



**Frontiers of Hispanic Theology
in the United States**

*Edited and with an Introduction
by
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Introduction

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Until now there have been few professional United States Hispanic theological voices.¹ Virgil Elizondo, within the Roman Catholic tradition, and Justo González and Orlando Costas, within the Protestant tradition, are among the few who come to mind. The emergence of a growing number of professional Hispanic theologians is a change that the publication of this book heralds.

This is, moreover, an event of great significance for theology as a vocation and profession in the United States. For much too long the dominant U.S. theological voices, be they liberal-progressive or conservative-integrist, have reflected the realities and interests of a mainstream that is aging and drying up. The biological life of the U.S. Catholic Church is surely passing to "newcomers": Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, and African American peoples.² Sooner or later the intellectual life and leadership must also move in that direction. This trend is now becoming obvious in the case of European and North American theologies where one observes the passing of "giants" like Karl Rahner but does not readily identify their successors. Is the torch being passed to a new generation of theologians in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and their descendants in the First World? The theologians whose works appear here are pioneers of a new theological "frontier."

The ideas behind this collection, my vision as editor, were simple: (1) to provide a collection of essays demonstrating the range and seriousness of theological reflection and writing going on today among these new emergent voices; (2) to promote a dialogue with both the Hispanic communities whose interests and perspectives this theology exemplifies and with mainstream colleagues on seminary and university faculties and within our professional organizations; (3) to affirm a clearer identity for U.S. Hispanic theology as a "bridge" theology suitable for a "bridge" people. These Hispanic writers are committed to the service of their communities within the United States. We are not Latin American theologians "passing through." We are North Americans of Hispanic origin. We have one foot, as it were, in the Third World and another in the First. In a unique way, we as U.S. Hispanics, know *both* worlds as perhaps few others do. For we have struggled in our own minds and hearts, in our flesh, with the complexities of

both the Hispanic-American and the Anglo-American worlds—so different and often antagonistic socio-economically and culturally speaking. Ours is a truly bilingual and bicultural theology that simply cannot take the perspective of any one group as the final word. Our deepest intuitions about and approaches to the understanding of the faith tend to be permanently dual (not dualistic), at once Hispanic and North American.

Readers can judge whether the dream that inspired the book has been attained. The articles reveal a breadth of interest, some more scholarly, others more pastoral, that fairly characterizes today's U.S. Hispanic theologian. The participation of most of the contributors on theological faculties and professional associations allows them to formulate the concerns of U.S. Hispanics in ways that engage U.S. mainstream, academic communities. U.S. Hispanic theologians thus articulate new ideas about theological education, methodology, and curricula that challenge the prevailing wisdom, norms, and mind-sets—progressive, moderate, or conservative—regarding theology's role in the life of church and society. This point is made by the various contributors in different ways.

One of the more obvious characteristics of this theology and the theologians who do it is its rootedness in the complex reality—social, economic, political, cultural, and pastoral—of the Hispanic communities. Such involvement is one of its notable strengths. But it is also a source of ongoing tension insofar as this theology desires to influence academia, whose professional demands often mean distancing oneself from the field of battle, from practical concerns, in the name of "intellectual rigor, scholarship, or seriousness." The movement back and forth from theory to praxis is not easy. Most of the writers in this collection have become veterans of just such a career. What has sustained them, undoubtedly, is the conviction that theology is an integral dimension of the life of a vibrant community struggling for that abundant life offered by Jesus Christ. This is the point made with passion and precision by María Pilar Aquino in chapter 2 of this book.

The collection before you gives witness to something new and still untested within North American religious and theological contexts. Arturo Bafuelas calls it "emerging U.S. Hispanic voices in the theologies of the Americas." This development, moreover, represents a qualitative change in the theological landscape, a breakthrough faithfully reflecting the dramatic transformation of the U.S. Catholic Church. No longer is it a church of mainstreamed European immigrants. The demographic trends reveal the birth of a new or "second-wave" church, one of Latin American origin. These trends also point to a rediscovery or recuperation of the oldest and deepest current of North American Catholicism—namely, its Hispanic roots. These roots have consistently been obscured by views of U.S. Catholic history which incorrectly place its origins in Maryland, and narrowly conceive of it as a movement westward.³ The emergence of theologians working out of a sounder vision of U.S. Catholic Church history is an important step in establishing the crucial importance of today's growing Hispanic presence.

The real identity and destiny of the U.S. Catholic Church as a whole is the issue.

The material conditions that give rise to such a development are frequently overlooked. Perhaps this is so because theology historically became a dialogue between disengaged academics/theoreticians on the one hand and the sources of Christian faith on the other. The engagement and rootedness of the theologian in a given socio-economic and cultural context was seldom viewed as relevant. The data upon which theologians reflected were often suspended in the air, in some eternal realm of ideas. Reality, especially in its socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions, has too often been *terra incognita* for theologians. The Second Vatican Council did much to change the dominant theological methodology by insisting on the church's, and hence theology's, need to be in dialogue with the world, to stop "looking at the clouds," as it were, and fix its vision on temporal affairs. In a Christian dispensation the worldly cannot be dichotomized from the eternal. Yet theological production and curricula, with some notable exceptions even twenty-five years after the Second Vatican Council, are limited to a dialogue with the Anglo-European world, its philosophical categories and burning issues, not necessarily with the concerns of the vast majority of human beings, the Third and Fourth Worlds. These worlds are in important ways more representative of the human, of the "real," world, than is the First World itself. U.S. Hispanic theology as modestly reflected in the articles in this collection now brings these viewpoints into the heart of modern or postmodern North American culture.

