THE WISDOM OF *LA FRONTERA*:
A CHRISTOLOGY FROM AND FOR THE INTERSTICIES

By

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To my parents, Jane and Tom, whose unconditional love, compassion, and support encourages me to make a positive difference in the world

and

To my undergraduate mentors, John, Paul, Nancy, and Ellen, who first inspired in me a love of learning and a passion for faith seeking understanding

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INTRODUCTION

In her work *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, novelist and non-fiction writer Anne Lamott writes, "Some people think that God is in the details, but I have come to believe that God is in the bathroom."[1] Lamott's statement refers to the many hours she spent in various bathrooms around California praying to God—nay, begging God—that her son, Sam, who was undergoing a series of medical tests, would not receive a terminal diagnosis as predicted by several medical professionals. Reflecting on her time in the bathroom and the many lessons she learned from this experience, she states, "I also remembered that sometimes when you need to feel the all-embracing nature of God, paradoxically you need to hang out in the ordinariness, in daily ritual and comfort."[2]

The above excerpts from Lamott's book offer an ideal opening for my dissertation. In writing this manuscript, I too have witnessed the all-embracing nature of God within in everyday life, and as Chapter 4 beautifully illustrates, I have even found God in the bathroom. The first line of Gerard Manley Hopkins' famous poem reads: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."[3] So too, I will argue, are the daily lives of marginalized peoples, who struggle for full humanity in the face of oppression.

Gordon Kaufman observes in his work *In Face of Mystery*, "Our particular human capacities and interest, our training and our social location, our practices and habits and

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[1] Lamott, *Plan B : Further Thoughts on Faith,* 161.
[2] Ibid., 167.
[3] Hopkins and Phillips, *The Major Works.* The poem ends, "Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs— Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."

customs will all influence our theological work."[4] This is true of my theological training, beginning with my undergraduate work in liberation theology and postmodern thought, extending through my graduate studies in Catholic theology and the relation between Christianity and the world religions, and my doctoral work in feminist and contemporary theologies, especially theologies of liberation. My engagements in theological discourse, along with my experiences as a Catholic woman, compel me to envision theology and christology from a new perspective adequate to our pluralistic, multicultural, multiethnic, and multilinguistic world.

Given this, my dissertation proposes that the borderlands between the United States and Mexico—the crossroads of *la frontera*—provide an important point of departure, both literally and metaphorically, for contemporary theological investigations. Described most often as a transitory and ambiguous place, the border's inhabitants live amidst the collision of cultures, languages and ethnicities, wrestling with and strategically claiming their own multiple, hybrid, and shifting interstitial existence. The pluralist logic of the borderlands not only challenges hegemonic constructions of identity that demand a stable, unified subject, but it also gives birth to a new *mestiza* consciousness. This creative strategy of resistance, in turn, engenders an ethical attitude of love and a celebration of those who are different.

Beginning its reflections from these interstices, my work explores the "problem of difference" within various theological constructions of identity. This problem suggests that in order to achieve a shared, collective understanding of Christian identity, the internal differences of the community must be overcome or suppressed. In this regard,

[4] Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery : A Constructive Theology,* 32.

unity and difference are understood as standing in opposition to one another.

Through conversations with a variety of scholarly disciplines—including philosophy, history, cultural studies, feminist and postcolonial theories—my dissertation explores the way in which a pluralist logic of identity, which understands one's subjectivity to be fluid, hybrid, and multiple, might reshape one-dimensional, homogenizing understandings of the Christian community. Moreover, it suggests that a theology conceived from these crossroads must reconceptualize Christology—the central component of Christian identity. Thus, at its height, my work paves the way for a performative understanding of Christology. Such an understanding, I argue, offers a faithful theological vision of the Christian community that honors the complexity and multiplicity of human identities, while at the same time remaining faithful to the Gospel message.

History of Scholarship

Over time theological thought has undergone significant changes. Regardless of the hermeneutical approach, theological method, norms, or sources used, the objective of theology remains, in the words of Anselm, "faith seeking understanding." My own pursuit of "Wisdom" begins amidst this diverse history, drawing on the works of those who have gone before me and seeking to make my own unique contributions.[5] Thus, it begins with the boundaries of Western-European theological thought and ends somewhere "in-between."

[5] Here I intentionally spell wisdom with a capital "W" in order to signify both the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of Wisdom-Sophia.

George A. Lindbeck's 1984 work, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, has been described as one of the most influential works of academic theology to appear in English over the last fifty years.[6] Its publication sparked heated debates about theological method, the nature of religion, and the role of the church in the world, especially with progressive liberal theologians, such as David Tracy. Because of this, Lindbeck's postliberal understanding of theology has become one of the most influential and controversial modes of American systematic theology in the late twentieth century. Yet, as Paul DeHart's analysis reminds us, this book has also been the subject of significant misinterpretation and misunderstanding.[7]

Three theologians in particular have informed my interpretation of Lindbeck's work—namely, Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Joerg Rieger, and Dwight Hopkins. Each of these thinkers examines the implications of Lindbeck's work from the lenses of gender, race, class, and/or religious pluralism. As such, their insights have both supported my own reading of Lindbeck's work and pushed me to think about his thought in new ways.

Jeannine Hill Fletcher's work *Monopoly on Salvation* for example, looks at the variety of Christian responses to religious pluralism, which she groups into four categories. According to her categorizations, Lindbeck's work falls under the category of "theological particularism." Using his work as a representative example, she notes that a particularist understands religious differences to exist because of the different ways in which the religions conceive of and order reality. Because Lindbeck understands these frameworks to be radically different from one another, he argues that the possibility for connections across the religions is virtually impossible. For Fletcher, such an

[6] Marshall, "Introduction: The Nature of Doctrine After 25 Years," vii.
[7] DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses : The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology.*

understanding creates rigid boundaries between the religions that are at once too sharp and too artificial, creating a fixed, compartmentalized notion of Christianity that is antithetical to the dynamic and fragmented cultural and interreligious experiences of humanity.[8]

Similarly, Dwight Hopkins's work, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion,* suggests that Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understanding overlooks the diversity of Christian experiences and cultures present within North America in general and the African American community in particular. According to Hopkins' analysis, Lindbeck's work assumes that there is a singular Christian culture and a singular Christian language embodied in the communities of all Christian believers. Secondly, he suggests that Lindbeck's postliberal view fails to acknowledge the diversity of Christian scriptural interpretations that are deeply influenced by one's social location.[9] For Hopkins, this inviolable theological understand ignores the messiness, struggle, and strife of daily life that are necessary for the construction of a theological understanding that takes seriously human liberation.

Finally, Joerg Rieger illustrates the ways in which Lindbeck's postliberal mode of theological reflection contributes to mechanisms of exclusion in his work *God and the Excluded*. For Rieger, these exclusions are not just social problems, but theological ones as well. Rieger exposes these mechanisms in the following aspects of Lindbeck's work: his formulation of universal statements regarding Christianity; his turn to textual understandings of the church that shut out differing readings; and his contribution to

[8] Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation?: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism,* 51-81.
[9] Hopkins, *Being Human : Race, Culture, and Religion,* 24-35.

(rather than disengagement from) the power structures already in place in both the church and the society, which exclude those who are different. [10]

My own analysis of Lindbeck's work acknowledges each of these critiques, while also putting them into conversation with the work of border theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa. By doing so, I suggest that a consciousness of the borderlands challenges singular, monolithic constructions of religious identity. Moreover, I assert that the multicultural, multivocal, and multireligious subjectivity of women provides an important point of departure for theological thought.

Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking work *Borderlands/*La Frontera is considered a foundational text in Chicana/Latina studies. It has also been widely cited in a variety of different disciplines, including feminist theory, cultural studies, religion, philosophy, and autobiographical literature. The primary appeal of this work is its alternative understanding of borders, as well as its constructive critique of homogenizing political practices that silence the voices of those whose identities are extended across various cultural domains.

For Anzaldúa, borders are not simply geographical boundaries that divide "us" from "them," but they are also the psychic, sexual, spiritual, cultural, linguistic, class, and racialized boundaries that are inscribed upon the multi-voiced subjectivity of all those who dwell on the borders between two or more worlds. Thusly conceived, Anzaldúa's border theory shatters dominant constructions of identity that insist that a subject is able to fully occupy a single identity category unproblematically. As a result, she opens up the traditional boundaries of acceptance and creates a space for those whose identities fall

[10] Rieger, *God and the Excluded : Visions and Blind Spots in Contemporary Theology,* 71-98.

"in-between." It is from this "in-betweenness," she avows, that a new *mestiza* consciousness emerges.

Like all epistemologies, *la conceincia de la mestiza* runs the risk of becoming a normative or totalizing discourse. Yet, Anzaldúa insists that "its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm."[11] It is this continual motion, I argue, that keeps this discourse from becoming essentializing or static. More than this, the disruptive temporality of this framework challenges hierarchical claims to the singularity of identity categories and offers an important understanding of that which occurs when borders are crossed—be they geographical, metaphorical, or even theological.

The insights and challenges of U.S. Latinas theologians, including the works of Michelle González, Jeanette Rodríguez, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, María Pilar Aquino, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, and Daisy Machado, have also deeply influenced my work. Central to their theological reflection is the category of *lo cotidiano*, which refers to the daily lives and lived faith of their communities, and the category of *mestizaje*, which identifies and recognizes the evolving cultural intermixture found in Latina/o communities. Through their culturally, racially, economically, and socially diverse experiences and histories, these theologians resist the assimilating tendencies of the Anglo-European theological tradition, while at the same time revealing the mystery of God that is found in the everyday struggles and resistance strategies of U.S. Latinas.

Guatemalan-Canadian theologian Néstor Medina has taken up the concept of *mestizaje* at length in a recent work titled, *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture and*

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[11] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 102.

Faith in Latina/o Catholicism. Medina suggests that the popularity and centrality of this category for U.S. Latina/o theologies stems from its two-fold function, which places the unique ethnocultural identity of U.S. Latina/os at the center of theological thought, while simultaneously creating a subversive framework that overturns the homogenizing practices of the dominant theological tradition that has silenced the voices of U.S. Latinas. Though Medina's work recognizes the significance of this category for U.S. Latina/o theology, it also points out several of the limitations and contradictions that are inherent in this term due to its complex history.

Aside from Virgilio P. Elizondo's conception of the *mestizo Jesus*, which argues that, "By growing up in Galilee…culturally and linguistically speaking Jesus was a 'mestizo,'" the category of *mestizaje* has typically been applied to the doctrine of theological anthropology.[12] Yet, as Asian-feminist theologian Kwok Pui Lan's work illustrates, the concept of Jesus/Christ is the most hybrid concept in the Christian tradition. Additionally, many queer theologians, such as Marcella Althaus-Ried and Lisa Isherwood, have pointed out the hybridity, fluidity, and instability present in the Incarnation wherein the divine becomes human and transforms traditional boundaries of being. However, thus far, there are few Christologies conceived from and for the borderlands.

Despite this absence, the field of feminist Christology has grown to encompass the rich diversity of women's voices from around the globe over the course of the last several decades. Two recent works by Lisa Isherwood provide helpful overviews of the range and scope of contemporary feminist Christologies. Within these surveys,

[12] Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo : Life Where Cultures Meet,* 79.

Isherwood explores the various questions, themes, sources, and methodologies employed by Christian and post-Christian feminists alike. Beginning with the early questioning of the relevance of a male savior for women, she examines the many faces of Christ that have emerged from the lives of women in the twenty-first century, grouping them into several categories, including the embodied Christ, the ecological Christ, the liberating prophet, Jesus-Sophia, and the suffering Christ. Although she claims that feminist Christologies have come a long way since their initial question of whether a male savior can save women, she also argues that they still have a long way to go in order to uncover the further dimensions of the mystery of Christ and create a fuller more abundant life for all.[13]

Recently, feminist theologians have also begun to dialogue with queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, in order to illustrate the ways in which the categories of gender, sex, and the self are inherently unstable. This understanding has important implications for Christian theology, ethics, and practices, especially those discourses that are entangled with the traditional gendered structures of identity and the norms and roles that are tied to these. Of particular interest for my dissertation research in this area, has been the work of Karen Trimble Alliume. Although she has only published a series of short essays, her application of Butler's theory of gender construction and performativity to theological thought and, specifically the gendered teachings and tradition of the Catholic Church, holds great promise for theological constructions of identity, at least theoretically. Her performative understanding of Christology illumines the way in which dominant Christological conversations can move beyond the stultified notion of sameness

[13] Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies.* and Isherwood, "Feminist Christologies."

and imitation, toward communal citations that perform God with us. The later, I argue, challenges the multiple structures of oppression and works toward the flourishing of all people by illustrating a preferential option for the in-between.

Thesis

My dissertation research explores George Lindbeck's "cultural linguistic" understanding of religion, which suggests that the singular language and culture of one's religion shapes and defines human experience rather than the reverse, one example that the "problem of difference" poses for theological constructions of Christian identity. Although Lindbeck's postliberal approach seeks to maintain a stable sense of Christian identity in the face of intra- and inter-religious differences, I argue that by withdrawing the possibility that human experiences can influence one's conception of religion (in full or in part), Lindbeck assumes that Christian identity must be virtually homogenous in order to maintain unity and stability.

Comparing Lindbeck's work to anti-immigration rhetoric that seeks to protect *the* "American" culture and the primacy of the English language, I draw on the works of Latina theologians and Mexican-American women living in the borderlands to illustrate the ways in which the dominant homogenizing categories ultimately silence the voices of those persons whose identities are extended over multiple cultures, languages, ethnicities. Next, I illustrate the ways in which an understanding of Christian identity bound up with difference can shift the theological conversation from border protection to border crossing. Such an understanding, I argue, requires a multidimensional Christology that takes seriously the ways in which the interrelated identity categories of race, class,

gender, sexuality, and so on are continually at play. Finally, my work seeks to contribute to theological thought by laying the preliminary groundwork for an interstitial, performative Christology that not only provides an "option for the in-between," which speaks to the daily ordinary struggle (*la lucha*) of all people who live and survive in physical and metaphorical border locations, but also suggests that the solidarity of Christians requires a celebration of differences rather than an imposed sameness.

Method

As one of my former professors, Peter Hodgson, once quipped, theologians are often charged with sitting at their desks and making things up. While theological thought is indeed full of a lot of imagination and creativity, it also emerges from a deep practice of faith seeking understanding, and as I hope this dissertation illustrates, an engagement *with* the world rather than an estrangement *from* it. Nevertheless, the practice of faith seeking understanding often involves raising more questions as much as finding answers.

My work is situated geographically and metaphorically at the borderlands between the United States and Mexico—the crossroads of *la frontera*. As such, it refers to the borders that divide the bodies of nations as well as the bodies of individuals. From a geographical perspective, it surveys the national boundary between the United States and Mexico, which includes the historical and contemporary contexts out of which Mexican American communities in the United States have been formed. Yet, it also takes seriously metaphorical borders that fracture the self along racial, class, gender, psychic, ethnic, and religious lines.

Within the multiple theologies of liberation, the voices of previously marginalized women, including Two-Thirds World women, have begun to demand recognition for their lives and experiences that have long remained invisible in mainstream scholarship. Often subsumed under universalized concepts or narratives (i.e. "human being" or "American") in which one group—namely, European, white, middle-class, males—has traditionally served as the norm, these women are articulating powerful critiques of the Western-European modes of representation that ultimately define one's identity according to a singular or totalizing feature. This unidimensional logic, they suggest, not only eradicates differences in favor of false universalisms, but in so doing also suppresses the ambiguous or interstitial spaces in which the interrelated identity categories of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, history, and language are continually at play. Recognizing that all identity categories are necessarily heterogeneous and unstable, these women call for a more complex understanding of experience that recognizes the multiplicity and hybridity of one's identity.

Locating my own inquiries at the crossroads of liberationist, feminist, queer, and theological studies, my dissertation work investigates the ways in which Western-European Christian theology has contributed to the afore-mentioned one-dimensional and universal Eurocentric subject. My dissertation raises questions regarding the construction of identity and the displacement of difference in mainstream theological scholarship. Because the latter has led to the exclusion of the voices of multiply marginalized women by way of totalizing religious metanarratives and fixed monocultural understandings of tradition, my work seeks to create an interstitial space from which to open up theological discourse and, in particular the doctrine of Christology, to new inquiries and voices.

As such, the task of my work is both liberationist and constructive. It is liberationist insofar as it understands theology to be a critical reflection on praxis, participating in the struggle for the liberation of all people, especially the plight of the marginalized in our midst, who have been excluded from the benefits of society and the centers of the theological tradition. It is constructive in that it lays the groundwork for a preferential option for the "in-between" through a performative Christology that bears witness to the inclusive and compassionate God of the Christian tradition, as well as the diversity of the multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic world in which we live.

Although this work explores the place and shape of borders and their implications for theological reflection in the 21st century, in writing about borders, I also cross my own borders. My work is interdisciplinary insofar as it draws on philosophy, border theory, feminist theory, and the research of political scientist and historians. My work takes as its premise R.S. Sugirtharajah's statement, "Theology is not alive in [the] writings of the masters, valuable as they are, but in the everyday activity of living in a society which is multicultural, multilingual and multiracial."[14]

Finally, recognizing that every designation somehow obscures the diversity among the people to which it refers, I would like to offer some preliminary definitions of some of the broad descriptive categories employed throughout my work.

First, I use the term "U.S. Latina" to refer to women living in the United States who are of Latin American or Hispano-Caribbean heritage, and who understand themselves to belong to the *Latina* American or Caribbean sociocultural universe. Despite my use of this umbrella category, I nevertheless recognize that the U.S. Latina/o

[14] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations : An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology,* 124.

community is comprised of many different groups with distinct national and cultural heritages, including Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Savladoran, Guatemalan, Argentinian, Costa Rican, and Nicaraguan, to name just a few.

Second, influenced by the work of bell hooks, I use the term "feminist" to refer to those persons who engage in the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.[15] Shaped by the insights of feminist, womanist, Latina, and other liberation theologians, I believe that theology must be concerned with and committed to the eradication of sexism in all its forms. To do so, I argue, will contribute to the flourishing of all people, male and female, rich and poor, gay and straight, able-bodied and disabled, and of every ethnicity and race. If the human dignity and rights of even one person or group are overlooked or trampled on, then the human dignity and rights of all of God's creation are denied as well

Procedure

My dissertation project includes four broad moves. It begins in Chapter One with the work of historical theologian George A. Lindbeck. As such, it explores one of the most influential strands of Western-European theology in the twentieth century—namely, Lindbeck's postliberal approach to theological thought as articulated in his groundbreaking work *The Nature of Doctrine*. In this provocative work, Lindbeck suggests that a religion can be understood as analogous to a cultural-linguistic system in which the language and culture of the Christian tradition shape the subjectivities and worldviews of its practitioners rather than the other way around.Upon outlining his work,

[15] hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody : Passionate Politics,* viii.

this chapter discusses both the promises and the problems I find inherent in his articulation of the enduring unity and identity proclaimed by Christians over time.

My appreciation for his work stems from the way in which he understands the subject to be rooted in and shaped by a particular community. Likewise, I find his connection between religious becoming and religious practice to be compelling. Nevertheless, I argue that his work rests on several misconceptions of identity, which are not uncommon in dominant Anglo-European discourses. First, I argue that Lindbeck's work assumes that there is a singular language and culture found within the Christian tradition. Second, his work presupposes that one's identity is composed of distinct categories or elements (*e.g.*, white, female, Catholic, etc.), which are developed in isolation from one another and, therefore, remain unaffected or untouched by the other. Third, I contend that his work regards difference as a problem to be overcome in order to achieve a unified, Christian identity. These assumptions, I suggest, are in contrast to the findings of feminist, race, and queer theories, among others, which have illuminated the intersecting nature of identity. When one's identity is understood as simultaneously situated within the spaces of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and so on, the myth of the singular, stable subject is shattered. Moreover, the attention to the intersecting web of identities also reveals the way in which one can also experience multiple oppressions. In Christian anthropological terms, when the various aspects of our identity are dismissed or ignored, our creation in the image and likeness of God is foreclosed.

Chapter Two, titled "Homeland In/Security," moves from border protection to border crossing. It begins at the boundary between Mexico and the United States,

described poetically by Gloria Anzaldúa in the following well known statement. "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture."[16]

Unlike most national borders, the borderlands represent more than a charted, physical territory. They are a site of great contradiction and, as Mexican American author Alma M. Garcia observes, "a symbol of both location and dislocation, of community and alienating individually, of discovery and colonization."[17] Here, cultures collide, languages and ethnicities converge, and a highly developed country and a developing nation come together.

Following a brief account of this region's geo-political history, I highlight the immigration debates currently dividing the United States, and more specifically those discussions surrounding the border between Mexico and the United States. Examining key issues such as border control and the primacy of the English language, I conclude with various historians and sociologists that these discussions have as much to do with America's "national historic imaginary" as with the stated underlying economic and political ramifications of Mexican immigration. This imagined narrative, I suggest, constructs the identity of the United States as culturally and linguistically homogenous, and, as a result, it suppresses the diverse histories of its people, controlling the disruptive aspect of plurality and keeping "difference" at bay. Moreover, I argue that the insistence by the U.S. to create and militarize definitive physical boundaries represents not only a desire for geographical fixity but also a fixity of power. In turn, the inhabitants of the

[16] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 25.
[17] García, *Narratives of Mexican American Women,* 63.

border region are trapped at random between unnatural and badly drawn cultural, linguistic, and ethnic lines, are betrayed by their inadequacy and, therefore, simultaneously perceived and rejected as aliens and essentially deficient.

Yet, is from this open wound that a new border culture or consciousness emerges. The new way of conceiving identities represents a tolerance for ambiguity and an appreciation for the hybrid, multi-voiced subjectivity of individuals. It is not an assembly of separate pieces coming together; rather, the third element is greater than the sum of its parts. Although this consciousness can at times be a source of pain, isolation, and desolation, it is also a place of intimacy and creativity, which moves to breakdown the unitary and singularity of homogenizing paradigms.

Chapter Three, "U.S. Latina Theologies: Voices from the Border," explores the ways in which multidimensional understandings of identity, like those articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa are present in the work of U.S. Latina theologies. To do so, I highlight the works of María Pilar Aquino, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Daisy Machado, three theologians whose pioneering work is inextricably tied to the lives, struggles, and religious commitments of the diverse U.S. Latina communities. My analysis of their work focuses on both their individual and collective insights regarding *lo cotidiano, mestizaje, and nepantla*.

Given these insights, I suggest that these multi-voiced subjectivities are powerful vehicles for transforming dominant monocultural understandings of identity and difference found within theological thought. Concluding that a faithful theological anthropology is not about an idealized or abstract understanding of humanity, but rather it is that which emerges out of and attends to particular contexts (*e.g.*, the interstices), this

chapter begins to explore a theological option for the in-between, which interjects and interrupts the dominant discourse. In so doing, it contends that we must broaden our perspective to include the plight of the marginal in our midst and, in particular, those whose identities are systematically excluded from or are unrecognized in our discursive representations.

Continuing to ask how the option for the in-between might engage theologians in new ways of thinking, I suggest that it cannot end with the doctrine of theological anthropology. Because the question of the person and significance of Jesus Christ sits at the heart of Christianity, it has come to represent an increasingly diverse set of interpretations, which have, in turn, influenced the Christian construals of meaning, identity, and difference. Moreover, as Kwok Pui Lan aptly notes:

> The most hybridized concept in the Christian tradition is that of Jesus/Christ. The space between Jesus and Christ is unsettling and fluid, resisting easy categorization and closure. It is the "contact zone" or "borderland" between the human and the divine, the one and the many, the historical and the cosmological, the Jewish and the Hellenistic, the prophetic and the sacramental, the God of the conquerors and the God of the meek and the lowly.[18]

Upon exploring Virgilio Elizondo's notion of the *mestizo* Jesus, Chapter Four, "Feminist Christologies Beyond Impasse: Performing Christ from Rome to the Borderlands" seeks to explore the ways in which an interstitial perspective and an option for the in-between might open up and enrich this Christological contact zone. As such, this chapter explores the tension between feminist theology, which takes seriously the experiences of women and the flourishing of all persons, and the

[18] Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology,* 171.

androcentric interpretations of Christ present in dominant theologies that have contributed to human indignities around the globe.

Focusing on the marginal experiences of women in the church, I consider the ways in which faith in Jesus Christ has been troublesome for feminist theologians, especially Catholic feminist theologians, within the interrelated issues of incarnation, ordination, and salvation. In order to carve out a space for feminist belief in Christ, I challenge feminist thinkers to move beyond imitation Christologies toward more performative ones, as proposed in the work of Karen Trimble Alliaume. Finally, I offer an example of a performative Christology, which emerges from the everyday lives and struggles of U.S. Latina women. This lived Christology, I contend, not only challenges the dominant theological discourses present within the doctrine of Christology, but it also reveals Christ with us in and through the multi-voiced subjectivities of U.S. Latina women, who inhabit the geographical and metaphorical borderlands. It is my hope such a Christology will personify Divine Wisdom, who takes her stand at the crossroads (Proverbs 8:1-2).

This option for the in-between, though central to my thesis, is not a new or original discovery; it is a depiction of what is and what has always been. The plurality of the self is a reality for all people, not just U.S. Latinas. The thrust of this dissertation work, as such, is to illustrate the ways in which the assumption of hybrid or multiple identities and the (re)citation of Christology can serve as a loci for discussions on the limits of fixed, monocultural understandings of religion, subsequently laying the preliminary groundwork for a more adequate theological understanding of Christian community and identity formation. As María Pilar Aquino notes, “In this new era of

globalization, entering *Nepantla* means for theologians that we are willing to engage in new explorations about God and ourselves from creative "border" locations."[19]

[19] Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theology: Central Features," 149.

CHAPTER 1

GEORGE A. LINDBECK: IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE IN *THE NATURE OF DOCTRINE*

Introduction

With the publication of his 1984 work, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, George A. Lindbeck laid the groundwork for a new form of theological thought.[20] This new way of thinking theologically—most commonly referred to as "postliberalism"—would eventually become one of the leading modes of Western theology in both the church and the academy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Reflecting on Lindbeck's work nearly twenty-five years later, Bruce D. Marshall states: "In the fragmented, even chaotic world of contemporary Anglophone theology, *The Nature of Doctrine* is one of the few books that practically everybody thinks they need to know something about."[21] Similarly, Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, OSB notes that Lindbeck's book has become one of the most quoted works in American systematic theology.[22]

The widespread success of Lindbeck's work can be partly attributed to its provocative and fresh approach to Christian theological discourse. At the time *The Nature of Doctrine* was published, Christian theology was in the midst of an identity crisis. For many theologians, this crisis had its roots in the intellectual foundations of

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[20] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age.*
[21] Marshall, "Introduction: The Nature of Doctrine After 25 Years," vii.
[22] Eckerstorfer, "The One Church in the Postmodern World: Reflections on the Life and Thought of George Lindbeck," 409.

Friedrich Schleiermacher—namely Schleiermacher's appeal to make Christianity relevant to its "cultural despisers" and his systematic approach to Christian theology, which was based on an appeal to the "experience of absolute dependence." These intellectual foundations, which eventually gave rise to the liberal Protestantism and revisionist theology that dominated the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were thought by some to have misguidedly charged the modern theological project with satisfying the criteria set by contemporary culture and scientific knowledge. As a result, many theologians feared that modern theology ran the risk of subordinating the word of God to the words and experiences of humankind. This fear was compounded by the growing concern that modern liberal individualism would soon displace the Christian community as the primary influence in the lives of Christians. Suspicious of the various attempts to correlate the Christian message with modern thought, but not wanting to abandon modern developments and return to a preliberal orthodoxy, many Christian theologians were in search of a way to rethink the Christian tradition without sacrificing the primacy of the Christian identity.

For these reasons, Paul DeHart observes, *The Nature of Doctrine* was appealing on at least four different levels. First, Lindbeck's cultural linguistic understanding of religion offered a promising alternative to the preferred theories of religion and religious doctrine, which Lindbeck described as inadequate. Second, Lindbeck's theory of religious doctrine attributed a "community-defining function" to doctrines by illustrating the way in which they functioned analogous to grammatical rules in language games. Third, it articulated a new theory of religious truth. Finally, it proposed that each of these

three elements comprised a new way of doing theology.[23] Speaking of the four interdependent theological proposals that comprise *The Nature of Doctrine*,[24] which are to some degree intertwined with the four levels of interested outlined above, DeHart captures the main task of Lindbeck's work when he writes: "Together, these elements articulate the basic theological vision of Lindbeck as dogmatically guided by ecclesiology: the task of articulating the continuity over time of a people of witness, faithfully proclaiming to the world God's coming salvation revealed in Jesus Christ."[25]

Lindbeck underscores this ecclesial focus in the "Foreward" to the German edition of *The Nature of Doctrine*, explaining that the primary purpose of his book was to offer a preliminary, ecumenical response to the doctrinal divisiveness within and among the major Christian traditions. Nevertheless, due to the theological climate at the time, he notes that his work was essentially received as a proposal for replacing modernity with a new "postliberal" cultural, religious, intellectual, and theological situation.[26] Regardless of how one receives Lindbeck's work, his desire to make the search for Christian unity and identity conceptually easier, while simultaneously remaining faithful to historic creeds and confessions, has profoundly influenced theological thought today.

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[23] DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses : The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology,* 32-33, 58.

[24] The four independent proposals that comprise Lindbeck's basic ecclesial, theological vision in *The Nature of Doctrine* are summarized by DeHart as follows: "(1) a sociological sectarianism combined with a catholic ecclesiology, (2) the idea of religion as a semiotic system, (3) a quasi-Thomist theory of religious truth, and (4) a notion of 'intratextuality' based largely on certain interpretations of the theological exegesis of Karl Barth." SeeIbid., 58. Due to the nature and scope of this chapter, our analysis of Lindbeck will cover only the first and second proposals identified by DeHart.

[25] Ibid., 58.

[26] Lindbeck, "Foreward to the German Edition of "The Nature of Doctrine"," 196-200.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore both the insights and issues that I believe Lindbeck's work poses for constructive Christian theological proposals of meaning, identity, and difference in the twenty-first century. In particular, I focus on two aspects of Lindbeck's theological proposal: his cultural and linguistic understanding of religions and religious identity, which claims that the language and culture of one's religion shapes and defines human experience rather than the reverse; and, the communal-identity-defining function presented in his theory of religious doctrines. My argument will take place in two basic parts. First, I will summarize Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understanding of religion and religious doctrine, indicating its importance for theological conversations of identity and difference. Second, I will discuss both the promise and problems that Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to religion and religious doctrine holds for theological construals of Christian identity, both individual and communal. An understanding of these insights and questions, I argue, are ultimately necessary to bring about a transformed community that embraces diversity and plurality and, in so doing, participates in the resistance and subversion of identity-based oppressions. Let us now turn to a summary of Lindbeck's understanding of religion and theology in a postliberal age.

Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Theological Vision

As stated above, George Lindbeck's groundbreaking work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, offers a new postliberal perspective from which to think about religion and religious doctrine. In this section I will sketch out the key themes and positions of this perspective, focusing in particular on Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of religion,

which he constructs as an alternative to the experiential-expressive approach. My purpose in doing so is not only to introduce the reader to the contours of Lindbeck's argument, but also to provide a backdrop for understanding the significance of his theological vision for North American and European theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The purpose for and urgency of Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*

Drawing on recent work in philosophical and social-scientific thought, Lindbeck proposes a cultural-linguistic understanding of religion in his work *The Nature of Doctrine*. This innovative theoretical framework was designed to function as an alternative to contemporary, favored theories of religion and doctrines, which Lindbeck claims are incapable of accounting for doctrinal differences and similarities among the major Christian traditions. For Lindbeck, the capacity to explain this immanent reality of doctrinal conflict and compatibility is of the utmost importance, as the enduring self-identity and unity proclaimed by Christians is at stake.[27]

According to Lindbeck, theories of religion and theories of religious doctrine are necessarily interdependent. In order for a religion to exist as a recognizable and distinct entity, he notes, it must have a set of beliefs or practices (*i.e.*, doctrines) by which it can be identified. Thus, he argues that these "operative doctrines," whether official or unofficial, are essential for communicating and exhibiting the communal identity of a group.[28]

Yet, as Lindbeck observes, doctrines do not always function the way they should. Take, for instance, the communal beliefs and practices that constitute Christian identity.

[27] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 74.
[28] Ibid., 74.

As the histories of Christianity have shown, these operative doctrines have not always been a source of unity or continuity. In fact, doctrinal relationships within and among the various traditions (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism, etc.) have at times created conflict and division rather than community and stability. This can be seen, for example, in the longstanding confessional debates surrounding the doctrine of the Eucharist that have resulted in both the historic affirmation and condemnations of issues such as transubstantiation and sacramental presence.[29]

For Lindbeck, this anomalous doctrinal behavior, coupled with the lack of doctrinal theories currently available to account for such complex interrelationships, puts the Christian identity at risk. Without the appropriate categories, he argues, doctrinal theories cannot intelligibly identify what changes to the tradition are faithful or unfaithful.[30] Furthermore, he notes that the absence of these categories often makes it difficult to communicate the unified and common identity claimed by Christians. For example, drawing on an his own experiences in ecumenical dialogue, he explains that even the most engaged participants struggle to describe to their constituents how it is possible for the ecumenical group to be united around divisive topics such as the Eucharist and sanctification, while simultaneously remaining committed to the historical interpretations that ultimately lead to the denominational divisions in the first place.[31]

Because Lindbeck is primarily concerned with issues of intra-Christian unity and ecumenism, he avows that dialogue participants and theologians alike must find a new way of thinking about the nature and function of doctrine. More specifically, he argues,

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[29] Ibid., 7-9.
[30] Ibid., 8.
[31] Ibid., 15.

this new methodology must be able to account for the existence of what he calls "doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation." According to Lindbeck, doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation is the process in which doctrinal positions that were at one time diametrically opposed are now reconciled, without either side having changed its initial stance. Furthermore, since the ability to account for this troublesome mixture of consistency, change, unity, and diversity in doctrinal discussions is essential for Christian unity, he contends that it cannot simply be resolved with an appeal (or deferment) to the Holy Spirit. Instead, he claims that it must follow a rigorous process of faith seeking understanding, which can and must be grasped by human reason and modern sensibilities. It is within this ecumenical context, then, that Lindbeck seeks to make a contribution to current theories about communal beliefs and practices.[32]

Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic alternative

Presently, Lindbeck notes that there are two functioning theories of religion and religious doctrines: the "cognitive-propositional" and the "experiential-expressive." In brief, the cognitive-propositional approach emphasizes the cognitive aspects of religion and perceives doctrines to be informative truth claims or propositions about objective realities in which there is an immediate correspondence between the doctrinal concept and ultimate reality. This approach, he suggests, is found in traditional orthodox theologies, which seek to communicate truth claims about the way things are in some final or ultimate sense. Conversely, the experiential-expressive approach emphasizes the experiential aspects of religion and understands doctrines to be noninformative,

[32] Ibid., 15-16.

nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings and existential orientations that are shared by all of humankind. Lindbeck associates this view with liberal theologies, starting with Schleiermacher's turn to experience.[33]

Although Lindbeck recognizes the allure of each of these positions, he argues that both of them are limited by their inability to adequately account for the possibility of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation. For instance, within the cognitive-propositional framework once a doctrine is understood to be true, it must always be true; and on the contrary, once a doctrine is determined to be false, it is always a falsity. If one follows this logic, Lindbeck points out, doctrinal disagreements cannot be resolved unless one or both sides abandon his or her original (and oppositional) position. Thus, he concludes that it is impossible for a propositionalist to even imagine that the meaning of a doctrine might change while the doctrine itself remains unchanged.[34]

Conversely, Lindbeck remarks that the experiential-expressivist approach is readily able to account for a change in religious meaning without a requisite change in the doctrine itself. Yet, he cautions that at the same time this approach allows for doctrinal changes without a significant variation in their meaning. These two contradictory positions can be held simultaneously, he argues, because the experiential-expressive model understands religious doctrines to be subjective, nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings or existential attitude. As a result, doctrines in the experiential-expressive model are susceptible to multiple changes in meaning or even a complete loss of meaningfulness because the same exact symbol can evoke a similar, dissimilar, or even no experience of the divine. Thus, Lindbeck argues that doctrines are unable to play

[33] Ibid., 16-17.
[34] Ibid., 16-17.

a significant role in religious agreements and disagreements for expressivists.[35] He concludes, therefore, that like the cognitive-propositional approach, the experiential-expressive approach is unable to account for the phenomenon of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation in ways that can adequately explain the enduring and unified self-identity claimed by Christians. Given the tenuous history of Christian doctrines, how can Christians move closer to a catholic ecclesiology?

Keeping in line with his ecumenical goal, Lindbeck advocates for a third, postliberal way of thinking about religion and religious doctrine, which he believes will enable Christians to communicate their common identity. Drawing primarily on Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology, Lindbeck purports that a religion can be understood, "as a cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of one's life and thought."[36] Consonant with this approach, he proposes a "regulative" or "rule" theory of doctrine, in which doctrines function as authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action that make possible the generation of truth claims and religious experiences in the first place.

According to Lindbeck, this cultural-linguistic understanding, if accepted, has the potential to move theology out of its current impasse, while simultaneously being responsive to the needs of the time. To this end, he seeks to demonstrate that it is more conceptually effective to understand religions as the producers of deep experiences of the Divine (as in the cultural-linguistic approach) rather than the products of these

[35] Ibid., 16-17.
[36] Ibid., 33.

experiences (as in the experiential-expressive approach).[37] In order to make his point, he systematically compares each of the two approaches.

With the intention of explaining the experiential-expressive approach, Lindbeck uses the work of Roman Catholic theologian, Bernard Lonergan, as a representative example.[38] From Lonergan's rich theory of religion, Lindbeck identifies several attributes that he believes to be indicative of the experiential-expressive model. The first, and perhaps the most significant, is Lonergan's definition of religion, which Lindbeck summarizes as follows: "Different religions are diverse expressions or objectifications of a common core experience. It is this experience which identifies them as religions."[39] For Lindbeck, Lonergan's premise that religions are diversely articulated expressions of a common core experience is an essential aspect of experiential-expressivism.

From Lonergan's remaining theses, Lindbeck deduces several additional characteristics of the experiential-expressive approach, which he believes are indicative of this model. First, the primordial and preconceptual experience, mentioned in Lonergan's definition of religion above, is thought to present in *all* human beings, be it consciously or subconsciously. Second, this "internal" primordial experience is understood to function as the source or norm for the "external" features of religion (*e.g.,*

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[37] Ibid., 30.
[38] Lindbeck's reasons for selecting Lonergan's work as a representative example of liberal theology are twofold. First, he believes that Lonergan's work takes into consideration a variety of theological concerns, which will allow it to function as an adequate test case; second, and not unrelated, he notes that the Catholicity pervasive in Lonergan's work will be useful in examining the ecumenical possibility of the cultural-linguistic approach. Ibid., 31.
[39] Ibid., 31.

doctrines, language, etc.). Third, the authenticity and truthfulness of the external objectivities is thought to be determined according to the initial, primary experience.[40]

Theologically speaking, Lindbeck observes that the notion of a common core experience permeates much of contemporary Christian theology. As an example, he cites Schleiermacher's articulation of humankind's "feeling of ultimate dependence" and Tillich's depiction of this experience as "a being grasped by ultimate concern."[41] To Lindbeck's examples, one could also add Karl Rahner's notion of the supernatural existential, which contends that all persons are created to be in relationship with God by virtue of their graced human existence.[42] Reflecting on this, Lindbeck notes that for these experiential-expressive theologians the objectivities of a religion are not simply expressions of random, baseless experiences; rather, they are thought to have their source in the revelation of God. By establishing this "proper" correlate between one's experience and the objectivities of the Christian religion, he contends that the experiential-expressive theologians attempt to impart a sense of stability and credibility to Christian experiences and identity.[43] On this subject, Gordon Michalson notes:

> Lindbeck's real point has less to do with historical interpretation than with theological principle. From Schleiermacher to Tillich, experiential expressivism has thrived on the insight that Christianity 'scores its point' (at the very least) or 'makes sense' (at the very most) because of what the believer is already carrying around 'inside' him or her. In other words, the intelligibility of Christian faith is potentially universal, since it has its source in an anthropological 'given,' such as a 'feeling of absolute dependence' or an 'ultimate concern.' The power of this tradition resides in his capacity to underwrite the truth of Christian claims by showing their incontrovertible intelligibility—incontrovertible because immediate in some way to human consciousness.[44]

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[40] Ibid., 31.
[41] Ibid., 31-32.
[42] See {Rahner 1982}
[43] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 31-32.
[44] Michalson, "The Response to Lindbeck," 112.

For Lindbeck, then, the experiential-expressive approach to religion and religious doctrine is ultimately unable to account for the distinct, common identity proclaimed by Christians. The overriding reason for this, he maintains, is that the experiential-expressive perspective gives experience the leading role, insofar as inner experiences are thought to shape the external features religions rather than the reverse. He writes: "Because [the] core experience is said to be common to a wide diversity of religions, it is difficult or impossible to specify its distinctive features, and yet unless this is done, the assertion of commonality becomes logically and empirically vacuous."[45] Thus, for Lindbeck, the experiential-expressive notion of a universal, common experience is too generic to provide the distinctive, defining features of a religion, which must be recognizable in and through a shared set of beliefs and practices.

Responding to this potential identity crisis, Lindbeck restates his case for a cultural-linguistic alternative. According to this approach, the external features of religion are thought to shape the inner experiences of the constituents, as opposed to the reverse. In other words, a religion functions similarly to a Kantian *a priori* or a comprehensive interpretive scheme that structures and molds the self and her experiences of the world. Describing this model of religion and religious doctrine further, he writes, "Like a culture or a language, [religion] is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities."[46] For Lindbeck, this shift in the role of experience is extremely important. The top-down (rather than bottom-up) approach ensures that the members of each

[45] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 32.
[46] Ibid., 33.

religious group are determined and shaped by similar texts and features, providing an easily-recognized, shared, common identity. Moreover, this approach prohibits the sacred texts and features of a religion from being subordinated to human subjectivity, and as a result, it seemingly imparts a sense of stability to one's religious identity.

In order to better comprehend Lindbeck's notion that the external features of a religion determine one's internal experiences, it is worthwhile to explain the way in which cultural-linguistic systems are thought to function in social-scientific circles. A recent broadcast on National Public Radio's (NPR) program *Morning Edition*, entitled "Shakespeare Had Roses All Wrong," I believe, provides a clear and helpful illustration of this process.[47] During this broadcast, NPR's science correspondent, Robert Krulwich, interviewed Dr. Lera Boroditsky about an experiment performed in her lab that sought to ascertain empirical evidence of how language shapes the way we think.

As part of this experiment, Boroditsky, a psychology professor at Stanford University, asked a sample of native German speakers and a sample of native Spanish speakers to look at a series of simple images. The images were projected onto a screen one at a time, and the subjects were asked to record the three adjectives that they believed best described the object at hand. From these initial lists, Boroditsky discovered that the German speakers and the Spanish speakers had two very different ways of perceiving the images, and in particular those images that corresponded to nouns that were gendered differently in each of the languages.

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[47] "Shakespeare Had Roses All Wrong," *Morning Edition,* National Public Radio (Nashville, TN: WPLN, April 6, 2009). Transcript available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102518565

In order to explain these findings to the audience, Boroditsky used the word "bridge" as an example. In German, the noun for bridge is feminine (*die Brücke*), and in Spanish, the noun for bridge is masculine (*el puente*). When the German speakers were shown the image of a bridge, they tended to describe the structure using markers traditionally associated with the feminine (*e.g.*, beautiful, elegant, fragile, and pretty). Conversely, when the Spanish speakers were shown the exact same image, they used masculine-identified descriptors such as long, strong, thrilling, sturdy, and towering. From these initial findings, Boroditsky concluded that the logic provided by the grammar of a language appears to have a tangible influence over the subjects' worldview.[48]

In a later article, Boroditsky points out that the effects of language are not just apparent in labs, but in places such as art galleries where abstract entities such as death, time, and victory are personified in human form. In 85 percent of these personifications, Boroditsky notes, the grammatical gender of the word in the artist's native language

[48] Ibid. In the second half of the broadcast, Krulwich reported on an additional component of Boroditsky's experiment. Here, Boroditsky sought to verify that it was the actual linguistic differences between the German and Spanish speakers (as opposed to the myriad of other differences between them) that produced the differing perspectives between the two groups. In this portion of her experiment, Boroditsky invited a sampling of Americans, who spoke only English, into the lab. Because the English language does not designate nouns as either masculine or feminine (although they may refer to male or female people or animals), and because this particular group of subjects was not familiar with any other languages, Boroditsky could assume that the group did not have any preconceived linguistic notions regarding the gender of inanimate objects (*i.e.*, they did not understand a bridge in feminine terms, as did the German speakers). Thus, Boroditsky and her assistants spent an entire day teaching the subjects a language, called Gambuzi, which they had invented for the purposes of this experiment. As part of the experiment, the nouns in the Gambuzi language were arbitrarily assigned different genders. After only one day of learning this new language, Boroditsky reported that the subjects began to describe the projected images using adjectives that corresponded to the gender assigned to each noun. She concluded, therefore, that even when this grammatical distinction was learned in a lab, it was sufficient enough to induce many of the same effects as the previous experiment.

determines whether a male of female figure is chosen to represent the particular concept in the artwork. For example, she notes that German painters are more likely to paint death as a man, whereas Russian painters are more likely to paint death as a woman. Thus, she contends that even minor quirks of grammar, such as grammatical gender, can influence our thinking in profound ways. [49]

In sum, Boroditsky concludes that when one inherits a language, she appears to inherit more than how to speak; she learns a whole cultural system that affects her sensual experience of the world and the way she lives her life. For her, language is central to our experience of being human. She writes, "linguistic processes are pervasive in most fundamental domains of thought, unconsciously shaping us from the nuts and bolts of cognition and perception to our loftiest abstract notions and major life decisions."[50] Moreover, her notion that languages are not merely tools for expressing our thoughts, but rather shape our thoughts in profound ways seems to cut to the heart of Lindbeck's distinction between the experiential-expressivist and cultural linguistic understanding of religion and religious doctrine.

Similarly, when Lindbeck proposes a cultural-linguistic understanding of religion and religious doctrine, he has in mind that a religion, like a language or culture, provides the basic categories through which the members of a religious community experience and understand reality. More specifically, he suggests that it is the sacred texts of the various faith traditions that provide the medium or lens through which this experience is filtered. For example, when Lindbeck speaks about Christianity, he writes: "What is important is that Christians allow their cultural conditions and highly diverse affections to be molded

[49] Boroditsky, "How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?" 128.
[50] Ibid., 129.

by the set of biblical stories that stretches from creation to eschaton and culminates in Jesus' passion and resurrection."[51] In turn, he argues, the stories are embodied in the lives and actions of the Christian community.

Lindbeck's notion of religious becoming

Although *The Nature of Doctrine* does not contain an explicit theological anthropology, it is within Lindbeck's discussions on religious formation that one begins to see traces of how he makes sense of human *be-ing*. According to Lindbeck, "The humanly real is not constructed from below upward or from the inner to the outer, but from the outer to the inner, and from above downward."[52] More specifically, speaking of the religious formation of a Christian, he argues that just as a human comes into being through the external acquisition of a language, "so [too] he or she begins to become a new creature through hearing and interiorizing the language that speaks of Christ."[53] Thus, Lindbeck assumes that the language and culture of a religion are the (external) preconditions for religious experience.

Accordingly, Lindbeck suggests that one becomes religious by learning the symbol system and language of a given tradition. This happens, he contends, similar to the ways in which one becomes culturally or linguistically competent—namely, by hearing the sacred texts (*fides ex auditu*) and interiorizing a set of skills through training and practice. Given this account, Lindbeck states that the primary knowledge in religious formation, "is not *about* the religion, nor *that* the religion teaches such and such, but

[51] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 84.
[52] Ibid., 62.
[53] Ibid., 62.

rather *how* to be religious in such and such ways."[54] Lindbeck's claim is that the objectivities of a religion, not unlike natural languages, provide the concepts with which one understands and explains reality, and these concepts are integrally related to the particular patterns of action through which a religion is internalized, practiced, and communicated within the particular community.[55] For Lindbeck, proper performance over correct belief appears to be the key to faithfulness.

Lindbeck's concept of religious becoming is loosely based on Wittgenstein's notion of language games. According to Wittgenstein, a child does not learn her native language through explanation (*e.g.*, rote memorization of vocabulary words), but rather she acquires the *use* of language through training or, what Wittgenstein calls, "language-games." For Wittgenstein, these games consist of both language and actions woven together, and "[are] meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a life-form."[56] In brief, Wittgenstein suggests that learning a language is an intricate process, which encompasses much more than learning the names of objects; it involves internalizing complex expressions of time, metaphors, and so on. Moreover, he suggests that like a game, a language has certain rules, guidelines, key players, etc., and each of these can only be understood within the context of daily life.[57]

[54] Ibid., 35.
[55] Ibid., 34-35,60.
[56] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations : The German Text, with a Revised English Translation,* 10.
[57] Ibid., 1-35.

Lindbeck's rule-theory of doctrine

Consequently, Lindbeck contends that if a religion functions like a comprehensive interpretive scheme in which individuals have particular kinds of experiences and are called to particular kinds of behaviors, and if the framework for this interpretive scheme is rooted in the sacred stories or symbol systems of the religion, then religious doctrines are best understood as the rules or grammar that inform the way these stories or symbol systems are used within a particular religious community. While Lindbeck notes that some doctrines are more directive or regulative in their approach (*i.e.,* the Christian doctrine of *solo Christo*, which claims that one is saved through Christ alone), he suggests that most doctrines illustrate or guide the proper usage of this material as one comes to understand the world, community, and her self in terms of a particular religion.[58] He argues, therefore, that faithful application of these doctrines does not necessarily warrant rote memorization or exact repetition; rather, he states, "it requires, in the making of any new formulations, adherence to the same directives that were involved in their first formulation."[59] As Gordon E. Michalson, Jr. helpfully surmises, for Lindbeck: "Faithfulness to a doctrine, then, is more like following a rule (like a grammatical rule) than like believing a first-order claim about an inner experience or feeling."[60]

According to Lindbeck, the advantage or ecumenical payoff of the "regulative" or "rule" theory of doctrine is that it is able to intelligibly account for the process of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation. To explain his point, Lindbeck cites two

[58] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 81-82.
[59] Ibid., 81.
[60] Michalson, "The Response to Lindbeck," 108.

unequivocally opposed traffic rules—specifically, "drive on the left" and "drive on the right." He notes that despite their oppositional intent, both rules are binding. However, he also notes that the degree to which they are binding depends first and foremost upon the context in which they are applied. For instance, he states that one must always drive on the left-hand side of the road in Great Britain, and conversely, in the United States one must always drive on the right-hand side of the road. Yet, he also notes that in either country a police officer might require one to drive on the opposite (read: incorrect) side of the road in the case of a traffic accident or other hazardous situation.[61] Drawing a connection between these examples and the notion of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation, Lindbeck states:

> Thus oppositions between rules can in some instances be resolved, not by altering one or both of them, but by specifying when or where they apply, or by stipulating which of the competing directives takes precedence. Similarly…both transubstantiation and at least some of the doctrines that appear to contradict it can be interpreted as embodying rules of sacramental thought and practice that may have been in unavoidable and perhaps irresolvable collision in certain historical contexts, but that can in other circumstances be harmonized by appropriate specifications of their respective domains, uses, and priorities.[62]

Hence, Lindbeck contends that when doctrines are understood as second-order formulas within a regulative framework, it is logically possible that two positions that were once historically opposed are now able to be reconciled without either position acquiescing to the other one, and as a result, different applications of the same core belief are able to occur.

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[61] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 17-18.
[62] Ibid., 18.

The significance of the cultural-linguistic approach for theological thought

Given each of these arguments for the cultural-linguistic approach, Lindbeck concludes that when religious experience is understood to be the *result of* rather than the *foundation for* religious life, two significant conceptual shifts take place that ultimately influence the trajectory of Christian theological thought. First, this experiential role-change ultimately calls into question the idea of a common, core experience of the divine, which is ubiquitously and synonymously present in all human beings and religious traditions. Second, it brings about a more adequate understanding of religious change and, therefore, a more fitting method through which one can intelligibly account for the enduring self-identity claimed by Christians. [63]

For Lindbeck, the first conceptual shift in theological thought occasioned by the cultural linguistic approach has to do with the fundamental difference between the cultural-linguistic and experiential-expressive models—specifically, that the cultural-linguistic model begins with the particularities of the religion and ends with the divergent religious experiences they produce, while the experiential-expressive model starts with a universal notion of experience common to all peoples and traditions and attempts to establish the ways in which this experience is diversely objectified in the world's religions. Lindbeck argues that the top-down approach offered by the cultural-linguistic model is preferable, as it enables the external objectivities of a religion (*e.g.* language and doctrines) to shape and mold one's internal religious experiences, and as a result, the particularities of a religious tradition become the defining factor in one's identity rather than the other way around. Moreover, he asserts that this move celebrates and preserves

[63] Ibid.

the uniqueness of each individual religious tradition rather than subsuming the religions under a false, universalizing umbrella of religious experience, a conceptual move he associates with most liberal theologies.[64] This universalizing tendency can be seen in the works of theologians such as John Hick, who uses the term "ultimate Reality" to refer to that which the great religious traditions constitute different human responses.[65]

The second conceptual shift in theological thought, which Lindbeck believes the cultural linguistic approach engenders, affects conceptual understandings of religious change. To make his point, Lindbeck compares the experiential-expressive and the cultural-linguistic models again. He notes that while the experiential-expressive approach perceives religious change to be the result of new or different experiences, the cultural-linguistic approach identifies change as a consequence of the intersection of a particular cultural-linguistic system with new situations. Explaining the cultural-linguistic point of view, he writes, "Religious traditions are not transformed, abandoned or replaced because of an upwelling of new or different ways of feeling about the self, world, or God, but because a religious interpretive scheme (embodied, as it always is, in religious practice and belief) develops anomalies in its application in new contexts."[66] This viewpoint is significant, he argues, because it imparts a sense of stability to religious identities rather than allowing them to be influenced or eclipsed by human impulses, experiences, and feelings. Here, the sacred story of a religion functions as a stable lens through which

[64] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 23, 39-40.
[65] See Hick, "The Non-absoluteness of Christianity."
[66] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 39.

changing worldviews can be reinterpreted. In other words, the self-same narrative fuses with the new worldview, in which it is told and retold, practiced and practiced again.[67]

Overall, Lindbeck's slim but complex volume, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* has had and continues to have a considerable influence on theological thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. With the cultural-linguistic approach to religion, Lindbeck not only advances his ecclesial vision, but in so doing he offers a new methodology with which to rethink and reaffirm the distinctive identity of the Christian community, which was thought to have been eroded by modernity and inter-doctrinal differences. In this view, religions are best understood as cultural frameworks or mediums that precede the inner experiences of the individual and engender a language and culture that shape the entirety of one's life and thought. As a result, the emphasis is no longer on the cognitive aspects or the immediately experiential, but rather on what Michaelson calls "communal construing," a process in which one participates by learning the new language and becoming skilled in this new idiom.[68] In this next section, we will look at what I believe are the lasting contributions of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understand for theological thought, as well as the potentially harmful misconceptions of identity that underscore his argument.

The Promise and Problems of Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Alternative

Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to religion and religious doctrine raises important questions regarding Christian identity—specifically, how in light of inter- and

[67] Ibid., 81-82.{MalformedField 1}
[68] Michalson, "The Response to Lindbeck," 107.

intra-religious difference can one come to understand the enduring self-identity and unity proclaimed by Christians over time. As outlined above, Lindbeck answers this question by prioritizing a "top-down" identity that is deeply rooted in the particularities of one's scripture and tradition. This cultural-linguistic approach, he argues, not only allows for the reconciliation of doctrinal conflicts within the Christian community via a regulative theory of doctrine, but in so doing, it communicates a stable but flexible conception of Christian identity that can be recognized in and through a shared, learned set of communal beliefs and practices.

Although Lindbeck's position has sparked much methodological debate and is often contrasted in terms of merit with revisionist theologians such as David Tracy, Schubert Ogden, and Gordon Kaufman, it can be argued that Lindbeck's position essentially accomplishes what it set out to do: in the face of both Christianity and modernity's competing claims, it provides a theoretical outline for understanding a distinctive, yet collective, Christian identity based on a common language and a common culture, which are thought to precede the inner experiences of the individual, molding her subjectivity and producing an idiom that shape "the entirety of life and thought."[69] One comes to participate in this distinct community just as one comes to speak a new language—by acquiring, learning, and practicing the new skills through the absorption of the common idiom. This "unity through commonality" enables Lindbeck to illustrate the unique set of features shared by all members of the Christian community—namely, the sacred stories and memories of Jesus, which he notes are used in specifiable ways to

[69] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 33.

interpret and live in the world.[70] As I will demonstrate below, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach holds both promising and potentially problematic implications for the construals of personal and collective identity in theological thought today. Each will be mentioned briefly below, but will also be taken up again in more detail in later chapters.

Lindbeck's contributions to theological conversations of identity

One of Lindbeck's major contributions to theological conversations of identity, I believe, is his renewed emphasis on the way in which one's religious identity is deeply rooted in and shaped by particular communities, or in his case particular faith communities. By underscoring the shared social (cultural) and discursive (linguistic) mediums through which one's identity is informed, Lindbeck is able to move away from the universalized, ahistorical or free-floating subject often associated with modernism or experiential-expressivism, toward an understanding of the subject as profoundly shaped by particular, concrete social and historical locations or communities. Discussing the positive implications of Lindbeck's attention to these communities or traditions within which the individual is situated, feminist theologian Linell Cady observes: "The subject is no longer the abstract individual disembedded from local contexts, but a historical being whose identity, rationality, and sensibilities are constituted in and through temporal and social relations."[71] In this sense, one could argue that Lindbeck's work begins to lay the groundwork for a more "embodied" or "contextual" understanding of the religious subject.

[70] Ibid., 64.
[71] Cady, "Identity, Feminist Theory and Theology," 27-28.

Furthermore, as many race, feminist, and queer theorists have demonstrated, the complexities of our identities cannot be fully captured without attention to the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which one's subjectivity is constructed and negotiated. As Stuart Hall notes, "Identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."[72] In this sense, Lindbeck's emphasis on the socio-cultural and historical contexts is beneficial not only because it highlights the influence of the various contexts or communities upon the subject, but it also underscores the ways in which the subject comes to know herself through these different communities. Despite this beneficial focus, I will argue below that Lindbeck's attention to the cultural-linguistic context of the Christian ultimately falls short in so far as he privileges the singular Christian community at the expense of the multiple and often contesting communities in which we find ourselves.

The second contribution that I think Lindbeck makes to theological construals of identity is his notion of the deep-seated connection between identity—both individual and communal—and practice. As mentioned above, Lindbeck claims that in order to become religious, one must become skilled via practice (or language games) in the language and symbol system of a given religion. In so doing, he argues, one learns to feel, think, and act in conformity with a religious tradition in ways that cannot be achieved or interiorized in any other manner. According to Lindbeck, the payoff of this performance, so to speak, is its effect on the community. In a highly poignant statement, he says: "The proclamation of the gospel, as a Christian would put it, may be first of all

[72] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.

the telling of the story, but this gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the total gestalt of community life and action."[73]

For Lindbeck then, identity is not something that is given; rather, it is that which is continually achieved and negotiated. By placing practice over theory, Bernhard Eckerstorfer notes that Lindbeck is able to draw attention to the inseparability of language and action. Eckerstorfer writes:

> If the symbol system really forms the medium for the construction of a distinctive worldview and religious experience, then church and theology must furnish and maintain it with an ever rich narrative that is visual, acoustic and dramatic in texture and which is able to make sense of what the believer encounters in daily life and in extraordinary moments.[74]

In chapter 4, we will return to and expand upon this notion of practice or performance via the work of feminist and queer theorist, Judith Butler, and feminist theologian Karen Trimble Alliume. Although these two scholars might initially appear to be unlikely conversation partners for Lindbeck, I will argue that their collective understanding of the way in which performativity constitutes the subject (both individually and communally) has exciting implications for theological thought.

Lindbeck's misconceptions of identity

Although I agree with Lindbeck that the sacred stories and texts of a religion ought to play an active role in shaping the identities of their constituents (i.e., the beliefs and actions of the community), I contend that Lindbeck's exclusive focus on the significance of the Christian language and culture in shaping both the individual and the

[73] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 36.
[74] Eckerstorfer, "The One Church in the Postmodern World: Reflections on the Life and Thought of George Lindbeck," 421.

community rests on several (mis)conceptions about identity in general, which I will assert has serious ramifications for the construction of religious identity in particular. In what follows, I will outline the three interrelated misconceptions of identity that I believe underlie Lindbeck's thought, as well as the relevant theological critiques offered by other scholars. Ironically, that which has been considered Lindbeck's greatest contribution by some theologians is the very thing that has left him open to criticism by others.

