the intelligence of the faith and as methodological axis, this option constitutes the basis on which to articulate an intercultural vision of Christian identity. Along these same lines, Anne E. Patrick indicates that *mestizaje* is “an increasingly important category for ethical and theological reflection.”<sup>116</sup>

As historical locus where different cultures and experiences converge, each carrying its history of suffering and struggle against the powers of death, *mestizaje* becomes a privileged space for a theology that navigates on the current of solidarity among peoples who seek to confront their suffering. This same current led Johann-Baptist Metz to make the transition between the *polycentric* to the *intercultural* discourse. According to Metz, “More universal and more interculturally communicative than the language of western rationality and of western science, is the language that articulates the memory of suffering . . . This memory of suffering is what makes a given culture sensitive and accessible to all other cultural worlds.”<sup>117</sup>

Given its intercultural cradle, its *mestizo/a* condition, and its epistemological options, Latino/a theology can greatly contribute to that authentic theological dialogue which seeks to discern the exigencies of God’s revelation in the present historical reality within which our communities live. The very future of Christianity is implicated in this search—a future that can only be intercultural. In the words of Jeanette Rodríguez: “The concept *mestizaje*, as developed by U.S. Latino/a theologians, is one that will prove useful to future generations as they learn to deal with, to engage and be creative about the realities of the future.”<sup>118</sup> The title of one of Virgilio Elizondo’s books has become an imperative for theology in the third millennium: *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*.<sup>119</sup>

## Lo cotidiano

We must first recognize that *lo cotidiano* (daily life) is a category of analysis developed by feminist critical theory. As cultural notion, it has always been present in Latino/a cultures as a way of designating the whole of the doing and thinking of our people in their daily and recurring routine. Although daily life has been a space controlled by dominant ideologies and religions, twentieth-century currents of liberation thought underestimated *lo cotidiano's* critical weight, the analytic magnitude of daily living, and its counter-hegemonic political value.

The analytic pertinence of daily life was discovered by feminist critical theory and not by androcentric liberation theologies. This category emerged within the context of the feminist philosophies and sociologies developed in eastern Europe and Latin America, in the 1960s and 1970s, in order to confront ideological totalitarianism and monolithic meta-discourses current at the time. Their aim was the reinvention of the ethical and political foundations of true democracy in social life.<sup>120</sup>

As analytical category, *lo cotidiano* has been one of critical feminism's most important contributions, because it permitted the exposure of the hierarchical historical dynamics—especially patriarchal ones—that affect people in their *daily living*, in the day after day of human relations lived in the home, in social institutions, at work, in culture, and in religion. Daily life, in this sense, radically critiques today's social models, which dehumanize and polarize persons. At the same time, daily life articulates an alternative democratic and aesthetic view of the world, of history, and of life. Within this perspective, a new model of life rejects all social relations based on social, sexual, or racial hierarchies; it puts a stop to ecological destruction and understands social power as the power to create a new rational daily life. *Lo cotidiano* is understood as a *dynamis* that seeks to make hegemonic and universal the logic of human rights—including the rights to friendship, bread, employment, and beauty.

For feminist theory, daily life leads to a new perspective for the future of persons and of the world through the radical transformation of all of life's dimensions. Because it has to do with everything that affects *lo cotidiano* of existence, it brings to the fore those topics left unattended by androcentric theories—culture, aesthetics, beauty, affects, happiness, reproductive rights, sexuality, and the development of personality. In this sense, the notion of aesthetic praxis positively corrects the reductive and utilitarian emphasis which often characterized the modern understanding of historical praxis. Just as it also broadens our comprehension of human praxis as transformation toward true liberation. With daily life, feminism inaugurated a new way of conceptualizing what is meant by *life*—not as mere abstract living, but as a good life that can be continually sup-

ported by the whole of society. That is, a life where people may *everyday* enjoy a greater and better quality of life—a life *worth* living.<sup>121</sup>

