

American Catholic Identities A Documentary History

Christopher J. Kauffman, General Editor

American Catholic Identities is a nine-volume series that makes available to the general reader, the student, and the scholar seminal documents in the history of American Catholicism. Subjects are wide-ranging and topically ordered within periods to encounter the richly textured experiences of American Catholics from the earliest years to the present day. The twenty-six editors of these volumes reveal a command of trends in historiography since the publication of John Tracy Ellis's three-volume work, *Documents of American Catholic History*. Hence the American Catholic Identities series shows developments in our understanding of social history — the significance of gender, race, regionalism, ethnicity, and spirituality, as well as Catholic thought and practice before and since the Second Vatican Council.

The series elucidates myriad meanings of the American Catholic experience by working with the marker of religious identity. It brings into relief the historical formations of religious self-understandings of a wide variety of Catholics in a society characterized by the principles of religious liberty, separation of church and state, religious pluralism, and voluntarism.

American Catholic Identities is united by such dominant factors in American history as waves of immigration, nativism, anti-Catholicism, racism, sexism, and several other social and ideological trends. Other aspects of unity are derived from American Catholic history: styles of episcopal leadership, multiple and various types of Catholic institutions, and the dynamic intellectual interaction between the United States and various national centers of Catholic thought. Woven into the themes of this documentary history are the protean meanings of what constitutes being American and Catholic in relation to the formations of religious identities.

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Presente!

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University students discuss Latino spirituality with theologian Virgilio Elizondo (document 75) at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, April 2000. Courtesy Cecilia González-Andrieu.

Part 6

CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL VOICES

Latinos, *nosotros*, vivimos sobre un puente que se extiende entre dos mundos: el de ellos y el nuestro.

Y el dolor nos llena al acercarnos más a un lado y apartarnos del otro, porque al caminar, tenemos que cortar los hilos antiguos que unen estos dos mundos en nosotros.

Sabemos en nuestras entrañas, que caminar hacia un lado del puente es imposible,

y al mismo tiempo quedarnos del otro lado traería nuestra muerte.

Porque el mundo que vemos a nuestros pies ya no es un mundo sin conquistadores

y el otro lado del puente solo nos ofrece una vida sin poetas, sin *nicabuman* y las canciones de amor de nuestra cultura.

Pero desde aquí, podemos ver el panorama distante, y el paisaje. . . .

Latinos, *nosotros*, live on the suspension bridge of two realities; theirs and ours.

It is painful to come to either end of the bridge, because in that journey, we must sever the already frayed strands of rope which have kept our two worlds together for so long.

We know in our hearts that going to one end of the bridge is impossible, while remaining on the other is certain annihilation.

For the world at our feet is no longer a place without conquerors and the end of the bridge means living in a world without the poets, without *nicabuman* and the love songs of our culture.

Yet from this vantage point, we can see the distant panorama, the landscape. . . .

José Roberto Gutiérrez, "A Journey of Faith, a Search for Dignity," presentation given at Fordham University, New York, 1992. Trans. Cecilia González-Andrieu. Printed by permission.

Introduction

Latina and Latino Catholics have engaged in profound reflection on and analysis of their faith experience for generations. The documents in this book reveal some of this rich theological tradition as expressed in diverse sources like rituals and devotions, sermons, letters, petitions, speeches, editorials, testimonials, and prayers. However, only over the past three decades have U.S. Hispanics produced a body of published theological literature. These writings

of U.S. Latino theologians reveal significant insights for the study of Latino Catholic identities.

Like the expanded Latino struggle for justice over the past three decades examined in the previous chapter, various social forces facilitated the emergence of Latino theologies. Vatican II and subsequent papal teaching, especially the call for theological reflection adapted to particular local contexts in documents like the conciliar decree *Ad gentes* (1965) and Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975), provided impetus and official support for the work of Hispanic theologians. The growing number of university-educated Hispanics and the noteworthy population increase among Latinos generally enhanced the pool of potential theologians and accentuated the need for a theology that addressed Hispanic faith expressions and pastoral needs. Additionally, Latin American liberation theology inspired many Hispanic theologians in their work, although from early on Latino theologians in the United States recognized they had to develop an original theology grounded in their unique historical experience and social reality (Deck; Medina 1994: 10–13).

The spark that ignited a theological movement and new school of thought to emerge from these conducive historical conditions was the groundbreaking work of Virgilio Elizondo (see documents 66, 75), who published his first essay from a distinctly Mexican American perspective in 1972 (Elizondo 2000: 58–61). In the years that followed, both Protestant and Catholic Hispanic colleagues joined Elizondo in a collaborative effort to construct theologies from a U.S. Latino perspective, most notably Justo González, a Cuban Methodist leader in theological education who has been the most prolific writer among Latino theologians. By the end of the 1980s, the number of Hispanic Catholic theologians was sufficient for them to form their own professional association. Led by Arturo Bañuelas and Allan Figueroa Deck, both noted theologians and widely recognized analysts and practitioners of Hispanic ministry, in 1988 U.S. Hispanic theologians formed the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). The following summer, they convened the organization's first annual meeting. While ecumenical both in its membership and its mission, ACHTUS is largely a Hispanic Catholic organization that provides a forum for professional Hispanic theologians to develop their ideas and projects (Deck xxi–xxiv). In 1993, ACHTUS leader Orlando Espín led the academy's initiative to establish the quarterly *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*. Since its inception the journal has enhanced scholarly, ecumenical, and interdisciplinary exchange on topics pertinent to U.S. Latino theology, as well as promoted "the Latino/Hispanic struggle for justice" (Espín 4). The *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, its Hispanic Protestant counterpart *Apuntes* (begun in 1981), and the dramatic increase in books and articles that Latina and Latino theologians publish in a wide variety of venues have provided a major new voice and perspective in the theological landscape of the United States and beyond.