There is something qualitatively different, then, about U.S. Hispanic theology. It is a theology which certainly contrasts with mainstream U.S. theology, but also with the theology of liberation. That difference emerges from a simple glance at the origins and trajectory of this theology. The articles in this collection will clarify even more the character and basic profile of this emergent new "family on the theological block."

The very fact that now it is possible to broach the subject of U.S. Hispanic theology is itself the sign of something new and perhaps unforeseen on the theological horizon. For up to now the sea change constituted by the Hispanic presence has been visible almost exclusively at the grass-roots level, within the context of parish and pastoral care. Fully one-third of today's U.S. Roman Catholics are Hispanic and, if trends persist (and they give every indication of doing so), Hispanics will constitute the majority of Roman Catholics sometime in the first decade of the next millennium.⁴

The assumption, however, has been that the Hispanic presence is fundamentally a practical matter. It is not something that portends anything particularly profound at the level of self-understanding or theory. While the U.S. bishops have shown considerable insight into the consequences of the Hispanic presence in their pastoral letter of 1983, *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment*, and more recently in the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (1987), the middle level of church leadership at the

pastoral, educational, and intellectual levels has tended to read the situation as an epiphenomenon, a passing (and, for some, unpleasant) phase.³ This is so at least in part due to the unanalyzed acceptance and dominance of the immigrant analogy/paradigm, that is, the conviction that "those people" will eventually become just "like us" as the forces of assimilation inexorably transform newcomers just as they transformed "our" grandparents. A clear sign of this tendency, perhaps one of its greatest verifications, has been the dearth of intellectual production—books, articles, courses, lectures, and research—on the Hispanic presence as source of significant theological reflection.

As I have noted elsewhere, that presence has in no way been reflected in the world of ideas, in the intellectual life of the U.S. Catholic Church.⁴ In theologates and Catholic universities, in the curricula, on the faculties, and in the administrations one is hard pressed to find significant Hispanic elements. But something is happening. One indication of this is the successful course taught by Arturo Bafuelas in the spring of 1991 at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. This was one of the first courses ever offered specifically on U.S. Hispanic theology. The course generated a fifteen-page bibliography of U.S. Hispanic theological literature. This book is, of course, another indicator of this development.

At the risk of being excessively schematic or anecdotal, I will proceed to profile the background that elucidates the context of the essays before you.

THE RISE OF U.S. HISPANIC THEOLOGY: THE LEGACY OF VIRGIL ELIZONDO

The history of contemporary U.S. Hispanic theology must begin with the work of Virgil Elizondo.⁷ A priest of the archdiocese of San Antonio, Elizondo has provided a paradigm for theological scholarship rooted in a love of the Hispanic communities. He began in the 1960s, spurred on by the vision of the late Archbishop Robert Lucey.⁸ From the beginning Elizondo demonstrated a keen interest in pastoral and catechetical concerns. His was a reflection grounded in practical realities but fascinated with the sources of Christian faith—scripture and tradition. His writing reflects a remarkable ability to apply those sources in new, imaginative, and pastorally energizing ways. His finest work to date is *The Galilean Journey*, in which he develops the concept of *mestizaje* or miscegenation as a theologically rich approach for understanding the importance of the historical experience of U.S. Hispanics. A synthesis of Elizondo's concept of *mestizaje*, so fertile and influential among U.S. Hispanic writers, is provided in chapter 6 of this volume.

Elizondo's bibliography includes more than seventy items. He is the only U.S. Hispanic theologian with wide recognition in the U.S., Europe, and the Third World as well. While producing a regular stream of books and articles, Elizondo has always been more than a scholar. He is an extraor-

dinary activist. He founded the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio, participated in numerous national and international conferences, became a famous lecturer, and served on the board of several national and international theological associations such as *Concilium*, EATWOT (the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians), and ACHTUS (the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the U.S.). For several years he has been rector of the cathedral in San Antonio where he has inaugurated many new outreach programs for the local community. Of special note are the meticulously planned Holy Week ceremonies. At the cathedral he has produced a weekly Sunday liturgy that is broadcast throughout the country on Spanish-language television.