The theological significance of daily life as source and locus of U.S. Latino/a theology is grounded in the fact that it is here where the real life of real people unfolds, and where God's revelation occurs.<sup>122</sup> We have no other place but *lo cotidiano* to welcome the living Word of God or to respond to it in faith. The faith of the people, as lived and expressed in popular Catholicism, happens within the dynamics of daily existence. The chapter by Orlando Espín in the present volume clearly establishes the epistemological and hermeneutic centrality of daily life for U.S. Latino/a theology. *Lo cotidiano* is presented there as the context within which occur all experiences of evil and hope, of grace and sin, of salvation and condemnation. Espín argues that it is here, in daily life, that we must religiously and culturally construct the categories for interpreting these experiences.

A theology that seeks to act as mediation of humanization and liberation must be engaged in the humanization and liberation of daily life, until every people, person, and living thing achieves a life worth living. The methodological importance of daily life is grounded on its being the privileged locus for an intercultural theology, since the cultures and religious experiences of our communities converge in it. Theologically, daily life has salvific value because the people themselves, in *lo cotidiano* of their existence, let us experience the salvific presence of God here and now in their daily struggles for humanization, for a better quality of life, and for greater social justice. At the same time, daily life urges us to join actively in the long march toward a new humanity and a future of fulfillment still latent in the heart of creation, until we reach God's definitive salvation.

## CONCLUSION

For U.S. Latino/a theology, the current theological search for a comprehensive, ordered, and systematic articulation of the faith of the people involves a critical and deliberate option for *interculturality* as methodological axis. This option opens the way to face the challenges inherent in the processes of truth of the faith and of revelation. Within these processes, where culturally plural truths find their wholeness, we discover our task as contributing to the incorporation of the world and of human persons into the universal circle of divine salvation. As a theology which solidarily accompanies the faith of the people, the primary identity of Latino/a theology comes from its way of welcoming and *co*-responding to the mystery of God in our lives. Therefore, this theology's elaboration

involves a journey, a direction, and a commitment. These three seek to speak these truths:

### **The Truth of Reality**

We see the historical dynamics within which we currently live as moments of grace and as signs of the times, calling us to rethink the whole of the theological enterprise. Face to face with neocapitalist, systemic currents which see in themselves the model for the total satisfaction of human aspirations, U.S. Latino/a theology proclaims that the ways of God lead us to journey toward another reality shaped by other currents. The faith of the people, so hopeful in the midst of so much violence, believes that God's dwelling place cannot be in the global marketplace. The economic and sociocultural processes of neoliberal globalization increasingly demonstrate the similarities of situations lived across the world: the violence and impunity with which the "powerful" of the world perpetrate crimes and injustices (with concomitant increases in fear and poverty among the "weak") are well documented global facts.

On the other hand, there is also a growing similarity in the response of peoples and cultures who, grounded on a religious vision of justice and human dignity, fight for an alternative civilization, for greater humanization, and for the end of violence. Because Latino/a theology navigates on these currents, our theological word wants to speak the language of liberation and hope, as the truer word of our people. To further identify and illuminate this word, U.S. Latino/a theology now needs to take more into account the contributions of relational theological anthropology, of intercultural liberation philosophy, of critical theories of systemic analysis—including critical feminist and ecologic theories—and of other sciences compatible with Christianity's liberating identity.

Latino/a theology is elaborated within a context of communities that transcend geographic and intellectual borders. Nevertheless, this theology still sees the pertinence of Christianity's liberation traditions, within Catholicism and within our own cultures. As such, ours is a theology with global implications. It stands *against* the hegemony of systemic domination, while it is *in favor* of the hegemony of worldwide solidarity and of compassion toward suffering peoples.

### **The Truth of Theology**

As all theological activity, ours is exposed to the traps of the reversed reality and seductive utopias created by the dominant intellectual traditions. Latino/a theology will be faithful to its nature, identity, and mission as knowledge of the faith as long as it maintains its connection to the tradi-

tion of culturally plural Christianity and its deliberate attention on the epistemologic-hermeneutic principles which ground it: the *faith of the people*, the *option for the poor and oppressed*, and *liberating praxis*. Faithfulness to these will offer Latino/a theology the possibility of speaking by recognizing truth through theological knowledge, even if it cannot guarantee it.