The first misconception about identity that I believe influences Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to religion is his assumption that identity and difference must be treated as opposites in order to effectively bring about the particularity or distinctiveness of a given religious community. Due to this assumption, Lindbeck projects a certain level of homogeneity (and to that extent the exclusion of difference) upon the individual communities, which is thought to be essential for their stability.[75] This (mis)understanding can be seen, in particular, in his discussion of the relations between the religions.

According to Lindbeck, the religions of the world can be described as "different idioms for construing reality, expressing experience, and ordering life." [76] Because of this, he maintains that each religious tradition has its own unique symbol system and, therefore, its own distinct framework through which to interpret the world. By setting up the religions in this manner, Lindbeck is able to honor the differences between the religions and, in so doing, to bring to fore their unique and defining characteristics.

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[75] I am grateful for Jose Medina for outlining this fundamental misconception of identity in his article on the problem of difference for philosophical literature on group identities and political movements. See Medina, "Identity Trouble."

[76] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 48-49.

However, I argue that Lindbeck's theory of the religions ultimately implies that the distinctiveness of one's religious identity is secured only in opposition to its "others." For example, in order to defend the particularity of each tradition and, in so doing, to illustrate the way in which the individual communities are bound together by a shared story, he argues that the differences between these interpretive schemas of the religions are so great that is virtually impossible to establish a common ground from which to compare them to one another. In other words, for Lindbeck, comparing Islam to Buddhism would be like trying to compare a circle to a square; aside from the fact that they are both religions (or shapes), he claims that there are no obvious points of comparison between them. Moreover, he suggests that categories utilized by each religion are virtually incommensurable or unintelligible.[77] As a result, when a concept or idea is exchanged between persons of categorically different faiths (*i.e.*, a Buddhist speaks to a Christian about *Nirvana* or a Christian speaks to a Buddhist about heaven), the effect, he suggests, is similar to "babbling" or "mathematical formulas employed in a poetic text."[78] This radical account of religious difference implies that sameness can (and must) occur within each religion tradition, but not among the traditions. Thus, for Lindbeck, the uniqueness of the Christian identity is further secured and stabilized in and through its difference from its religious "others."

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[77] On this issue, Gordon Michaelson makes a helpful distinction. He notes that Lindbeck does not claim that faith is unintelligible in and of itself, but rather it is only intelligible within a particular form of life that must be learned and practice. Thus, the "unintelligibility" of faith refers only to the idea that it cannot be translated into experiential terms that are universally available to all traditions and not to the fact that it is generally unintelligible. See Michalson, "The Response to Lindbeck," 116.

[78] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 49.

In her work, *Monopoly on Salvation?*, feminist theologian Jeannine Hill Fletcher points out the consequences of Lindbeck's notion of difference, describing it as "the impasse of sameness or difference." Recounting the current theologies of religious pluralism, she notes two distinct trends—first, the liberal tendency to search for similarities or sameness among the religions, and second, the postmodern tendency to defend the absolute distinctness or differences of the particular religions. (Not surprisingly, she finds Lindbeck's work to be representative of the second position, "particularism," while theologians such as John Hick occupy the first category). According to Fletcher, the positions of "sameness" and "difference" both function to distance the religious "other." On the one hand, she argues that the search for sameness among the world's religions erases their differences, thereby rejecting the "other." Yet, on the other hand, to the extent that the theologian defends the differences between the religions at all costs, Fletcher argues that he or she renders the religious traditions as incomprehensible and therefore impenetrable to outsiders. [79]

The latter tendency can be seen clearly in Lindbeck's work. Take, for instance, Lindbeck's argument that a person cannot understand religious statements unless she is totally and completely immersed in that religion's life-world and truly understands its rules of practice. According to Fletcher, this focus on particularity enables him to make ecumenical progress (in so far as the Christian community shares the same sacred story), but it simultaneously puts a strain on interreligious relationships. She writes: "While a given community is bound together by the same story, the boundaries of the story preclude understanding across difference, because persons are so thoroughly shaped by

[79] Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation?: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism,* 77-81.

their particular story."[80] This construction of tightly bounded communities, coupled with a radical understanding of difference, she contends, eliminates the possibility of making interreligious connections. Furthermore, as Fletcher helpfully points out, this radical separation between Christians and persons of other faiths does not match the actual lived experience of persons in pluralistic contexts.[81] Thus, the boundaries he draws around the Christian community in order to promote its distinctiveness in opposition to its religious others at times appear to be unnatural. Furthermore, as we will see below, these boundaries impose an illusory homogeneity on the Christian community.

The second misconception about identity that pervades Lindbeck's thought can be found in his distinct understanding of how the language and culture of a religion ought to shape the particular patterns of action and thought in both the individual believer and the religious community at large. For Lindbeck, this religious story ultimately functions as the *singular*, *comprehensive* framework that practitioners utilize for encountering and understanding the world.[82] While I agree with Lindbeck that the sacred stories and texts of a religion ought to play an active role in shaping the identities of their constituents, I argue that Lindbeck's understanding mistakenly rests on a one-dimensional understanding of identity. This common misconception of identity, I suggest, fails to acknowledge the ways in which the other communities to which we belong (*e.g.*, race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) have some bearing upon our identities as Christians. Additionally, I argue that it ultimately implies a monolinguistic and monocultural understanding of the Christian community, which is antithetical to both the heterogeneity

[80] Ibid., 74.
[81] Ibid., 76.
[82] See, for example, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 33,40,80.

in the Christian community and the various cultures and languages that influence the community at large.

As outlined above, Lindbeck maintains that "a religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the *entirety* of life and thought [emphasis added]."[83] "Like a language or culture," he claims, "it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities."[84] These statements are key to understanding Lindbeck's argument. Not only do they capture what Lindbeck identifies as the chief, difference between a cultural-linguistic and an experiential-expressive understanding of religion—namely, the relationship between religion and experience—but, in so doing, they enable Lindbeck to shift the theological conversation from an ahistorical, universal understanding of religious experience to the particular social and discursive mediums that constitute the experience itself.

In spite of this significant top-down shift, Lindbeck asserts that the cultural-linguistic understanding of the relation between religion and experience is not unilateral but dialectical.[85] He writes:

> It is simplistic to say (as I earlier did) merely that religions produce experiences, for the causality is reciprocal. Patterns of experience alien to a given religion can profoundly influence it…Yet…in the interplay between the 'inner' experience and 'external' religious and cultural factors, the latter can be viewed as the

[83] Ibid., 33. According to Lindbeck, the primary difference between a religious and a nonreligious interpretive schema is that the interpretive scheme of religion necessarily describes that which is "more important than everything else in the universe" and therefore renders an "immense influence" on the way in which people experience both themselves and the world around them. As a result, Lindbeck contends that a religious interpretive schema must organize *all* of life, and furthermore, it must do so according to that which is maximally important or else it will cease to be religious in nature.
[84] Ibid., 33.
[85] Ibid., 33.

> leading partners, and it is this option which the cultural and/or linguistic analyst favors.[86]

While Lindbeck professes to hold a dialectical understanding of religion and experience, he devotes little-to-no time in *The Nature of Doctrine* to discussing the significant ways in which these patterns of experience can and do influence religious communities. This is a considerable omission if one takes into account his above statement, which describes the potential for this influence as "profound."

Instead, Lindbeck's work privileges the distinct, untranslatable Christian grammar in the formation of the believer's identity. This virtually unilateral approach, I argue, ultimately occurs at the expense of other patterns of experience (including the experiential dimension of religion). The issue is not that Lindbeck denies the existence of the multiple sources that influence one's identity in a systematic way; rather, as Linell Cady observes, the issue is that he, "refuses to make this empirical reality normative."[87] In fact, she points out that Lindbeck's postliberal alterative to modernity deliberately favors the Christian grammar so as to overcome the multiple, pluralistic, and eclectic influences that mark contemporary society. As such, Lindbeck's twofold objective is to procure the distinctiveness of the Christian identity in the midst of modernity's competing claims and to facilitate the embrace of the particular Christian community, whose Sacred Scripture he describes as defining truth, goodness, and beauty.[88]

If one follows Lindbeck's argument, then it appears as if the Christian identity is untouched by our participation in overlapping discourses. This one-dimensional logic suggests that one's subjectivity is composed of discrete elements that are easily separated

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[86] Ibid., 33-34.
[87] Cady, "Identity, Feminist Theory and Theology," 27.
[88] Ibid., 27-28.

and developed in isolation form one another. Here, one's "Christian-ness" is sequestered and stripped of the interrelated messiness of all other identity categories (*e.g.*, race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.). As a result, the narrative of one's religion becomes constitutive of one's identity, eclipsing all other identity categories, which, if included at all, are only included deferentially.

Yet, feminist, race, and queer theories have repeatedly demonstrated that one's identity is very much influenced by one's location in the complex, intersecting webs of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, culture, language, as well as religion. For example, Judith Butler notes that its difficult to speak of women in general, "because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities…it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained."[89]

Discussing the multifaceted character of identity as outlined by Butler, Jose Medina notes that our identities are inextricably intertwined with our membership in different identity categories or families. This inextricable intertwinement, he argues, is highlighted by three features of identity formation: contextuality, performativity, and normativity. Contextually speaking, he notes that for the most part the various aspects of our identity are shaped and developed simultaneously in a wide range of situations that cannot be neatly isolated into separate contexts. Secondly, he remarks that by its very nature the performativity of identity is complex and multifaceted. As a result, he argues that our practices cannot be divided into neat categories that contribute individually to

[89] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 3.

various aspects of our identity. He writes: "It is not as if we developed our identity by doing a bit of gender, and then a bit of race, etc…Our gender performance is not separable from the performances of race, ethnicity, or sexuality; and any separation here would be artificial."[90] Similarly, it would be hard for me, a white, feminist, Catholic woman to perform my identity as a Christian without also including my identity as a woman, who is marginalized in the Catholic tradition. Finally, Medina suggests that the norms associated with the different aspects of our identities also overlap in undistinguishable and concrete ways. For example, he notes that the normative expectations of a white, middle-class, straight woman or a Latino, working-class, gay man are not presented to them as discrete compartments; rather they are blended together in an undistinguishable mix that regulate their practices and structure their contexts.[91]

Comparing Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic alternative with the insights and observations of feminist theorists, such as those outlined by Butler and Medina, Linell Cady poignantly states:

> If recent feminist theorists are correct in identifying the multiplicity within the self, then the critical problem is in negotiating the conflicting social and cultural trajectories that constitute the self. To choose a tradition in Lindbeckian fashion prematurely opts out of this negotiating process. It is to choose to become monolingual, after knowing how to speak multiple languages. Even if this is imaginable, it is not clear that it is desirable. Certainly a Christian feminist would resist the suggestion that the biblical text should always "trump" nonscriptural sensibilities or values."[92]

By withdrawing the possibility,whether in full or in part, that the multiple communities to which we belong might also influence one's Christian identity, I suggest that Lindbeck is not far from positing the very ahistorical and de-contextualized notion of identity that his

[90] Medina, "Identity Trouble," 669.
[91] Ibid., 668-669.
[92] Cady, "Identity, Feminist Theory and Theology," 29.

work critiques. In Chapter 2 we will discuss the way in which a pluralistic understanding of the self can counter this one-dimensional understanding of identity in significant and powerful ways.

Lindbeck's one-dimensional (mis)construal of identity not only overlooks the multiple, overlapping identities of those who participate in the Christian community, but it also fails to acknowledge the plurality and diversity of cultures and discourses that shape the community as a whole. In her work, *Theories of Culture,* Kathryn Tanner critiques the postliberal understanding of culture insofar as it isolates both Christian church and its theological community from cultural pluralism. According to Tanner, this modern understanding envisions the multiple cultures as self-contained, internally consistent societies with sharp, impermeable boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. As such, each culture contains its own fixed customs, legitimate traditions, and so on, which are thought to be necessary for sustaining social stability. Yet Tanner, a postmodernist, critiques this understanding due to its totalizing tendency, which imposes both an illusory homogeneity and an illusory distinctiveness onto the Christian community. As a result, she argues this postliberal approach ignores the diversity and dissent that is present within each culture, as well as the actual porous and interactive boundaries that exist between cultures. [93]

Dwight Hopkins also critiques Lindbeck's singular understanding of the Christian culture and discourse in his work *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*. Hopkins writes: "[Lindbeck] apparently sees one Christian culture that permeates the communities of all Christian believers. However, though many profess to follow the one Christ, a

[93] Tanner, *Theories of Culture : A New Agenda for Theology.*

multitude of different cultures have absorbed Christianity into their own indigenous, pre-Christian cultures."[94] This is especially true, he notes, for many communities of color as well as Third World people in North America, who are often overlooked by the dominant standpoints of European and North American white overclasses. Hopkins notes that for these marginalized groups patterns of action such as the style of proclamation and the form of the ritual are often as important as the content of Christian dogma. Moreover, like Tanner, he notes that Lindbeck's singular understanding of language and culture is discredited by the heterogeneity of cultures, languages, and material realities found in the United States alone. First, he points to the political economy of African Americans communities living in structural poverty, which affects their reception of and response to the Gospel message in ways much different, one could imagine, than an upper-middle class, white community. Second, he notes that for Christians in North American, the various types of spoken English (*e.g.*, black English) shape how they live their lives as Christians and express their beliefs as a community.[95]

For Tanner, this postliberal approach to culture is not only problematic insofar as it ignores the diversity of cultures that influence the Christian identity, but it also leaves out the possibility of a radical openness to the diversity and creativity of theological judgment, including a radical openness to God's free and uncontrollable Word. She writes:

> One should not try to contain diversity by getting rid of it because diversity involves certain positive goods…Diversity is a salutary reminder, moreover, that Christians cannot control the movements of the God they hope to serve. It helps

[94] Hopkins, *Being Human : Race, Culture, and Religion,* 28.
[95] Ibid., 28-29.

> them remain open to the Word by keeping them from taking their own view of things for granted.[96]

Likewise, Kristen Heyer notes that Lindbeck's emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Christian community often misses the living Christ, who the Christian narrative cannot encompass, as well as the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit, which transforms human lives and communities. In a poignant statement, she writes: "Lindbeck's emphasis on the Christian narrative as normative proves a useful corrective to theologies that would conform themselves to secular questions or paradigms, yet conformity to narrative action alone cannot exempt Christians from clarifying our particular understandings and response to God's call in Christ."[97] As Tanner, Hopkins, and Heyer have all noted, Lindbeck's the singular conception of language and culture presented by Lindbeck runs the risk of closing off the continual formation of the Christian identity, as well as the dynamic reality to which the dominant, privileged narratives do not necessarily point.

A third way in which I find Lindbeck's understanding of identity to be potentially troubling is that he pays little if any attention to the ways in which relations of power are typically embedded in identity formation. An uncritical reading of *The Nature of Doctrine* would lead the reader to believe that the language of a religion, along with its symbols system, gives rise to one's thoughts, convictions, and religious experiences in an objective or impartial manner. While many would agree that one's identity is shaped through cultural and linguistic mediums, it does not always happen under the conditions of one's choosing. Thus, I argue that Lindbeck overlooks the cultural and symbolic

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[96] Tanner, *Theories of Culture : A New Agenda for Theology,* 174-175.
[97] Heyer, "How Does Theology Go Public? Rethinking the Debate Between David Tracy and George Lindbeck," 321.

power and even violence through which these thoughts, convictions, and experiences are inevitably produced and maintained. As sociologist Pierre Bordieu notes, the forms of power and inequality that naturally exist in society inevitably mold linguistic practices and products. A brief look at Bordieu's social theory helps to illuminate my point.[98]

For Bordieu, the struggle for linguistic authority always occurs within a shared field or linguistic market. It is within this site that the conditions are ripe for a competition of sorts, through which power relations are established by the acquisition of cultural and symbolic capital. The struggle for and use of this capital, he argues, results in "symbolic power" or, in some cases, "symbolic violence." According to this view, symbolic power is not garnered through overt physical force; rather it is transferred into a symbolic form, wherein the dominant modes of speech and knowledge are bestowed with a kind of authority that they would not otherwise have.[99] In short, Bordieu claims that power relations are deeply embedded social constructions that often go unseen, but ultimately serve the interest groups of some at the expense of others.

To see the way in which Bordieu's notion of symbolic power and symbolic violence is operative in the Christian theological tradition, one need only look to arguments lodged by feminist theologians against the dominant heteropatriarchal symbols in the Christian tradition, such as exclusive male language for God. Feminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Reuther, have long argued that those in power (*e.g.*, the predominately white, male celibate leadership in the Catholic Church) often construct cultural and discursive symbols to justify and legitimate their own authority and power.

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[98] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power.*

[99] For Bordieu, cultural capital can be understood as knowledge and skills, while symbolic capital is understood as accumulated prestige and honor. See Ibid., 43-65.

By this means, she argues, these dominant forces continue the patterns of belief and action that marginalize the role of women in the Church, especially in terms of social relations, such as class, race, gender, and sexuality. What is ultimately necessary, Ruether suggests, is an understanding of the way in which theological symbols are socially constructed (and therefore changeable) rather than eternally given by God to disclose the order of creation.[100] We will return to this point again in Chapter 4.

In addition to cultural symbols, Lindbeck clearly understands a particular form of the Christian language and culture to be normative, and in so doing, he ignores the social-historical conditions that have established them as dominant and legitimate. On this topic, Serene Jones observes:

> Lindbeck's object of analysis [seems] an isolated person of faith, living in a isolated ecclesial community, whose isolated confessional and liturgical actions unfolded in a world untouched by power relations and complex cultural forces (such as the class relations embedded in a capitalist market). He [has] no analysis of the multiple power relations that course through the langue of doctrine, and he [provides] no conceptual apparatus for seeing faith traditions as linguistic contexts within which political subjects, national subjects, gendered subjects, ethnic subjects, and religious subjects are constructed and deployed.[101]

The discourse of the church does not take place in a vacuum. Thus, Lindbeck not only misses the opportunity to understand and evaluate these power relations, but, as I will argue below, he also misses the chance to meaningfully participate in the struggles against this symbolic violence and identity-based forms of oppression, which occur even within the bounds of the Christian community.

For example, Lindbeck's inattentiveness to the ways in which relations of power are typically embedded in identity formation confines his focus to the official (read:

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[100] Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology," 3-4.
[101] Jones, "Cultural Labor and Theological Critique," 159.

dominant) language and culture of the Christian church, subsequently excluding the insights of grassroots communities and other marginalized groups. In his book, *God and the Excluded*, theologian Joerg Rieger challenges Lindbeck on this very point. Rieger contends that Lindbeck gives priority to those texts and common beliefs negotiated by doctrinal experts so as not to endanger his "unitive" goal of shaping a common identity grounded in sacred texts. Rieger notes that for Lindbeck, "Anything else that does not have to do with the text is attributed to the modern self's activism, even the praxis of those at the margins who have never shared in the modern self's autonomy and power."[102] Consequently, all forms of religious belief and practice that are rooted in contextual construals of identity (*i.e.*, feminist, queer, liberation, womanist communities, etc.) are dismissed as experiential and included only deferentially, thereby pushing these groups further toward the margins.

Yet, quoting Lindbeck's own work, Rieger asserts that a glimpse into the dynamics of language at this grassroots level would actually help Lindbeck move closer to his self-professed, futuristic desire for a "pluralistic unity within the framework of distinctively Christian belief and practice," a model which Lindbeck claims is scarcely performed anywhere today. Here, Rieger cites the black church's attention to tradition and the Latin American base communities' biblical engagement not only as lived examples of this model, but as powerful resources for contributing to the common interest. This can only happen, Rieger suggests, if they are taken seriously rather than declared as special interest groups that fragment the "official" center.[103]

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[102] Rieger, *God and the Excluded : Visions and Blind Spots in Contemporary Theology,* 89.
[103] Ibid., 89-90.

In sum, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understanding contains both promise and potential issues for Christian construals of identity formation. On the one hand, I appreciate his attention to historical, cultural, and discursive mediums that constitute one's identity, as well as emphasis on the inseparability of identity and practice. On the other hand, I have argued that his argument rests on several (mis)conceptions about what is finally necessary to engender a stable, distinct identity—namely, his assumption that identity and difference are opposites, his one-dimensional understanding of identity, which ignores the overlapping communities that inform our identity and projects a monlinguistic and monocultural understanding of Christianity that ignores the heterogeneity and permeability of cultures, and finally, his inattention to the way in which symbolic power and violence are deeply embedded in identity formation. As a result, he moves further away from the "unity in diversity" that he imagines and overlooks powerful resources for transforming the Christian community into one that lives out truth, justice, and beauty through an appreciation of plurality and diversity.

Conclusion

Lindbeck's notion of a religion as analagous to a cultural or linguistic medium that shapes the entirety of one's life and thought has profoundly influenced the North American and European churches and academy in the last three decades. Not only has his work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, sparked a heated debated among theologians, but it has also generated a renewed interest in discussions of theological method, the church in the world, and the nature of religion and religious doctrine. For his supporters, Lindbeck's focus on the significance of the tradition and culture in shaping individuals has been

touted as his greatest contribution. Yet, for his detractors, this view has left him open to criticism insofar as they believe that we are simultaneously constituted by our overlapping communities, traditions, and cultures.

Although Lindbeck's intent is to preserve the distinctiveness of the Christian identity in the face of inter- and intra-religious differences, his attempt to maintain the distinctiveness of the Christian story at times closes off the identity formation of the Christian. He creates cultural and linguistic boundaries that are at once unnatural and too rigid, creating a fixed and homogenous understanding of Christianity that is antithetical to the dynamic intercultural and interreligious experiences of humanity.

In the next chapter, I will explore various geographical and metaphorical understandings of borders, including their implications for frameworks of identity and belonging. My work will focus in particular on the border between the United States and Mexico—the crossroads of *la frontera*. In part one, I will look at monocultural and monolinguistic understandings of borders, which serve to bound and separate one's identity. Part two, on the other hand, will explore a multidimensional understanding of identity as seen in the groundbreaking work of border theorist, Gloria Analdúa. Finally, I will offer some reflections on border crossing for contemporary theological thought before moving on, in Chapter Three, to the works of U.S. Latina theologians.

CHAPTER II

THE CROSSROADS OF *LA FRONTERA*: GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES, METAPHORICHAL BORDERS, AND GLORIA ANZALDUA'S NEW *MESTIZA* CONSCIOUSNESS

The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta *where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture."*[104]

Introduction

Borders function. In her chapter, "A Theology of Border Passage," feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan discusses the implications of border passage for twenty-first century theological reflection. Describing the "place and shape" of this border passage, she briefly outlines the various types and functions of borders. First, she notes that borders may be physical or geographical to the extent that they mark the territory of a particular state, region, or country. It is this type of border, she explains, that people cross over from their homelands to become immigrants, expatriates, and refuges. Second, she observes that borders can function to demarcate cultural, linguistic, and political entities. These borders are epitomized in Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational work *Borderlands/*La Frontera (discussed below), but they can also be seen, I will argue, in cultural and linguistic constructions of identity such as those found in the theological work of George Lindbeck (discussed in the previous chapter). Third, Kwok states that borders may be religious and civilizational insofar as they describe entities such as "Islamic world" or the "Hindu civilization." Fourth, she notes that borders are those

[104] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 25.

constructs often used by queer theorists to describe the body and body politic. Chapter 4 of this work will examine this type of border more closely. Finally, Kwok notes that the border can also be symbolic or imaginary, such as borders that engender the "in-between space," the "third space, and the "imaginary homeland," also discussed below.[105]

In his work, *In Our Own Tongues*, theologian Peter Phan develops a unique vision of border-crossing spiritualty. Discussing border crossing as a new way of missionary life, he identifies three additional and distinct theoretical roles that borders perform. First, he notes that borders are often used to delineate or mark out one's individual and/or communal identity. Second, he observes, borders often function to fence out those who are different from oneself. Third, he contends, in a more positive light, borders can function, "as frontiers from which to venture out into new horizons to expand one's knowledge and one's circle of relationship."[106]

For both Kwok and Phan, crossing borders is an important part of our modern history. Traditional boundaries that have functioned to keep people bound and separated no longer hold. Not only has this understanding been criticized as outdated and essentialist, but it has been permeated and exploded by those who have crisscrossed multiple sociocultural and national boundaries as a product of their very being. Although my work touches to some extent on each type of border described above, it is these latter three functions of borders described by Phan that are at the center of my theological proposal. What, then, can this new understanding of border crossing and *fronteras* contribute to the field of theological thought in the twenty-first century?

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[105] Kwok, "A Theology of Border Passage," 103-104.
[106] Phan, *In Our Own Tongues : Perspectives From Asia on Mission and Inculturation,* 137.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part looks at the geographical, historical-political, and social dimensions of the borderlands between the United States and Mexico—the crossroads of *la frontera.* The purpose, as such, is not only to outline the geographical and historical context of my work, but also to look at the ways in which the violent legacy of this region has contributed to issues of race, class, and nationalism. Drawing on the works of historians, political scientists, and sociologists, I touch on the immigration debates in the United States, focusing in particular on the rhetoric that calls for a return to a singular "American" language and culture. With the help of the qualified scholars, I assert that this rhetoric has less to do with the economic and political ramifications of Mexican immigration, and more to do with the United States' desire to dramatically reassert its view of itself and its place in the world. My intention, as such, is not to debate the efficacy of border control or to ascertain the economic reasons why illegal immigration occurs; rather I wish to explore the understanding of communal belonging and identity in the United States of America that is being presented. For example, what does it mean when someone says that the immigrants who are entering into the United States are ruining *the* American culture and *the* American language? What is this understanding of identity being presented here, and what does it mean to understand one's identity as inherently monocultural and monolinguistic?

Alternatively, the second part of this chapter moves away from the monolithic Anglo-European frames of reference toward a hybrid and multidimensional mode of thinking, which provides a new way of articulating and formulating questions of identity. This pluralistic understanding of identity—both individual and communal—is apparent in the multi-voiced subjectivity of those who live at the borders of cultures, languages,

ethnicities, and so on. It not only articulates a new way of thinking, but it also provides a source for discussing systems of power and marginalization, as well as methods of resistance for overcoming them. It is this *new mestiza consciousnesss* or border feminism found primarily in the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, and other women of color, which I believe have the capacity to make a strong contribution to theological thought and practice.

The Borderlands: Traditional Monocultural and Monolinguistic Understandings

The international border between the United States and Mexico is a far from imaginary line. With a length of nearly 2000 miles and a population of over 12 million peoples, it cuts across a variety of terrains and traverses the rich social histories of its inhabitants. In addition, it is one of the busiest land borders in the world, with an estimated 300 million legal and illegal crossings each year.

Yet, this region is more than a populated, transient territory; it is a dramatic meeting point where cultures collide, languages and ethnicities converge, and a so-called economically developed country and a developing nation come together. This deeply interstitial space not only reflects the complex geopolitical history of this region, but it also acts as a stage upon which issues of race, class, and national self-image play out in very real ways. Thus, as Mexican-American author Alma García writes, the border simultaneously functions as "a symbol of both location and dislocation, of community and alienating individuality, of discovery and colonization."[107] In what follows, I will explore the geographical, historical, and political aspects of the Mexico-United States

[107] García, *Narratives of Mexican American Women,* 63.

border, as well as the social dimensions that engender the complex and conflicting emotions described by García and others.

The Geographical Border

The continental boundary that separates the United States from Mexico is approximately 1,954 miles in length.[108] Stretching from the Pacific Ocean in the West all the way to the Gulf of Mexico in the Southeast, this vast border cuts across ten states—six Mexican and four U.S.[109] In addition to passing through myriad towns, cities, and regions, the border also traverses rugged mountains, arid deserts, and two major rivers—the Colorado River and the Rio Grande River (*Río Bravo del Norte*). According to recent estimates, the population of the borderlands, which includes the counties and *municipios* on both sides of the border, exceeds 12.5 million people.

With the exception of those areas of the border delineated by the two major rivers, the boundary between the two countries remained a line in the sand, metaphorically speaking, until the early 1990's. At this time, the United States government began constructing a series of large separation barriers that marked the border in a physical manner, and did so in an attempt to channel all border-crossings to official checkpoints. Today, there are over forty United States-Mexico checkpoints, which are located in the major border cities on both sides of the border, including San Diego, California/Tijuana,

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[108] This data has been taken from figures provided by the United States and Mexico's International Boundary and Water Commission. A map of the boundary, including mileage, is available via their website at: http://www.ibwc.state.gov/Files/US-Mx_Boundary_Map.pdf

[109] The six Mexican states are Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sonora, and Tamaulipas. The four states on the U.S. side are Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas.

Baja California, Nogales, Arizona/Nogales, Sonora, and El Paso,Texas/Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Including the crossings that occur at these checkpoints, there are over 300 million legal and illegal crossings of the U.S.-Mexico border each year.

Yet this geographical location is plagued by the region's complicated and violent past. In the section that follows, I will briefly examine the historical-political dimensions of the border. This brief summary will help to set the stage for the ways in which the border functions, at worst, to define one's communal identity by fencing out those who are different from oneself, as seen in Phan's second description of border functions outlined above.

The Historical-Political Border

The present day border between the United States and Mexico was officially established in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought the Mexican-American war of 1846-1848 to a close. Due to its overwhelming military victory, the United States largely dictated the terms of the settlement. As a result, it acquired more than 500,000 square miles of Mexican territory. "The Mexican Cession," as it is known to some, included Upper California and New Mexico, present-day Arizona, and parts of Utah, Nevada, and Colorado. Additionally, Mexico relinquished its claims to Texas and recognized the Rio Grande as its northern boundary with the Texas.

This forcible acquisition of more than half of Mexico's national territory also included a significant percentage of its population. Although the treaty contained several provisions designed to protect the civil and property rights of the Mexican nationals who were now residing within the new boundaries of the United States by default, the

Mexicans and Indians who lived north of the new border essentially became residents of a different country overnight.[110] Citing theologian Virgilio Elizondo, Miguel De La Torre notes that with this agreement, "the border literally crossed *through* the Mexicans (emphasis added)."[111]

According to most historians, the United States' conquest and annexation of this region was motivated by the overriding spirit of Manifest Destiny. This ideology, which perpetuated and justified the Westward expansion of the United States, was ultimately bound up with the ideologies of predestination, imperialism, nationalism, and the desire for domination. Moreover, many historians, including Daisy Machado, have noted that this understanding ultimately shaped the capitalist economics, racial ideologies, and political and military inequalities that continue to plague the relations between the two countries to this day.[112] Let me now turn to a brief examination of the way in which these ideologies continue to play out today.

Social Conditions on the Border: Race, Ethnicity, Class, and National Self-Image

Because of its geographical location and complex political history, the U.S.-Mexican border also functions as a social space or contact zone. According to Mary Louise Pratt, "contact zones" are those spaces where "disparate cultures meet, clash, and

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[110] While the terms of the settlement did in fact call for the equality and protection of the rights of the Mexicans and Indians in the conquered territories, many historians have pointed out that these provisions were virtually ignored. Instead, preference was given to those persons involved in the Western expansion of the United States rather than the former Mexican nationals and Indians. See Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo : A Legacy of Conflict.*

[111] De La Torre, "Living on the Borders," 214.