For approximately twenty years Elizondo was the sole, highly visible U.S. Hispanic theologian. That is one of the reasons why in 1989 the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the U.S. (ACHTUS) decided to give its first annual award for outstanding contributions to a theology of and for U.S. Hispanics to Elizondo, and to name it the Virgil Elizondo Award.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Elizondo's contribution to U.S. Hispanic theology.⁹ In addition to the work on *mestizaje*, Elizondo was one of the first theologians to view popular religiosity as a *locus theologicus*. In this he pioneered an implicit theological method that takes the anthropological concept of culture quite seriously. Undoubtedly this interest was the fruit of Elizondo's reading of *Gaudium et Spes*, especially paragraphs 56 and the following. In several articles and in a small, highly readable book entitled *La Morenita*, Elizondo reinterpreted the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a myth in the deepest anthropological sense of the word, a myth which allows us to get at the heart of the Mexican and the Mexican-American culture and identity. In this Elizondo actually anticipated the criticism that was going to be made of liberation theologians for their disregard for the anthropological core of popular culture. A theology which purports to be "of the people" cannot take seriously only or mainly the socio-economic and political factors; it must attend to the people's religion, to their devotions, rituals, and customs. Among the Latin American peoples that means paying attention to their profound interest in the Virgin Mary. The contribution that Elizondo has made to the understanding of the Guadalupe event as it is celebrated and lived by Hispanics of Mexican origin shows that he possessed the insight long before many of his contemporaries.

Like Latin American liberation theologians, however, Elizondo has attempted to view popular religiosity, especially its strong Marian character, as a fundamental feature of any truly liberative approach to the issues of society and political economy. Elizondo is a theologian squarely committed to action on behalf of justice, to a faith doing justice. His concerns, then, go beyond what may at times appear to be a romantic interest in quaint, sometimes alienating, and often dying popular religious customs. It is fair to say, however, that his writings have tended to reflect more interest in

pastoral, catechetical, and anthropological issues than in socio-economic and political issues. Personally and in terms of his considerable commitments, Elizondo sees his work as that of an organic intellectual rooted in the horizon of the Hispanic poor for whom *mestizaje* and popular religiosity are key root experiences.

This schematic overview of Elizondo's work shows that his approach has been highly influential. Two interwoven features of the "new generation" of U.S. Hispanic writers, the ones writing in this volume and others as well, are the interest in popular religiosity and the commitment to the social struggles of the people. This means that the starting point for most contemporary U.S. Hispanic theologians is the socio-economic, political, or cultural realities grasped with the aid of the corresponding social sciences. Theirs is a theology explicit about its commitments and social location, much like Third World and women's theologies. In this regard, the emerging U.S. Hispanic theology like liberation, women's, and black theologies, has been called an "advocacy theology." This often pejorative epithet still has currency among some "mainstream" theologians who naively persist in holding, implicitly or explicitly, that there is some serious, intellectually rigorous, neutral, objective, serenely uncommitted theology "out there," and that theirs is most likely it. The persistence of this attitude contributes to the enduring marginalization of Hispanics and their theologians, which shows itself, at best, in patronizing and, at worst, in disdainful ways.

The Legacy of Latin American Theology

At the same time that Elizondo was beginning his career as writer, lecturer, and teacher, currents of Latin American theology began to influence U.S. Catholic thinkers. Elizondo was the first U.S. Hispanic to personally know Latin American theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Enrique Dussel, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and Ricardo Antoncich. His friendship with Gustavo Gutiérrez was especially important and is reflected in the numerous lectures and teaching engagements Gutiérrez has accepted over the years at the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio. Over time Elizondo had the opportunity to meet and deepen friendships with many of these Latin American theologians. Certainly one of those occasions was at the annual meetings of *Concilium* in Belgium, as well as at numerous theological gatherings in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. While Elizondo was communicating to his U.S. audience some of the concerns and approaches of these Latin American theologians and recasting them from the unique perspective of U.S. Latinos, a younger generation was listening.

Liberation theology then, especially its praxis-oriented methodology, was embraced by a new generation of U.S. Hispanic thinkers with enthusiasm and hope. The many common points between the Latin American situation and the U.S. Hispanic one—marginality, powerlessness, discrimination, and

outright oppression—suggested to thoughtful U.S. Hispanics that in the brilliant writings of Latin American sisters and brothers there was something of special relevance. We admired what they were accomplishing and desired to emulate them.

Corresponding to this fascination with Latin American theology was a similar attraction to the "new" church, the "people's church," being heralded by the bishops' conferences of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979). The Latin American theologians were producing an articulate, theologically grounded vision of church and society. The institutional church, through the often episcopally sanctioned basic ecclesial communities, was facilitating the creation of institutional bases that incarnated that vision of God's reign.

U.S. Hispanic theologians have thus deepened their respect for the accomplishments of Latin American and other third-world theologies. They have acknowledged an important debt. Yet there has been a gradual recognition of the need to do something different: to affirm the originality of theology grounded on the unique experiences of Hispanics specifically in the U.S. Gustavo Gutiérrez reminded us over and over again of the need to do this. He suggested that it was not a question of replicating the work of Latin Americans in the considerably different North American context, but of truly taking their *method* seriously—that is, doing theology out of *this* particular U.S. Hispanic reality. The resulting theology would surely be something fresh and original.

Virgil Elizondo has already taken the lead in this search for the specificity of U.S. Hispanic theology with his discussion of the role of *el rechazo* or "rejection" in the experience of Hispanics of Mexican origin in the borderlands. This is an element in his more elaborate concept of *mestizaje*.