### **The Truth of God**

Our theological task is carried out in the midst of a world that permanently threatens the faith of our community with the idolatrous message of profit and superficial happiness. To speak the truth of God in this world means that we must denounce the idol's evil and sin. It also implies that we must proclaim the God encountered in the religion of the people—in their celebrations, rituals, *fiestas*, prayers, and reconciliations. Popular Catholicism goes on revealing a God who defends, protects, corrects, and nourishes the very same social groups the world disdains. Latino/a theology must discover and proclaim this God who is preferentially revealed in the *faith of the people*, in the reality of *mestizaje*, and in the *daily life* of our communities.

I want to conclude by insisting that my reflections here ultimately speak of what theology is and has been in my life, and of how I understand the journey I share with my colleagues in the theological community. My becoming a theologian and my personal identification with U.S. Latino/a theology are, before everything else, a vocation whose ultimate justification is found in God alone. For a *mestiza* woman like myself, daughter of poor Mexican migrant workers, theology is not a given, nor can it be taken for granted. In my family and cultural contexts, there was no support or encouragement for women to become involved in the intellectual life. With my theological word I am attempting to reclaim, for myself and for women of similar background, a place in the world as builders of knowledge. I learned early enough that theology is not the concern of an individual or a mere academic "career," as I suspect it's often perceived in the United States. For me, theology is the process of faith lived with the Christian community with which I share joy and suffering, company and loneliness, and with which I often spend "days of mourning in hope." Theology, as aware and informed faith, guides the core options of my life and inspires the decisions I make in *lo cotidiano* of my existence. In a word, theology is not something I do, as if it were an object external to my life. Theology is a central axis of my identity as a Catholic woman, and it is the way I *co-respond* to the mystery of God in my life. Theology takes me down the great rivers of resistance and hope that irrigate *lo cotidiano* of the popular classes from which I come. It is the privileged way I have for finding strength, inspiration, and hope in my life.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> On the use of *Latino/a*, please see the Glossary in the present volume.
- <sup>2</sup> Mission Statement, Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, ACHTUS Constitution, art. I.
- <sup>3</sup> Professor Raúl Fonet-Betancourt's work on an intercultural philosophical model has proven very useful to me in this and in subsequent parts of the present article. I find his philosophical perspectives very important for U.S. Latino/a theology's future development. From among Fonet-Betancourt's many publications, see especially "El cristianismo: Perspectivas de futuro en el umbral del Tercer Milenio a partir de la experiencia de América Latina," *Pasos* 51 (1994), 1-8; and *Hacia una filosofía intercultural latinoamericana* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1994).
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Karl Rahner, "Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 1690-91; Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994, new edition), 51-52; J. J. Mueller, "Theology, Systematic," in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. M. Glazier and M. Hellwig (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 865; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Foundations of Theology," in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. W. Beinert and F. S. Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 258-59, 261; Wolfgang Beinert, "Dogmatic Theology," in Beinert and Fiorenza, *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 190; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. F. S. Fiorenza and J. P. Galvin (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991), 1:3-87.
- <sup>5</sup> In order to see the reason for this affirmation, the reader needs only to review the publications cited in the preceding note, as well as the authors and sources they use when defining and explaining theology as a whole, its topics, and its several disciplines.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology," 35-85. See also the chapters included in T. W. Tilley, ed., *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).
- <sup>7</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand," in *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, ed. A. Bañuelas (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 35.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Roberto S. Goizueta, "El mestizaje hispano-americano y el método teológico," in *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología ReLAT* 168 (1993), www.uca.ni/koinonia/relat/168.htm, 4.
- <sup>9</sup> On the articulation of theological knowledge in Latin American liberation theology, see Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 7-38.
- <sup>10</sup> Leonardo Boff, "Post-Modernity and the Misery of Liberating Reason," *Pasos Review* 1 (1995), 5.
- <sup>11</sup> Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 167.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Fonet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*.
- <sup>13</sup> Fonet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*, 16.
- <sup>14</sup> For the definition and meaning of these terms, see "Rationality or Irrationality? Modernity, Postmodernity, and the U.S. Hispanic Theologian," in Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, chap. 6, 132-72; see also his contribution to the present volume, especially the section "The Self in Modernity and Postmodernity."
- <sup>15</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 134-35.
- <sup>16</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 137, 154. Leonardo Boff says that, for