[112] Machado, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands: The Church and Manifest Destiny." and Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo : A Legacy of Conflict.*

grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination…"[113] Like most international borders, however, it is not only cultures that meet and collide in hierarchical relationships at the U.S.-Mexican border, but languages, ethnicities, and social classes also bump into one another as well. At worst, these dramatic meeting points have incited issues of race and class that have played out in highly intricate and dramatic ways. One result of this incitement is that the United States has felt pressure to reaffirm its understanding of itself and its place in the world.

Take, for instance, the classist rhetoric emerging from the shared American border. The U.S.-Mexican border marks one of the few places in the world where a so-called highly developed country and a developing nation come together.[114] Yet, as the upper, middle, lower, and under classes rub against one another, North Americans have come to perceive their Southern neighbors as the "ever-present other" and "the economically ravaged neighbor banging anxiously at the back door of prosperity longing for the opportunity to enter."[115] These all-too-familiar words captured by Luis D. Leon reflect the underlying class and racial tensions that materialize at the interstices and construct Mexican immigrants as alleged freeloaders, lawbreakers, drug lords, and menaces to the economic and political fabric of the United States. To make matters worse, Avtar Brah points out that certain corporations have found it more profitable to locate the labor process in *maquiladoras* in Mexico. As a result, Mexican workers now suffer opposition for taking "our jobs" in both the United States and Mexico. Thus, in the

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[113] Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes,* 4.
[114] Other examples of such inequitable borders include, but are not limited to, the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea, the contested boundaries between Israel and Palestine, and the border between Singapore and Thailand.
[115] León, "Metaphor and Place: The US-Mexico Border As Center and Periphery in the Interpretation of Religion," 543.

end, Brah contends: "These tropes of resentment construct the worker as an embodiment of capital rather than its contradiction."[116]

Because of these tensions, alongside growing political pressure emerging from job losses in various sectors of the economy, the United States eventually erected and fortified a series of barriers between the two countries, beginning in the late 1990's and finishing in the early 2000's. Known as the "Great Wall of Mexico" or the "Tortilla Curtain," these massive separation barriers were built by U.S. Army reservists out of metal sheets originally used as temporary landing fields during the First Iraqi War. The purpose of these barriers was to regulate the flow of migrants and dissuade (read: end) illegal migration.

Yet, as many sociologists, historians, and political scientists have effectively argued, this extreme measure, coupled with a dramatic escalation of border enforcement, has less to do with the economic and political ramifications of Mexican immigration, and more to do with United States' desire to dramatically reassert its view of itself and its place in the world. When the government's actions are viewed from this perspective, U.S. border enforcement is ultimately about crafting the country's image and reinforcing the political boundaries of an "imagined community." [117] As geographer Patricia L. Price notes, "Geopolitical boundaries are central to the modern project of nation building precisely because they function to purify and stabilize a collective sense of self through both the erasure of internal difference and the demarcation of a constitutive outside through the expulsion of Other nations."[118]

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[116] Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities ," 627.
[117] AndreasPeter 2009@143-144}See also {Massey 2003}
[118] Price, *Dry Place,* 9.

In his work *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, political scientist Peter Andreas draws attention to the ways in which the sharp increase in border control enables the United States to reconstruct and reaffirm its territorial authority. Noting the ways in which the present-day border functions as the site of intense interaction between law enforcement and law evasion, Andreas points out that despite the sturdy 15 foot-high walls, the enforcement escalation in the United States Border Patrol, and the addition of thousands of light posts and night-vision cameras on the border, the flow of illegal migrants into the United States continues to occur at an alarmingly high rate.[119] Yet, he contends that those who criticize border enforcement as costly, ineffective, and/or inhumane overlook both its ritualistic and performative elements that are embraced by its proponents. Drawing on the work of Timothy Mitchell, a political theorist, Andreas claims that by setting up and policing the border by means of barbed-wire fences, concrete separation barriers, strict immigration laws, border inspections, passport checkpoints, and so on, the United States is able to publically perform or craft an almost transcendental entity—the nation state. He writes:

> As the U.S.-Mexico border experience illustrates, the political and bureaucratic allure of enhanced law enforcement is that it has delivered perceptually appealing and symbolically useful indicators of state activity: smugglers arrested, drugs seized, and so on. And in the case of immigration control, the crackdown on illegal crossings along the most visible stretches of the border has erased politically embarrassing images of chaos and replaced them with comforting images of order. The border control offensive has successful decreased the visibility, even though not necessarily the number, of illegal border crossings, while increasing the visibility of policing.[120]

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[119] Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide,* vii. Although these extreme measures have not dissuaded the increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants from heading north, they have, unfortunately, channeled the flow of this migration through hazardous deserts, in spite of the serious risks involved. According to reports, over 500 Mexicans die per year while trying to reach U.S. soil

[120] Ibid., 144.

Given this, Andreas argues that border enforcement functions as a "signifying practice," which allows the United States to outwardly signal three things: 1) where authority is located; 2) how order in the community is to be maintained; and 3) where to expect danger or threats.[121] In essence, it forms a physical dividing line between inside and outside, citizen and alien, and the haves and the have-nots. This, I believe, has multiple implications for theological and non-theological discussions of identity and belonging conceived in terms of sameness and difference.

Another way in which the United States shapes its national identity is through the perpetuation of what church historian Daisy Machado terms "the national historic imaginary." Drawing on the work of historian Martin Marty, she notes that this national imaginary serves as a "usable past," in which a nation or a group promotes its self-understanding as subjects of history. As such, this "normative historical consciousness" provides a seamless, unifying historical narrative that constructs stories, images, and heroes that are then embedded in the national consciousness. Here, Machado cites the popular legend about George Washington and the cherry tree in which the young Washington is portrayed as someone who could not tell a lie. The role of such narratives, Machado suggests, is to enable the nation state to shape its own self-perceptions and identity, which, in turn, are used to promote ideologies such as nationalism, patriotism, and exceptionalism.[122] Take, for example, Machado's example of Washington and the cherry tree. Although she does not expand on the purposes of this legend, its role in the U.S. historical consciousness is clear: to publically proclaim the

[121] Ibid., 143-144.
[122] Machado, "The Historical Imagination and Latina/o Rights," 158-159.

"self-evident" values and truths (in this case the honesty embodied in a young boy) upon which the U.S. was founded as "evidenced" in the moral fabric of its first president, George Washington.

For Machado, the national historical imaginary is problematic insofar as it narrates particular stories of the "chosen people," (i.e., those who are in power or are part of the dominant race or class), while the voices of those on the underside of history are written out of the national narrative. She writes:

> That is why I do not find it surprising that many of my students tell me that the history they have been taught in school, of the Americas, in general, and of the U.S., in particular, has been presented as a seamless narrative. It begins with Columbus in 1492 and, then jumps to the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock almost two centuries later and, then, to the Revolution of 1776. Presented this way, it is as if in the narrative of this national history there was no human activity in the Americas before 1492 worth chronicling. This history tells us that the important events in North American (sic) did not begin before the seventeenth century nor do people who are not European (and who are British preferably) have any part in this history except as intruders who are quickly exterminated or marginalized.[123]

Thus, this dominant creation myth has "white-washed" the history of North America. The early history of the this region was not English, or even Spanish, but rather it includes the history of the American Indians, who occupied the continent thousands of years before the colonizers even arrived.

The national historical imaginary described above stands in sharp contrast to postmodern conceptions of history, which claim that historical events are not fixed, static, or in possession of a singular underlying truth. At best, postmodernist histories suggest that historical events are made up of many different pieces, including social relationships, struggles, oppression, liberation, and so on. In this sense, they attempt to achieve a more well-rounded or grounded understanding of past events. For example, as Machado notes,

[123] Ibid., 158-159.

a postmodern understanding of the Mexican-American War might investigate the various sequences and events that led to the creation of the larger historical markers, especially the stories of the "non-victors," who are traditionally written out of such historical accounts.[124]

Nevertheless, an investigation of the national historic imaginary is important. It allows us, as Machado states, to understand, "how history constructs heroes and enemies; how it imagines and either gives value to or devalues the Other; how it uses language to tell that narrative within the complex reality of human relations and human struggles."[125] Given these outcomes, my purpose in what follows is not to concentrate on the truthfulness of such narratives; rather, my goal is to look at the way in which one of the various stories that lies at the heart of the United States' consciousness—and in particular the self-perception that lies at the heart of the contemporary immigration debates—is rooted in a contestation of identity and belonging, much like that of Lindbeck. This understanding of identity ultimately functions to create a false sense of sameness at the expense of difference, which is mistakenly assumed to lead to greater unity and stability. It is my belief that these constructions of identity and belonging have important implications for theological thought.

One of the most divisive issues in U.S. politics at the beginning of the 21st century is that of immigration, and in particular discussions of immigration surrounding the border between the United States and Mexico. Pulsing through this immigration debate, I contend, is the unexamined faith that *the* (read: singular) American identity rests on culturally and linguistically homogenous bedrock. At its core, this bedrock celebrates the

[124] Ibid., 157-158.
[125] Ibid., 159.

Mayflower's arrival at Plymouth Rock and the European presence on U.S. soil at the expense of all that occurred on the continent before 1620.[126] In the end, I argue, this foundational narrative, and the ensuing debates surrounding it, perpetuate social, racial, and political distinctions that not only function to separate "us" from "them," but, in so doing, also attempt to erase internal differences in order to ostensibly create a constitutive, unified identity.

In order to observe such efforts, one needs only to look at contemporary anti-immigration rhetoric and, more specifically, those discussions calling for stricter border control and English-only language initiatives throughout the United States. Amidst these discussions, groups of politicians and concerned citizens repeatedly use alarmist words and phrases to warn of the threat posed to *the* American culture and *the* American identity by the "invasion" of immigrants across the Mexican border. In the end, these concerns are inextricably intertwined with how certain groups imagine themselves as a people, and, consequently, who these groups think should be included within the self-imagined bounds of the nation state—or, in the case of the next few chapters, the Church.

Take, for example, the former United States Senator from Tennessee, Lamar Alexander. In 2007, he attempted to push legislation that would require English-only speaking in the workplace, if a business so chose. According to various interviews and news reports from that time, Alexander's efforts were driven by his belief that English is not only the national language of the United States, but also part of America's "lifeblood," which he believed to be "endangered" by the reluctance of Hispanic immigrants to assimilate to the American language and culture. Later, in response to a

[126] Horwitz, "Immigration and the Curse of the Black Legend (Op-Ed)." Machado, "The Historical Imagination and Latina/o Rights," 161.

series of oppositional lawsuits that were filed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Alexander stated: "We have spent the last 40 years in our country celebrating diversity at the expense of unity. One way to create that unity is to value, not devalue, our common language, English." [127]

Similarly, former Representative J.D. Hayworth of Arizona warns of the threat posed by immigrants to the language and culture of the United State in his book, *Whatever it Takes: Illegal immigration, Border Security, and the War on Terror.* Here, among other extremist statements, he writes: "Illegal aliens invade our country…and they tell us the question isn't, 'how do we get them to leave?' but 'how can we make them feel welcome?' We act like a bunch of defeatist wimps unwilling to stand up for our culture, our borders, our security…"[128]

Alexander and Hayworth's alarmist predictions about Hispanic immigration, are epitomized in Samuel Huntington's controversial book, *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's National Identity.* In this work, Huntington claims that the tidal wave of Hispanic immigrants swelling across the border has the potential to split the United States into two cultures, two languages, and therefore two peoples. If this inflow of immigrants were to be stopped, he argues, "the possibility of a de facto split between a predominantly Spanish-speaking America would disappear and with it a major potential threat to the cultural and possibly political integrity of the United States."[129] For Huntington, it is the

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[127]John Fund, "Mi Casa, Sue Casa" *Opinion Journal* from *The Wall Street Journal*, November 19th, 2007, http://www.lamaralexander.com/index.cfm?Fuseaction=Articles.View&Article_id=4357d965-cf7a-43c6-9576-83a4092b467e (accessed November 15, 2011).

[128] Hayworth and Eule, *Whatever It Takes : Illegal Immigration, Border Security, and the War on Terror,* 78.

[129] Huntington, *Who Are We? : The Challenges to America's National Identity,* 238.

Hispanic immigrants in general, and the Mexican immigrants in particular, who pose the greatest threat to the white, Anglo-Protestant culture and values upon which he asserts that the American dream was founded. Unlike other immigrant groups, Huntington argues that Latinos and Mexicans have not embraced the American identity. He presumes that the reasons for their lack of assimilation include: the formation of political and linguistic enclaves across the U.S.; their ability to remain emotionally and politically tied to their home countries while living and working in the U.S. due to dual-citizenships and transnational mobility; and the disproportionate numbers, regional concentration, and the proximity of Mexicans to their country of origin.[130]

What each of the three authors and politicians have in common, I contend, is a monolithic understanding of the American language and culture, coupled with a belief that those who do not assimilate (or who are not deemed worthy to assimilate) to this language and culture for whatever reason are unable to be part of the national community. In his work entitled, *The Latino Threat*, Leo Chavez points out that insofar as Mexicans have been repeatedly represented and constructed as the quintessential "illegal aliens," their social identity has been marked by illegality. Furthermore, Chavez notes, Mexicans are represented as desiring to remain socially, culturally, and politically separate before they begin their re-conquest of the land north of the border. Because of this, they have been considered undeserving of social benefits, including citizenship. [131] As Miguel De La Torre explains:

> Regardless of if the Hispanics were part of the land prior to the founding of the United State (*sic*) or if they crossed a border in the past century or the past few days, all Hispanics are usually seen as not belonging, part of an immigration

[130] Ibid., 221-256.
[131] Chavez, *The Latino Threat : Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation,* 2-3.

> problem. Those living in the borderlands are forced to defend and prove their very existence and worth to the dominant Euro-American culture.[132]

Although questions of citizenship (*i.e.*, who is eligible for citizenship) have been contested throughout the history of the United States, what is at stake in these representations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, as well as the ensuing anti-immigration discourse, is the imagination and definition of one's communal identity by those in power—namely, the white, male North American overclass. For Huntington and others, one's identity emerges from a necessary cultural and linguistic sameness. In other words, one must speak the English language and embrace the same white, Protestant culture in order to become a legitimate member of society.

The result of this understanding is that difference or otherness becomes a threat to (or at the very least a negative influence on) the existing identity of the United States. In the face of this perceived loss of identity and community, distinctions such as citizen/non-citizen, us/them, legal/illegal, are invoked to create and assign difference. Moreover, such distinctions are used to designate a constitutive outside, which is thought to keep the "disruptive" aspects of plurality at bay. What follows is an erasure of internal differences in order to achieve a sense of unity and stability that is thought to be capable of transpiring only through sameness, understood as identicalness. Here, one hears echoes of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic construction of religious identity.

The heterogeneous realities of those living in the United States, however, disrupt the notion of a singular language and culture for present-day American citizens. Take, for instance, the inhabitants of the borderlands who live at the intersections of multiple cultures and languages, and the indigenous populations and communities of color whose

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[132] De La Torre, "Living on the Borders," 215.

multitudes of different cultures or types of spoken English influence to some degree how they live their lives as Americans and express their identity as a community. Yet, this heterogeneous reality is repeatedly overlooked or suppressed. As Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn point out:

> From the initial movement of European explorers forward, the creation of what became the United States entailed the destruction and rearrangement of cultures and worldviews. The United States has always been a contested terrain, forged through often violent and destructive sociopolitical arrangements. Markers of "difference" such as race and gender are embedded in the formation and development of this country.[133]

In essence, the dominant class uses these markers or borders of difference—whether physical or metaphorical—to ensure their fixity of power. As Daisy Machado notes, "The U.S. Borderlands are that place where Latinas and Latinos live, struggle, love, fight and strive to define who they are in the midst of a society that has for centuries kept them an invisible mass, a footnote in the homogenizing historical process of an entire nation."[134]

The lived reality of the border inhabitants, discussed at length in the second part of this chapter, offers a useful, alternative understanding of identity that seeks to foster communal ties across difference rather than in spite of it. This "politics of becoming," as described in William Connolly's discussion of community, refers to the conflicting moment at which a culturally marked constituency, which was previously marginalized under the dominant institutional matrix, appears at the zone of contestability in an effort to renegotiate its identity. If it is not thwarted by the controlling powers, a new, unexpected cultural identity emerges.[135] It is this notion of communal becoming that I

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[133] Floyd-Thomas and Pinn, "Introduction."
[134] Machado, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands: The Church and Manifest Destiny," 63.
[135] Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist,* 51-58.

believe border feminism offers us with its emphasis on the "plurivocity" of being and its multidimensional understanding of identity. Let me now turn to this new way of conceiving one's personal and communal identities, which, I believe, has the potential to help us open up theological thought to new and alternative life-giving horizons.

The *Fronteras* of Gloria Anzaldúa: A New *Mestiza* Identity

In addition to the geographical, historical-political, and social dimensions of the United States-Mexico border outlined in part one, the borderlands also evoke another significant, yet distinctive dimension—namely, that of metaphor. In this sense, the border serves as a trope for the psychic, sexual, spiritual, cultural, linguistic, class, and racialized boundaries inscribed upon the multi-voiced subjectivity of those who live on the borders in-between two or more worlds. Fundamental to this conception of the border, popularized in the groundbreaking work of Gloria Anzaldúa, is a pluralistic and fluid understanding of the self/subject.

Despite their metaphorical connotations, these types of boundaries are not simple or ephemeral abstractions of concrete reality. Rather, as Avtar Brah points out, these psychic, sexual, spiritual, racial, cultural, linguistic, class and racialized boundaries are deeply intertwined with the discursive materiality of power relations. This materiality, she argues, emerges through the actual lived experiences of particular groups whose lives have been affected (for better or for worse) by the creation of the geographical and

historical-political border zone described above. It is in this manner, Brah contends, that, "metaphors can serve as powerful inscriptions of the effects of political borders."[136]

The purpose of this section is to explore the metaphorical materiality of the borderlands. Drawing primarily on Anzaldúa's groundbreaking work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I will explore the ways in which a multi-voiced subjectivity characterizes the border experience, as well as the ways in which this plurality is often hindered by hegemonic, political, and discursive practices that insist that a subject is able to occupy a single identity category unproblematically. Because these political practices often silence the voices of those whose identity is extended across many categories, this section will pay special attention to the way in which feminists of color, and in particular Gloria Anzaldúa, seek to explode these practices by emphasizing identity as multiple, fluid, hybrid, and contradictory. Finally, this section will explore the Anzaldúa's transformative reconfiguration of the new *mestiza* identity. Special attention will be paid to the themes of hybridity, ambiguity, performativity, alienation, and liberation, which will be taken up again in later chapters.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Originally published in 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa's enormously influential work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, is considered a foundational text in Chicana/Latina studies. It is also widely cited in other disciplines, including feminist theory, cultural studies, philosophy, religion, border studies, and autobiographical literature. The appeal of Anzaldúa's work for this project is threefold. First, it highlights the physical Texas-U.S.

[136] Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities ," 625.

Southwest/Mexican border, which is the central geographical, social, and metaphorical focus of this project. Second, Anzaldúa's work provides a pointed critique of dominant, singular constructions of identity, which I believe can and must be applied to similar theological constructions of identity such as those found in the writings of George Lindbeck and his followers. Third, her writing offers both a powerful means of resistance and a constructive alternative to these singular understandings of identity through her formulation of new *mestiza* consciousness. This new *mestiza* consciousness emphasizes the self as a site of multiplicity, ambiguity, and hybridity. As Cristina Beltran accurately observes, "And while other feminists have theorized subjects that destabilize categories and occupy multiple subject positions, few have created a theoretical framework as accessible and emotionally gripping as Anzaldúa's *mestiza*."[137]

The genre of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* defies easy categorization. It is at once history, poetry, prose, myth, social protest, cultural biography, and *testimonio*.[138] According to Anna Louise Keating, Anzaldúa herself describes this combination as an "*autohistoria-teoría*."[139] For Anzaldúa, this theory of autobiographical writing signifies the intrusion into and transformation of traditional western autobiographical forms by women-of-color. Moreover, as Keating notes, these *autohistoria-teorístas*, "expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new

[137] Beltran, "Patrolling Borders: Hybrids, Hierarchies and the Challenge of Mestizaje," 597.

[138] Theologian Elizabeth Conde-Frazier defines *testimonios* as the faith narratives of women's everyday lives. We will return to the importance of *testimonios* in Chapter IV. See Conde-Frazier, "Latina Women and Immigration," 57-58.

139Keating, "Introduction: Reading Gloria Anzaldúa, Reading Ourselves…Complex Intimacies, Intricate Connections," 9.

stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation."[140] It is this very sentiment that I find appealing for theological thought.

Additionally, Anzaldúa's work defies traditional, dominant forms of cultural and linguistic paradigms. The first way in which *Borderlands/La Frontera* explodes and transforms traditional cultural and linguistic understandings of identity is through what Anzaldúa terms "code switching." In the "Preface" to the First Edition of this work, she unapologetically informs the reader that this work will be written in a new language—the language of the Borderlands. This single language, she notes, switches from Spanish to the North Mexican dialect, from Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of a Nahuatl, to some combination of all of these. She writes: "There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance…"[141]

Like Lindbeck and other proponents of a cultural-linguistic understanding of identity, Anzaldúa asserts that language is deeply and intrinsically connected to one's identity. For Anzaldúa, it is through language that one communicates the realities and values that express the truth and realness of one's self. Thus, she contends that Chicano Spanish—a "border tongue" that is neither *"español ni inglés*, but both"—emerged from the need of the Chicano people to identify themselves as a distinct, collective group. This living language, she writes, is, "For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot

[140] Ibid., 319.
[141] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 20.

entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English."[142] This "forked tongue" personifies a complex, heterogeneous people caught in the borderlands between two worlds. In sum, Anzaldúa avers, it is the variation of the multiple languages captured within a single language that communicates the lived reality and values of their lives on the U.S.-Mexico border to others.

Yet, unlike Lindbeck and other cultural-linguistic proponents, Anzaldúa notes the ways in which one's language is intimately bound to *all* aspects of one's identity and therefore has profound and sometimes painful consequences on a person's being. In a powerful statement on this subject, she writes: "So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—*I am my language* (emphasis added)."[143] Furthermore, speaking from her location on the margins rather than the overclass, she states, "We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue."[144]

One of the more powerful features of Anzaldúas linguistic code-switching, I believe, is the way in which it subverts traditional language laws and norms. It is in this capacity that she imparts a radical critique of the dominant, monolinguistic (and therefore monolithic) constructions of identity. In the introduction to her edited collection, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, Anzaldúa discusses the importance of this critical moment. She writes, "*Mujeres-*

[142] Ibid., 77.
[143] Ibid., 81.
[144] Ibid., 80.

de-color speak and write not just against traditional white ways and texts but against a prevailing mode of being, against a white frame of reference. Those of us who are bilingual…are under constant pressure to speak and write in standard English."[145] Thus, Anzaldúa's fluid movement from "English to Castilian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these" speaks back against the master's English in an attempt to carve out a space for new ways of being.[146]

A second way in which Anzaldúa's work explodes traditional, dominant cultural and linguistic identity paradigms is through her non-linear approach to and account of history. One of the primary objectives of *Borderland/La Frontera* is to present a lived history of Mexican-origin, U.S. Chicanas. Yet, unlike the historical imaginaries mentioned above, Anzaldúa gives a more cyclical, postmodern account of history. In this regard, her historical account is told from perspective of those without power—namely, women and those who are considered aliens, transgressors, or invisible by the dominant culture, such as Chicanos, Indians, Mexicans, and Blacks.

To achieve this non-linear approach, Anzaldúa looks to the past and examines those aspects of culture that have been oppressive to Chicanas, revealing the ways in which history has been distorted and repressed the histories of women and people of color. In order to bring these histories to the fore and make them more accessible, Anzaldúa uses personal narratives. For example, she tells the story of her uncle who successfully crossed over the border from Mexico to the United States only to be arrested by *la migra* when he didn't have papers. She also tells of her own experiences as a *campesina.* By using these personal stories, Anzaldúa goal is to encourage the reader to

[145] Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader,* 133.
[146] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 20.

hook into the historical marginalization of particular groups that have often been dismissed or exploited by mainstream society.[147]

In this manner, Anzaldúa describes the objective of her work as not only spreading knowledge but, more importantly, producing knowledge.[148] On writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she states:

> The whole time I've been in school the producers of knowledge have been middle-and upper-class white people—those with power in the universities, science establishments, and publishing and art houses. They produce the theories and books that we read. They produce the unconscious values, views, and assumptions about reality, about culture, about everything. We internalize, we assimilate, these theories…I wanted to produce artworks, to produce knowledge, but I was from a campesina-working class, a woman from a racial minority who's a lesbian…I wanted to do it my way, using my approach, my language. I didn't want to do what Audre Lorde describes as using the master's tools; I did not want to ape the master. I wanted to write in a mestiza style, in my own vernacular, yet also use the knowledges and the histories of the white cultures, of other ethnic cultures.[149]

For Anzaldúa, this production of knowledge is a political act that emerges from her desire to subvert, resist, and alter the boundaries of what is (and is not) held to be acceptable in the dominant culture.

Moreover, by exposing the underside of history, Anzaldúa is able to reveal the thick structures of domination and subordination which result in the marginalization of particular groups by the dominant culture. For example, Anzaldúa repeatedly describes the feeling of alienating individuality and dislocation associated with border tensions. Portraying the geographical border as a 1,950 mile-long open wound that not only divides the *pueblos* but also rips through her body, she underscores the painful, fractured, and

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[147] Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader,* 187-190.
[148] Ibid., 189.
[149] Ibid., 188-189.

hyphenated identities of those who straddle the border between the Mexican and Anglo worlds. She writes:

> The prohibited forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here; the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass over or go through the confines of the "normal." Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks…The only "legitimate" inhabitant are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with the whites.[150]

Seen as not fully American, and therefore, not fully human, the existential reality of the border inhabitants is dominated by contradiction, hatred, anger, and exploitation that stems from the "emotional residue" of an unnatural boundary.[151] Here, distinctions are made and categories are created to define and assign difference, which, in turn, impose a sense of disenfranchisement on particular groups in North American society.

Likewise, those who find their lives torn between languages, cultures, and identities are marginalized by the dominant culture's homogenizing practices that ultimately reduce reality to dualistic frameworks. Anzaldúa explains, "Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual…is a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?"[152] The state of psychic restlessness and emotional perplexity that plagues the *mestiza* is best captured in Anzaldúa's own words:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like other having or living in more

[150] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 25-26.
[151] Ibid., 19,25.
[152] Ibid., 100.

> than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision.[153]

Thus, as Gregory Velazaxo Y Trianosky points out in his discussion on *mestizaje* and Hispanic identity, it is split in one's day-to-day experience. This split forces one to willingly or unwillingly recognize the authority of two often competing sets of norms—the norms of the dominant culture, which provide an external force against which the *mestizo/a* must wrestle, and the internalized norms of the "home" culture, which shapes one's habits, outlooks, and choices in particular ways.[154]

Yet this in-between place is not only characterized by pain, isolation, and incompatibility; it is also a place of creativity, subversion, and critique. This can be found in Gloria Anzaldúa's articulation of a new *mestiza* consciousness, which offers an alternative process of personal and collective identity formation based on the conception of multiple subjectivities.[155] As a result, it calls for the liberation and empowerment of all those whose identities have been subject to oppression by the appeal to monolithic, monolinguistic, or monocultural forms of identity. My goal in the next section is not only to explain this new *mestiza* consciousness, but also to illustrate the ways in which it can be life giving for theological thought.

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[153] Ibid., 100.
[154] Velazco y Trianosky, "Mestizaje and Hispanic Identity," 286-287.
[155] The term *metizaje* is the Spanish word for "mixture." Anzaldúa generally uses it to refer to the combination of Mexican, American, and Indian.

Anzaldúa's *La Conciencia de la mestiza*

The *mestiza* consciousness as articulated by Anzaldúa is first and foremost a consciousness of the borderlands. It is an "alien" awareness born at the interstices where cultures collide, languages cross-pollinate, ethnicities converge, and the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" continues to swell. Describing this consciousness, she states: "Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time…"[156] This new *mestiza* consciousness is grounded in the experience of living in-between.

Because it is grounded in lived experience, I believe *la conciencia de la mestiza* is best understood as an everyday practice, performed in the flesh and soul of the *mestiza*. Describing the everyday life of the *mestiza*, Anzaldúa writes, "[The *mestiza*] learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view…She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected and abandoned."[157] She describes this lived experience again in a poem entitled, "To live in the Borderlands means you." Here she writes, "[To live in the Borderlands means you] are neither *Hispania india negra española / ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata,* half-breed / caught in the crossfire between camps / while carrying all given races on your back / not knowing which side to turn to, run from."[158] As a result, the *mestiza* necessarily develops a tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions.

[156] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 99.
[157] Ibid., 101.
[158] Ibid., 216.

It is this plural mode of being and the resulting tolerance for ambiguity, Anzaldúa argues, which creates the opportunity for a "(r)evolutionary" step forward. [159]

On the one hand, this forward momentum has to do with the *mestiza's* discovery that concepts, ideas, and people cannot be held in rigid boundaries. For the *mestiza*, Anzaldúa contends, rigidity means death. As a Western mode of reasoning, rigid forms of thinking embrace set patterns and move blindly toward a single goal. In contrast, *la conciencia de la mestiza* embodies a flexible, divergent form of thinking that has the capacity to move both horizontally and vertically. In so doing, it seeks to include rather than exclude by incorporating the multiply-ambiguous experience of everyday life.[160]

On the other hand, this forward momentum stems from the continual creative motion of the new *mestiza* consciousness, which by its very nature opens up the possibilities for (r)evolution. Anzaldúa states:

> [The juncture where the *mestiza* stands] is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary of each new paradigm.[161]

This understanding of *mestizaje* offers an alternative to Western ways of thinking. As Velazco Y Trianosky argues, this shift in thought moves from the notion of *la mestiza* as half one thing and half another to the conception of her as someone who is "fully

[159] Ibid., 103.
[160] Ibid., 101.
[161] Ibid., 101-102.

neither."[162] In this sense, the new *mestiza* consciousness serves as an instrument for social and cultural change in both the church and society.

How, then, does *la conciencia de la mestiza* work to counter the homogenizing practices of the unidimensional logic of the dominant culture? First, it provides a method of oppositional consciousness, which is not limited by the boundaries imposed by dominant culture, but rather defies them. These practices and modes of resistance are born out of the "third space" or "third element," which is radically different from the static, unitary categories traditionally deployed by the dominant group. Moreover, it resists essentializing or fixing the hybrid position because it is continually in motion.