Latino theologies are by no means univocal and monolithic, thus the use of the plural form *theologies* in this chapter. However, Latina and Latino writers have noted several common themes and issues in Hispanic theological works,

such as conquest, *mestizaje* (the mixing of cultures), the engagement of popular Hispanic expressions of faith as a primary source for theology, cultural analysis, and, particularly in the work of Hispanic women theologians, a concomitant attention to gender and class analysis. Moreover, Latinas and Latinos articulate passionate, advocacy theologies that are linked to Hispanic communities' faith-filled struggles for survival, life, justice, and liberation (Bañuelas 72–80; Deck ix–xxi; Fernández 2000; Medina 1994: 13–31).

For the purposes of this study on Latino Catholic identities, one further salient feature of Hispanic theologians and their writings is particularly important: the tendency for these thinkers to critically engage their personal histories as well as the communal history of Hispanic groups in the United States. The five documents that follow, for example, successively mirror the major historical experiences and topics explored in this volume's previous five parts: the legacy of Spanish colonization, the enduring faith of conquered Hispanic Catholics in the Southwest, immigration, exile, and the struggle for justice. In their reflections on these respective topics, each author uncovers significant insights on theological issues and themes such as conversion, Christology, devotional traditions, and the prophetic demand for justice. Together these select writings illustrate contemporary Latina and Latino theologians' conscious attempt to develop their work from a specified social location and lived experience such as that of *mestizaje*, the "diaspora" of exile, or the *mujerista* (Hispanic women's) struggle for liberation. These and other writings of Hispanic theologians encompass an implicit (and often explicit) critique of Euro-American theologians who ignore the particular context out of which their theology arises and uncritically presume their work is "objective" and therefore normative for all. Most importantly for this study, the documents that follow illuminate the fascinating scholarly and pastoral contribution that has emerged out of Hispanic theologians' efforts to critically assess their personal and collective histories and articulate their sense of identity.

74. Conversion: Embracing an Indigenous Heritage

Alvaro Dávila left his native Guatemala in 1981 and lived in Honduras and El Salvador until 1983, when he resettled in Chicago. He has served as associate director of the Chicago archdiocese's Instituto de Liderazgo Pastoral and as a pastoral associate at Nuestra Señora de la Merced (Our Lady of Mercy) parish. Currently he is the domestic violence project coordinator at the Counseling Center of Lake View, as well as the director of religious education at St. Francis of Assisi parish, where his primary work is family-based catechesis. He is also pursuing a master's degree at Catholic Theological Union and is a frequent lecturer and animator of Hispanic ministry groups. The following passage, an excerpt from Dávila's contribution for a book on Latino spirituality, reveals his profound theological reflection on conversion in light of his struggle to appreciate and embrace his indigenous roots.

I never had to read *Popol Vuh* (the holy book of the Mayas) as part of my education. This would have helped me to understand better why I eat so many

tortillas, corn stew, tamales, and corn drinks. Who knows, I might have even considered becoming a farmer and learned to respect mother nature. But instead I had to eat ham sandwiches in school to be considered "normal." Only the rejected, the poor, the Indian, or the lowly, as we tend to describe them, eat tortillas and beans.

Now that I remember, it brings tears to my eyes when I hear my mother, with her immense unconditional love, telling me so often not to say that she was my mother, so that I wouldn't feel tied to a "peasant reality," which in the capital city would only serve to make me part of a rejected heritage and which would prevent me from advancing "in the civilized world of the Ladinos [mixed-blood or Hispanicized indigenous Guatemalans]." In fact, I even learned to insult others by saying, "You look like an Indian."

I remember the tears in my father's eyes when I took down all his photos from his living room wall and put them in a box sealed with tape and tied with twine, as if to make sure that they wouldn't get out. I was ashamed of them when my school friends came to visit me. Those time-yellowed photographs reflect the little that my father knows of his history. They show the faces of the people who helped my father and the efforts that he had made to "get ahead" in his life. They speak of the suffering of being orphaned, but also of the joys and the pride of being father of a family of nine. Today my father has those same photos on the walls of his room. Every time I go home those pictures remind me of what I did.

Mine is a history of constant denial of what I am, a *mestizo* [mixed blood] with a beard, the product of a raped Indian culture who has had to spend most of his life denying who he is. Finally, after being confronted, I have begun to recognize the identity that "Tata Chus" (Father of Jesus) gave me.

My background has helped me to learn to value what we often deny. I remember that when I arrived in the United States and I began to wash dishes, I felt so happy the first day because I was working. But as the days went by, it became depressing to realize that this was what I would do for the rest of my life. But what else could I do? I came to this country to work.

Then, after my first week of work, they couldn't pay me because they didn't have my Social Security number to make out the check. In my naïveté I told them: "Just make out the check to my name and that's enough." They responded: "Don't be a... it's not your name we care about, but your number." How sad, I said to myself! In order to be someone in life it is not enough just to quit being rural, to stop eating beans, to have no mother, but now not even my name mattered. I could go by any name, since it no longer made any difference.

In the midst of all this rejection something happened. It was during Advent in 1986 in our parish (Nuestra Señora de la Merced in Chicago). We were invited those four Sundays to wear the typical clothing of our countries. It was something very colorful, wonderful, and joyful to see a whole world of people arrive each Sunday who were celebrating their life with their colors, their clothing, and the fragrance that those give off, and all of it in the name of the God who gave us that life, that face, that fragrance, and that color.