In recent years U.S. Hispanic theologians have begun to pursue the implications of their people's being "a bridge" within North American culture. Here one sees a clear element of contrast with Latin American theology. It is the bridge or dialogical nature of U.S. Hispanic theology that seems to set it apart from mainstream U.S. theology, from mainstream feminist theology, and perhaps even from black theology. There are three areas where in my view the bridge character is revealed. The first area has to do with the context of modernity, where U.S. Hispanic theologians function. The second refers to the distinctive situation of U.S. Latinas and their prototypical participation in the elaboration of U.S. Hispanic theology. The third area revolves around the issue of the relative importance of different analytical tools of the social sciences and differing social science methodologies in the analysis of reality, the first moment in liberation methodology.

U.S. HISPANICS CONFRONT THE CULTURE OF MODERNITY

Let us consider the first issue: the import of the culture of modernity as contextualizing the U.S. Hispanic reality. The key point here is that U.S.

Hispanics encounter the culture of modernity *at the source* and not in some derivative or "watered down" fashion as is the case in the Third World. What that means in terms of theological reflection and intellectual life is one of the central concerns of Roberto Goizueta (chapter 1). His theological writings focus on issues of method and hermeneutics. He deals with the epistemological suppositions of the dominant North American theological milieu, Roman Catholic and Protestant, and the interface of that epistemology with that of U.S. Hispanic theologians. Goizueta pursues the issues of ontological individualism and pluralism as they are understood and sometimes reflected by mainstream theologians. He critiques these conceptions and values from the vantage point of a committed U.S. Hispanic.

Goizueta's background in fundamental theology allows him to dialogue with mainstream colleagues. In the process he proposes some interesting, new directions for U.S. Hispanic theology in dialogue with mainstream U.S. theology. U.S. Hispanic theologians are not outsiders but distinctive voices within the North American context. Goizueta's thought challenges mainstream U.S. theology, whether liberal, progressive, or conservative, Catholic or Protestant, in the sense that paradigms rooted in the experience of the Third World make claims that possibly go to the heart of Anglo-American and European theologies. As long as Latin American theology was precisely that—Latin American—it remained somewhat foreign, perhaps exotic, even intriguing. But its claims on the dominant theologies and the way of life those theologies ground and enhance remain minimal. Goizueta issues a challenge to mainstream theologians on their own ground, on their own turf. This is perhaps what is most interesting, problematic, and to some thinkers even disconcerting about his approach.

Goizueta's critique of the prevailing understanding of pluralism among North American intellectuals is telling. His contribution to this book is a fine example of how this young, promising theologian approaches underlying philosophical and methodological issues from the unique standpoint of a committed, organic U.S. Hispanic intellectual. His work represents a distinctive, new moment for U.S. Hispanic theology, a moment that reflects the peculiar position of U.S. Hispanics somewhere between the First World ("in" modernity but somehow still not "of" it) and the Third World ("of" it but not "in" it). His thought runs the risk of being rejected by both those worlds insofar as its social class and cultural location reflect a *tertium quid*. It therefore seems foreign and peculiarly threatening to the status quo, the hegemonic intellectual and ideological forces (of whatever stripe) of either Latin America or the U.S..

In chapter 2 María Pilar Aquino cautions us against the unanalyzed acceptance of or complicity with the culture of modernity. She claims that U.S. Hispanic theologians may inadvertently succumb to this modernity's enchantments and thus lose their critical edge.⁹ She is challenging U.S.

Hispanic theologians to go back to their roots, their people, their identity. This means taking a stand, and in that sense not being a "bridge."

Hispanic Women's Voices at the Ground Floor

The second bridge character of U.S. Hispanic theology is manifested in the unusually prominent role that women have had in this emergent theology. One of Bafuelas's students, Eduardo Fernández, documented the fact that approximately 25 percent of the current generation of U.S. Hispanic theological writers are women. It is doubtful that even today such a significant percentage of women theological writers could be found in the Latin American context.

The number of Latina women doing theology is gradually rising. Theologians like Gloria Loya, Rosa María Icaza, and María Pilar Aquino who have contributed to this volume exemplify this. But there are others as well, as the select bibliography found at the end of this book demonstrates. Especially notable among these are María de la Cruz Aymes, Marina Herrera, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Aymes's work has been limited to catechetics and pastoral issues, and goes back to the 1960s. For many years she conceived of herself as a "mainstream" writer-educator. In 1990 she was awarded the Virgilio Elizondo Award of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the U.S. In her acceptance speech the Mexican-born woman religious shared the story of her "conversion" to the U.S. Hispanic reality. For most of her career as a leading, internationally known catechist she had prescinded from issues of Hispanic identity in the United States—that is, from her people's social and cultural questions. Her exposure to the thought of Virgil Elizondo and the work of the Mexican-American Cultural Center was decisive in her *conscientización* or conversion to a new view of her people and of herself as teacher and writer. This is reflected in her literary production of the 1980s to the present.