Implicit in this defiance of the dominant culture is a conceptualization of the subject as multiply positioned and always in process. It actively uproots the dualistic thinking that imprisons the subject in dominant Western modes of reasoning (*e.g.,* black/white, male/female, insider/outsider) and, in so doing, welcomes ambiguity. Consequently the new *mestiza* consciousness provides what Avtar Brah calls a "locationality in contradiction"—a simultaneous situatedness within the spaces of class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality and a movement across shifting cultural, linguistic and psychic boundaries. [163]

This hybrid mode of consciousness and meaning-making better reflects the complexity of human identities, as discussed in the previous chapter. As such, it does not

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[162] Velazco y Trianosky, "Mestizaje and Hispanic Identity," 187. As an aside, this language of "fully neither" offers an interesting parallel with the language of many christological debates (*i.e.,* the notion of Jesus as fully human and fully divine). I believe that this parallel has significant implications for theological thought in general and the doctrines of chistology and anthropology in particular, which will be taken up in Chapters 3 and 4 of this work.

[163] Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities ," 628.

construct false umbrella categories that constrain or control the subject by homogenizing or erasing difference, nor does it define or separate one aspect of identity from the other aspects of identity. As Gloria Anzaldúa notes, "Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process."[164] Because *la conciencia de la mestiza* considers the whole person, so to speak, it does not predetermine the kind of subject that will be constructed and assumed through the creation of rigid boundaries. More than this, it realizes that theorizing must come from the lived experiences and bodies of persons and not from detached or abstract academic theories.

Second, and not unrelated, this new multidimensional consciousness counters the homogenizing and essentialist categories of the dominant ideologies by opening up new ways of understanding collective identity. In this respect, José Medina's article, "Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the problem of difference" is useful This article explains the ways in which understanding the self "as a site of multiple voices that give expression to multiple registers of existence" still enables identity-based solidarities without erasing differences via homogenizing political practices or categories. [165]

Drawing on the later work of Wittgenstein, performativity theories of gender and sexuality, and the writings of women of color, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Medina dissolves the so-called "problem of difference" found in collective constructions of identity that seek unity and stability through homogenizing practices. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic notion of identity outlined in the previous chapter is an example of this type of practice.

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[164] Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer--Loca, Escritora Y Chicana," 267.
[165] Medina, "Identity Trouble," 667.

For Medina, the idea that collective identities can achieve unity and stability by eschewing differences is suspect. What is ultimately necessary, he argues, is a multidimensional logic that enables one to see that identity categories are inherently heterogeneous, pluralistic (i.e., the different aspects of identity are not developed individually or in isolation but are interwoven with one another), and unstable, no matter how rigid, unitary, or fixed one wants to make them. Enter the multi-voiced subjectivity and new *mestiza* consciousness as articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa.[166]

Yet, if identity is ultimately bound up with difference, how does one maintain collectivity in spite of the differences? Medina answers this question by recalling Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances, which suggests that concepts are like families in which the members resemble each other in different ways, but are not necessarily identical in any respect. Here, family members share certain family resemblances (*e.g.*, similar hair, noses, facial expressions, etc.), but they do not share all of the same exact features. In fact, families are composed of heterogeneous elements. What unites them together in the face of this heterogeneity, Medina (quoting Wittgenstein) argues, is a "complicated network of similarities and overlapping criss-crossing." Thus, shared membership is based on one's overlapping membership in a community or family. Let us now turn to a brief consideration of this border crossing for theological thought and, in particular, theological constructions of identity that trend toward monocultural and monolinguistic understandings.

Crossing Borders: Implications for Theological Thought

[166] Ibid., 655-657.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of Lindbeck's primary objectives in *The Nature of Doctrine* is to explain the enduring self-identity and unity proclaimed by Christians over time in the face of inter- and intra-religious differences. For Lindbeck, this can be achieved through a cultural-linguistic understanding of religion and a rule theory of doctrine. According to this understanding, Christians are bound together in so far as they are shaped by the language and culture of Christianity. Yet, one of the consequences of this postliberal approach is that the conception of identity that he outlines is one-dimensional, monocultural, and monolinguistic. This singular and bounded understanding of identity, I argue, stems from his perception that difference poses a problem to unity.

When Lindbeck's initial dilemma is placed in conversation with the works of Anzaldúa and other women of color, however, the problem of difference starts to dissolve and Christian identity is understood as multidimensional. In this sense, Christians are bound together by their similar adherence to the story of Jesus Christ, but their "Christianness" would not preclude their membership in other communities, such as gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity.[167] In fact one's membership in these other communities is conceived as so intertwined with one's Christianness, that it is not only hard to separate the individual categories out from one another, but it is also hard to imagine that these communities do not simultaneously influence one's Christianness. Here I am reminded of James Cone's statement in the introduction to his book, *The Cross*

[167] Ibid., 658-661.

and the Lynching Tree. Cone writes, "..neither could I separate my Christian identity from my blackness. I was *black* before I was Christian."[168]

How, then, can Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* consciousness be life giving for theological thought? Aside from her powerful articulation of the pluralistic view of the self and its implications for the diverse identities of those who participate in particular communities that challenge the rigid and monolithic theological constructions of identity by theologians such as George Lindbeck, I suggest her work offers two additional contributions to Western theological thought. I will summarize these contributions briefly below, but they will be examined more thoroughly in the remaining two chapters.

The first contribution I believe Anzaldúa's work makes to theological thought is her emphasis on the everyday reality of those who live in a multilinguistic and multicultural society. For Anzaldúa, these everyday lives, though not traditionally deemed theoretical or rigorous enough by dominant Western theologies, are an important source of knowledge and theorizing. In the "Introduction" to her co-edited work, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, she and Cherrie Moraga describe their need to create, to be heard, and to speak out with their own voices as a "theory in the flesh," which emerges from their own unique experience and worldviews. In this sense, their "flesh and blood" (to use theological language) are transformed into radical sources of knowledge, which has the capacity to make visible the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, language and culture are intertwined.[169] Describing this concept, they write:

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[168] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* xvii.
[169] Moraga and Anzaldúa, "Introduction."

> A theory in flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience…We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words.[170]

For me, this hermeneutical privilege given to the everyday struggle of those who live on the interstices, be they geographical or metaphorical, illustrates the way in which meaning-making often occurs outside of predetermined theoretical categories in theological thought. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of experience for theological constructions of identity (which the work of Lindbeck and other postliberal theologians ultimately eschew), alongside its alternative articulations through poetry, narrative, performance, and so on. It is, to some degree, an embodied form of resistance performed through everyday practices. In Chapter 4, I will look at an example of this embodied form of resistance.

The second contribution that I believe Anzaldúa's work makes to theological thought is that it allows one to recognize and honor the multiplicity that makes both human and Christian identities. It is this understanding of multiplicity and hybridity, I contend, which brings forth a necessary preferential option for the in-between—an option for those who live in precarious circumstances and who put their lives on the line (albeit geographical or metaphorical) every day and every night.

Given this, the option for the in-between focuses on the marginal in our midst, and in particular those persons whose suffering and exploitation stems from their lack of recognition in society because they do not fit neatly within the boundaries drawn by the dominant culture. As a result, the preferential option for the in-between insists that we

[170] Ibid., 21.

open our eyes to what José Medina describes as the most radical kind of identity trouble—those whose identity is systematically excluded from all families or who remain invisible because their identity is not named or recognized at all. Daisy Machado calls us to see the way in which this group of "non-persons" must be inclusive of the undocumented women—the ultimate outsiders whose names and identities are not given recognition in the United States of America. As ultimate outsiders, she notes, these women are without voice, legal rights, or power and, subsequently, remain unnoticed in their suffering.[171]

More than merely recognizing the marginal in our midst, however, a preferential option for the in-between calls us to respond to this injustice. With a goal for the flourishing all people, it shows that these are not just social and economic concerns, but also biblical, Christian, and religious concerns as well.[172] Thus, they must be incorporated into our practices of faith seeking understanding.

In the next chapter, I look at the way in which the notions of hybridity, ambiguity, multiplicity, instability have been foundational categories in the work of U.S. Latina theologians, particularly in discussions surrounding theological anthropology. In the end, however, I will suggest that these discussions cannot end with theological anthropology. Because the question of the person and significance of Christ sits at the very heart of Christian identity, this multidimensional framework and consciousness of the borderlands can and should be applied to Christological conversations. This, I argue, illustrated God's preferential option for the in-between.

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[171] Machado, "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminists, and the Undocumented Woman," 161-176.
[172] Medina, "Identity Trouble," 663.

St. Toribio is considered Mexico's patron saint of border-crossers. Found within pocket-sized prayer books sold by vendors at the religious shrine of St. Toribio is a bon voyage message and prayer for all those crossing the border without documents that was written by a local bishop. It states, "I feel I am a citizen of the world…and of a church without borders."[173] Let me now turn to this understanding in the works of U.S. Latina Theologians.

[173] Levitt, "God Needs No Passport: Trying to Define the Boundaries of Belonging."

CHAPTER III

U.S. LATINA THEOLOGIES: VOICES FROM THE BORDER

Introduction

Faith Seeking Understanding: Practices Across Time and Place

The classical definition of theology, as articulated by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), is *fides quaerens intellectum*—the act of "faith seeking understanding." From the outset, this quest involves the incomprehensible—the living God who remains absolute mystery. It is amidst this mystery, in a universe saturated with the awesome and the inexplicable, that the acts of faith and reason engender candid questions about the divine, humankind, and the world.

Though theological thought often inquires about the transcendent and metaphysical dimension, it also has concrete personal and practical implications for the world in which we live. Sallie McFague captures the personal dimension of theology in her work *Speaking in Parables.* She writes:

> …whatever else theology may be, it is not "incredible," not something apart from my life, your life or the life of our contemporary society. It is fearfully personal, which is of course to say fearfully social as well, for stories are always about persons in relation to their world. And being personal in this way means that theology is radically concrete, for there is no such thing as "a person in general" as the parables, the confessions of Paul and Augustine, so painfully and gloriously illustrate.[174]

Likewise, Daniel Migliore writes in his introductory work on Christian theology, "Christian faith invariably prompts questions, sets an inquiry in motion, fights the

[174] McFague, *Speaking in Parables : A Study in Metaphor and Theology,* 2.

inclination to accept things as they are, continually calls into question unexamined assumptions about God, ourselves, and our world."[175] It is this fearfully personal, social and radically concrete dimensions of theology, coupled with the unwillingness to accept things as they are and the desire to call into question the effects of our unexamined assumptions, that I believe lends theological thought its rich emancipatory possibilities and its agency for transformation.

Like all personal "reasoned discourses," theological thought does not occur in or emerge out of a vacuum. Instead, it is influenced by the historical context of the author, as well as the various inquiries, promises, challenges, and possibilities that his or her context presents. If one were to gather a group of theologians together across time and place and ask each of them to articulate the nature and task of theology, she would undoubtedly be met with a rich diversity of answers.

For instance, Thomas Aquinas (*c.* 1225-74, Italy) understands theology as an ordered inquiry or a science, which is concerned with the sum of all knowledge pertaining to God. Given this understanding, his *Summa Theologica* was written in order to give a comprehensive and systematic overview of the sacred doctrines of Christian theology. Asserting that there are truths about God that remain beyond the domain of philosophy and human reason alone, he argued that theology was absolutely necessary to uncover the essential truths about God as revealed in scripture, the explication of which was considered to be the primary task of the theologian. During this era, theology was considered the "queen of the sciences," while philosophy was thought to be its handmaiden.

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[175] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding : An Introduction to Christian Theology,* 2.

Almost six hundred years later, nineteenth-century German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher sought to rekindle theology's waning relevance for both the church and the academy. Known as the father of modern theology, his well-known work, *On Religion: Speeches to Cultured Despisers*, attempted to reconcile traditional Protestant Orthodoxy with contemporary Enlightenment criticisms of religion. Because he believed that religion could be described as a feeling of absolute dependence, he argued that the task of theology was to describe these transcendent realities in a way acceptable even to the "cultured despisers of religion." [176]

In contrast, Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P. (b.1922, Peru), a pioneer in Latin American liberation theology, asserts that theological thought is irrelevant for both the academy and the church unless it is preceded by a preferential action for the "scorned of this world." Drawing on his own work with the poor and the suffering in the slums of Lima, he argues that we cannot be excused from taking the reality of the poor and the marginalized into account as we live and think our faith. These "crucified people," he observes, live in an inhumane and unjust situation that is contrary to the gratuitous love of God for every human being expressed in the revelation of Jesus Christ as well as the demands this love makes for the church. Thus, he writes, "Only if we take seriously the suffering of the innocent and live the mystery of the cross amidst that suffering, but in the light of Easter, can we prevent our theology from being 'windy arguments' (Job16:3)."[177]

James Cone (b. 1938, USA) provides yet another understanding of the nature and task of theology, which is deeply shaped by his historical context. Cone asserts that discourse about God "is human speech informed by historical and theological traditions,

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[176] Schleiermacher and Oman, *On Religion : Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers,* 1893.
[177]Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *On Job : God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent, 103.*

and written for particular times and places."[178] Writing for the black community in the United States which has collectively endured the pernicious effects of white supremacy, he claims that theological thought must answer the question, "How can one reconcile the gospel message of liberation with the reality of black oppression?"[179] For Cone, God's presence in the world is best depicted through God's concern for and involvement with the struggle for justice. Consequently, he maintains that any theological discourse which does not engage the African American struggle for justice and work to heal the wounds of racial violence inflicted by white supremacy will remain theologically bankrupt.

John Millbank (b. 1952, United Kingdom), on the other hand, suggests a postmodern understanding of theology that moves away from the more "contextual" understandings of theology espoused by Guttierez and Cone and criticizes those theologies that draw on and are informed by the social sciences at large. In brief, Millbank's postmodern conception of theological thought eschews modern theology's absorption of the methods and conclusions of the social sciences insofar as he believes these conclusions are products of modern secularism and therefore part of what he terms, "an ontology of violence." His argument stems from his belief that Christian theology better reflects the word of the creator God if it focuses on the practice of the community formed by the Christian story in which violence and conflict are rejected in favor of the salvific offering of the triune God.[180]

The last unique articulation of the nature and task of theology that I want to offer emerges from the writing of Kwok Pui Lan (b. 1952, Hong Kong). For Kwok, theology

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[178] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* xi.
[179] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* xv-xvi.
[180] "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions."

must be imagined from a postcolonial and feminist lens that disengages from the colonial syndrome and draws on postcolonial and feminist theories and thought. By viewing theological construals through these particular lenses, she asserts that one is better able to work towards a multicultural and intercultural theological vision, which she describes as rooted in multiple communities and cultural contexts in which the different cultures are not isolated but intertwined with one another. Such a vision is necessary, she suggests, because it draws on and liberates the voices and experiences of *all* people in what has traditionally been a Euro- and Euro-American, male-dominated Christian history and theology.[181]

The Dominant Euro-American Theological Tradition

The six conceptions of theology outlined above shed light on the various ways in which theologians have understood the practice of faith seeking understanding throughout time and across place. Despite the rich diversity of theological voices that have emerged from around the globe over the course of the last several centuries, the dominant theological tradition as articulated by European and European American theologians is still considered normative and universal. While these traditional historical, metaphysical, and conceptualist approaches are increasingly adopting critical-constructive methods, María Pilar Aquino points out that they are still founded on perspectives created unilaterally within the Western academy. She writes:

> In this sense, Western definitions of revelation, faith, and theology continue to be considered as rules or truth which should be assimilated or inculturated" by other (i.e., non-European or European-American) communities of faith. This is why we should acknowledge that dominant

[181] Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology,* 2-3, 21.

> understandings of what systematic theology is or should be remain profoundly *monocultural*. We must also recognize that the way the hegemonic theological academy constructs knowledge remains deeply embedded in *patriarchal ideology* which as been so pervasive through the history of Christian theology. [182]

Similar to the postliberal theology of George Lindbeck discussed in Chapter 1, these normative elaborations of theological thought reinforce the idea that objective inquiry and universal truth, can only be achieved by creating frames of thinking which are removed—albeit in full or in part—from historical situatedness, human subjectivity, and cultural values. Consequently, theologies emerging from the experiences and histories of particular groups are considered to be valuable only from within the boundaries of the communities out of which they emerge. As a result, these theologies are assigned a secondary status or included only differentially.

Theologian Dwight Hopkins points out, however, that even the theological frameworks that claim to be objective, detached, scientific, and universal are, nevertheless, entrenched in specific, social locations. He writes, "The difference between the so-called broad interrogations of theology, in contrast to the so-called narrow, adjectival, or hyphenated theologies (such as black, womanist, feminist….), is that the former, as a group, had had the resources to promote their voice, their experiences and their thinkers as normative or as *the* tradition."[183] Moreover, they remain content with doing theology only for a particular group.

The fact that a small elite group has dominated academic conversations and framed theological debates in both the past and the present is problematic. At worst, these

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[182] Aquino, "Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward An Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium," 8-9.
[183] Hopkins, *Being Human : Race, Culture, and Religion,* 15.

dominant theologies continue to silence and marginalize the rich diversity of theological voices around the globe and, in so doing, contribute to the harmful divisions and inequalities in society today (*e.g.*, geopolitical, gender, racial, and sexual divides). No longer can theologies which work toward faithful explications of God and the flourishing of all God's creation faithfully affirm these implicit and explicit structures of domination and exclusion that strip individuals of their cultures and traditions, creating harmful blind spots in its discourse and practice. It is my belief that these blind spots diminish our capacity for experiencing new openings in which to see the active presence of God and Jesus in our midst.

Faith Seeking Understanding: Toward the Flourishing of All Peoples

Shaped by the insights of feminist, womanist, Latina, and other liberation theologians, I believe that theology must be concerned with and committed to the flourishing of all people—male and female, rich and poor, gay and straight, able-bodied and disabled, and of every ethnicity and race. If the human dignity and rights of even one person or group is overlooked or trampled on, then the human dignity and rights of all of God's creation is denied as well. Given this understanding, this chapter proposes that theological thought cannot simply be understood as the repetition of doctrines or the attempt to correlate abstract formulas with contemporary life, though it certainly includes each of these things. Rather, it contends that theological thought must also be grounded in a reflection on texts, tradition, history, culture, and experience prompted by an engagement *with* the world rather than an estrangement *from* it.

In this respect, I propose that a major thrust of thinking theologically must include an examination of the everyday activity of lived faith and practices of the Christian community, which includes the rich diversity of voices and communities that construct complex and life-giving understandings of God, Christ, Church, humankind, the world, and salvation. This act of faith seeking understanding, I contend, has social, cultural, and ethical implications for how we live in the world—as believers or non-believers—both individually and as a community. Thus, I heartily agree with R.S. Sugirtharajah, who astutely observes, "theology is not alive in [the] writings of the masters, valuable as they are, but in the everyday activity of living in a society which is multicultural, multilingual and multiracial."[184]

The task of this chapter is to explore the ways in which multidimensional understandings of identity, like those articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa in chapter 2 of this work, are present in U.S. Latina/o theologies. My analysis is based on several assumptions. First, that this understanding of identity and difference offers an implicit critique of and alternative to dominant, monocultural theologies, such as those of Lindbeck outlined in the first chapter. Second, that these multi-voiced subjectivities are powerful vehicles for transforming theological understandings of identity and difference on both an individual and communal level. I make these claims based on my convictions that theology must be done in a way faithful to the tradition, but also from an engagement with a world that is increasingly multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural.

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[184] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations : An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology,* 124.

In this section I explore the understandings of multiplicity, hybridity, and difference found in the writings of U.S. Latina theologians. My task is threefold. I begin with an overview of four frameworks offered by Kwok Pui Lan, which identify four interpretive strategies that have been used by feminist, womanist, Asian-American women, *mujeristas,* and so on, to discuss the identity and subjectivity of women from the perspective of Christian theology. Second I give an overview of some of the sources and methodological themes that inform present day theologies constructed by women of Latina descent in the United States. Last, I consider the categories of *mestizaje and nepantlah*, illustrating their unique contributions to Western theological thought and their challenge to the dominant, monolithic systems of theological thought.

Discourses on Difference: Four Theological Frameworks Used to Discuss the Identity and Subjectivity of Women

In addition to contesting the hegemonic and patriarchal thought emerging from the dominant white male group, the multicultural, multiracial, multilingual, and multi-voiced character of "women of color" has also posited constructive challenges to the dominant strands of feminist theology, which, since its inception in the late 1970s, has typically been associated with Western white women in Europe and the United States. These challenges have to do with the incapacity of the dominant group—specifically, white middle-to-upper class women, who have had the privilege of higher education—to account for the questions and experiences of those outside of their group. In her essay, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made," Catholic womanist theologian, Diana Hayes, illustrates the narrow and exclusive focus of traditional white feminist theology, stating

with her Black sisters, "There isn't enough fabric in that dress to fit me."[185] Hayes' metaphorical statement is both striking and rich. It eloquently captures the way in which white feminist theologians have constructed a theological bodice that is fitting for the needs of only one specific group, thereby leaving the needs and concerns of all others un(ad)dressed.

Due to a host of similar challenges by women of color, it can be argued that contemporary feminist theological thought is no longer exclusively defined by the interests of white, middle class, Euro-American women. Although there is still significant room for growth and improvement in its incorporation of traditionally "othered" discourses, white feminist theologians have been pushed to recognize the blind spots in their discourse. As a result, their theologies have been enriched by theologians and women of color around the world who have begun to negotiate their identities and faith practices in multiple and complex ways, including the development of alternative theologies, such as womanist, Latina, *mujerista*, Asian-American, and African. These alternative practices and reflections not only challenge the field of theological thought to take into consideration the categories of gender, class, race, sexuality, ethnicity and so on, but they also demonstrate the ways in which one's communities, experiences, and traditions bear witness to the divine imprint of God. From this realization, new life-giving theological questions emerge that continue to push the act of faith seeking understanding in important new directions.

In the *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Kwok Pui Lan identifies four leading theoretical frameworks that have been used by feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and

[185] Hayes, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian," 59.

Latina theologians to discuss the identity and subjectivity of women in feminist theology. Each of these frameworks offers a critique of universalizing understandings of experience and a discourse on difference. I should like to give a brief overview of these frameworks, for it proves crucial in helping to situate the field of Latina/*mujerista* within the larger field of theological thought. More importantly, this overview helps to bring to the fore the significant and unique contributions of Latina/*Mujerista* theology to theological discussions of identity and belonging, particularly in the strands of discourse surrounding *mestizaje* and *nepantlah*.

The first framework that Kwok identifies emerged from the work of womanist theologians in the late 1970's and early 1980's. During this time, womanist theologians began to challenge the liberal ideal of equality upheld by traditional Anglo-European feminist theologies, which suggested that the equality of women was based upon a notion of shared human nature. For womanists, this ideal overlooked the ways in which women of color experience double, triple, and even multiple oppressions. By subsuming these particularities under one paradigm of human difference (i.e., women), Euro- and Euro-American feminists not only ignored the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, etc., simultaneously constructed one's social reality, but also the ways in which this "burden of difference" is distributed unevenly in society. This first framework suggests that what is ultimately necessary is a theological account of subjectivity that takes into account the ways in which women experience their lives both positively and negatively according to a multiplicity of identities.[186]

[186] Kwok, "Feminist Theology As Intercultural Discourse," 30-31.

The second framework that Kwok traces within feminist discourse on difference emerges at the intersection of feminist theory and feminist theology. This poststructural discourse recognizes the multiple identities of women in theological thought, while at the same time contending that the subject—woman—is constituted discursively. Here, Kwok uses the work of feminist theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson as a prime example. Fulkerson's work seeks to move from the false universals associated with the liberal subject (*e.g.,* an ahistorical and transcendental notion of "women's experience") to the notion of the multiple subject positions of women formed at the intersection of different and oftentimes competing discourses. In other words, it looks to the particular social relations out of which one's identity or subjectivity is constructed, and it contends that these positions of women are formed in relation to the identities of others.[187] Kwok notes that a particular insight associated with this framework lies in the poststructural notion that, "our identity is formed by the others it creates and thus our narration of our own identity must be opened up to the criticism of the other."[188]

The third framework that Kwok recognizes emerges out of Asian American and *mujerista* theologies. Like each of the frameworks outlined above, this framework resists the assimilative tendencies of white Anglo-European categories of thinking and, in so doing, it recognizes the multiple-subject positions of women. What differentiates this framework from the others, however, is its emphasis on the fluidity and hybridity of identity categories. For example, Kwok points out that because Asian Americans are situated in a variety of worlds, they develop a sense of identity that is multiple, transversal, and hybridized. However, this understanding of identity, which emerges out

[187] Ibid., 31-32.
[188] Ibid., 32.

of the way in which women are oftentimes multiply and contradictorily positioned in society and the church, is also a form of resistance. Drawing on Japanese American theologian Rita Nakashima Brock's understanding of interstitial integrity, Kwok notes, "Interstitial refers to the places in-between, and the interstitial integrity is the refusal to rest in one place, to make constricting either/or decisions, and to be placed always on the periphery."[189]

The fourth and final framework that Kwok identifies is also one of the most recent discourses of identity to emerge within theological thought. Here, feminist theologians draw heavily on the writings of queer theorists, particularly Judith Butler, in order to illustrate the ways in which the categories of gender, sex, and the self are inherently unstable. [190] This understanding has important implications for Christian theology, ethics, and practices, especially those discourses that are entangled with the old gender structures of identity and the norms and roles that are tied to these. In chapter 4, I will look at an example of the way in which the idea of the fluidity of sexed and gendered identities challenges the givenness of the teachings and tradition of the Catholic Church.

Each of the four frameworks outlined by Kwok raises important questions for theological understandings of identity and difference. By illustrating the ways in which women from traditionally marginalized communities have come together to negotiate their individual and communal identities in multiple and complex ways, she shows the way in which they challenge the homogenizing and universalizing tendencies of dominant theological discourse that assume the category of experience is everywhere the same. More than this, she illustrates how the various theoretical applications can push

[189] Ibid., 32.
[190] Ibid., 32-33.

theological thought to open up new possibilities for celebrating and working across diversity and multiplicity.

In what follows, I will explore the theologies of U.S. Latina and *mujerista* theologians within the context of the third framework identified by Kwok Pui Lan. In particular, I highlight the contributions of María Pilar Aquino and Ada-María Isasi-Díaz, two theologians whose pioneering work is inextricably tied to the lives, struggles, and religious commitments of the diverse U.S. Latina communities. Reflecting on their hybrid and fluid understandings of identity and belonging that is characteristic of this framework, my objective is to highlight the ways in which interstitial identity is invaluable in understanding the multiple-subject positions of women and challenging dominant, monocultural conceptions of identity and belonging. Moreover, it helps provide a "preferential option for the in-between." The particular contributions of this framework, I argue, are not limited to the U.S. Latina community, but have universal life-giving implications for theological thought. Speaking on behalf of American-Hispanic Theologians, Virgilio Elizondo states: "…[this type of theological reflection] is not only more honest but even more universal…We are convinced that the more universal one tries to be, the less one has to offer others. Conversely, the more particular a thought is, the more its universal implications become evident."[191]

U.S. Latina Theology: Sources and Methods

The background of U.S. Latina theologies must be set against the Latin America's contentious history as a conquered and colonized continent. From the initial invasions of

[191] "Toward An American-Hispanic Theology of Liberation in the U.S.A," 54-55.

the European conquistadors, to the subjugation and destruction of entire peoples, cultures, and religions by the colonizers, the historical memory of the struggle and resistance of these communities both in the United States and in their Latin American countries profoundly shapes the theological reflections of Latinas more than five hundred years later. One could reasonably argue that this historical context is a large contributing factor to U.S. Latina/o theology's pervasive rejection of the established asymmetry that is rooted in the hegemonic, assimilationist tendencies of the dominant U.S.-Anglo culture and present-day capitalism.

Despite the significance of this historical backdrop for U.S. Latina/o theologies, there is no singular or monolithic historical narrative common to Latina/os. The U.S. Latina/o community is comprised of many different groups with distinct national and cultural heritages, including Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Argentinian, Costa Rican, and Nicaraguan, to name just a few. As Nancy Pineda-Madrid states, "While a Mexican American, a Salvadorian, and Cuban American will all use the term 'Latina' to identify their work the concrete given worlds *from which* and *for which* they write typically differ significantly."[192]

This racial, ethnic, religious, economic, political, social, linguistic, and cultural diversity plays a significant role in U.S. Latina/o's attempts to negotiate their identity and inclusion within the dominant culture of the United States. Not surprisingly, this mixture and diversity is also a fundamental feature in the theologies of U.S. Latinas. Drawing on a document from the third *Encuentro Continental de Mujeres*, María Pilar Aquino writes, "As Latina American feminist women well recognize, '*En nuestra diversidad está*

[192] Pineda-Madrid, "Latina Theology," 74.

nuestra rigueza, en nuestro proyecto común está nuestra fuerza' (In our diversity lies our richness, in our common project our power)."[193] As we will see in the next section, this diversity, and particularly the category of *mestizaje,* functions as a *locus theologicus* for U.S. Latinas, which both vindicates their identities and experiences as a racially and ethically mixed people and imparts them with a prophetic agenda to address the racism, sexism, classism, and ethnic prejudices embedded in dominant theologies and society.

Another important theological category found in U.S. Latino/as theology is *lo cotidiano*. Put simply, this term refers to daily life. However, despite its apparent simplicity and its reference to the everyday routine aspects of one's life, it is a highly sophisticated concept that contains significant epistemological, hermeneutical, analytical and liberationist implications for theological thought. It moves away from essentialized understandings of human and is used to represent a culturally, racially, economically and socially diverse set of experiences and histories.

Lo cotidiano functions as a source, a hermeneutical lens, and an epistemological framework in the theological reflections of Isasi-Díaz. For her, a theology appropriate for poor and marginalized Latinas must draw on resources that are intimately connected to the community and develop out of their experiences, beliefs, and practices of faith and resistance. Thus, she suggests that *lo cotidiano*, which consists of the daily ordinary struggle (*la lucha*) of Latinas to survive and live fully as human beings, is an important point of departure for theological thought. However, Isasi-Díaz notes, that daily life is not just the place where these experiences occur; it is also the place from which those

[193] "The Collective "Dis-covery" of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology," 252.

experiences become elements of reality.[194] She writes, "*lo cotidiano* also includes the way we Latinas consider actions, sources, norms, established social roles and our own selves."[195] Thus, it functions hermeneutically and epistemologically insofar as it foregrounds Latina's ways of interpreting and understanding the world.