Suddenly, just like when children discover their shadows and see themselves without realizing that it is them, I asked myself two questions. First, on this occasion not only the children dressed in their special clothing, but so did the adults. That didn't happen in our native countries. We had never wanted to be indigenous people. The only time indigenous dress was allowed during the religious celebration of the town was for the festivals of the Virgin of Guadalupe, for which the boys and girls dressed as "little Indians," but the adults never dressed up. What was happening here, I asked myself? We were celebrating what we had rejected our entire lives. How is that possible?

A second and more profound question occurred to me later. I started thinking that my people, when they came to this country, brought with them those indigenous things that they had rejected for generations. It didn't matter how many rivers we had to cross; it didn't matter that we had never worn them; it didn't matter that we might never wear them. Nevertheless we brought them with us and we hung them up on the walls of our homes, and we gave them to our new neighbors in other countries as a sign of our love for them. How can it be that we would bring that which we rejected, I asked myself? My answer was laughter, pleasure, and also anxiety. I trembled because I saw my children dressed up like "Tona," the Indian woman who used to sell me corn drink every day. I trembled because I didn't know what was happening.

Years after that experience I realize that our life, along with our language, with our medicinal plants, with our good customs, with its beautiful and rich culture, this life is good enough to enable us to be in harmony with God and with God's creation. Today I have learned to be free. Today I have learned to be spiritual because I have reconnected with my roots, with the source of my life. Today I have a clearer idea of where I'm going. Today I have learned to call myself a child of God. Today I have learned to see God in my brothers and sisters and, although I don't wear a hat with which I could greet people respectfully as my father does, I have learned to stand up and give them my hand.

That's why when I was asked to write my experience of spirituality as a Latin American man, as the Christian I profess to be, the word "conversion" came to mind. Conversion to what, I asked myself? Well, being a man I was told that I would be the provider for a family and for that reason I had to go to school and educate myself and learn. For that reason I do believe that to speak of the spirituality of the Latin American male is also to speak of conversion. The only difference is that this time we are talking about a conversion to recognize ourselves as God made us.

Alvaro Dávila, "Re-discovering My Spiritual History: Exodus and Exile," in Arturo Pérez, Consuelo Covarrubias, and Edward Foley, eds., *Así es: Stories of Hispanic Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 89-92. Printed by permission.

75. A Galilean Christology: *Mestizaje* and the New Humanity

Virgilio Elizondo is internationally known as a writer, speaker, and pastor, particularly for his visionary work on the Mexican American religious experience. A Mexican American native of San Antonio and a priest of the San Antonio archdiocese, his numerous leadership positions include his service from 1972 to 1987 as the founding president of the Mexican American Cultural Center (see document 66) and his tenure as rector of San Fernando Cathedral (see documents 4, 43) from 1983 to 1995. Currently he is director of the San Antonio archdiocesan television ministry. As the following selection illustrates, Elizondo consistently enjoins his fellow mestizos not to identify themselves in a negative way as "not Mexican" or "not American" but to claim the positive identity of mestizos who, despite frequent experiences of rejection, have the advantage of knowing two (or more) cultures. Drawing on his fascinating insights about Jesus' Galilean identity, Elizondo insists that a mestizo identity entails a calling and mission; despite the pain of rejection, those who know multiple cultures can lead others in building a "new humanity" that transcends the divisive barriers between peoples (Elizondo 1983, 1988, 1997a, 2000).

During my boyhood days there were no questions whatsoever about my identity or belonging. We grew up at home wherever we went — playgrounds, school, church. The whole atmosphere was Mexican and there was no doubt in our minds about the pride of being Mexican. Radio stations provided us with good Mexican music and the local Mexican theaters kept us in contact with the dances, folklore, romance, and daily life of Mexico. The poverty of Mexico, which was always evident in the movies, was completely surpassed by the natural simplicity, ingenuity, graciousness, and joy of the Mexican people. The United States was so efficient, but Mexico was so human. The contrasts were clear. We might be living outside the political boundaries of Mexico, but Mexico was not outside of us. We continued to interiorize it with great pride.

Como México no hay dos — there is nothing else like Mexico. Being Mexican was the greatest gift of God's grace. We loved it, lived it, and celebrated it. In many ways, we felt sorry for the people who were not so lucky as to be Mexican. In those early years I never thought of myself as a native-born U.S. citizen of Mexican descent. My U.S. identity was quite secondary to my Mexican identity. Yet I was happy living in the United States. We belonged to this land called the United States and this land belonged to us. In those early days, I never experienced being Mexican as not belonging. This was my home. I was born here and I belonged here.

Little did I think in those early years that the foundations of a new identity were already being formed within me. I was living a new identity that had not yet been defined and that would take many years to emerge. The new identity was beginning to emerge, not as a theory of evolution or as a political ideology of one type or another. It was rather a life lived not just by me, but by thousands of others who were living a similar experience. We were the first of the new human group that was beginning to emerge.

The paradise existence of the neighborhood came to a halt the first day I

went to a Catholic grade school operated by German nuns in what had been a German parish. There the pastor still told Mexicans to go away because it wasn't their church. My parents had sent me there because it was the nearest Catholic school. Mexicans were tolerated but not very welcome.

The next few years would be a real purgatory. The new language was completely foreign to me and everything was strange. The food in the cafeteria was horrible — sauerkraut and other foods that I only remember as weird. We were not allowed to speak Spanish and were punished when we got caught doing so. The sisters and lay teachers were strict disciplinarians. I don't think I ever saw them smile but I remember well them hitting us frequently with a ruler or a stick. They were the exact opposite of the Mexican sisters around our home who were always happy, joking, and smiling and formed us carefully through counsels, suggestions, and rewards. In one system we were punished for bad things we did while in the other we were rewarded for our good accomplishments.