Marina Herrera was the first U.S. Hispanic (born in Santo Domingo) woman to earn the doctorate in theology. Her numerous writings go back to the mid 1970s. She deserves recognition, therefore, as one of the first U.S. Hispanic theological writers along with Elizondo himself. Herrera, like Aymes, is an accomplished religious educator. She identified with cultural and women's issues from the beginning of her career. This is reflected in her bibliography, which includes articles on catechesis, multicultural ministry, and the Hispanic woman.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz is a Cuban American who began writing in earnest in the late 1970s. She has an excellent theological background, having earned the doctorate in social ethics at Union Theological Seminary. Isasi-Díaz has specialized in a U.S. Hispanic women's theology and published along with Yolanda Tarango the only booklength monograph to date in this crucial area. Currently on the faculty of Drew University, she has been active in the women's ordination movement. Perhaps more than any other

U.S. Latina, Isasi-Díaz has moved in ecumenical circles and thus is an invaluable resource in the almost nonexistent area of ecumenism among Roman Catholic and Protestant Hispanics.

In the area of U.S. Hispanic liturgy, prayer, and spirituality, Rosa María Icaza (chapter 8) is certainly a leader. She has served for many years on the faculty of the Mexican-American Cultural Center and is at this writing president of the Instituto de Liturgia Hispana. In addition to teaching and writing, Icaza has been a leader in promoting the inculturation of liturgy within Hispanic contexts in countless parishes and dioceses.

There are other Latinas who have begun to teach and write. Jeanette Rodríguez-Holgún was born in Ecuador and raised in New York. She earned the doctorate at the Graduate Theological Union and is currently teaching at Seattle University, where she is also director of a graduate program. She is specializing in Hispanic women's issues. Her thesis was on Guadalupe as a potentially liberative symbol for Hispanic women.

Ana María Pineda, born in El Salvador and raised in San Francisco, is completing the doctorate at the Universidad de Salamanca while teaching and directing the Hispanic ministry program at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Pineda has contributed articles to *New Theology Review*. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the permanent diaconate among U.S. Hispanics and promises to be one of the few substantive pastoral/theological reflections on a subject that has not received the attention it deserves.

Gloria Inés Loya (chapter 7) is currently teaching Hispanic studies and supervising field ministry at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. She can be included among the women who are beginning to write during and after the arduous process of acquiring the doctorate. Loya's article on a U.S. Hispanic women's liberation theology is included in this collection and synthesizes a section of her doctoral dissertation at the Universidad de Salamanca.

The presence of a significant number of women in the gestation of this new U.S. Hispanic theology is unthinkable outside the context of the United States. It is here that women—"mainstream," white women—have achieved more recognition in the field of theology than anywhere else in the world. That recognition is the fruit of a considerable theological production that is respected for its high quality. Undoubtedly the issues and concerns developed by U.S. women have in various ways encouraged Latinas to pursue the theological vocation within their own distinctive cultural and social settings. They have done this without losing sight of the growing theological production of Latin American women such as Elsa Tamez, María Clara Bingemer, and many others. This dual indebtedness—to U.S. mainstream feminism on the one hand and to a Latin American counterpart on the other—suggests and evokes once again the bridge character of U.S. Hispanic theology.

U.S. Hispanic Culture and Socio-Political Liberation

A third way in which U.S. Hispanic theology manifests its bridge character and originality is more implicit than explicit. It has to do with (1) the

importance given to certain elements of Marxist analysis and (2) the explicit call for radical change that at times was quite influential in Latin American theology. While seldom if ever critiquing the emphasis on economic, structural, and social class analyses of their Latin American counterparts and their passionate calls for socio-economic and political transformation, U.S. Hispanic theologians have gravitated toward *cultural* analysis, especially to popular culture as epitomized by popular religiosity. Such a tendency has a muting effect, at least in the short term, on the urgent calls for radical change. María Pilar Aquino in her article in this collection critiques this approach and warns us about its pitfalls and inadequacies.

The thought of Elizondo certainly moves with the cultural, anthropological reality more than with any other, and therefore may be viewed as somewhat more "culturalist" than "liberationist." Orlando Espín, as cogently demonstrated in chapter 4 in this book and in much of his other writings, has insisted, however, on the value of popular religiosity as the least invaded or colonized source for the doing of a U.S. Hispanic theology. In his view it can and must be linked to the liberation struggle. For popular religiosity is a special instance of a first moment, a response, precisely to the initial oppression of indigenous and African cultures in the Americas.

A review of the literature reveals that the single most recurrent topic in U.S. Hispanic theology is the practical, pastoral reality and issues of evangelization, ministry, and catechesis. The second most popular topic is women's issues, and the third is popular religiosity and spirituality. Interestingly enough, to this writer's knowledge no one has investigated the lack of a more rigorous socio-economic and political analysis of the U.S. Hispanic realities as a starting point for theological reflection. Aquino does provide us with some suggestive leads. In any event, this lack is notable and a contrasting feature with much Latin American theology. This lack may be a source of a valid critique of U.S. Hispanic theology. That theology has perhaps unintentionally fallen into the trap of viewing reality in the pragmatic and functionalist fashion severely criticized by Gregory Baum. At a plenary session of the Catholic Theological Society of America he expressed this concern in these words:

The question raised is whether post-conciliar American theology has surrendered to liberal values and the liberal political philosophy associated with the American dream? ... Has a certain sense of discontinuity made post-conciliar theologians forget the cautions against liberalism contained in pre-conciliar theology? ... Is American theology generated out of an identification with the middle class? ... The question must, therefore, be asked whether and to what extent American Catholic theology has become part of the liberal ideology that legitimizes American society ... as a model for the rest of the world.¹⁰