postmodern theories, "none of the types of rationalization should assume the monopoly of reason. On the contrary, several types of rationalization should be valid, autonomous, and irreducible" (Boff, "Post-Modernity and the Misery of Liberating Reason," 2).

<sup>17</sup> Franz J. Hinkelammert, "Capitalismo y socialismo: La posibilidad de alternativas," *Pasos* 48 (1993), 10-15; idem, "El cautiverio de la utopía: Las utopías conservadoras del capitalismo actual, el neoliberalismo y la dialéctica de las alternativas," *Pasos* 50 (1993), 1-14.

<sup>18</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Fonet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), "Final Statement of the Sixth EATWOT Conference," in *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, ed. V. Fabella and S. Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 188.

<sup>21</sup> "Final Statement of the 'Women against Violence' Dialogue," in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, ed. M. J. Mananzan et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 183; see also Sixto J. García, "Sources and Loci of Hispanic Theology," in Bañuelas, *Mestizo Christianity*, 120.

<sup>22</sup> "Final Document of the Intercontinental Women's Conference, Oaxtepec, Mexico, December 1-6, 1986," in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. V. Fabella and M. A. Oduyoye (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 186, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Raúl Vidales, "Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 43.

<sup>24</sup> Final Reflection, "Commonalities, Divergences, and Crossfertilization among Third World Theologies: A Document Based on the Seventh International Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (Oaxtepec, Mexico, December 7-14, 1986)," in *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*, ed. K. C. Abraham (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 200.

<sup>25</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Centralidad del Reino de Dios en la teología de la liberación," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación*, ed. I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1990), 1:496 (English translation: *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts in Liberation Theology* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993]).

<sup>26</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts in Liberation Theology*, 374.

<sup>27</sup> Raúl Vidales, "Cuestiones en torno al método en la teología de la liberación," in *La nueva frontera de la teología en América Latina*, ed. R. Gibellini (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1977), 50.

<sup>28</sup> Vidales, "Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology."

<sup>29</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Juan José Tamayo, *Presente y futuro de la teología de la liberación* (Madrid: San Pablo, 1994), 31-32.

<sup>31</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Opción por los pobres," in *Conceptos fundamentales del cristianismo*, ed. C. Floristán and J. J. Tamayo (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1993), 881-85.

<sup>32</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, *Conversión de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios* (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1984), 84.

<sup>34</sup> Andrés G. Guerrero, *A Chicano Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 159.

<sup>35</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 60.

<sup>36</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 107.

<sup>37</sup> João B. Libânio and Alfonso Murad, *Introdução à teologia: Perfil, enfoques, tarefas* (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1996), 172-73.

<sup>38</sup> Fernet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> Within the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), and in other scholarly contexts, it has become common practice to refer the expression *Third World* to the impoverished peoples and marginalized cultures of the geopolitical South (i.e., Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa), as well as the impoverished peoples and marginalized cultures within the rich countries of the geopolitical North (i.e., the Third World within Europe, North America, and Japan). In this sense, the Third World exists within the First, as the First also exists within the Third. See "The Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology: Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT Conference, New Delhi, August 17-29, 1981," in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, ed. V. Fabella and S. Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 191-206. In its most recent statement, EATWOT indicates that "the term 'Third World' remains the official identity of our Association. Its meaning primarily arises from the social, economic, political, religious and cultural forces which render our people expendable" ("Search for a New Just World Order: Challenges to Theology. Final Statement of the EATWOT Assembly at Tagaytay City, Philippines, December 10-17, 1996," *Voices of the Third World/EATWOT* 20:1 (1997), 24.