The collective work of María Pilar Aquino's work highlights the important analytical and liberative dimensions of *lo cotidiano*. Analytically, this category functions to expose the dynamic characteristic of hegemonic hierarchical cultures (*e.g.,* patriarchy) that negatively affect the daily lives of women and others. For Aquino, this abstraction of daily life occurs in two ways: first, its focus on the public realm conceals the violence committed against women in the private realm; and second, it overlooks the ways in which the personal categories of sex and gender are also political.[196] This brings Aquino to the transforming potential of *lo cotidiano*, which foregrounds the various strategies used by Latinas daily to survive and pursue justice and liberation in the face of various systems of oppression and domination. For Aquino, this "counter-hegemonic political value" of daily life has salvific value for the reason that it is here that the people truly experience the salvific presence of God in their struggle for humanization and liberation.[197]

Methodologically speaking, U.S. Latina/o theologies, like most theologies of liberation, are committed to critical reflection on praxis. That is, their practice of faith seeking understanding is understood to be a second-order enterprise that emerges out of

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[194] Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues : Mujerista Theology,* 95.
[195] Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology : A Theology for the Twenty-first Century,* 67.
[196] "The Collective "Dis-covery" of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology," 256.
[197] Aquino, "Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward An Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium," 38-39.

the "faith-based" commitments and activities of its distinct communities. For the U.S. Latina theologies, this form of religious reflection entails an awareness of the oppression and marginalization of their communities, as well as sociopolitical and theological push for justice, equality, and the flourishing of all people. It is in this respect that they broaden our understanding of the relationship between the gospel and the imperative to structural change in our society. Ada María Isasi-Díaz notes that this commitment to justice, coupled with the preferential option for the poor and the oppressed, is not just something that U.S. Latinas *do*; rather, it is an integral component of who they *are* as individuals and as part of the community at large.[198]

At the same time as U.S. Latina theologies remain indebted to Latin American liberation theology for advancing the theological frameworks with which to negotiate issues of social and cultural oppression, they also add to the profundity of its insights. U.S. Latina theologians insist that the transformation of the current asymmetrical social system must include the incorporation of women into the social and ecclesial realms. Thus, they privilege Latina narratives of survival, which call attention to the social location of knowledge and the interlocking webs of oppression that result from the multiple intersections of identity categories, such as race, class, sexuality, gender, and so on. As Aquino states, "For Latina American women, the exercise of imagination—inventing new ways to struggle, resist, and survive—and the possibility of choosing a different future have finally been liberated from their long captivity by a combination of hope, joy, and suffering within our daily struggles."[199]

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[198] Isherwood, "An Interview with Ada María Isasi-Díaz," 9.
[199] "The Collective "Dis-covery" of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology," 240.

Although many Latina theologians, including Isasi-Díaz and Aquino, embrace methodologies and commitments similar to those of their white feminists counterparts, they often frame their theological projects differently in order to name themselves in their own right and claim their unique hermeneutical contributions to theological thought. In her article "Latina Feminist Theology: Past, Present, and Future," theologian Michelle González writes, "While the question of naming may seem frivolous, it is fundamental to the public voice of Latina theologians who claim a feminist hermeneutic and their relationship with other feminist theologians."[200] Quoting Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza González reminds us that, "language is not just performative; it's political."[201]

According to Isasi-Díaz, the radicality of affirming authentic subjectivity lies in Latina women's ability to name themselves as a group distinct from the Euro-American feminist movement, which has continually marginalized their contributions and gifts. The failings in the white feminist movement, she argues, lies in their perpetuation of hierarchical systems that benefit some at the expense of other, as well as their disregard for the intersection of the identity categories of race, sex, class, and so on. "A *mujerista*," she writes, "is someone who makes a preferential option for Latin women, for our struggle for liberation."[202] In an article written almost twelve years later, she noted that she intentionally tried not to define (read: confine) the term "*mujerista*," imparting it only with the broadest description possible. Her goal as such was to include all those who opt for Latinas, who have their liberation as their goal, and who see this as an important

[200] Gonzalez, "Latina Feminist Theology: Past, Present, and Future," 152.
[201] Ibid., 152.
[202] Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology : A Theology for the Twenty-first Century,* 61.

element of their own personhood.[203] Describing this particular form of theological reflection, she writes:

> ...*mujeristas* believe that in Latinas, though not exclusive so, God chooses once again to lay claim to the divine image and likeness made visible from the very beginning in women. *Mujeristas* are called to bring to birth new women and new men Hispanics willing to work for the good of our people (the common good") knowing that such work requires the denunciation of all destructive sense of self-abnegation.

Thus, for Isasi-Díaz, a *mujerista* is a woman committed to resisting the multiple forces of oppression that threaten her self-actualization as well as that survival of her community.

In contrast, María Pilar Aquino believes that Latina women must reclaim the word "feminist" as part of their own history, looking not to white feminists to define their liberation but instead to themselves. For Aquino, a dismal use of the term "feminist" overlooks the various ways in which Latinas already *have* contributed to this movement, both in the past and the present. She writes, "…in a continent conquered by men, colonized by European powers, and brought to submission by the white race, the organizing capacity of women and their impact in the socioreligous milieu have helped to obtain at least minimum recognition that we exist and that we are a part of society. This is indeed a great achievement for Latina American women." [204] For Aquino, then, feminist hermeneutical strategies are not solely the domain of Euro-American women, but also include the plurality of stories, voices, and experiences of U.S. Latinas.[205] Moreover, she contends that the development of this emergent Latina feminist theological vision, which

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[203] Isasi-Díaz and Marks, *"Mujerista* Theology: A Praxis of Liberation--My Story," 83.
[204] "The Collective "Dis-covery" of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology," 249.
[205] Aquino also states that the *mujerista* position is rooted in a more homogenous identity of women and women's strategy for change, whereas a Latina feminist position engages with the plural feminist experiences of Latinas. Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theology: Central Features," 139.

places poor and marginalized women at its center, necessarily includes feminist and women's movements as its privileged conversation partners.[206]

Although the claims made by Isasi-Díaz and Aquino do not represent the entire spectrum of positions made by U.S. Latina's who claim a feminist hermeneutic, their naming strategies represent two dimensions of a multi-faceted conversation. What each of these frameworks hold in common, however, is that they name the radical subjectivity of U.S. Latina women and claim the author's right to authentic, theological intellectual construction from the perspective of Latina feminists and *mujeristas*. In so doing, they make visible a community whose influence has been rendered invisible in traditional feminist circles. More than this, by creating an alternative emancipatory space that works to overcome the unjust power structures and sexual domination that reinforces the subordination of women in the church and society, they claim that another more just world is indeed possible.

Foundational to U.S. Latina theological reflection is the daily lives and lived faith of the community, which reveals the encounter between the mystery of God and the mystery of human experience. María Pilar Aquino, notes that this lived faith of the community, "welcomes God's presence in its midst; celebrates it in its popular rituals, ceremonies, and prayers; and witnesses to it through the community's words and deeds…If theology speaks of a deeper meaning of our being and our doing under the light of revelation, then theology needs, demands, and implies an anthropology."[207] For Aquino and others, such as Michelle González, the strength of any theological project is

[206] "The Collective "Dis-covery" of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology," 255.
[207] Aquino, "Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward An Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium," 25.

intimately tied to the theological anthropology it espouses. A defining component of U.S. Latina theological anthropology, as noted in Kwok Pui Lan's comparative frameworks outlined above, includes a focus on the multiplicity and hybridity of identity categories.

U.S. Latina Theological Anthropology: *Mestizaje* and *Nepantla*

Theological anthropology seeks to answer the question, "What does it mean to be a human being?" and more precisely, "What does it mean to be a human being created in the image and likeness of God?" Given these guiding questions, it explores beliefs about the human person, the divine-human relationship, and the interrelationship of the human community through the lens of the Christian tradition. Like most theological thought, however, the answers to these questions differ among time and place and shed light upon the way in which God remains absolute mystery.

Over the course of the last forty years or so, theologians and communities have begun to rearticulate and reexamine the field of theological anthropology in relation to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, power, politics, and ecology. U.S. Latina theology offers a perspective based on hybridity and plurality. This liberative theological anthropology emerges from the daily struggle of U.S. Latinas to survive and flourish as human beings and compels us toward what I argue can be called a "preferential option for the 'in-between'."

From the constructive religious reflections and expressions of U.S. Latina theologians, two angles, I find, prove most helpful in approaching the concept of

hybridity within discussions of theological anthropology. The first angle examines the multi-voiced subjectivity of women as interpreted through the foundational category of *mestizaje,* which refers to the racial/ethnic mixture that has shaped the identities and experiences of U.S. Latinas. The second angle explores the philosophical concept of *nepantlah*, which speaks to the in-between-ness and the "both/and" experienced by those who dwell on geographical and metaphorical borders. In this sense, *nepantlah* becomes a lens for understanding and articulating the fluidity of Latinas' identities. In what follows I will explore the ways in which these concepts have been adopted to articulate the theological identity of Latinas.

The Category of *Mestizaje* in U.S. Latina Theologies

Mestizaje is a concept that traditionally refers to the biological and cultural intermixture that occurred in the "New World." Although this term was originally used to denote a biological mixture of indigenous and Spanish peoples born out of the Spanish invasion and colonization of Latin America, it has been expanded and used more recently to identify and recognize the evolving cultural intermixture found in Latina/o communities. As such, it has become a widely cited, analytical category in a variety of disciplines, including feminist theory, race theory, cultural studies, philosophy, and religion.

In his work *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*, Guatemalan-Canadian theologian Néstor Medina examines the ways in which *mestizaje* became a foundational category for U.S. Latina/o theologies, and as a result, placed the ethonocultural identity of this group of theologians at the center of

theological thought. From his work, one can discern at least two significant ways in which this concept has generally functioned to describe issues of identity and difference within this within U.S. Latina/o theological thought.[208]

First, Medina notes that the category of *mestizaje* gives U.S. Latina/o theologians a powerful lens through which to articulate and (re)claim their unique culture, identity, and religious expressions, including their experiences of marginalization and oppression. By articulating their experiences through the category of *mestizaje*, he suggests, U.S. Latina/o theologians are not only able to speak theologically about their own diverse cultures, identities, and religious traditions, but, more importantly, they are able to claim their legitimacy as part of God's people. Moreover, by taking as their starting point the way in which a particular people live out the Christian faith, conceptualize God, and interpret these religious experiences in light of their unique cultural traditions and ethnic identities, they are able to illustrate the way in which God's self-disclosure occurs not in abstract theological concepts, but rather in and through a people who are living out their faith in the struggle against inequality and injustice.[209]

Second, and not unrelated, Medina observes that the concept of *mestizaje* has given U.S. Latina/o theologians a powerful and subversive framework with which to resist the homogenizing practices and assimilation tendencies of the dominant culture. By marking the fusion of dissimilar groups, which vary according to the wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious traditions out of which they are comprised, he argues that

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[208] Medina, *Mestizaje : (re)mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina,* ix-xix. Medina's work also examines the tensions and contradictions inherent in the category of *mestizaje.* For example, he suggests that U.S. Latina/o theologians uncritically adopted and appropriated a reified understanding of *mestizaje* insofar as they virtually divorced it from the Latin American context, as well as its traditional hegemonic expressions.
[209] Ibid., 2-14.

the category of *mestizaje* foregrounds the plurality and diversity embodied by U.S. Latina/os, illustrating once again that they are in no way a monolithic group. More than this, he suggests, it models a new way of constructing diverse communities of belonging, alongside a new radical way of being. This new way of being and belonging, I suggest, bears strong resemblances to Gloria Anzaldúa's understanding of border culture and the new *mestiza* consciousness described in chapter 2 of this work. Let us now turn to the ways in which this concept has been used in Latina theology.

Throughout her work, Isasi-Díaz highlights the concept of *mestizaje-mulatez* as a *locus theologicus*. For her, *mestizaje*, which refers to the mixture of white people and native people in what is now Latin America and the Caribbean, and *mulatez,* which refers to the mixture of black African people and white people, signals the mixture of races, cultures, and heritages embodied by Latinas in the United States.[210] She writes, "Because we choose *mestizaje* and *mulatez* as our theological locus*,* we are saying that this is the structure in which we operate, from which we reach out to explain who we are and to contribute to how theology and religion are understood in the society in which we live."[211]

The racial-ethnic-cultural-historical-religious reality that comprises the Latino community in the U.S.A, she contends, is an important resource for theological thought for three distinct reasons. First, it functions as an ethical category that challenges the

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[210] In her later work, Isasi-Diaz began to expand this concept from the mixture of Amerindian and African blood with European blood (as presented in her 1996 work *Mujerista Theology*) to include the contemporary mixtures of people from Latina American and the Caribbean among themselves and with people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds in the United States. SeeIsasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues : Mujerista Theology,* 70.

[211] Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology : A Theology for the Twenty-first Century,* 66.

racism and ethnic prejudice prevalent in the dominant culture and theological tradition. Second, it validates and recovers the cultural and historical ancestry of Latina/os, including their contributions to the Christian tradition. Third, she contends that this category offers a new understanding of pluralism and relationality that embraces diversity and difference as an asset to be celebrated rather than an obstacle to be overcome.[212] It is in this third area, I suggest, that Isasi-Díaz's understanding of *mestizaje-multatez* expands the current discourse on the subject and offers significant contributions to discussions of theological anthropology.

For Isasi-Díaz, this is a non-essentialist emphasis on difference calls humanity to establish an ethics of rationality. She writes:

> In *mujerista* theology difference, then, means not otherness or exclusive opposition but specificity and heterogeneity. Difference is understood as relational rather than as a matter of substantive categories and attributes. Difference is not then a description of categories, descriptions set one against the other across a barbed wire fence. Rather difference points to the specificity of each description and seeks ways to relate those different descriptions, different because they come from people with dissimilar life-experiences.[213]

Underlying this understanding of relationality, is her emphasis on fluidity and the multiple, shifting subject positions of U.S. Latinas, which she describes as a "a fluid social ontology that is one of the constructive elements of *mestiaje-mulatez*."[214] Here, difference is associated with unifying relationships rather than opposing distinctions.[215] As Michelle González notes, at the heart of this vision is Isasi-Díaz's awareness that the dominant, static, and oppositional categories of identity that have been imposed do not

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[212] Ibid., 66.
[213] Ibid., 81.
[214] See Gonzalez footnote 72 who we are.
[215] Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues : Mujerista Theology,* 78.

match up to the realities or lived experiences of U.S. Latina in either the church or society.[216]

The category of *Nepantla* in U.S. Latina Theologies

A second category in U.S. Latina theology that speaks to multiplicity and hybridity is *nepantla.* The term "*nepantla*" is derived from the Náhuatl language of Mesoamerica. Literally, it means "in the middle," but rather than recounting a location, it more accurately describes a mutual or reciprocal relation. According to Orlando Espín, its best English equivalent can be translated as "there where we are both and," or "there where abundant dialogue occurs."[217] As theologians Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella observe:

> People who live in-between, in nepantla, find themselves moving between these variously fashioned elements in a cultural or religious world whose identity is characterized precisely by its lack of holism. That is nepantla describes a world composed of differences that are not forced into coherence but rather remain on discrete planes….It is a "borderlands" world where meanings, perspectives, and cosmologies, either in their entirety or in parts that have survived, collide; the primary characteristic of this new worldview is to be found precisely in the colliding.[218]

This term is brought to life in the writings of Latina women, who live in the geographical and metaphorical border culture of *La Frontera*, strategically claiming and exercising their own multiple, hybrid, and shifting interstitial existence. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa, writes "To live in the Borderlands means to/ put *chile* in the borscht,/ eat whole wheat *tortillas*,/ speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;/ be stopped by *la*

[216] Gonzalez, Keepingit real, 29
[217] Espin, "Immigration, Territory and Globalization: Theological Reflections," 56.
[218]Riebe-Estrella and Matovina, "Introduction," 11.

migra at the border checkpoints."[219] Pat Mora's poem, *Legal Alien,* illustrates a similar sentiment. Describing the difficulty of living in the interstices, she writes, "Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural/ American but hyphenated,/ viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic/ perhaps inferior, definitely different,/ viewed by Mexicans as alien, / (their eyes say, "You may speak /Spanish but you're not like me")/ an American to Mexicans/ a Mexican to Americans."[220] For these women, identity is best understood not as an arbitrary or fixed set of traits, but rather a complex, and often times painful, ontology that emerges from racial, ideological, psychic and cultural borders.

The concept *nepantla* is featured prominently in the religious reflections of church historian, Daisy Machado. Drawing on Texas writer Pat Mora's description of *nepantlah* as the "place in the middle," Machado observes that the geographical and metaphorical borderlands are the conceptual space in which U.S. Latinas live, struggle, love, fight, and strive to name and discover their self-identity in the face of a national historic imaginary that has constituted them as eternal outsiders or rendered them invisible through homogenizing national histories.[221] Like the new mestizo consciousness, *nepantla* speaks to the in-between-ness experienced by Latino/as, emphasizing the fluidity and plurality of Latino/a identity as a site of both struggle and transformation within the context of their daily lives.

For Machado Latina/os have historically occupied the nation's "third space," the paradox between belonging yet not really belonging. Consequently, they have learned to negotiate and interpret daily life on both sides of the border—life in the dominant culture

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[219] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 216.
[220] Mora and Anzaldúa, "Legal Alien," 376.
[221] Machado, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands: The Church and Manifest Destiny," 63.

and life in the Latino community.[222] Yet, inspired by Chicano historian Emma Pérez discussion of the third-space, Machado also notes that it is a place of possibilities for where, "the uncovered can be discovered, suppressed can be claimed, and where the devalued can be celebrated."[223] Rather than letting themselves be defined, imagined and made invisible by the dominant culture, she calls U.S. Latina's to reimagine their past and their future in a way that is truly inclusive and representative. Regarding this goal, she asserts, "And it is to be hoped that with each passing year we will become less invisible so that our stories will begin to fill in the gaps of a national religious history that will remain incomplete until *all* the stories have been acknowledged and included."[224]

From a Latina perspective, then, the question of what it means to be human has been answered with the concepts of *mestizaje-mulatez* and *nepatnlh*, which signals the multiplicity, relationality, hybridity, fluidity, and the in-between-ness that constitute the everyday lives of U.S. Latinas. As Michelle González notes, categories such as *mestizaje-mulatez* are not merely academic construction, but are intimately intertwined with the lived experiences of people.[225] Locating themselves partially outside and partially inside the Euro-North-American frame of reference, U.S. Latinas have used the complexities of their identities to challenge partial, provincial, and one-sided scholarship by claiming their own radical subjectivity and refusing to submit to the assimilationist tendencies of the dominant culture.

Many Latina feminist theologians, including, but not limited to, Michelle González, Teresa Delgado, Jeanette Rodríguez, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, María Pilar

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[222] Machado, "Voices From *Nepantlah:* Latinas in U.S. Religious History," 97.
[223] Ibid., 97.
[224] Ibid., 106.
[225] Gonzalez, "Who We Are: A Latino/a Constructive Anthropology," 71-73.

Aquino, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Daisy Machado, apply this framework to theological studies, articulating their own plural and liberative ways of experiencing God, of writing theology, and of living their faith. They maintain that it is precisely as Latinas that they have something to contribute to theological conversations that work toward the flourishing of all people and the creation of a better, more just world. An anthropological themes that emerges from the context of Latinas, offer exciting and fruitful implications for theological thought.

Theological Constructions From *Nepantla*: U.S. Latina Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe

In this section, I wish to briefly explain the ways in which the categories of hybridity, *mestizaje*, and border crossing are present within Mexican-American women's popular devotion to Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.[226] How do they understand Guadalupe's *mestizaje* and border-crossing capacity? The answers to these questions, I suggest, not only point us toward the ways in which this devotion transcends the monocultural and patriarchal trappings of the Euro-American tradition, but they also represent a faithful interpretation of the symbol and a grace-filled understanding of the multi-voiced subjectivity of women. This sets the stage for a similar Christological interpretation in chapter 4 of this work.

[226] To be sure, Guadalupe has also been use to silence women and to legitimize their subordination, especially when she is set up in a dichotomous relationship with Malinche, who has been used in the Mexican/Chicano cultural tradition to represent women as subversive and evil. For more on this, see Pineda-Madrid, ""Holy Guadalupe…Shameful Malinche?" Excavating the Problem of 'Female Dualism,' Doing Theological Spade Work."

Mexican American women's devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is pointed and expansive. On the one hand, it signals their daily struggles, which include racial prejudices, poverty, and sexism as well as their invocation of an ever-present consoler, who is sympathetic to their suffering and brings peace, hope, and comfort. On the other hand, their devotion also alludes to their need to engage in religious practices and speak a religious language that emerges from their own lives and experiences of humanity and God, as opposed to a language, history, and practice that others have written for them.

For many Latinas, the Virgin of Guadalupe is the most common religious figure typically invoked when scholars or lay people speak about crossing borders and *mestizaje.* Understood as the religious, political and cultural symbol for the Chicano/Mexicanos, Guadalupe is the synthesis of the old world and the new world.[227] Virgilio Elizondo recalls the pivotal moment in his young life when a *mestizo* priest, Father Aguilera, explained to him that it "in and through [Guadalupe] that the Iberian soul had united with the ancient Mexican soul to give rise to the *mestizo* soul of Mexico."[228] As with many Latina/os, the *mestizaje* of Guadalupe spoke to his own lived experiences and his journey.

Because the symbol of Guadalupe is often understood in contrast to the Catholicism of the Europeans both past and present, she continues to be a popular religious and cultural figure among Mexican Americans and Latina/os. As cultural geographer Patricia Price observes:

> Beloved particulary by poor *mexicanos*, [Guadalupe] is called La Morenita, the brown-skinned Virgin, 'Little Darkling.' On banners and

[227] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 52.
[228] Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders: Mestizaje and the Future of Humanity," 178-179.

> baseball caps, wrapped inside tortillas and tilmas of rough-woven cactus cloth, stamped on Los Angeles phone cards and burnished into the bumpers of cars with Texas license plates, the Virgin of Guadalupe has long moved across borders, held close to the bodies and soles of the *mexicanos* on both sides of the line. [229]

This mobility not only establishes *la Virgen de Guadalupe* as a symbol of ethnic identity, but, as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, it also confirms her tolerance of and appreciation for "[the] ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos*, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess."[230]

Theologically speaking, it is Guadalupe's broadest border crossing function—as an intercessor between the believer and God—that she begins to bring the sacred and the laity together. Known as the "Mother of the Americas" and the "Mother of Border Crossers," she is most often the central figure on the home altars of Mexican American women. Here, *La Morenita*, champion of the excluded and oppressed, adeptly spans the chasm between heaven and earth, crossing not only geopolitical, racial, and economic lines, but spiritual boundaries as well. Kay Turner describes this border crossing function as a "medial propensity," which enables a relationship between two seemingly structurally opposed domains. In this sense, Guadalupe not only facilitates (inter)relationship amongst distinct realms (e.g., ethnic boundaries, geographical borders, spiritual realms, and the boundaries between traditional and popular religious practices), but in so doing, she contests fixed notions of identity and belonging, suggesting that it is through movement rather than stasis that meaning is created and recreated.[231] As a result, *Guadalupana* has been adopted by U.S. Latinas as both a traditional symbol of liberation

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[229] Price, *Dry Place,* 123-124.
[230] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 52.
231Turner, " Mexican American Home Altars: Towards Their Interpretation," 322-323.

and an untraditional catalyst, which together validate their continued search for meaning and identity in their homes, churches, and societies.[232]

These powerful understandings of Guadalupe present in the popular devotions of Mexican American women raise an important question: how might the U.S. Latina sense of identity as multidimensional, transversal, and hybridized reshape contemporary Christological constructions? Aside from Virgilio Elizondo's conception of the *mestizo Jesus*, which will be examined below, there are very few christological construals that are written *from* and *for* the in-between, which emphasize the promise of hybridity and multiplicity for contemporary Christology.

Isasi-Díaz outlines a *mujerista* christological understanding in her article "*Identificate con Nosotras,*" which is found in the edited volume *Jesus in the Hispanic Community.* For her, a *mujerista* Christology revolves around three elements that emerge from the daily praxis of Latinas in the United Sates. First, the desire for intimate personal relationships to sustain Latinas in their everyday struggles for the fullness of life, which she recognizes in the category of *la familia de dios*, the Kin-dom of God. Second, the hunger for God to be a companion in the struggles of Latinas, which she finds embodied in the understanding of Jesus Christ as faithful companion (*Jesucristo me acompaña siempre*). And, third, the personal relationship with the divine—*Jesús Mío*—that one experiences when she becomes part of God's family.[233] While her constructive Christology is written from a *mujerista* perspective and illuminates a Christ who is concerned for the most valuable in society, who empowers critical reflection on

[232] For a more detailed account of Guadalupe's role in the daily life of Mexican American women, see Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe : Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican-American Women.*
[233] Isasi-Días, *"Identificate Con Nosotras:* A *Mujerista* Christological Understanding."

oppressive structures, and who illumines a commitment to a more just society, she does not directly connect her Christology with the *mestizo-mulatez* identity outlined in her systematic theology.

In the same edited volume, Zaida Maldonado Pérez offers cursory explorations of various titles applied to the person and work of Christ from a U.S. Latina evangelical/Pentecostal perspective in her article "Exploring Latino/a Titles for Christ." One of the titles that she briefly explores is "*El Jesucristo Mulato* and the *Mulato* Body of Christ." She notes that to speak of a *mulato* Christ illuminates the way in which the scandal of difference is divinely ordained. She writes, "And, if divinely ordained, then this 'mulatto' body whose head is the Christ ought to become a critical part of our self-understanding and self-identity." Pérez's explanation, although limited only to a few short paragraphs, holds much potential for future conversations, if expanded further. [234]

As Michelle González states in her entry on "Jesus" in the *Handbook of Latina/o Theologies,* "While the centrality of the crucified Christ in the faith and religious practices of Latino/a communities is clear, the centrality of Christology within Latino/a theology is not."[235] Yet, because Christology is understood as the center of Christian identity, and because I believe U.S. Latina theologies offer us a rich theological framework for understanding the fluidity and hybridity of identity categories, I believe that a Christology written from and for the interstices—the crossroads of *la frontera*—could have important implications for theological conversations. To situate these implications, we need to examine the emergence of the *mestizo* Jesus in the work of Virgilio Elizondo.

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[234] Pérez, "Exploring Latino/a Titles for Christ," 124.
[235] González, "Jesus," 22-23.

Elizondo's *Mestizo* Jesus

Virgilio Elizondo has been described as one of the forefather of U.S. Latino/Hispanic liberation theology. The vast majority of his work centers on the theological significance of *mestizaje*, and his work has illuminated the contributions of the context of the Mexican American experience for Christian theological thought. One of Elizondo's most recognized contributions to theology is his reflection on the historical Jesus as a first-century, Galilean Jewish *mestizo*, which, he argues, has liberating significance for the marginalized around the word and, in particular, the Mexican Americans.[236]

A cursory look at Elizondo's biography is helpful in understanding his commitment to the plight of all *mestizo* Christians. The son of Mexican immigrants, Elizondo grew up in San Antonio, Texas, on what he describes as the Mexican side of the dividing line between Mexican San Antonio and Anglo San Antonio—a line that has since dissolved. The section of the city in which he lived, he observes, could easily have been mistaken for Mexico. He writes: "Our language, our customs, our humor, our religious expressions, our foods, our body language—everything was Mexico, U.S.A.!"[237] Yet, at the same time, he also notes that this larger community of migrants never thought of themselves as migrants, per se, to the extent that they felt that they were at home in a land illegitimately taken by North Americans.[238]

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[236] See Elizondo, *Galilean Journey : The Mexican-American Promise.* and Elizondo, *A God of Incredible Surprises : Jesus of Galilee.*
[237] Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders: Mestizaje and the Future of Humanity," 177.
[238] Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo : Life Where Cultures Meet,* 3-4.

Over the course of his lifetime, Elizondo would eventually have many border crossing experiences—geographical and metaphorical alike. From his attendance in what he describes as English-speaking and Anglo schools (a shock to his system after growing up on the Mexican side of San Antonio), to his college career and early priesthood, many of Elizondo's writings describe the ways in which these experiences caused him to feel torn between his identities as Mexican and/or U.S. American. He writes:

> It seemed like the separation between the United States and Mexico reached to the very depths of our individual and collective soul. The separation seemed irreparable… It seemed that no matter where we were, Mexico or the United States, we had to be constantly apologizing for who we were—too "Gringo" for the Mexicans and too Mexican for the "Americans."…All this produced a certain type of shame in being who we were, for we had no place we could really call home, where we could really be ourselves. The only being we knew was our non-being and the only place we had was "in-between" Mexico and the United States.[239]

It was this quest for identity and belonging that not only brought about his categorization of *mestiza* as essential to the doctrine of theological anthropology, but it also shaped his understanding of the border as central to Christology as well.

Elizondo points out that Christianity, from its inception, has been about crossing ostensibly impenetrable borders. He observes, "The eternal Christ, the Word of God, crossed the border between the eternal and the temporal, between the divine and the human to become Jesus of Nazareth."[240] According to Elizondo, however, it is Jesus' Galilean identity that is particularly important to interpreting and understanding Jesus liberating and salvific roles today.

Like all persons, Elizondo insists that Jesus was culturally situated and conditioned by the time and place in which he lived. If this is the case, Elizondo notes,

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[239] Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders: Mestizaje and the Future of Humanity," 178.
[240] Ibid., 180.

Jesus cannot simply be understood as Jew; rather, he must be understood as a *Galilean* Jew. Galilee was the region in which Jesus grew up and also the place where the greatest parts of his public ministry took place.

For Elizondo, then, the significance of Jesus' Galilean identity stems from the historical and cultural context of Galilee during biblical times. In short, Elizondo suggests, Galilee was a border region between Greeks and Jews of Judea and an international crossroads for caravan routes to and from Egypt. Thus, he contends that it was a land of great mixture and *mestizaje* between the Jews and their gentile neighbors. As an example of this mixture, he cites the linguistic heritage of the Galilean Jews, who, he claims, "most likely mixed their language quite readily with the Greek of the dominant culture and the Latin of the Roman Empire."[241]

For this reason, Elizondo asserts that Jesus' identity as a first-century Galilean Jew was one of *mestizaje*. He writes, "Culturally and linguistically speaking, Jesus was a *mestizo*. And we dare say to those of his time, he must have even appeared to be a biological *mestizo*—the child of a Jewish girl and a Roman father."[242] Yet, Elizondo also contends that this biological and cultural *mestizaje* would have been a source of anguish for the Son of God. Because Galilee was an outer region far from the center of power and belonging (*i.e.*, Jerusalem), and because Galilean Jews experienced double oppression insofar as they were rejected by both the Gentiles (who despised the Jews) and the Jerusalem Jews (who would found them to be ignorant of the temple laws and contaminated by their contact with pagans), Elizondo maintains that Jesus would have

[241] Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo : Life Where Cultures Meet,* 76-77.
[242] Ibid., 79.

experienced the marginalization, ambiguity, and oppression often associated with border existence.[243]

In Elizondo's construal of the *mestizo* Jesus, however, Jesus' marginalization unfolds as the central Christological principle. Throughout his work, Elizondo emphasizes that in the incarnation God does not just become human, but rather God chooses to become human in a body that would have undoubtedly experienced the suffering, rejection, and marginalization of border existence.[244] He states, "And the very geographical-historical place where [the incarnation] took place was in Galilee, a crossroads of the peoples of the world, a place whose people were considered impure and inferior precisely because here the boundaries of identity and belonging were constantly crossed if for no other reason than basic human survival."[245]

For Elizondo, God's choice to become human among the marginalized and rejected of the world is important for two distinct reasons. First, it implies that Jesus would have known firsthand what it is like to experience the suffering and oppression that stems from cultural rejection. Second, it insinuates that what is inferior to the world is central to God, as well as the starting point of God's presence on earth. Thus, the *mestizo* reality of the borderlands takes on a sacramental nature.