Roberto Goizueta has pointed to the pervasive tendency among mainstream Euro-North American thinkers to romanticize and hence dismiss

the realities of the poor and powerless, among them U.S. Hispanics.¹¹ One example of this is the stereotyping of Hispanics as carefree and fiesta-oriented, as a kind of "ornamental" people. They are nice to have around. Their food is tasty enough and their music often exhilarating. But do they have anything to say? Anything substantive or intellectually, socially, politically, or economically challenging or profound to offer? Goizueta was speaking of the dilemma of the U.S. Hispanic intellectual who is a kind of nonentity, a contradiction in terms, because of the stereotypical, folkloric view in which Hispanics are held by the dominant society and into which they sometimes willingly allow themselves to be ensnared. Women have helped us understand a comparable mechanism at work in patriarchal society with its implicit axiom about women being "seen but not heard." Certainly the African-American theologians as well as women could speak volumes about this romanticizing phenomenon.

One may ask why U.S. Hispanic theologians have not read the abundant historical and social science literature of Chicano nationalism of the 1970s in a more frontal fashion. This literature was a counterpart of the social class and economic analyses coming out of Latin America. It was often inspired by the theory of dependency, a form of Marxist analysis influential in Latin America a decade or more ago. Chicano nationalism inspired an entire generation of U.S. Hispanic intellectuals in the social sciences. Many of them are today professors at leading secular universities. U.S. Hispanic theologians, in contrast, tended to reflect a pastoral, church-oriented, and perhaps even a clerical vision of themselves. They may appear to an outside viewer to function more as companions of people within church than as companions of people within society. Hence the neglect of the social class, political, and economic coordinates.

Yet this lack of a more constant and coherent socio-economic and political interest in U.S. Hispanic theology is more implicit than explicit. It is seemingly unintentional. This deficiency may be addressed in future U.S. Hispanic theology. The possibility is suggested by changes in the use of social analysis among Latin American theologians in the wake of *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and the worldwide collapse of socialism. Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino, for example, have turned more and more to issues of spirituality, to cultural and anthropological concerns, without necessarily abandoning their epistemological option for the poor.

U.S. Hispanic theology, since it has focused on pastoral and religious issues more than on any others, is relatively unencumbered by the heavy ideological concerns of Latin American theology. It has done so in a practical, nontheory-laden way. Consequently, it may have something to offer Latin American theology—for instance, a more practical understanding of how basic ecclesial communities constitute a new way of being church in the highly mobile, urban, and modernized context of U.S. Hispanics. This is a context that becomes less and less foreign to Latin Americans even if they never leave their nation of birth, given the dramatic urbanization

underway throughout that continent. On the other hand the critique of U.S. Hispanic theology on the grounds that it fails to take a more clearly liberationist perspective and remains more in the "culturalist" camp may find a resolution as Latin American theology struggles with a new, more mature synthesis of how to use practical tools for analyzing reality in all its diversity and depth—socially, politically, economically, and of course culturally. The excesses of the past have been acknowledged as Latin American theologians strive to move beyond the accomplishments of the past twenty-five years, while owning up to the sometimes strident and inflexible ideology of a vaguely socialist flavor that lost contact with the reality it was claiming to elucidate.

To acknowledge such excesses does not at all imply the canonization of free market, neocapitalist ideologies and practices. Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, for example, vigorously criticizes capitalism and insists on the need to modify it.¹² Hispanics may contribute to this new maturity and search for viable socio-economic and political alternatives while gaining insights from their Latin American colleagues. All of this, once again, brings home the bridge or dialogical nature of the relationship of U.S. Hispanic theologians with their Euro-North American colleagues on the one side and their Latin American colleagues on the other.

ACHTUS: Midwife of U.S. Hispanic Theology

The historical evolution of theological reflection from the unique perspectives of Hispanics in the United States owes much to the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). Its origins and trajectory read like a Who's Who of that theology and help clarify the problems and possibilities for the doing of such a theology.

It is hard to say who originally had the idea of founding an association of U.S. Hispanic Catholic theologians. Certainly the idea had been vaguely discussed in the 1970s, perhaps in the context of the *encuentros* sponsored by the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs of the United States Catholic Conference or at other important moments in the Hispanic ministry movement of the 1970s and 80s. Nothing happened, however, until 1985 when this writer renewed his friendship with Arturo Bañuelas. I had met Arturo twelve years before, at a meeting of Hispanic seminarians at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Santa Fe, New Mexico. We saw or conversed with each other only a few times in the intervening years. We both followed each other's work in Hispanic ministry. Arturo had found some of my articles on the rights of undocumented immigrants useful in his ministry. I had heard of Arturo's leadership in his diocese and work on the board of the Mexican-American Cultural Center.

Our meeting in Rome in the fall of 1985 was the result of circumstance. Arturo was completing the doctorate in fundamental theology at the Gregorian University and I was beginning the doctoral program in missiology.

On our first meeting in so many years one of us broached the subject of the need for an association of U.S. Hispanic theologians. We spoke passionately about the need but also understood some of the obstacles.