<sup>40</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "Hispanic American Theology and the Bible: Effective Weapon and Faithful Ally," in *We Are a People! Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology*, ed. R. S. Goizueta (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert R. Cadena, "The Social Location of Liberation Theology: From Latin America to the United States," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. F. Segovia and A. Isasi-Díaz (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>43</sup> Allan Figueroa Deck, "Introduction," in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. A. F. Deck (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), xiv.

<sup>44</sup> María Pilar Aquino, "Perspectives on a Latina Feminist Liberation Theology," in Deck, *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> For an approximation to the now classic method of Latin American liberation theology, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "Hacia una fundamentación del método teológico latinoamericano," in *ECA [Estudios Centroamericanos]* 322-23 (1975), 409-25; Clodovis Boff, "Epistemology and Method of Liberation Theology," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts*, 57-84; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 3-12, 83-120; Tamayo, *Presente y futuro de la teología de la liberación*, 25-73; and the excellently edited collection *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, ed. J. B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 23-77.

<sup>46</sup> For an introduction to theological and biblical hermeneutics in the early stages of liberation theology, see Juan José Tamayo, *Para comprender la teología de la liberación* (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1989), 53-70, 98-114; Gilberto da Silva Gorgulho, "Biblical Hermeneutics," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts*, 123-50; Carlos Bravo G., "Del Éxodo at seguimiento de Jesús," in *Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina*, ed. J. Comblin, J. I. González Faus, and J. Sobrino (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1993), 79-100; Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, 78-148; Carlos Mesters, *Defenseless Flower* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> On Latin American theology's fundamental intentionality, centered on the

notion of *integral liberation*, see the two preceding notes. See also the text that, in my opinion, is the most representative and the most important one on the topic, although it is one of the least known: Ignacio Ellacuría, "Liberación," in Floristán and Tamayo, *Conceptos fundamentales del cristianismo*, 690-710. For a more recent understanding of the fundamental intentionality, based on the notion of Christian love as mercy, justice, and liberation, see Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 27-46; and also Jon Sobrino, "De una teología sólo de la liberación a una teología del martirio," in Comblin, González Faus, and Sobrino, *Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina*, 101-21.

<sup>48</sup> Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 64.

<sup>49</sup> Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 91.

<sup>50</sup> See note 39, supra.

<sup>51</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, "Críticas y autocríticas de la teología de la liberación," in Comblin, González Faus, and Sobrino, *Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina*, 215, 217-36.

<sup>52</sup> João B. Libânio, "Panorama de la teología de América Latina en los últimos veinte años," in Comblin, González Faus, and Sobrino, *Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina*, 72-78.

<sup>53</sup> Diego Irarrázaval, *Rito y pensar cristiano* (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1993); idem, *Tradición y porvenir andino* (Puno/Lima: Instituto de Estudios Aymaras/Asociación de Publicaciones Educativas, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> Diego Irarrázaval, "How Is Theology Done in Latin America?," *Voices from the Third World/EATWOT* 18:1 (1995), 59-78.

<sup>55</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxxvi.

<sup>56</sup> María Pilar Aquino and Ana María Tepedino, eds., *Entre la indignación y la esperanza: Teología feminista latinoamericana* (Bogotá: Indo-American Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, "Condiciones y criterios para un diálogo teológico intercultural," in *Concilium* 191 (1984), 45.

<sup>58</sup> On this, see Arturo J. Bañuelas, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: An Initial Assessment," in Bañuelas, *Mestizo Christianity*, 77; Roberto S. Goizueta, "Rediscovering Praxis: The Significance of U.S. Hispanic Experience for the Theological Method," in Bañuelas, *Mestizo Christianity*, 85; García, "Sources and Loci of Hispanic Theology," 106; Ada M. Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 79; María Pilar Aquino, "Directions and Foundations of Hispanic/Latino Theology: Toward a Mestiza Theology of Liberation," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 1:1 (1993), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Goizueta, "El mestizaje hispano-americano," 4.