Not surprisingly, Elizondo asserts that Jesus' first-century *mestizo* identity closely resembles the cultural reality of the Mexican Southwest of the United States. In his description of Elizondo's notion of the border as *locus theologicus*, Roberto Goizueta notes that, "For him, the border is not only a place *in which* he is located, or *from which*

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[243] Elizondo, *Galilean Journey : The Mexican-American Promise,* 50-54.
[244] Ibid., 50-54.
[245] Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders: Mestizaje and the Future of Humanity," 180.

he comes; the border is *who* he is as a *mestizo*, a person—like all Latino/as, whose very identity and reality is 'in between.'"[246] By linking the experience of Mexican Americans with the Galilean identity of Jesus, Elizondo not only insinuates that Mexican Americans can relate to Jesus' borderland existence (and vice versa), but he also asserts that God is in their midst. In sharing their border experience, Jesus does so not as the dominant ruling class of society, but as one who lived among the multiply oppressed, the in-between. In this sense, Elizondo's Jesus is both a liberator and the creator of a new humanity. He frees all persons from the destructiveness of social structures and brings life out of death. But more than this, he explodes carnal and spiritual borders and, in so doing, exemplifies the transgressive consciousness of the *mestizo*. Elizondo writes, "As a Mexican American Christian, I am convinced that the full potential of *mestizaje* will be actualized only in and through the way of the Lord that brings order out of chaos and new life out of death. It is in his way that the liberating role of our human *mestizaje* way finds its ultimate identity, meaning, direction, and challenge."[247]

To be clear, Elizondo's work remains controversial in some circles for his romanticization and broad generalizations of the Jesus' Galilean identity. [248] Nevertheless, his articulation of the *mestizo* Jesus has enabled him to claim his place in the reformulation of Christology in the U.S. Latino/a community, in particular, and the

[246] Goizueta, "A Christology for a Global Church," 151.
[247] Elizondo, "Elements for a Mexican American *Mestizo* Christology," 6.
[248] In his discussion of Elizondo's work, Benjamín Valentín sympathetically points out the ways in which current literary, archeological, and historical evidence virtually debunk Elizondo's claim's regarding cultural hybridity in Jesus' Galilee. Yet, Michael Lee responds to many of these critiques in his article, "The Galilean Jesus as Faithful Dissenter: Latino/a Christology and the Dynamics of Exclusion." See Valentin, "Who Do We Say He Was and Is? Jesus and Christology Among Latino/a Theologians." and Lee, "The Galilean Jesus As Faithful Dissenter: Latino/a Christology and the Dynamics of Exclusion."

formation of North American theological identity, in general. As Michael Lee points out, a significant insight in Elizondo's work can be found in his articulation of the logic of exclusion found in religious legitimations and the subsequent need for the Galilean Jesus's ministry in the present-day Galilees.[249]

My own appreciation of Elizondo's *mestizo* Jesus can be found in two interrelated themes present in his work. The first area is his deep-seated connection between the Jesus event and the marginalization, suffering, and struggle for liberation of those persons (i.e., the *mestizo*) whose dual identity does not allow them to fit into a singular set of norms traditionally used to identify a person and their history. The second theme is the overarching suggestion that theological thought, including Christology, must take into consideration the category of human experience, including cultural self-identity and the plural character of social reality. Like many of the feminist Christologies that I will outline in the next chapter, though, I believe that his over-emphasis on the historical life and Jesus and his ministry causes his Christology to remain at an impasse, lodged within an economy of imitation.

Conclusion

The theologies of U.S. Latinas are often marginalized in the dominant Western theological tradition. These dominant traditions reinforce the idea that objective inquiry and universal truth can only be achieved only by creating frames of thinking which are removed from historical situatedness, human subjectivity, and cultural values. However,

[249] Ibid.

for many, the U.S. Latina practices of faith seeking understanding, which take into consideration the beliefs, practices, experiences, cultural values, and historical situatedness of U.S. Latinas, offer new openings through which to see the active presence of God in our midst.

For U.S. Latinas, *lo cotidiano* is where their many worlds collide, where the injustices of systems of oppression and domination occur, and the space in which people struggle against discrimination for the fullness of their humanity. As Isasi-Díaz notes, "For Latinas in the USA to struggle is to live, *la vida es la lucha."*[250] Yet, the everyday also becomes a place for doing theology—a place where they come to know the world and God through their own unique context.

Likewise, Kwok Pui Lan points out that the theological frameworks for discussing the radical subjectivity of women developed within U.S. Latina theologies are noteworthy, particularly in their fundamental recognition of the multiplicity and hybridity of identity categories. Not surprisingly, U.S. Latinas have almost unilaterally applied this framework, alongside the foundational categories of *mestizaje-mulatez* and *nepantlah,* to discussions of theological anthropology and in the interpretation of Mexican American women's popular devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. As a result, they have left the theological category for thinking about the person, presence and purpose of Jesus ripe for exploration. The primary exception to this is Latino theologian, Virgilio Elizondo, who discusses the *mestizo* identity of the Galilean Jesus and his ministry.

In the next chapter, I will illustrate the way in which a multiple and hybrid understanding of identity might reshape feminist Christological constructions. I suggest

[250] Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology : A Theology for the Twenty-first Century,* 82.

that a Christology conceived from lived experiences of the crossroads, as articulated in the writings of U.S. Latina theologians, offers a powerful way in which to recognizes and honor the multi-voiced subjectivities that comprise human and Christian identities. By placing the writings of Latina theologians in conversation with the work of George Lindbeck, I attempt to illustrate the liberative possibilities of shifting the theological task from border protection to border crossing.

CHAPTER IV

FEMINST CHRISTOLOGIES BEYOND IMPASSE: PERFORMING CHRIST FROM ROME TO THE BORDERLANDS

Introduction

Several years ago, I received a framed cartoon from a friend. At first glance, the image resembled a traditional nativity scene: images in the likeness of Mary, Joseph, and the Three Wise Men were gathered around the manger admiring the baby Jesus. Yet, unlike traditional portrayals of the nativity narrative, this one featured a speech bubble over the head of one of the Magi, who, looking directly at the viewer, mischievously proclaimed: "It's a girl!" Though the purpose of the cartoon was to invoke humor, the Magi's provocative proclamation packs a powerful theological punch. By declaring the infant Jesus to be a girl, the artist playfully disrupts the viewer's proclivity to see the Christ-child as male.

In the late 1970s, two sculptures of female Christs were created in North America which would also overturn the traditional symbol of the male Christ-form. Edwina Sandys fashioned a four-foot bronze statue of a female Christ entitled *Christa* in 1975 for the United Nation's Decade for Women (1976-1985). Four years later, Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey's *Crucified Woman* was created in honor of the International Year of the Woman. Each of these sculptures, whether consciously or subconsciously, challenged the dominant orthodoxies ingrained within the typically male symbol.

Sandy's *Christa* is considered to be the first female representation of the crucified Christ. Complete with a crown of thorns, *Christa* hangs in the traditional cruciform pose,

revealing the sinewy, slumped body of a naked woman with long hair, breasts and rounded hips. *Christa* calls to mind the oppression of and violence against women, through the graphic imagery of female sacrifice and suffering.

Although the sculpture received little opposition when it was first displayed at various art shows and galleries, it became the subject of much controversy during its 1984 exhibition at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John Divine in New York City during Holy Week. A brief write-up of the controversy in *Time* magazine, "Vexing Christa," reported the troubled responses of several viewers, including then suffragan bishop for the Episcopal Diocese of New York, Walter Dennis. According to the magazine, Dennis called the statue and its placement in the Cathedral "a desecration of Christian symbols." Another viewer, Beverly Stewart, allegedly remarked: "It's disgraceful. God and Christ are male. They're playing with a symbol we have believed in for all our lives."[251] Later that same week, the *New York Times* reported yet another controversial statement made by suffragan bishop Dennis. In this instance, Dennis allegedly declared that, while he did not object to seeing Jesus cast in different skin colors, he believed that by changing the sex of Jesus Sandy's sculpture went to far, "totally changing the symbol."[252]

In 1979, German-born Canadian sculptor Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey created a bronze sculptured titled *Crucified Woman*. This bronze sculpture portrays an elongated, naked, female figure in a cruciform pose, yet the cross and the nails are absent. Similar to Sandy's sculpture, the *Crucified Woman* was put on display at the Bloor Street United Church in Toronto as a focus for the Passiontide services and Easter, and, as a result, it was also heavily politicized. In this case of *The Crucified Woman*, the controversy had as

[251] "Vexing Christa," 94.
[252] Briggs, "Cathedral Removing Statue of Crucified Woman."

much to do with both the nudity of the figure as it did the portrayal of Jesus as a woman.[253] Yet, one senses that these two criticisms are deeply related, as traditional male depictions of the crucifix do not receive the same level of scrutiny.

Interestingly, Mark Jordan's chapter "God's Body," found in the edited volume *Queer Theology,* offers a unique "thought experiment" on the uneasy feelings that emerge even from nude male depictions of Jesus. Jordan begins by asking why the Christian tradition insists on covering up Jesus' naked body in various images, while at the same time considering discussions about Jesus' genitals to be unspeakable and reason for rebuke. For Jordan, this "cover-up" is puzzling. On one hand, he notes, the Christian tradition has virtually insisted on Jesus' male sex, using it to justify certain theological conclusions, which in some cases operate to exclude women from ministry. Yet, at the same time, he points out that the Christian tradition has considered discussions around Jesus' male sex organs to be alarming, outrageous, and unutterable.

A layer of complexity is added to this paradox when one looks at various images of the crucifix which often contain extremely graphic and detailed images of Jesus' crucified body in some areas, but insist on covering up his genitals with a loin cloth, as if what is hidden underneath were worse than the image of the tortured body that is presented on the cross. Jordan also notes that, if lifted, the loin cloth often reveals nothing underneath but a smooth-skinned androgynous area similar to old mannequins.

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[253] Elliot, "Crucified Woman." In 1986 Luthkenhaus-Lackey's sculpture was placed on the grounds of Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto. It would eventually become the subject of a book, *Crucified Woman*, which elicits various responses to the presence of this sculpture on campus as a way into theological reflections on Protestantism and art, the female body, and the needless suffering of women. SeeDyke, *Crucified Woman.*

Regarding this irony of paradox, Jordan observes, "God let Jesus hang naked on the cross; our crucifixes cannot. Indeed, and with few exceptions, Catholic art has refused to allow any hint of a penis underneath Jesus' loincloth. The loincloth must cover a vacuum."[254] After much discussion, Jordan concludes that the loincloth has functioned to cover our own associations between sexuality, sex, shame and the divine. The remedy for this, he suggests, is meditating on those shames before a sexed savior, who teaches us that the only way into a full understanding of *agape* is through *eros*.[255] Jordan's thought experiment is helpful in the context of this chapter, because it brings to the fore the hypocritical tension in the church's simultaneous insistence that Jesus was marked as male from birth and its absolute refusal to think about Jesus' sex in an embodied way. The result, one might argue, is a disembodied Jesus, who is therefore neither fully divine nor fully human.

In addition to *Christa* and *Crucified Woman*, James M. Murphy, a psychotherapist and former professor at Union Theological Seminary, created another sculpture of the female Christ that was placed on exhibit during Holy Week of 1984 in the Seminary. His work, titled *Christine on the Cross,* offers a more transgressive image than those of Sandys and Lutkenhaus-Lackey's. In Murphy's sculpture, the cross is inverted, and the woman's arms are nailed together on the vertical beam above her head. Her legs, in stark contrast, are nailed wide open on the horizontal beam. Murphy describes his piece as an expression of the violence and hostility toward woman. Describing the way in which this sculpture emerged from his own spiritual reflections, he writes:

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[254] Jordan, "God's Body," 284.
[255] Ibid., 290.

> Last Easter my sketch in soft clay took the shape of a woman. I realized thereby that the worlds' rejection and hatred of women culminates in crucifying the female Christ…I thought the crucifixion of a woman would be accurately expressed by spreading her legs, not her arms, on a lowered crossbar. Such a posture symbolizes hostility toward woman with the implications of submission, sexual humiliation and rape. [256]

Similarly, in an article not linked explicitly to the sculpture, Murphy expresses his conviction that one's imagery of Christ should not be limited to maleness. For him, understanding Christ as a "daughter of God" fulfills a woman's creation in the image and likeness of God. This, in turn, enables her sexuality and spirituality to be tied equally to the essence of what it means to be created by God as male and female. Murphy asserts that how we perceive the sex and gender of God and Christ not only affects our faith and worship of God but also the way in which we understand ourselves and our relationships to others, particularly persons of the opposite sex in our communities of faith. [257]

Perhaps one of the most provocative images of a female Jesus is Renée Cox's photograph, *Yo Mama's Last Supper.* This photograph is part of a larger collection of work created by Cox called "Flipping the Script." This collection of photographs re-presents well-known Renaissance art, such as Michelangelo's *David*, using black models as subjects and often placing them in modern-day settings. *Yo Mama's Last Supper* is a fifteen-foot wide, five-panel photograph that portrays the Last Supper in the style of Leonardo Da Vinci. In Cox's picture, however, Jesus is a naked black woman facing forward and standing with her arms open, a self-portrait of the artist. All of the disciples in the picture are black men, with the exception of Judas, who is, not surprisingly, portrayed as white.

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[256] Crawford, "A Female Crucifix?" 27.
[257] Murphy, "Sex and Gender of God, Christ, and Humankind," 37.

This stunning symbolism in this portrait celebrates black womanhood, while simultaneously criticizing a society that the artist points out is plagued with the sins of white supremacy and sexism.[258]

When Cox's photograph was first displayed at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, it was in a 2001 exhibition called "Committed to the Image." Then mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, denounced Cox's picture to the media, describing it as "disgusting," "outrageous," and "anti-Catholic."[259] Furthermore, his public objection of the museum's use of taxpayer's money to fund this exhibit ignited a fiery debate and encouraged other religious organizations to respond in a similar fashion. For example, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights sent an open letter of protest to the museum, and Rabbi Yehuda Levin (an orthodox Jew and former co-chairman of Pat Buchanan's presidential bid) said in an interview with a newspaper: "The exhibit is part of a pattern of attacks on Orthodox religion by atheist and nihilist members of the 'arts' community."[260]

For Jamaican-born former fashion photographer Renée Cox, this work is neither anti-Catholic nor a nihilistic attack on orthodox religion. Instead, she insists, her work is a multi-layered critique, which protests both the church's treatment of women and the absence of African Americans in Christian symbolism and Renaissance art. Moreover, according to Cox, this photograph expresses one of the Bible's most basic teachings—namely, that we are all created in God's likeness.[261]

By portraying Jesus as female, each of the five images described above subverts both the viewer's expectation of seeing the traditional male symbol and what Jesus'

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[258] "Art Offends New York Mayor--Again."
[259] Croft, "Using Her Body: Interview with Renee Cox."
[260] "Art Offends New York Mayor--Again."
[261] Croft, "Using Her Body: Interview with Renee Cox."

maleness has stood for in the church and society. Julie Clague's article "Divine Transgressions: The Female Christ-form in Art" explains that the cognitive dissonance created by glimpsing at a female figure on a cross causes a "frisson of experience" and a "conflict of difference" for the observer. Because the traditional symbol is strained by the suggestion of femaleness where there was once maleness, she notes that a sort of religious turbulence necessarily ensues. This turbulence, in turn, forces the viewer to immediately question whether the artist's intention was insult, parody, blasphemy, or possibly even reverence.[262]

Overtly negative responses to non-traditional images of Jesus are not uncommon. However, when the boundary of Christ's gender and sexuality is crossed, these reactions tend to become extremely heightened. Clague writes, "The scandal of particularity appears to be at its most scandalous in relation to the gender of Jesus, whereas his social status, his ethnic and even his religious identities are to be considered rather more incidental."[263] Yet, why is this the case? What makes cultural imagery depicting the female gender and sexuality of Jesus (as opposed to his maleness) so scandalous, causing it to be described as "disgraceful," "blasphemous," and "obscene?"

The answers to these questions, I suggest, arise from the degree to which androcentric theological discussions have emphasized and identified Jesus' maleness as central to his person and saving work. In her work *Indecent Theology*, Marcella Althaus-Reid discusses these Christological "obscenities." She writes:

> "Historically, obscene Christs have appeared when people wanted to uncover the graceful pretenses of current Christologies. The Black Christ of Black Theology was obscene because it uncovered racism under the

[262] Clague, "Divine Transgressions: The Female Christ-form in Art," 56.
[263] Ibid., 57.

> guise of a white Jesus….The Christa is another example of obscenity. It undresses the masculinity of God and produces feelings and questions which were suppressed by centuries of identificatory masculine processes with God."[264]

Because these androcentric identificatory processes have served to marginalize the roles and experiences of women in the Church, the visual depictions of Jesus as female begin to expose the narrow-mindedness of Christological interpretations that focus exclusively on the *man*, Jesus Christ.[265] But are visual and theoretical Christological sex changes such as these powerful enough to challenge the negative situations of sexism in the church and contribute toward the flourishing of all persons?

This chapter explores the tension between feminist theology, which takes seriously the experiences of women and the flourishing of all persons, and androcentric interpretations of Christ in dominant theologies that have contributed to human indignities around the globe. Focusing on the marginal experiences of women in the church, I consider the ways in which faith in Jesus Christ has been troublesome for feminist theologians, especially Catholic feminist theologians, within the interrelated issues of incarnation, ordination, and salvation. In order to carve out a space for feminist belief in Christ, I challenge feminist thinkers to move beyond imitation Christologies

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[264] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics,* 111.

[265] Here, it is important to acknowledge that oppression of women is not symmetrical. As feminist thinkers have illustrated, a woman's identity is simultaneously constructed by the multiple categories of race, class, sexuality, age, nationality, physical ability, and so on. Because women are not a homogenous group, feminists are called to recognize the particular mixture of identities, as well as the multi-layered and disproportional experiences of oppression that it entails. For further reading on "intersectionality," see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender and Nationality,* eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003) pp. 175-200.

toward more performative ones, as proposed in the work of Karen Trimble Alliaume. Finally, I offer an example of a performative Christology, which emerges from the everyday lives and struggles of U.S. Latina women. This lived Christology, I contend, not only challenges the dominant theological discourses present within the doctrine of Christology, but it also reveals Christ with us in and through the multi-voiced subjectivities of U.S. Latina women, who inhabit the geographical and metaphorical borderlands.

Traditional Feminist Christology

The Male Problem

Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). This question remains at the heart of Christological discussions today. From Peter's pre-Easter confession—"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16), to the early Church Fathers' understanding of Christ's death as a ransom paid for the debt of human sin, to Mercy Amba Oduyoye's recent imagery of Christ as an African midwife who brings life out of death, there have been myriad answers to Jesus' query. The multiple and oftentimes conflicting responses illustrate the various political, historical, and cultural contexts that have shaped Christological thought in particular and theological thought in general. Further, this ambiguity points toward experiences of God, who, although became flesh, nevertheless remains absolute mystery.

The encounter of God in and through Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, resurrected, and professed as the Christ, is central to feminist Christology. As early

feminist theologians sought to understand the marginalization of women in church practice and theological reflection, they realized that distorted understandings of Jesus Christ played a pivotal role in their exclusion. They claimed that sexist readings of the narratives, symbols, and doctrines of Jesus skewed the liberating Gospel message for women and were complicit in determining their marginal status in both the church and society.

For example, feminist theologian and historian Sheila Briggs notes that male-dominated Christological interpretations can be discovered throughout church history, even when issues of gender are seemingly not at stake. In her article "A History of Our Own: What Would a Feminist History of Theology Look Like?" Briggs uses a feminist interpretive strategy to uncover the way in which gender is at play even in the history of doctrinal texts where women have been notably absent. Applying this hermeneutic to the doctrinal understanding of Christ that emerged from the Council of Chalcedon, Briggs points out the ways in which the gendered subject relates to the theological realm in both the formulation of doctrine and the legitimization of male ecclesial power. According to her analysis, the Church Fathers' definition of Christ's two natures seemingly reenacts the gender codes of masculinity (reason) and femininity (the senses), which in the end were fundamental to the patriarchal social order during late antiquity. On this, Briggs writes:

> Christ's humanity was pure masculinity, but in relation to his divinity it was a lesser nature and occupied the position of the feminine. The order of Christ's two natures was the prototype of proper order, anthropologically, socially, politically and ecclesiastically. In it the feminine was subordinated to the masculine as reason should rule the

> senses, men should rule women, the emperor should rule his subjects, and the clergy the laity.[266]

Briggs' interpretive strategy not only illumines the collective emphasis on Jesus's maleness in the fifth century, but it also illustrates the way in which the ensuing gender codes and hierarchical patterns of relation were embraced in the discursive practices of the patristic fathers.[267]

Womanist theologian Jacquelyn Grant also notes the ways in which the present-day androcentric readings of Jesus have led to the exclusion of women in both the church and society. For Grant, Jesus has remained historically imprisoned within the ideologies of those in power—namely, elite, white males. As a result, the white-skinned, blue-eyed Christ associated with the dominant culture has legitimated the social and political positions of those in power, while simultaneously contributing to the multiple oppression of those who are not. She writes:

> Jesus has been held captive to the sin of patriarchy (sexism), to the sin of white supremacy (racism), and to the sin of privilege (classism). As such, Jesus has been used to keep women in their proper place and blacks meek, mild, and docile in the face of brutal forms of dehumanization, and he has also been used to insure the servility of servants. African American women heard twice (and sometimes three times) the mandate "Be subject…, for it is sanctioned by Jesus and ordained by God…."[268]

Similar to Briggs' analysis, Grant illustrates the way in which the figure of Jesus has been considered to be the creator and founder of existing social and political hierarchies, in which the rich control the poor, masters command slaves, and men rule over women.

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[266] Briggs, Chopp and Davaney, "A History of Our Own: What Would a Feminist History of Theology Look Like?" 174.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Grant, ""Come to My Help, Lord, for I'm in Trouble":Womanist Jesus and the Mutual Struggle for Liberation," 66.

For Catholic feminist theologians, one of the greatest obstacles has been the long-standing ecclesial emphasis on the ontological maleness of Jesus. By associating maleness with divinity, the magisterium has increasingly relegated women to second-class citizenship and prevented them from understanding themselves as created in the image of God. As Elizabeth Johnson observes, the issue for feminist thinkers is *not* that Jesus was born a male, but rather the ways in which his maleness has been construed in the official language, theology, and practices of the Church.[269] At stake are three interrelated issues—incarnation, ordination, and salvation.

Incarnation

Christians understand the incarnation, or the Word made flesh, as the event that brings the world to salvation. It is the defining belief in the Christian faith, and for Catholic thinkers the incarnation is implicit to understanding the Catholic idea of sacramentality. In fact, John Henry Newman understood the incarnation to be *the* Catholic idea that sustains Catholic life and imagination. For him, the incarnation is not just a remedy or an antidote for sin, but rather it is the fulfillment of God's sanctifying, creative, and transformative work in the world, which ultimately joins creation and the divine, especially humanity and the divine. From here, the sacramental principle extends the Catholic imagination to encompass God's intimate and continued presence to humankind, which humans experience and respond to through the grace-filled ordinary and everyday life in the world.

[269] Johnson, "The Maleness of Christ," 307.

Yet, for many Christian feminist theologians, this extraordinary incarnational event is the scandal of the Gospel insofar as androcentric logic has consistently privileged the manner in which the divine embodiment occurred—namely in and through the male body of Jesus of Nazareth, the God-*man.* The pernicious effects of this androcentrism have been two-fold. First, because Jesus is confessed by Christians to be the revelation of God, the idea that God became man (rather than woman) is thought to point to maleness as an essential characteristic of divine being. Second, and not unrelated, because the male body of Jesus Christ has been interpreted as the favored site of God's revelation, maleness has been perceived as the standard for both humanity and divinity. According to Sandra Schneiders, "If any of these ideas are true, the incarnation can only be seen as an unmitigated disaster for women."[270]

Feminist histories of theology have shown that this androcentric line of reasoning can be traced back as far as the early Church, when the Greek term "Logos," or Word, was used to describe the historical presence of God in Jesus. For instance, the prologue to the Gospel of John begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1); and adds "And the Word became flesh and lived among us…"(Jn 1:14). This terminology, found in Greek philosophy, was intimately tied to the male principle and in particular the qualities of rationality, sovereignty, and divinity that were associated exclusively with the male sex. Rosemary Radford Ruether judges that the coupling of a male-principled, logos Christology with the man Jesus of Nazareth brings about the unwarranted idea of an essential and necessary connection between the maleness of Jesus, the incarnation of the male Logos, and the revelation of a male God.

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[270] Schneiders, *Women and the Word : The Gender of God in the New Testament and the Spirituality of Women,* 50.

In other words, this correlation suggests that the human Christ must be male in order to reveal the male God.[271]

Over time, this patriarchal framework has been naturalized by the repetition of the Father/Son metaphors used to interpret Jesus' relationship to God. As Elizabeth Johnson points out, this pattern of naming God exclusively in the image of hierarchical relationships embodied by all-powerful men has not only functioned to reinscribe the centrality of maleness and male-privilege, but it has also sanctioned and legitimated the notion of a patriarchal ruler atop the vast hierarchy of being. She states, "The symbol of God functions. It is never neutral in its effects, but it expresses and molds a community's bedrock convictions and actions."[272] In the case of Euro-Anglo society, the bedrock has traditionally consisted of sexist and patriarchal ideologies.

As a result, the incarnation, although a decisive event for Christians, has functioned to the detriment of women. It has been used as a lynchpin in arguments that uphold the essential maleness of God and the necessary maleness of Jesus. In so doing, it has construed the male sex as normative of both humanity and divinity. Furthermore, these androcentric interpretations of the incarnation have suggested that women are incapable of imaging the divine and have therefore functioned to justify the unequal status and role of women in the Church, explored in the next subsection.

Ordination

[271] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 117.
[272] Johnson, *Quest for the Living God : Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God,* 98.

A second way in which the maleness of Jesus has been an obstacle for feminist theologians is in discussions on the Roman Catholic sacrament of priestly ordination. According to Vatican teachings, women cannot be admitted to the priesthood. The magisterium's reasons for this include: the belief that Jesus chose only men to become part of the Twelve Apostles, whom he established as the foundation of his Church; the notion that the Apostles did not ordain women to succeed them in their ministry out of loyalty to the example set by Jesus Christ; the perceived need to protect the Church's long-standing tradition of reserving the priesthood for men alone, so as to theoretically act in accordance with what is thought to be God's plan for the Church; and, the magisterium's presupposition that the sacrament of priestly ministry cannot adequately reflect the mystery of Christ unless it is assumed by a man, because Christ himself was a man, marked with the male sex from his birth.[273]

In each of these arguments against the ordination of women, "maleness" (or lack there of) plays a key role. Although the magisterium proclaims that women are "necessary" and "irreplaceable" in the life and mission of the Church, it also insists that women are unsuited for priestly ministry due to their femaleness, which is understood as non-maleness. It is the magisterium's theological identification of maleness with the mystery of Christ, however, that ultimately determines the marginal role of women in the Church. This identification has reinforced the idea that the incarnation of Jesus as a man rather than a woman was not a matter of chance, but rather a decisive and necessary moment in the life of the Church. For example, *Inter Insigniores*, or the "Declaration on

[273] Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," written and published at the behest of Pope John Paul VI, October 15, 1976; available at http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_df76ii.htm.

the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," written by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) in 1976, declares that the maleness of Christ was a fundamental part of God's plan. The document states:

> The incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex; this is indeed a question of fact, and this fact, while not implying an alleged natural superiority of man over woman, cannot be disassociated from the economy of salvation; it is indeed in harmony with the entirety of God's plan as God himself has revealed it, and of which the mystery of the Covenant is the nucleus.[274]

This passage draws on scriptural imagery and Church teachings that interpret the salvation offered by God to humankind as a nuptial mystery, or Covenant. Here, God is portrayed as the divine Bridegroom and the Church as his beloved Bride. The nuptial mystery comes to fruition when the Word takes on flesh in order to seal and establish the new and eternal Covenant by shedding his blood so that sins may be forgiven.

As stated by the CDF, this Scriptural language and symbolism reveal the ultimate mystery of God and Christ. Because Christ is understood to be the Bridegroom, and therefore the Head of the Church, which is his bride, the CDF contends that we cannot ignore the fact that Christ is a man. To do so, they argue, would contradict the importance of this symbolism for the economy of salvation, as well as the sexual differences created by God for the communion of persons and the generation of human beings. In effect, the magisterium maintains that even in analogies of faith marriage must always occur between a man and a woman.

In creating a theological association between the maleness of Jesus and the mystery of Christ, the magisterium is able to restrict the priesthood to men. Just as it is thought that Christ necessarily became male, so too, they argue, can men alone represent

[274] Ibid.

Jesus Christ. According to the Church's teachings, the priest does not act in his own name (*in persona propria*) during the exercise of his ministry, but rather he represents Christ (*in persona Christi*), who acts through him. This representation finds its supreme expression in the celebration of the Eucharist in which the priest takes on the image and role of Christ, who accomplishes the sacrifice of the Covenant. Since the Church teaches that sacramental symbols must naturally resemble that which they signify, the CDF specifies that role of Christ must be taken by a man, otherwise the natural resemblance between the minister and Christ could not occur.[275]

As feminist theologians have observed, the magisterium's focus on the maleness of Christ is more than just a matter of sexual difference; it is a case of radical exclusion that has functioned to secure and conserve elite, male ecclesial power. As Elizabeth Johnson observes:

> Taking for granted the implicit inferiority of women, Christian theology has dignified maleness as the only genuine way of being human, thus making Jesus' embodiment as male an ontological necessity rather than a historical option. Jesus is a male revealer of a male God whose full representative can only be male.[276]

To put it succinctly, the dividing line between those who are able to act *in persona Christi* and those who are not is a single, physical characteristic possessed by one group and not the other: the male genitalia. Due to this essentialist categorization of the sexes, men are thought to enjoy a closer identification with Christ via their natural bodily resemblance and women are excluded from leadership roles in the Church. This intense notion of separate natures is used to justify not only the wildly different privileges of men

[275] Ibid.
[276] Johnson, *Consider Jesus : Waves of Renewal in Christology,* 104.

and women in the Church, but also, explored in the next section, their prejudicially different fates.