It seemed to us that the lack of articulate Hispanic theological voices was a basic and alarming symptom of the marginality that characterized the Hispanic presence in the U.S. Catholic Church. While the Hispanic communities' lack of "hands on" pastoral care and outreach was of deep concern to us, the failure to raise up a more critical and theologically grounded voice seemed to us to be especially serious in the North American Catholic Church context. The fuller participation of Hispanics in the church especially at the levels of policy and planning, a fairer distribution of the church's resources, and a more valid vision of the U.S. church's identity and destiny would never come about without the contribution of thinkers and theologians. But not just *any* thinkers and theologians. We were concerned about professionals interested in and capable of doing what Clodovis Boff calls "feet-on-the-ground" theology.

We knew there were many pitfalls. One of them was a kind of anti-intellectualism we had noted among some of our Hispanic colleagues. One of the words used to describe this anti-intellectualism is *basismo*—that is, the idea that only the poor themselves, the grass-roots people of the "base," are qualified to do this theology. All other efforts, especially those that reek of academe, are suspect. This *basismo* could also be compounded with a suspicion of elitism. Here we have two priests (in Rome of all places!) plotting to initiate yet another theological men's club. This view struck us as understandable given the reality of ivory-tower theology, of elitism, clericalism, and sexism in church and society. However, we also saw ourselves as being qualified, as having some credibility, to begin such an effort. We both were committed and had a record of social justice activism and serious involvement in grass-roots ministries. It also seemed to us that one of the best ways to acknowledge our debt as theologians to persons like Gustavo Gutiérrez and a host of other Latin American theologians was by doing in our context what they had done in theirs. Few, if any, were accusing them of being elitist, ivory-tower intellectuals.

Another factor that entered into our conversation was the relationship of theologians, specifically Hispanic theologians, not this time to the base or grass-roots communities, but rather to the bishops, especially the U.S. Hispanic bishops and other key leaders. Both Bafuelas and I felt that there was something lacking in the reflection that Hispanic leaders—lay, clerical, or episcopal—had thus far been able to produce. This concern was brought home by a simple comparison between the elaborate, sophisticated processes and resources brought to bear on the U.S. bishops vis-à-vis their famous pastoral letters on war and peace and on the U.S. economy on the one hand, and the relatively simple, unsophisticated tone of their pastoral letter on the Hispanic presence on the other. We were not belittling the significance of the pastoral letter on Hispanics, but pointing to something

that is rather evident: the dearth of theological and other reflective, intellectual expertise among the U.S. Hispanic leadership. That is what our ACHTUS project wanted to do something about.

One of the final considerations that influenced our "dream" was a factual matter. *Are there any U.S. Hispanic theologians?* We knew of just a handful and realized that the "dream" might not get off the ground unless we did more research. That would have to await our return to the United States.

On returning to the United States in 1987 the project was taken up in earnest. By that time we had identified others who also shared this vision and helped make it a reality: María Pilar Aquino, Roger Luna, Roberto Goizrieta, C. Gilbert Romero, Virgil Elizondo, and Orlando Espín. These, plus Arturo Bafuelas and I, met in January 1988 at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. It was there that the decision was made to move ahead with bylaws and statutes for the new academy and to initiate a membership campaign. The first meeting of the board of directors took place in Ruidoso, New Mexico, in November 1988. The first officers were elected and the first annual meeting of the academy planned for June 1989. The decision was made to inaugurate the Virgilio Elizondo Award and confer the first award on Elizondo himself. This was done at the June 1989 meeting at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

An issue that concerned ACHTUS from the very beginning was how to be sensitive toward and inclusive of women. We were pleased that the academy had at least one foundress: María Pilar Aquino. But soon other women theologians joined as regular or associate members: Marina Herrera, Jeanette Rodríguez-Holguín, Ada Isasi-Díaz, Zoila Díaz, Gloria Inés Loya, Ana María Pineda, and Carmen Cervantes. The Second Annual Virgilio Elizondo Award, as mentioned above was given to María de la Cruz Aymes.

A second concern of ACHTUS was how to be inclusive of the diverse Hispanic national groups. We recruited members from every major Hispanic community in the country. As a result the forty-four regular and associate members of ACHTUS in 1991 reflect rather faithfully the distribution of U.S. Hispanics according to national origin (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Central American, and South American). The recruitment effort was quite successful in that it brought almost two-thirds of all U.S. Hispanic Catholics with or completing doctorates in some theological discipline into the academy.¹³

A third issue of some concern to ACHTUS members was the need to assert the difference between Latin American theology and U.S. Hispanic theology. Several members have had the experience of being recognized as followers of some liberation theologian or an exponent of liberation theology in the United States. We wanted to move beyond that stereotype to create something rooted in the historical praxis of U.S. Hispanics who certainly have much in common with their Latin American progenitors but

who need theology appropriate to their distinct circumstances. ACHTUS members such as Arturo Bañuelas reminded us of the original Hispanic roots of U.S. Catholicism. He expressed a special interest in defining and developing what he calls a "borderlands" theology that originated in the first evangelization of the Southwest four hundred years ago.