<sup>60</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Fernet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*, 34.

<sup>62</sup> Fernet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*, 39; Bañuelas, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: An Initial Assessment," 72; Segovia, "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand," 35; Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 32, 63, 68-70.

<sup>63</sup> Fernet-Betancourt, *Hacia una filosofía intercultural*, 21-26, 47.

<sup>64</sup> Fernando Segovia, "Aliens in the Promised Land: The Manifest Destiny of U.S. Hispanic American Theology," in Segovia and Isasi-Díaz, *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Respectivity* is a classic and fundamental concept in X. Zubiri's philosophy. Zubiri was one of the most important influences on Ignacio Ellacuría's thought, considering that Ellacuría was Zubiri's closest disciple and his best interpreter. According to Zubiri: "Since reality is an 'open' formality, it is not reality except 'respectively' to that to which it is open. This respectivity is not a relation, be-

cause every relation is the relation of a thing or form of reality to another thing or form of reality. Respectivity, on the contrary, is a constitutive moment of reality's formality itself and as itself" (Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad*, 3d ed. [Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984], 120). See also X. Zubiri, *Estructura dinámica de la realidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1989), 25, 215, 314, 318; idem, *Inteligencia y razón* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1983), 285-86, 342, 349; idem, *Inteligencia y Logos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982), 22-32.

<sup>66</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1991), 30.

<sup>67</sup> Cornelius Ernst indicates that "the notion of a theological epistemology . . . is itself historically conditioned . . . The search for identity in the new nations of the post-colonial era, in a tension between traditional religions and new technology, is a preoccupation with the redefinition of meanings . . . [These] support the suggestion that the reformulation of theology taking place in our time demands a corresponding reformulation of theological epistemology" (C. Ernst, "Theological Methodology," in Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, 1677).

<sup>68</sup> EATWOT, Final Reflection, "Commonalities, Divergences, and Crossfertilization," 200.

<sup>69</sup> Wolfgang Beinert, "Revelation," in Beinert and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 602-3; Libânio and Murad, *Introdução à teologia*, 172, 245-46.

<sup>70</sup> Orlando Espín, in the third part of his essay in the present volume.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals. A Critical Feminist Ekklesiology of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 101-2.

<sup>72</sup> Orlando Espín, in the first part of his essay in the present volume. See also Espín's important study on the overall role of culture in theology and church: "A 'Multicultural' Church?: Theological Reflections from 'Below,'" in *The Multicultural Church: A New Landscape in U.S. Theologies*, ed. W. Cenkner (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 54-71.

<sup>73</sup> Ellacuría, "Liberación," 690; idem, *Conversión de la Iglesia*, 191-204.

<sup>74</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, nos. 2-5; Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 9, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Jeanette Rodríguez, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: Context and Challenge," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 5:3 (1998), 6.

<sup>76</sup> Deck, "Introduction," xi.

<sup>77</sup> Cadena, "The Social Location of Liberation Theology," 176.

<sup>78</sup> Virgil Elizondo, "Toward an American-Hispanic Theology of Liberation in the U.S.A.," in Fabella and Torres, *Irruption of the Third World*, 54-55.

<sup>79</sup> Virgil Elizondo, "Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection," in Bañuelas, *Mestizo Christianity*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> María Pilar Aquino, *La teología, la Iglesia y la mujer en América Latina* (Bogotá: Indo-American Press, 1994), 10-11.

<sup>81</sup> Aquino, "Directions and Foundations of Hispanic/Latino Theology," 8.

<sup>82</sup> Goizueta, "Rediscovering Praxis," 90.

<sup>83</sup> Bañuelas, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: An Initial Assessment," 73. See Glossary for *teología de conjunto*.

<sup>84</sup> On this understanding of theological method, see Ellacuría, "Hacia una fundamentación," 419; Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 206-7; Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, 22-23; José Ramos Regidor, *Jesús y el despertar de los oprimidos* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1984), 97; and "Final Statement of the 'Women against Violence' Dialogue," 180.