Mass was so different. Everything was orderly and stern. People seemed to be in pain and even afraid of being there. It was a church of discipline, but it was not one of joy. In fact, joy seemed to be out of place. Mass was recited, not celebrated. People went because they had to, not because they wanted to. It seemed like a totally different religion.

It was hard going to school in a language that was almost completely unknown and in surroundings that were so foreign and alienating. Things did not make sense. I used to get very bored. The school hours seemed eternal; the clock appeared not even to move during those horribly unintelligible hours. My parents had to force me to study and it was very difficult for me even to make passing grades. Going to school was so different that it was like crossing the border every day, like going to another country to go to school, even though it was only a few blocks from our home.

It was during these days that I first started to get a feeling of being a foreigner in the very country in which I had been born and raised. Guilt started to develop within me: why wasn't I like the other children who spoke English and ate sandwiches rather than *tortillas*? I started to feel different and mixed-up about who I was. But the mixture and the bad feelings came to a quick end every day at three o'clock when school was dismissed and I returned home. It was the beginning of life in two countries that were worlds apart.

I wanted to become what I felt I had to be, for it was my parents, whose authority and wisdom I never questioned, who had sent me to that school. Yet it meant not so much developing myself as ceasing to be who I was in order to become another person. Those three years in primary school were awful. I was afraid to mix with the kids and often felt better going off by myself. The teachers were constantly getting after me for daydreaming. That was my natural escape mechanism or, better yet, my instinct to survive. The dreams were my spontaneous efforts to create an existence of my own, thus refusing to accept the existence that was being imposed on me.

As I look into the past and try to understand it from my present perspective many years later, I re-experience the original pain, sadness, em-

barrassment, ambiguity, frustration, and the sense of seeking refuge by being alone. Yet I can also see that it was already the beginning of the formation of the consciousness of a new existence — of a new *mestizaje* (“the process through which two totally different peoples mix biologically and culturally so that a new people begins to emerge”). The daily border crossing was having its effect on me. I didn’t know what it meant. I didn’t even know why it had to be. But that constant crossing became the most ordinary thing in my life. In spite of the contradictions at school, there was never any serious doubt in my mind that my original home experience in a Mexican neighborhood was the core of my existence and identity; there my belonging was never questioned. There I did not seek to go off by myself but was developing into quite an outgoing person. . . .

Yet this certitude of being Mexican began to be questioned whenever we visited our relatives in Mexico. Even though they loved us and we loved to visit them, in many ways they would let us know that we were *pochos* — Mexicans from the United States. To this day, it is not uncommon to hear someone in Mexico say about a Mexican American’s Spanish, “For a *norteamericano*, your Spanish is not so bad.” Yet it is not uncommon for an Anglo American from the United States to say about a Mexican American speaking perfect English, “For a Mexican American your English is pretty good.” Whether in Mexico or the United States we are always the distant and different “other.” The core of our existence is to be “other” or to “not be” in relation to those who are. Yet being called *pocho* in Mexico was not insulting, for we were fully accepted. There was always rejoicing when our families visited us in San Antonio or when we visited them in Mexico. *Pocho* was simply a reality. Even though the United States was our home, it was in Mexico that we felt more and more at home. The label marked distance and difference but not separation or rejection.

This was an experience totally different from being called “Meskins,” “Greasers,” or “wetbacks” in the United States. The titles were used to remind us that we were different — meaning that we were backward, ignorant, inferior, scum. We were not wanted in the United States, merely tolerated and exploited. Our people were consistently subjected to multiple injustices. The movies depicted us as treacherous bandits or drunken fools and our women as wanting nothing better in life than to go to bed with one of the white masters. Anglo-American society had no doubts that it alone was the Master Race! Indians, Mexican “half-breeds,” and Blacks were inferior and therefore to be kept down for the good of humanity. . . .

The Galilean identity of Jesus and of his first followers is one of the constants of the New Testament. As I started exploring the socio-cultural imagery of Galilee I became more intrigued. It was a borderland, the great border region between the Greeks and the Jews of Judea. People of all nationalities came along the caravan routes on their way to and from Egypt. There was abundant agriculture and commerce and a flourishing Greek society. The Jews were in the minority and were forced to mix with their Gentile neighbors. It was a land of great mixture and of an ongoing *mestizaje* — similar to our own

Southwest of the United States. The Galilean Jews spoke with a very marked accent and most likely mixed their language quite readily with the Greek of the dominant culture and the Latin of the Roman Empire. Peter could deny Jesus, but there was no way he could deny he was a Galilean. The moment he opened his mouth he revealed his Galilean identity.

The more I discovered about Galilee, the more I felt at home there and the more Jesus truly became my flesh-and-blood brother. He was not just a religious icon, but a living partner in the human struggle for life. He too had lived the experience of human distance and ridicule. Being a Jew in Galilee was very much like being a Mexican American in Texas. As the Jews in Galilee were too Jewish to be accepted by the Gentile population and too contaminated with pagan ways to be accepted by the pure-minded Jews of Jerusalem, so have the Mexican Americans in the Southwest been rejected by two groups. . . .

In his *mestizo* existence Jesus breaks the barriers of separation, as does every *mestizo*, and already begins to live a new unity. That is both the threat and the greatness of a *mestizo* existence. *Mestizos* may struggle to become one or the other of the great traditions out of which they are born, but even if they were to succeed, that would be a mere return to the previous divisions of society. We usher in new life for the betterment of everyone when we freely and consciously assume the great traditions flowing through our veins and transcend them, not by denying either but by synthesizing them into something new.