A final major concern of ACHTUS was ecumenism. It seemed that an academy purporting to be Roman Catholic must take seriously the Second Vatican Council and its challenge of promoting Christian unity. Yet the group was sensitive to the negative experience that U.S. Hispanic Catholics have had of an aggressive and disrespectful proselytism on the part of some Protestant sects. For the time being it was decided that the academy would stress its Roman Catholic character in pursuit of a firmer and clearer identity. From the beginning, however, the academy had excellent relations with Hispanic Protestant colleagues, most of them from the historical, mainline churches. Some ACHTUS members are actively involved in *La Comunidad*, an ecumenical association of Hispanic scholars of religion, organized at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and promoted by the Fund for Theological Education. ACHTUS and Protestant Hispanic theologians have had occasion to dialogue and even collaborate on projects at meetings of ACHTUS, of *La Comunidad*, and at the annual Hispanic summer program sponsored by the Fund for Theological Education. ACHTUS members have regularly written in *Apuntes*, the only journal of U.S. Hispanic theology in the country. It is edited by Justo González and published at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. In light of the academy's interest in Christian unity, the board of directors conferred the 1991 Virgilio Elizondo Award on Justo L. González, a Methodist, who is, without a doubt, one of the most prolific and accomplished U.S. Hispanic theologians—Roman Catholic or Protestant. Finally, ACHTUS decided to cosponsor an ecumenical conference on Hispanic theology called "Faith Doing Justice," which took place at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in October 1991. This was one of the first major ecumenical U.S. Hispanic theological conferences ever held.

Having completed this cursory review of the origins of U.S. Hispanic theology, now it is time to turn to the theologians themselves as reflected in the nine chapters of this collection. They offer a glimpse of how the Christian faith is again understood and actualized in the complex and pluralistic North American setting. Their reflections are nurtured by the profound faith of the Hispanic communities. For the first time these communities are acquiring, through these and many other writers, a theological voice. That voice promises to shed new, unexpected light on what Christian discipleship means in the changing circumstances of ecclesial life in contemporary North America. Theirs is certainly not a definitive voice or the last word. This is, after all, just a beginning for what promises to be a crucial, revitalizing dialogue engaging the attention of intelligent U.S. Christians for many years to come.

NOTES

1. There is no consensus among persons of Latin American origin in the United States regarding the most appropriate umbrella term. Church and government agencies have tended to use "Hispanic." In the western United States university, professional, and political leaders have preferred the term "Latino." The simple truth is that no single term is adequate. This editor therefore uses Hispanic and Latino interchangeably. Each contributor has made his or her own option in this regard.
2. The use of the word "newcomer" with reference to Hispanics is really quite inappropriate. The Hispanics were the first Europeans to settle in several parts of what is now the United States.
3. One of the few studies of the Hispanic Catholic in what is now the United States is the collection of essays edited by Moisés Sandoval, *Fronteras*, San Antonio: Mexican-American Cultural Center, 1983. The Cushwa Center at the University of Notre Dame has undertaken an ambitious project to advance the historical knowledge about Hispanics in the U.S. Catholic Church. Three volumes are being planned with publication beginning in 1992. Jay Dolan is the chief editor of this series.
4. See Allan Figueroa Deck, *The Second Wave*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, pp. 9–10.
5. See *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment*, Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1984, and *The National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry*, Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1987.
6. See Deck, *Second Wave*, Foreword, pp. xi–xvi; and "Opening the Door to Life in the Church," a collection of reflections on the challenge of the Hispanic presence, in *Origins*, vol. 19, no. 12, August 17, 1989.
7. It should be noted that the very first U.S. Hispanic theologian was really the nineteenth-century Cuban-American priest of the archdiocese of New York, Felix Varela. His was a brilliant but isolated example of theological reflection on the part of a U.S. Hispanic. See Felipe J. Estévez, *El perfil pastoral de Felix Varela*, Miami: Editorial Universal, 1989, and by the same author, *Felix Varela, Letters to Elpidio: A Critical Translation*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1989.
8. For the life of Archbishop Lucey and its relevance to the growth of Hispanic ministry, see Stephen A. Privett, S.J., *The U.S. Catholic Church and Its Hispanic Members: The Pastoral Vision of Archbishop Robert E. Lucey*, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1988.
9. The issue of modern culture's influence on the evangelization of Latin America is being discussed more and more under the heading of the "new evangelization." The fifth centenary of Columbus's arrival in the New World has inaugurated a debate about modernity and evangelization. See, for instance, Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelization*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991. U.S. Hispanic thinkers in the very center of modern culture—that is, in the United States—have much to contribute.
10. Gregory Baum, "The Social Context of American Catholic Theology," in *Proceedings of the Forty-First Annual Convention*, Catholic Theological Society of America, p. 94.
11. See Roberto Goizueta's presentation in the section entitled "New Vitality: Theology and the Challenge of Black, Hispanic, and Feminist Theologies in North America," at the third plenary session of the forty-sixth annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America (1991) to be published in the *Proceedings*.

12. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1991, nos. 33 and 42.

13. For further information on the members of ACHTUS, see *The Directory of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States for 1991*, available from the ACHTUS National Office, 1050 N. Clark St., El Paso, Texas 79905.

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