<sup>85</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>86</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>87</sup> Goizueta, "El mestizaje hispano-americano," 1.

<sup>88</sup> Roberto Goizueta, "U.S. Hispanic Popular Catholicism as Theopoetics," in Segovia and Isasi-Díaz, *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 275.

<sup>89</sup> Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 166-67.

<sup>90</sup> Elizondo, "Condiciones y criterios para un diálogo teológico intercultural," 48.

<sup>91</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 177. See also the biblical, theological, and soteriological foundations for the option for the poor in Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts*, 235-50; Pablo Richard and Ignacio Ellacuría, "Pobreza/Pobres," in Floristán and Tamayo, *Conceptos fundamentales del cristianismo*, 1030-57.

<sup>92</sup> Franz Hinkelammert, *Cultura de esperanza y sociedad sin exclusión* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1995), 15, 141, 143, 158.

<sup>93</sup> Hinkelammert, *Cultura de esperanza*, 19, 167-78, 303-7, 315-18.

<sup>94</sup> Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, "El cuerno del jubileo," *Reflexión y Liberación* 10:37 (1998), 5-8.

<sup>95</sup> Hinkelammert, *Cultura de esperanza*, 358.

<sup>96</sup> For the notions of liberating praxis and accompaniment, see the works by Roberto Goizueta, which I use in the present article, especially *Caminemos con Jesús*, 86-102, and "El mestizaje hispano-americano," 1. See also María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 11-13; idem, "Directions and Foundations of Hispanic/Latino Theology," 8-9; idem, "Perspectives on a Latina Feminist Liberation Theology," 34-37; and Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, 470-72.

<sup>97</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>98</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 103.

<sup>99</sup> Evangelista Vilanova, *Historia de la teología cristiana* 3 vols. (Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 1989), 2:612.

<sup>100</sup> Vilanova, *Historia de la teología cristiana*, 2:611; Yves Congar, *A History of Theology* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 163-65.

<sup>101</sup> García, "Sources and Loci of Hispanic Theology," 106.

<sup>102</sup> Ellacuría, *Conversión de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios*, 168.

<sup>103</sup> It is worth noting that, following Virgilio Elizondo's suggestions in that direction, Orlando Espín and Sixto García were the first U.S. Latino/a theologians to propose and elaborate (starting in the early 1980s) a critical examination of popular Catholicism as source and locus for Latino/a systematic theology.

<sup>104</sup> Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 92, 162; see also Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 21-23.

<sup>105</sup> Virgil Elizondo, "Popular Religions as Support of Identity—Based on the Mexican-American Experience in the United States," in *Spirituality of the Third World: A Cry for Life*, papers and reflections from the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) 1992 Assembly, in Nairobi, Kenya, ed. K. C. Abraham and B. Mbuy-Beya (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 56.

<sup>106</sup> On this type of rationality, see Goizueta, "Rediscovering Praxis," 94-97; idem, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 140-41; Cristián Parker, *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 258-64; Manuel M. Marzal, "The Religion of the Andean Quechua in Southern Peru," in *The Indian Face of God in Latin America*, ed. M. Marzal et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 90; Xavier Albó, "The Aymara Religious Experience," in Marzal et al., *The Indian Face of God*, 141-44.

<sup>107</sup> Parker, *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America*, 377.

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<sup>108</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>109</sup> The entire book *Mestizo Christianity*, edited by Arturo Bañuelas revolves around this theme. Therein, especially see Virgil Elizondo, "Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection," 7-27; Fernando Segovia, "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand" 29-43; and Arturo Bañuelas, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: An Initial Assessment," 55-82. See also Aquino, "Directions and Foundations of Hispanic/Latino Theology," 5-21; Fernando Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," in Segovia and Isasi-Díaz *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 195-217; Ada M. Isasi-Díaz, "Afterwords: Strangers No Longer," in Segovia and Isasi-Díaz, *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 367-74; Allan F. Deck, "Latino Theology: The Year of the Boom," in *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 1:2 (1994), 51-63; Rodríguez, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: Context and Challenge," 6-15.