The *mestizo* is the biblical stone, rejected by the builders of this world, that God has chosen to be the cornerstone of a new creation, not chosen for honor and privilege, but for a sacred mission. Having been marginated and misunderstood, we know the suffering of separation by our own experiences; we know that this type of existence is wrong and it must change. But change does not mean that we now take over and impose our ways upon all. This would simply be a new conquest, a new domination, and nothing would really change. The *mestizo* affirms both the identities received while offering something new to both. Being an insider-outsider and an outsider-insider to two worlds at the same time, we have the unique privilege of seeing and appreciating both worlds. It is from this position that we begin to combine the elements of both to form something new.

In the *mestizaje* and mission of Jesus our own *mestizaje* is transformed and redeemed. What appears to be a curse to some now appears for what it truly is — a blessing. What humanly speaking is the basis of margination and rejection is now discovered to be the basis of divine election. What appeared to be at the furthest outposts of the frontiers of nationality and race, now is recognized as the cradle of a new humanity.

Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer Stone, 1988; reprint, San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center Press, 1998), 12-17, 20-21, 76-77, 84-85. Printed by permission.

76. Immigrant Traditions: The Religion of the Mountains on Fifth Avenue

Ana María Díaz-Stevens (née Díaz-Ramírez) was born in Moca, Puerto Rico; at the age of eleven she moved with her family to New York. As a young woman she joined the Maryknoll sisters, but left before final vows because of an illness; later on she joined the Puerto Rican congregation of the *Hermanas Dominicanas de Fátima*. After four years of ministry in the Puerto Rican countryside she left in order to care for her ailing parents. Subsequently she worked as administrative coordinator of the Office for the Spanish-Speaking Apostolate of the New York Archdiocese and at the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. She also attended City College, New York University, and Fordham University, where she earned a Ph.D. in sociology. Díaz-Stevens has taught at Fordham and Rutgers Universities and currently is a full professor in the Department of Church and Society at Union Theological Seminary. In the following passage, she relates her childhood experience in the rural world of a devout Puerto Rican family and compares that experience to her adult life in the urban setting of New York and its archdiocese (Díaz-Stevens 1993a; Díaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo 1994, 1998).

Religion in that mountain town of my childhood was part of daily life despite the fact that some of us saw the priest and visited the town church sparingly. The day would always begin with my mother opening up the windows and doors and proclaiming: "May God's grace enter upon this house and those therein and may it remain with us always." When we left home to help in the fields or to go to school, we always asked for a blessing from our parents. The same was done upon returning. Passing a place marked with a cross, we knew someone had met an untimely death there; we said a quick prayer for the repose of that person's soul. And, upon entering a crossway we remembered the agony of Jesus on the cross and the souls in purgatory. A statue or an icon of the Blessed Mother made the rounds to the dwellings of the mountain town, where it was kept overnight. There was a prayer to greet the statue and a prayer to take leave of it. We prayed the holy rosary promptly after sunset every night, and no one in the family was excused from this obligation. On special feast days like *la Candelaria*, or Candlemas day, each family prepared bonfires, which were set ablaze at sunset. The families got together to recite the rosary, sing hymns, and tell stories of bygone days. All Souls' Day was a time for pranks but also for prayer for the departed souls of relatives, friends, and neighbors. On the feast of St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of the island, everyone made a special effort to go to church and then to the closest town near the ocean to take the ritual baths. Oftentimes modesty only allowed walking, fully dressed, knee-high into the water and sprinkling the face and arms. People believed that because on that day Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, all the waters, especially ocean waters, were blessed. There was a prayer for every hour of need: when you left the house, when you returned, when it rained too much, when it would not rain enough, for the living, for the dying, for the dead, to find a good husband, to straighten out the one you already had, to be blessed with a child, to stop having so many, and so on.

Holy Week was a time of penance. No one was allowed to sing, dance, shout, do unnecessary work, or make noise. It was a time of prayer and recollection. My father would bring out one of our most precious possessions, the old *Camino recto y seguro para subir al cielo* [Straight and Sure Way to Heaven], an old prayer book yellowed with age and the tropical weather. He would read aloud to us all kinds of mysterious prayers about the passion of Jesus before our humble home altar of *Santos de palos* [folk carvings of saints] and the imported Santa Teresita, which my grandmother had secured after her youngest son, missing in action in World War II, was found, wounded but alive.

My father had a reputation for being a good *rezador* [prayer leader]. That coupled to the fact that he had a magnificent voice made him the most sought-after *cantador* [song leader] as well. For Christmas *parrandas* [a Puerto Rican caroling tradition], for the *rosarios de cruz* in May [hymn services in honor of the Holy Cross], for *bakinés* and *velorios* (child and adult wakes), my father was always present. People from neighboring towns would seek his services. He brought this reputation to the United States; it carried him into many Puerto Rican households on both sides of the Hudson River until age and cancer no longer allowed him to move his aching body. Perhaps that was the one thing he regretted most. In an interview on his eightieth birthday, he told a priest he missed being able to provide this service and that he hoped one day he would be well enough to continue his mission among his people.

Back in our hometown my father had inherited, by public acclamation, the post of catechist after my uncle's departure [to the mainland]. He and my mother instilled in us the belief that we should pray at home when we could not go to church on Sundays and that each member of the family should at least go the one Sunday a month assigned to the sodality to which each one belonged. For the girls in the family, it meant inviting all the girls from the neighboring farms to sleep over (in a house barely big enough for a ten-member family). It also meant getting up before the crack of dawn, getting dressed in the white uniform of the *Congregación de Hijas de María* [Daughters of Mary], walking miles to the paved road (crossing two streams of water on the way), and then boarding a *público* [public transportation vehicle], in which we literally felt like we were packed in a can like sardines. This was a three to four hour expedition. If we were lucky some gallant young fellow would give up his only day of rest to take us in an oxcart to the public transportation. Our pale, youthful faces were a perfect match for the white uniforms (the venerable curate frowned and even prohibited the use of "that worldly, almost satanical use of *esencias y colorines*," that is, perfumes and makeup!). Upon arriving at church, everyone had to go to confession. The lines were interminable, and since church law at that time prohibited the consumption of water or any other food from the previous midnight on, many became dizzy and suffered fainting spells.