<sup>110</sup> Johann-Baptist Metz, "La teología en el ocaso de la modernidad," *Concilium* 191 (1984), 37-39; idem, "Standing at the End of the Eurocentric Era of Christianity: A Catholic View," in Fabella and Torres, *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, 85-90.

<sup>111</sup> Tamayo, *Presente y futuro*, 29.

<sup>112</sup> Roberto Goizueta, "United States Hispanic Theology and the Challenge of Pluralism," in Deck, *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, 15, 19.

<sup>113</sup> Fornet-Betancourt, "El cristianismo: Perspectivas de futuro," 7-8.

<sup>114</sup> Elizondo, "Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection," 9-10.

<sup>115</sup> Elizondo, "Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection," 10, 12.

<sup>116</sup> In M. P. Aquino and R. Goizueta, eds., *Theology: Expanding the Borders*, Annual Publication of the College Theology Society, vol. 43 (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 10.

<sup>117</sup> Johann-Baptist Metz, "Perspectivas de un cristianismo multicultural," in *Cristianismo y liberación: Homenaje a Casiano Floristán*, ed. J. J. Tamayo (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1996), 36.

<sup>118</sup> Rodríguez, "U.S. Hispanic Theology: Context and Challenge," 11.

<sup>119</sup> Originally published in French as *L'avenir est au métissage* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Mame, 1987). In English, *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Oak Park, Ill.: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988).

<sup>120</sup> Among the pioneering authors, see Agnes Heller, *Historia y vida cotidiana* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1972); idem, *Sociología de la vida cotidiana* (Barcelona: Editorial Península, 1977); idem, *La revolución de la vida cotidiana* (Barcelona: Editorial Península, 1982); Teresita de Barbieri, *Mujeres y vida cotidiana* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984); Julieta Kirkwood, "El feminismo como negación del autoritarismo," in *Teoría feminista: Selección de textos*, ed. Ediciones Populares Feministas (Santo Domingo: Ediciones del CIPAF, 1984); Ana Sojo, *Mujer y política. Ensayo sobre feminismo y sujeto popular* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1985).

<sup>121</sup> On these perspectives, see Alfonso Ibáñez, ed., *Agnes Heller: La satisfacción de las necesidades radicales* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1991), 11-17, 55-59; and Oscar Jara, "Prólogo a la edición centroamericana: De la amistad, el pan y la belleza," in Ibáñez, *Agnes Heller*, i-iv.

<sup>122</sup> See my work on daily life in theological method in Aquino, "Perspectives on a Latina Feminist Liberation Theology," 33-34; idem, "Feminismo," in Floristán and Tamayo, *Conceptos fundamentales del cristianismo*, 519-20; idem, *Our Cry for Life*, 38-41, 109-21; idem, "Latin American Feminist Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14:1 (1998), 104. See also Ada M. Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 66-73.

## 2

## Theology's Contribution to Society

### *The Ministry of the Theologian*



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In our Hispanic quest for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in the United States, the Hispanic theologian has a very crucial contribution to make. Emerging out of the common struggles of our people, the theological word is an essential element of our quest. Without it, the efforts of others will remain incomplete. We are a deeply religious people. Religious expressions are interlaced throughout our language and culture; religious themes appear throughout our novels, songs, and art work; religious imagery is the most common and persistent element of our Hispanic language—whether English, Spanish, Náhuatl, *Cholo*, *Pocho*, Mayan, or otherwise. For us, religion is not just a Sunday observance but everyday life. Our God-imagery is the deepest element of our identity. Will our religion bind us to an enslaving past or liberate us? Is it a power unto survival or a fatalistic force condemning us to subservience and to domination by others?

Religion is a power, but how that power is used must be named and directed. That is the task and challenge of the religious thinker of the group. Others can help, but no one can do it for us. As long as we do not explore and articulate this element of our being, we will remain a spiritually colonized and oppressed people. As Hispanic culture is fundamentally Chris-