To be a churchgoer was indeed a very hard task. To be religious, however, was something else. This was expected; it was as natural as being a Puerto Rican mountain dweller. Everyone we knew was a Catholic. In my town there was no other religion practiced or believed, except for the exceptional occasion

when someone consulted a *curandera* [healer] in case of emergency or when the doctor's medicine did not have the expected results. No one asked if a person was Catholic, only if he or she was religious. This meant, were you and your children baptized? If so, did you truly believe in the Creator and live as if your life depended on him? Did you pray and meet your obligations as a parent, a son, a neighbor?

As an employee of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, after my tenure with the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic at Ossining, New York, and *La Congregación Dominicana de Hermanas de Fátima* in Puerto Rico, I would pass by St. Patrick's Cathedral on my way to work. To this day I cannot make up my mind if I find the cathedral on Fifth Avenue beautiful or simply awesome. I do know that more often than not I felt lost in its vastness. I also often wondered if the feeling would some day go away forever, but I can honestly say that it has not. The imposing St. Patrick's on New York's Fifth Avenue is a far cry from my village's *Nuestra Señora de la Monserrate*, just as downtown Manhattan, with its magnificent skyscrapers, its sophistication, and its hurried existence, is a far cry from my hometown of Moca in the northwestern plateau of Puerto Rico. And although at times I could almost hear the irreverent whisper, "You've come a long way, baby," deep in my heart I knew (and still know) that I cannot help preferring the hills to the skyscrapers, or the church of my youth to the cathedral of my adult life, or my native tongue, in which my most fervent prayers are always said, to the language of the metropolis, which is mostly reserved for professional purposes.

Ana María Díaz-Stevens, *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration upon the Archdiocese of New York* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 6–9. © 1993 by University of Notre Dame Press. Used by permission of the publisher.

77. Diaspora Theology: Journeying through Exile

Cuban exile Fernando Segovia completed his advanced studies in theology at the University of Notre Dame and is now professor of New Testament and early Christianity at the Divinity School of Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Among Latino and other colleagues he is esteemed for his outstanding leadership in professional associations and his dedication as an advocate for "minorities" in the academy. A highly acclaimed scholar of Johannine literature and biblical hermeneutics, Segovia has consistently challenged his fellow scholars to recognize the vital significance of an interpreter's social location for theology, biblical studies, and other disciplines (Segovia and Tolbert 1995, 1998; Isasi-Díaz and Segovia). In writings like the following excerpt from a 1996 essay, he illustrates the importance of social location as he draws on his own experience of displacement and "otherness" to initiate his reflections on theology constructed in the diaspora of exile.

From a personal point of view, this rather typical day [July 10, 1961] of the Cold War era proved to be, with the benefit of over thirty years of hindsight, the most important day of my life. For it was on that day that I embarked on my journey of exile, a journey of mythic proportions across the Florida

Straits—that great divide between worlds that so many have dreamed of crossing, where so many have lost their lives while doing so, and through which so many others have had their lives transformed beyond recognition. In effect, this divide signified a cosmic journey involving a variety of highly complex and imbricated worlds: (1) from the world of Latin American civilization, by way of its Caribbean version, to the world of Western civilization, in terms of its North American variant; (2) from East to West, from the world of state-controlled communism to the world of capitalist liberal democracy; (3) from South to North, from the traditional world of the colonized, with honor and shame as dominant cultural values, to the industrialized world of the colonizers, with the dollar as its core value; (4) from a world that was mine, which I knew and to which I belonged without question, to a world where I represented the "other"—the alien and the foreigner. While the actual journey as such was over rather quickly (waking up early in La Habana, so that my mother and I could make the late morning flight on KLM to Miami; a flight of approximately an hour; and going to sleep that night in Miami at the house of friends of friends of the family), the journey of exile has never ended; indeed, exile has become my permanent land and home—the diaspora.

I still recall that journey as if it had taken place but yesterday or last week, although I was only thirteen at the time. Indeed, it is only now, with the advantage and disadvantage of time, that I can see the symbolic and highly ritualistic dimensions of the entire proceedings, properly marking such a transcending occasion and transition in my life in a quasi-sacramental way—a re-birth of water and the spirit, the waters of the Gulf Stream and the spirit of "otherness."

Preparations for the Journey. I recall the preparations for the journey itself. The efforts to get me out of the country, for fear that I would be sent to Eastern Europe for study—standard procedure in the colonies of the Soviet Empire and not at all surprising, given the logic of empires and the weight attached to the center vis-à-vis the margins. The frantic search for a missing passport—sent through mysterious channels for the procurement of the waiver visa necessary to enter the United States, lost in the hectic diplomatic world of the capital, and finally found quite by chance at the embassy of the Dominican Republic. The surprise call on a Friday to the effect that I would be leaving on the following Monday, alone—as so many others did, though in the end a seat came open for my mother as well. The final weekend of visits to family, friends, places—the exchange of good-byes, *sotto voce* in case somebody might wish to do us harm; the preparation of the one piece of baggage per-person allowed, a sack that came to be known affectionately as *el chorizo* (the sausage) and that was stuffed with clothing for an unspecified period of time in the unknown *el norte*. (I often wonder nowadays what we must have looked like as we donned our distinctive tropical attire in the streets of New York.) And throughout, quite ironically, my own gleeful anticipation of the voyage.

That anticipation of flying for the first time and visiting the United States remained uppermost in my mind. Little did I understand what was going on

around me — about what was in the mind of my parents, who were separating for my own sake; about my family, some of whom would never cross the divide; and about our friends, many of whom we never saw or heard from again. I must confess that exile for me had, on the whole, a rather joyous beginning. It was a terrific adventure and, besides, nobody expected it to last very long. Soon we would all be back — next year in La Habana!

Crossing the Divide. I distinctly recall the flight over the divide. The final glance at the house where we lived, as we set off for the airport — faces staring out of the windows, one hand waving goodbye while the other held a wet handkerchief. The long wait at the airport itself in what came to be known as *la pecera* (the fishbowl), where those about to depart were kept together, separated from their families by a thick glass partition from ground to ceiling — sitting there for hours, subject to repeated interrogations, baggage searches, body and even strip searches. The long walk to the plane itself, the taking of seats, the takeoff — and throughout hardly a word on the part of anyone, for fear that next to you or behind you or in front of you someone might be listening, indeed for fear that the plane itself might be called back. Then, all of a sudden, the announcement from the cockpit to the effect that we were now out of Cuban waters and in international waters — pandemonium! I remember the explosion: the clapping, the embracing, and the conversation à la Latin style — emotional, boisterous, heartfelt. The people who had not dared to exchange a word before now proceeded to tell their life story, their apprehensions for the immediate future, their dreams of freedom, and their hopes for a quick return. Finally, the sign from the window that read “Welcome to Miami” and a long walk along endless and curved corridors, leading to the immigration office — more questions, more papers, more information.

Arrival in the Promised Land. I recall our arrival in the United States, our exit into the waiting area, and our first days in Miami. We had no money whatsoever, for those who left were allowed to take nothing out but the one *chorizo* — exiles were completely dependent on the goodwill of family and friends who had already made the journey and who would be waiting for the new arrivals at the airport. Actually, two other items were allowed, a bottle of rum and a box of cigars, which we, like everybody else, dutifully carried — such items would fetch our first earnings at the airport itself. It was our introduction to American culture and capitalism. The opened doors and the avalanche of two different groups of people: those who were there to receive us, speaking in our tongue and giving us as warm a greeting as the good-byes we had received hours earlier; and those who were there to buy goods, speaking in another tongue and angling for the best deal — we sold it all for ten dollars, the sum total of our wealth, aside from the offer of a room for the next few nights. The room at the inn — I had never experienced such surroundings: carpeting, air-conditioning, color television, a large and well-groomed patio.

Indeed, my earliest memories of the United States have to do with its wealth, a wealth I had never encountered before in my life, a wealth conveyed to me at that time by way of vivid and concrete images: air-conditioned churches with cushioned kneelers; enormous supermarkets with an endless

variety of products, stacked to the hilt, row upon row; suburbia, with enormous distances between houses, immaculate lawns and streets, and nobody to be seen anywhere.

In one day, indeed in the space of a few hours, my whole life had changed — my life in Cuba (=Latin American civilization; the East; the colonized; my world) had come to an end, and my life in the United States (=Western civilization; the West; the colonizer; somebody else's world) had begun. . . . Thirty-some years later, this cosmic journey of mine into exile and this long experience of exile continue to ground, inform, and shape my theological reflection about the world, the otherworld, and the relationship between the two. It is a reflection with “otherness” at its very core, as if suspended in the air somewhere over the great divide, over the waters of the Florida Straits, looking — like Janus — in various directions at the same time: a part of both worlds and yet of none; at home in two cultures and in neither one; speaking in two tongues with none to call my own; in the world but not of it. Such is the locus and voice of my theology of the diaspora.

Fernando F. Segovia, “In the World But Not of It: Exile as Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora,” in Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 209–12. Reproduced from *Hispanic/Latino Theology* by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando Segovia, copyright © 1996 Augsburg Fortress.

78. *Mujerista* Theology: The Struggle for Liberation

Ada María Isasi-Díaz was born and raised in La Habana, Cuba, earned graduate degrees at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and is currently professor of Christian ethics and theology at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. A popular author and lecturer, she has extensive experience in pastoral work, particularly through her activism with Hispanic women in the United States and different oppressed groups here and in other countries. Significantly, her activism and scholarly endeavors are inextricably bound, as her grassroots work and research among Latinas across the United States are the primary sources for her acclaimed and ongoing project to articulate a Hispanic women's mujerista theology (Isasi-Díaz and Tarango; Isasi-Díaz 1993, 1996). In the process of developing mujerista theology, Isasi-Díaz has offered an insistent challenge to Euro-American theologians who fail to identify their social location and lived experience in articulating their supposedly “objective” theological perspectives. The following excerpt is from an article published in a collection of essays that explored how women's theological enterprise is rooted in their lived experience and the way they have “inherited their mothers' gardens.”

I was born a feminist on Thanksgiving weekend, 1975, when over one thousand Roman Catholic women met to insist on the right of women to be ordained to a renewed priestly ministry in our church. Failing, as the overwhelming majority of humans do, to remember my bodily birth, I am privileged to remember every detail of this birth to the struggle for liberation. But the process of “giving birth to myself” was not an all-of-a-sudden experience; in many ways the process had started years before.

I spent the early part of my life in Cuba, where I belonged to the dominant race and the middle class. Growing up in the 1950s, I did not pay much attention to the oppressive structures of sexism operative in my country. But I was always attracted to struggling along with those "who had less than I did" — as I thought of the oppressed then. As a matter of fact, it was precisely that attraction which made me come to understand my vocation to the ministry. It was that attraction which I now understand as the seed of my commitment to the struggle for liberation.

At age eighteen I entered the convent, a protected way of life that used to carry with it much prestige and privilege. Therefore, the few times I came into contact with the broader society during the first eight years of my adulthood, I was treated with deference, respect, and even reverence. My life within the convent walls was very difficult, and at the time I did not have the lenses needed to understand ethnic prejudice. I was greatly misunderstood and suffered much because of it, but I did not have a good analysis of what was happening to me and how I was being treated by the other nuns.

By 1975, therefore, the only oppression I was aware of was the one I suffer within the church simply because I am a woman. It is no surprise, then, that it was in relation to church teaching and practice that I came to understand the dynamics of personal oppression and joined the struggle for liberation. The 1975 Women's Ordination Conference was such an intense experience that when I emerged from the hotel where we had held the three-day conference, I realized I was perceiving the world in a different way. It took a few months before I realized what the difference was that I was seeing. My eyes had been opened to the reality of sexism. My whole life had been affected; how I saw myself and what I was to do with my life had changed radically.

The struggle against sexism in the Roman Catholic Church has been the school where I learned about feminism, as well as the main arena in which I carried out my struggle for liberation between 1975 and 1988. I rejoice in the sisterhood in whose creation I participated and am grateful for all that I learned from the women involved in the Womanchurch movement. This became my home. Soon I proceeded to plant my own garden there; however, that brought me into conflict with the sisterhood. As long as I toiled in the garden of Euro-American feminism, I was welcomed. But as I started to claim a space in the garden to plant my own flowers, the ethnic/racist prejudice prevalent in society reared its head within the Womanchurch movement.

The issue was and is power. Somewhat naively I had thought that together we would decide not only how to garden but what the garden was to look like, what it would be. But the Euro-American feminists, being part of the dominant culture, deal with Hispanic women — and other racial/ethnic women — differently from the way they deal with each other. They take for granted that feminism in the United States is their garden, and therefore they will decide what manner of work racial/ethnic women will do there.

By the time I began to experience all this, I had learned much about the dynamics of oppression and prejudice and I could understand what was going on. However, what took me totally by surprise was the inability or unwill-

ingness of the Euro-American feminists to acknowledge their prejudice. Most feminists believe that, because they are feminists, they cannot be racists. Euro-American feminists, like all liberals, sooner or later, have come to the point at which they are willing to acknowledge that racism exists, reluctantly of course, but nobody admits to being a racist. While whitewashing — pun intended — their personal sins of racism/ethnic prejudice in the restful waters of guilt, they continue to control access to power within the movement. Euro-American feminists need to understand that as long as they refuse to recognize that oppressive power-over is an intrinsic element of their racism/ethnic prejudice, they will continue to do violence to feminism. As a liberative praxis, feminism has to do with radically changing the patriarchal understanding of power, which is operative even in the feminist movement. Euro-American feminists need to remember that, in order to undo patriarchy, we must create societies in which people can be self-defining and self-determining. To achieve that, power has to be transformed and shared.

True sharing of power leads to mutuality, and that is what we *mujeristas* ask of Euro-American feminists. It is not a matter of their allowing us to share in what they define as good. Nor is it only a matter of each one of us respecting what the other says and defending her right to say it. Mutuality asks us to give a serious consideration to what the other is saying, not only to respect it but to be willing to accept it as good for all. *Mujerista* understandings must be included in what is normative for all feminists. Our priorities must be considered to be just as important as the priorities of the Euro-American feminists. All women committed to liberation must work together on deciding the priorities for the movement....

As a Hispanic I belong to a marginalized group in this society and have had to struggle to understand and deal with the siege mentality we suffer. The need to protect ourselves against discrimination is such an integral part of our lives that we are unable or unwilling to critique ourselves. It is difficult to see criticism as constructive when we are not valued by society. Those of us who as *mujeristas* criticize sexism in the Hispanic culture are often belittled and accused of selling out to the Euro-American women. But Euro-American feminists call into question our integrity and praxis as *mujerista* feminists when we are not willing to criticize Hispanic men and culture in public. I would like to suggest that this kind of horizontal violence is linked to both internalized oppression and the siege mentality.

The challenge that lies before me has many different facets. I must struggle to convince myself and other Hispanics that our goal has to be liberation and not participation in oppressive situations and societies. We must not give in to internalized oppression and a siege mentality. We must be willing to look at ourselves and examine our experiences in view of our liberation and continue to insist, no matter where we are, on being included in setting the norm of the feminist movement. Then I have to find renewed strength and commitment to struggle with Euro-American feminists over the issue of sharing power with all involved in the women's liberation movement. Finally, I have to challenge myself and others to understand that, as women committed to liberation, the

changes we are advocating will change the world radically and that we need to begin to live out those changes so they can become a reality. The only way we can move ahead is by living the reality we envision; our preferred future will flower only if we allow it to be firmly rooted in us and among us. It is up to us to change our lives radically if we want our world to change.

I plow ahead, aware that I must not idealize what I have inherited from my mother — especially because we have been transplanted and in that process have lost some of our roots and have not always correctly reinvented them. I must be careful because as transplants we often have to defend ourselves, and that can easily distort the truth. What I have received from my mother, as well as what I have gained on my own, must be subjected to the critical lens of liberation; that is the only way I can be faithful to myself and to other Hispanic women and men. The task is not easy, but the community of my family provides for me a safety net — it gives me an immense sense of security. This is one of the main reasons why, for me, hope is guaranteed and I always see possibilities. That is why I keep trying to plant my garden. That it has been uprooted several times does not keep me from trying again. Though often it is a painful struggle, I believe the struggle for women's liberation is the best of struggles, and this is why that struggle is my life. *¡La vida es la lucha!*

"A Hispanic Garden in a Foreign Land," by Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Adapted from Letty M. Russell, Kwok Pui-lan, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Katie Geneva Cannon, eds., *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 94-97, 103-4; reprint, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 16-19, 25-27. © 1988 Letty M. Russell. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.

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