Salvation

A third area in which the maleness of Jesus has been a stumbling block for feminist theologians is the doctrine of salvation. In her 1984 work, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether posed a hypothetical question that would shift the landscape of feminist discussions in Christology. Noting the ways in which androcentric interpretations of Christ had marginalized the voices and experiences of women in the Church, she asks, "Can a male Savior save women?"[277]

For Ruether, the ecclesial emphasis on the maleness of Christ places the salvation of women in danger. To make her point, she draws on the work of Gregory of Nazianzus. Bishop of Constantinople from 379-381, Gregory was forced to confront the various understandings of Christ that divided the community. Of particular concern was the belief espoused by Apollinarius and his followers, who argued that Christ's divinity eclipsed his humanity in the incarnation. Although Apollinarius believed that the divine Logos became flesh, he denied that Jesus had a human intellect or a rational soul, fearing that the acquisition of such things would jeopardize or taint the true and direct incarnation of the Word.

Gregory, however, argued that Apollinarius' attempt to preserve the divinity of Christ at the expense of his humanity undermined the saving act of the incarnation. Because the Word became human in order to save lost humanity, Gregory held that

[277]Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk : Toward a Feminist Theology,* 116-138.

Christ had to become like us in all things but sin, which included the assumption of a human mind, will, and soul. Were this not to have happened, he reasoned, the Covenant initiated by God could not have been accomplished. In a letter against Apollinarius, Gregory wrote: "For that which [Christ] has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to the Godhead is also saved."[278] Put differently, what is not physically taken on by Jesus in the incarnation cannot be saved by Jesus because it remains estranged from God.

Ruether's question draws on Gregory's logic. She notes that if what is not assumed in the incarnation is not saved, then the salvation of women is theoretically in jeopardy. As per Church teachings, the incarnation of the Word necessarily took place according to the male sex, and as a result, women are considered incapable of resembling Christ. Thus, Ruether surmises that one might logically ask to what degree (if any) can a male Savior represent women in the salvific event?

Ruether's cunning inquiry sheds light on the way in which the maleness of Jesus has been naturalized in official theological discourse and praxis. His sex has been interpreted as essential to both his identity and saving work, and this, alongside the Church's dualistic framework that constructs men and women as polar opposites, has marginalized women, even in terms of salvation. Consciously or unconsciously, the Church, which declares that women are equal members in the Body of Christ, has simultaneously prevented women from participating *in persona Christi* by virtue of their differently sexed bodies. As Lisa Isherwood notes, "When feminists consider whether or not a male savior can save women, the question goes beyond the maleness of the man and

[278] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letter to Cleodonius*.

embraces the male who has been created by generations of fathers and sons in an attempt to gain a firmer hold on power in the world."[279]

Feminist Christology at an Impasse

Given the ways in which the maleness of Christ has been used to legitimate male ecclesial power and prevent women's flourishing in the Church, some feminist thinkers have found the Christ symbol to be irredeemably patriarchal. Daphne Hampson, for example, claims that Christology and feminism are irreconcilable. For her, Christianity's sexist and patriarchal past has produced a Christ symbol that is deeply embedded with maleness and masculinity and, therefore, utterly incapable of promoting the full equality of women. [280] One of the things at stake for Hampson in this emphasis on maleness is the issue of autonomy. Because of the way in which Jesus has been imaged as a Savior in the masculinist Christian tradition, Hampson believes that women are willingly placing themselves in unequal power relationships, giving power to the churches and the clerics who claim to understand the revelation more fully than others (read: women). She writes, "To be a Christian is to be placed in a heteronomous position. Feminists believe in autonomy."[281] In the end, Hampson abandons Christianity as an inherently masculinist religion.

Likewise, Mary Daly and Naomi Goldenberg have argued that in order to develop a true theology of women's liberation, feminists must leave male-dominated symbols

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[279] Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies,* 28.
[280] Hampson, *Theology and Feminism,* 50-80.
[281] Hampson, *Swallowing a Fishbone? : Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity,* 1.

such as Christ and the Bible behind.[282] In her work *Beyond God the Father*, Daly suggests, "If God is male, then male is God."[283] Because of the way in which the symbol of the male God has legitimated the sexist exploitation and oppression of women, she argues that feminists must "castrate" the supreme phallus of Christianity, moving beyond God the Father and the male sons he has spawned.

For most feminist theologians, however, the contention that Christology is inherently sexist represents the undoing of what has traditionally been claimed of Christ. Thus, they have sought to extricate the liberating and inclusive aspects of Jesus' life and message from patriarchal control. Early feminist efforts to reconstruct the Christ symbol for women can be roughly divided into two camps: those who focused on the historical Jesus as the leader of an egalitarian socio-political movement and the embodiment of female-identified traits such as relationality and connectedness; and those who focused on the Christ symbol as Sophia, or the female personification of divine Wisdom. In addition to the images of Jesus as liberating prophet and Christ-Sophia, the next several decades of feminist Christology witnessed the emergence of the embodied Christ, the Queer Christ, the ecological Christ, the Black Christ, the suffering Christ, the *mujerista* Christ, the disabled Christ and various other images engendered by diverse experiences of women around the globe.[284]

Despite the wealth of new images, I believe that the field of feminist Christology is at a standstill. As I have illustrated with the help of other feminist theologians

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[282] See Daly, *Beyond God the Father : Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.* and Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods : Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions.*
[283] Daly, *Beyond God the Father : Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation,* 19.
[284] For an overview of these Christologies, seeIsherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies.*

throughout this chapter, sex and gender matter Christologically, especially for the magisterium. Yet, for the most part, feminist Christologies have been unable to effectively challenge this gender essentialism wielded by this elite body. This failure is due, in part, to what I refer to as the Vatican's body politic.

The term "body politic," first used in political thought, refers to the analogous relation between a corporate structure (*i.e.*, society or the state) and the citizen, where the structural body is thought to represent the human body in terms of both organization and polity. In Catholic teachings, this correspondence functions to denote the Church as the Body of Christ. One of the most recognized instances of this can be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he describes the Church as a human body incorporating different parts. Paul writes:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ… Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many… And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?… As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you", nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."… If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12:12-27).

Yet, as feminist theologies have shown, when the magisterium refers to the Body of Christ—whether physically or metaphorically—it is to the male body. Consequently, those bodies that naturally resemble Jesus' body are accorded power within the semi-divine body politic, while those incapable of this resemblance (*e.g.*, females) are marked as inappropriate analogues and thereby excluded from full political participation, such as the sacrament of priestly ministry. This sexually differentiated notion of citizenship classifies members of the Church according to their sex and invests them with fundamentally different values and roles, thought to stem from the very ground of their being.

As Pope John Paul II illustrates in his apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," the Church holds that human nature is embodied in two distinct but equal forms—male and female.[285] In turn, the male and the female are called to integrate what is masculine and what is feminine into a relationship of complementarity. This idea can be seen in the Church's teaching on marriage, which claims that the innate structure of human sexuality makes a man and a woman "natural" partners for the creation of new life. In the sacrament of holy matrimony, the woman and the man are to give themselves totally over to each other in their femininity and their masculinity. They are equal as human beings, but different as man and woman (par.7). Likewise, the Church teaches that a woman reaches the fullness and originality intended by God through the gender-complementary roles of mother and virgin, in which the woman gives herself to her husband and to God through the feminine markers of relationality, empathy, generativity, and intuition (par.17-21).

[285] John Paul II, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women."

These taken-for-granted "truths" wielded by the Vatican makes the equality of women in the Church literally unthinkable. Because women are unable to resemble the physical body of Christ, they have no place within the corporate Body of Christ, except to serve at its most essentializing virginal, maternal and generative levels. Moreover, Vatican teachings declare that the disparate roles allotted to men and women stem from the mystery of Christ in relation to the Church and are therefore impervious to the equal opportunities granted to individuals in modern democracies. By framing their argument in the context of mystery, the magisterium asserts that the sex and gender categories that are used to define and imagine community are disclosed from beyond and, therefore, are eternal and unchangeable. As Catholic feminists have pointed out, this strategy functions only to allow the magisterium to validate their own power and positions within this community.

Thus, it is not the case that women are biologically unsuited for full ecclesial participation, but rather that the Vatican's body politic is structured and defined in a manner that includes women only in very particular ways. If this is true, then fighting to have women fully included in the present politic is counterproductive, unless the strict opposition between the Vatican's body politic and women's bodies is rethought. But, how can this be achieved?

Karen Trimble Alliaume claims that insofar as feminist theologians continue to assert that women must resemble Christ in order to be saved, they remain indebted to this body politic of the Vatican, which she terms the "economy of imitation." According to this system, Jesus is the norm that individuals must imitate in order to achieve salvation. Although women are able to resemble Jesus in terms of their everyday ethical behavior,

she notes that they are precluded from imitating him in those functions that pertain to his divinity, such as the administration of sacraments. As a result, she contends that feminist Christologies, which focus on the salient aspects of Jesus' life and message as the key features that women resemble, remain beholden to the Vatican's imitative economy. By focusing exclusively on Jesus' humanity, she argues, these Christologies are unable to break the link between Jesus' maleness and the redemptive powers associated by the magisterium with his divinity.[286]

To illustrate her point, Alliume draws primarily on the feminist Christology developed by Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk*. Here, Ruether presents Jesus as the paradigm of liberated humanity, whose redemptive power stems not from maleness, but from a prophetic call to action that challenges others to participate in the struggle against injustice. In this interpretation, Jesus initiates a new community committed to socio-political action and right relations, which propels one toward Christ. Accordingly, it is the community that imitates Christ's redemptive humanity rather than specific individuals, and Jesus' maleness is significant only to the extent that he renounces patriarchy as a wrongful situation that must be redressed.[287]

For Alliaume, Ruether's attempt to downplay the significance of Jesus' maleness by focusing on his exemplary humanity inevitably backfires. First, in order for Jesus' rejection of the privileges associated with maleness to be efficacious for the contemporary reception of his message, he had to be a male. Therefore, Alliaume points out that Ruether's claim inadvertently reinscribes the historical maleness of Jesus as

[286]Alliaume, Armour and St. Ville, "Disturbingly Catholic: Thinking the Inordinate Body," 97-102.
[287] Ibid., 100.

theologically necessary for her liberating conclusions. Second, Alliaume asserts that despite Ruether's best efforts to disavow the magisterium's hold over Jesus' maleness, her Christology ultimately remains beholden to its economy of imitation. In her redefinition of Jesus' liberated humanity as right relation, Alliaume notes that Ruether essentializes women as "relaters" and therefore better able to "resemble" Jesus. Because relationality is one of the stereotypically feminine markers that the Vatican associates with women, Alliaume claims the Ruether's Christology reinforces rather than undercuts the magisterium's gender essentialism. In other words, Ruether's Christology suggests that women are able to resemble Jesus according to the Vatican-sanctioned, feminine gifts of right relation, while men inexorably maintain the stronghold over representations of Jesus' divine nature. Finally, Alliaume concludes that Ruether's account of the ways in which Jesus is more like women than men potentially implements a reverse form of essentialism in which women but not men are able to resemble Jesus.[288]

Agreeing with Alliaume's analysis, I contend that the imitative body politic constructed by official Church teachings and practices presents a serious obstacle for feminist Christologies. Its gendered understanding of bodies and identities makes it nearly impossible to raise Christological questions that articulate bodily differences that can be heard in an efficacious way. In effect, the Church excludes a created reality that ultimately bears the imprint of the divine. It establishes women as members *of* but not full participants *in* the Body of Christ.[289]

But, what are these alternatives for women who fall in-between? And how can feminist Christologies move beyond this impasse? The purpose of the next two sections

[288]Ibid., 100-102.
[289] Ibid., 97.

is to answer these questions, illustrating how the everyday lived experiences of U.S. Latinas, alongside an understanding of the fluidity and hybridity of identity categories, creates a redemptive space for new Christological understandings.

What's a "Girl" to Do?

At stake for feminist theologians in questions like the ones listed above is an inclusive understanding of Christ that is able to overcome the gender essentialism of the Vatican and the oppressive tendencies of dominant theological discourses, assuming *all* of humanity. In order to counter the Vatican's link between maleness and Christology, I propose that feminist thinkers need a new perspective from which to think about and live out liberating representations of Christ. Drawing on Alliaume's reading of Judith Butler and U.S. Latina theologians understanding of identity as hybrid and multiple, I suggest a performative framework as one such alternative. This framework does not reduce identities to reified categories measured by markers like "male" and "female," but rather assumes that one's identity is ambivalent, in process, and open to reinscription. Such an approach, I hope, will enable feminists to dismantle the magisterium's monopoly on salvation and create a space for feminist performances of Christ not typically found in dominant monolithic theological discourse.

Alliaume's essay, "Disturbingly Catholic: Thinking the Inordinate Body," uses the work of Butler to counter the gender construction found in official Church teachings and practices. Butler, a feminist theorist, is known for her revolutionary understanding of identity, which claims that the categories of sex and gender are constituted through language, discourse, and bodily performance and are therefore neither "naturally" nor

"causally" related. She argues that people commonly thought of as biologically female are not born with feminine-identified traits, but are "gendered" over time by enacting a received set of norms that prescribe how women should or should not behave. According to Butler, this process begins at birth (or during an ultrasound), when a doctor announces, "It's a girl!" By assigning the baby a sex and a gender, the doctor's performative statement constitutes the baby as a particular kind of proto-subject. In other words, one is not born a girl, but is "girled" by discourses that associate a specific set of meanings with the female genitalia. Over the course of her lifetime, these discourses will compel the "girl" to cite and recite (read: perform and re-perform) the gender norms associated with her sex, such as playing with dolls, wearing dresses, and so forth. This sequence of repeated acts eventually produces the appearance of sex and gender as natural, or God-given.[290]

Two recent news stories about families who are attempting to raise their children in gender-free environments provide useful examples that help shed light on Butler's theory of gender construction. In each case, the parents of a newborn child decided not to reveal the sex of their baby to anyone except a select few. They simply announced to their family members and friends: "It's a baby!" Interestingly, one popular media outlet reported that the mother of "Sasha" stated that, when she did not tell people the sex of her child, people automatically assumed it was a boy unless told otherwise, because maleness seems to function as the normative sex. The intended goal of these two families was to raise their child in a gender-neutral environment, free from societal norms regarding gender. The children were given freedom to play with toys and dress in clothes that are

[290] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.*

traditionally designated for girls or boys—for example, flowery tops usually labeled for girls and matchbox cars typically labeled for boys. Although some consider the parenting strategies of these two families to be outrageous, the parents of both "Sasha" and "Storm" suggest that their objective is to give their children as many opportunities as possible rather than allowing the children's roles and experiences to be limited by the stereotypes assigned to their gender by society at large.[291]

As Butler's work indicates, if the appearance of one's gender as "natural" is sustained only through dutiful repetition of specific gender norms, then the categories of sex and gender are subject to slippage if these norms are repeated differently (or not at all). As she notes in her work, *Gender Trouble,* the instability of gender and other identity categories mean that one's performance of the associated norms can never be exact and can be understood as parody. Like all citations, parodic acts never exactly perform what they name. They thus lend themselves to processes of resignification, or responses that undermine the original category being enacted. Take, for example, cross-dressing or dressing in drag. Butler illustrates that this act involves the appropriation of a gender norm traditionally associated with one sex by a member of the opposite sex. [292] A man in drag inevitably draws attention to the disjunction between his "male" body and the "female" gender he is performing, particularly when "he" makes a better "she" than most biologically-identified females.

In her work, *Undoing Gender,* Butler recalls attending a drag show and realizing that "some of these so-called men could do femininity much better than [she] ever could,

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[291] Battle, "It's a Boy! Couple Reveal Sex of Their 'gender Neutral' Kid After Five Years." and Davis, "Canadian Mother Raising 'Genderless' Baby, Storm, Defends Her Family's Decision."
[292] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 137-140.

ever wanted to, ever would."[293] The shock associated with such realizations sheds light on the ways in which the relations between sex, gender, and desire are naturalized in a heterosexually oriented society. A heterosexist society, such as the one authorized in Church teachings, establishes a linear connection between one's sex, one's gender, and one's sexuality. According to this system, femaleness is thought to give rise to femininity, which, in turn, is "naturally" expressed through the sexual desire for men, and the system is the same for men. By subverting and "denaturalizing" these connections, cross-dressing exploits the instability of gender identities and calls into question the very assumptions on which this society operates.

Drawing on Butler's notion of gender identity as performative, Alliaume explains that Christian identity also materializes through the repetition of certain culturally intelligible norms. Just as becoming a woman entails the citation of the particular norms of womanhood, becoming a Christian involves the citation of specific Christian norms accepted by the Christian community. In this case of the Christian tradition, the central norm is Jesus Christ.[294]

It is within this understanding of identity, I argue, that one begins to hear echoes of Lindbeck's cultural and linguistic understanding of identity, which was outlined in Chapter 1 of this work. For Lindbeck, in order for a religion to exist as a recognizable and distinct entity, it must have a set of beliefs and/or practices by which it can be identified. Here, the sacred story of a religion functions as a stable lens through which

[293] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* 213.
[294] Alliaume, Armour and St. Ville, "Disturbingly Catholic: Thinking the Inordinate Body," 105-106.

changing worldviews can be reinterpreted.[295] In the case of Christians, he notes, "What is important is that Christians allow their cultural conditions and highly diverse affections to be molded by the set of biblical stories that stretches from creation to eschaton and culminates in Jesus' passion and resurrection."[296]

Lindbeck claims that in order to become religious, one must become skilled via practice (or language games) in the language and symbol system of a given religion. Here the story is told and retold, practiced and practiced again. In so doing, he argues, one learns to feel, think, and act in conformity with a religious tradition in ways that cannot be achieved or interiorized in any other manner. According to Lindbeck, the payoff of this performance, so to speak, is its effect on the community.[297] We will return to this notion of practicing and performing one's identity again below.

Yet, not unlike the ways in which I find Lindbeck's top-down approach to understanding religion to reify a monolithic and one-dimensional understanding of identity, Alliaume observes that the canonical body of Jesus has been the site for patriarchal reifications of maleness within the Catholic Church. The discourse of the magisterium has repeatedly invested the body of Christ with certain meanings and associated it with certain practices based on a naturalized link between the maleness of Jesus and the sacrament of priestly ordination. Because the citation of Jesus is constitutive of Christian identity, and because the male Jesus is the standard assembled by the Vatican, women's bodies are unable to fit within the anatomically normative parameters and are therefore incapable of imitating Christ. Whereas men's bodies are

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[295] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 74,81-82.
[296] Ibid., 84.
[297] Ibid., 36.

considered natural vehicles for and culturally intelligible recipients of salvation, women's bodies are declared inordinate and fail to materialize within the Body of Christ, except as salvific beneficiaries, and even this is up for debate. If this is the case, then the identity categories of "Catholic" and "woman" seem mutually exclusive. [298] So, what are Catholic women to do?

It is at this juncture that I believe Alliaume's theological appropriation of Butler's work makes a significant contribution to the field of feminist Christology and contributes to the critique of dominant, monocultural theologies. By applying Butler's citational understanding of bodies and identities to Christological conversations, Alliaume dislodges "women" and "Jesus" from the relation of imitation and navigates the discourse beyond the threat of impasse in several important ways. First, drawing on Butler's deconstruction of the body, Alliaume reveals the "fictitious" nature of maleness as a foundational category for the body (and Body) Christ. Her argument maintains that maleness, like all identity categories, does not pre-exist the magisterium's utterances, but is a performative product of them. Second, Butler's notion of cultural intelligibility allows Alliaume to demonstrate that what feminist Christologies are protesting is not the idea that Jesus was a man, but rather the way in which "maleness" has been used to construct an understanding of identity that forecloses on all differently sexed/gendered identities. This failure of women's bodies to matter, Alliaume argues, is not the result of misunderstood texts or doctrines, as feminist Christologies have traditionally claimed, but

[298] Alliaume, Armour and St. Ville, "Disturbingly Catholic: Thinking the Inordinate Body," 105-106.

rather it stems from the community's inability to reconstruct the rules of recognition in ways that allow all bodies in the Body of Christ to matter.[299]

For this reason, Alliaume suggests that Butler's notion of gender performativity is an important framework for interpreting feminist Christologies. If to imitate means to resemble or to produce an exact copy, then women are doomed to failure when trying to replicate a male figure, such as Jesus. If to perform, on the other hand, means to act or to give a rendition of, then women are able to cite the body of Christ without having to duplicate it perfectly or entirely.[300] Alliaume explains:

> A performative and citational reading is better able to account for the ways in which women already *do* "re(as)semble" Jesus. *Re(as)sembly* connotes an alternative to resemblance, since the latter is understood as imitation of or representation of Jesus, a representation from which women are liable to disqualification. Re(as)sembly of Christ denotes communal performances of Jesus rather than individual women's representations.[301]

Whereas feminist christologies have traditionally remained beholden to the Vatican mandate that men and women must "matchup" to a pre-existing aspect of Jesus (*i.e.*, his right relationality or liberating humanity), she argues that christologies read as performances of Jesus are able to illustrate the way in which bodies come to be in communal citational processes.[302] The agency for re(as)sembly, she states, is not located in either the Church hierarchy or resisting

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[299]Ibid., 104-106.
[300] Ibid., 102.
[301] Ibid., 102.
[302]Ibid., 100-102.Alliaume's essay offers two performative readings of feminist christologies: the Roman Catholic WomanPriest movement, which "illicitly" ordained several women to the priesthood; and Eleanor McLaughlin's essay "Feminist Christologies: Re-dressing the Tradition," which likens Jesus to a transvestite. For Alliaume, these christological citations "recontextualize" the body of Christ by inciting the simultaneous recognition of two supposedly incompatible things, specifically womanhood and priesthood. See pp. 108, 109-116.

feminist subjects, but "in the interaction between them, in the moment when the very constraints of the 'norms' we cannot help but cite (like Jesus's maleness) allow the possibility of our citing them differently and thus reshaping them."[303] Thus, Alliaume shifts the notion of redemptive power from mere bodily resemblance to that which exists in and through our relationships with one another as they emerge out of our citations of Jesus.[304]

In sum, Alliaume's citational understanding of Jesus has liberating implications for feminist Christologies that help move it beyond impasse by enabling women's bodies to matter. It dismantles the magisterial body of Christ that has haunted feminist theologians, and in so doing, empowers women, who find themselves somehow implicated in or accountable to the Catholic tradition, to re(as)semble the norms of Jesus in ways that undermine this hegemonic paradigm. These (re)citations, Alliaume argues, should not be read as uncovering women's essential resemblance to Jesus from the guise of patriarchy, but rather as performative claims made by women to (re)present Jesus. She states, "To 'cite' Jesus with one's own body refers to what appears to be a preexistent relationship of congruity between Jesus and women, a relationship that is actually *created* in the citation."[305]

But what does Butler have to do with Lindbeck, and what has Rome to do with the borderlands? Let us turn to one such example of a performative Christology that emerges from the everyday lives of a particular group of U.S.

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[303]Ibid., 109.
[304]Ibid., 102.
[305]Alliaume, "The Risks of Repeating Ourselves: Reading Feminist/Womanist Figures of Jesus," 198-217.

Latina women. These women are living between two worlds, while simultaneously creating a third redemptive space.

Performing Christ: A Communal Narrative

If, as Alliaume suggests, the citation of Jesus' body is constitutive of Christian identity, then this body also necessarily includes the stories and sayings of Jesus, as well as their repetition.[306] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier's article, "Latina Women and Immigration," looks at *testimonios*, or the faith stories of Latinas that interweave biblical narratives with the narratives of women's everyday lives. Like Alliaume, Conde-Frasier emphasizes that these stories, when shared publically, both create and maintain communities. [307]

Moreover, she notes that for Latinas/Latinos, *testimonios* are a form of "doing theology." They include the voices and experiences of those who have been marginalized in traditional "academic" theology. She writes:

> When we acknowledge God's presence in our daily living, then God's story intertwines with our own. This interweaving becomes part of the doing of theology in the Latino/a community… It answers the questions, *where* is the theology of the people? Is there a *place* from which they speak? [308]

For Conde-Frasier, these testimonies are transformative and life-giving, offering women a place to find voice, agency, and a knowledge of God that gives meaning to their everyday lives and their struggle for justice against various forms of oppression.

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[306] Alliaume, Armour and St. Ville, "Disturbingly Catholic: Thinking the Inordinate Body," 98.
[307] Conde-Frazier, "Latina Women and Immigration," 57-58.
[308] Ibid., 58.

"Why The Woman Bled": A Communal Narrative

To illustrate her point, Conde-Frazier recounts a *testmonio* shared by a group of women at a retreat. This narrative weaves together the everyday struggle toward justice of women who have been sexually abused and the account of the hemorrhaging woman found in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 5:21-34). After briefly summarizing this story, I conclude that it provides a powerful example of women (re)citing Christ.

As told by Conde-Frazier, the women's story begins in a church bathroom one Sunday following services.[309] This bathroom had been the group's gathering place for many years, as it was one of the few places where the women felt unhindered by the male pastor and free to interpret the Scripture as it spoke to them as women. On this particular Sunday, the women were discussing the Gospel story of the woman with a hemorrhage. According to the Scripture, the woman had been bleeding for over twelve years, and physicians had only made her condition worse. Having heard of Jesus' miracles, the woman believed that he had the power to heal her. One day, she saw him in a crowd and came up behind him, placing her hands on his garment. Immediately, her hemorrhaging ceased. Jesus felt the power flow from him and turned around to see who had touched him. The woman knelt before him fearfully. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your suffering" (Mk 5:34).

That morning, from the safety of the bathroom, the women posed a series of questions: What would it feel like to have your period for twelve years? What might cause someone to bleed like that? What would it be like to be judged as unclean?

[309] What follows, is my summary of the story as told by Conde-Frazier. Ibid., 67-74.

Together, the women looked at this story from many different angles. Yet, two members of the group, Minerva and Ana, remained silent. Eventually, their silence filled the room, and Minerva spoke up. She said she knew why the woman was bleeding.

For Minerva, this story centered around "touch." She began to (re)cite the narrative from the perspective of a young woman who had been sexually abused. She spoke about the girl's body beginning to develop, of men starting to take notice, and of one man, in particular, who often touched her inappropriately. Through her tears, Minerva recounted the "infections" his touch brought—shame, fear, self-hatred, and paralysis. "The woman bled to protect herself," Minerva said. "He would not touch her if she were unclean. She bled each time she remembered what he had done to her." Minerva recalled the woman's many trips to the doctor, which only made her feel worse. She was mocked her for being a 24-year-old virgin, and the doctor told her just to get married and have sex.

"One day," Minerva continued, "the woman heard of a man who did not have an infectious touch. Instead, he had a healing light. But, the woman could not bear the thought of being touched by a man, even one whose intentions were pure." Hearing these words, Ana fell to the floor and started sobbing. Betsaida tried to comfort her, but Ana screamed, "Don't touch me, don't touch me!" Minerva responded, "But what if I touch him? What if I touch him until the curse that was put on me is healed?" Taking the handkerchief from her Bible, Minerva tied it to the bottom of her skirt. She stood near Ana, but turned away. "When the woman touched Jesus' garment," Minerva uttered, "Her shame subsided. She was able to close her eyes and see a beautiful woman looking back at her. She was finally able to touch her breasts without fear." As Minerva

continued her reenactment, Ana reached for the handkerchief tied to Minerva's skirt. She held onto it, and her crying grew softer. Minerva turned around and, remaining in character, asked who had touched her. Ana knelt before her and said it was she. Minerva then told Ana that she had been sexually molested by her uncle, and Ana told Minerva the story of her rape. While they told each other their secrets, the other women formed a circle around them and prayed silently.

Suddenly, Ana shouted, "Give me water to be cleaned!" Ana approached the sink and took off her shirt. Placing her hands under the running water, she poured it over herself. Minerva did the same. When they had finished, the rest of the women took the water and, without touching either Minerva or Ana, poured it on them from all directions. As the ritual drew to a close, Minerva proclaimed: "The woman knelt before Jesus and told him the truth. She told him her secret, and he drew out the woman's faith in herself: she was not a walking curse; she could have faith in her body again, in her own spirit, and in her womanhood."

Following the ritual, the women remained in the bathroom to reflect with one another about what had just occurred. Together, they discussed the way in which sexist violence strips people and groups of their voices, and they vowed to each other and to themselves to always continue in their struggle for justice so that that all may have peace in the end. Following a final benediction given by one of the group members, the women kissed and embraced, mischievously leaving the water on the bathroom floor as they left so that others may see and wonder what had just taken place. The *testimonio* ends by revealing that as Ana left the bathroom, for the first time since any of the women had known her, she walked without with her head up.

This powerful *testimonio* recounted by Conde-Frazier exemplifies a lived theology among the marginalized and disempowered. Describing *testimonios* as the "people's theology," she writes, "*Lo cotidiano* therefore allows the voiceless to tell their stories and to cry out to the heavens for justice and peace. The stories let us see the grace justice, presence, and love of God manifested in the everyday occurrences…"[310] Similarly, the theology of the women in the bathroom emerges from the everyday lives and struggles of the women. It is spoken in their language and written on their bodies. It not only allows them to constitute themselves as powerful subjects, but it also enables them to bring agency and justice to others.

In addition to being a people's theology, I would also argue that the *testimonio* of the women in the bathroom is a people's Christology. It is an embodied Christology, which sits at the heart of the Gospel message, and it illustrates the ways in which women can (re)cite Jesus' humanity *and* his divinity. More than this, it begins to break the link described by Jordan in which Christians traditionally associate sexuality, the body, and shame with the divine.

As Lindbeck and Butler's connection between communal and individual identity and practice illustrates, one "becomes" by doing. In the case of Christians, Lindbeck writes, "The proclamation of the gospel, as a Christian would put it, may be, first of all, the telling of the story, but this gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the

[310] Ibid., 60.

total *Gestalt* of community life and action."[311] The women in the *testimonio* recounted by Conde-Frazier offer a powerful, dramatic illustration of the way in which this Christian story gains transformative meaning in the experiences of the everyday negotiation of their individual identities.

Furthermore, through their (re)citation of the Gospel text and the sacrament of baptism, the women in the story reincarnate Christ in and for one another. In her recounting of Ana and Minerva's testimony, Conde-Frazier describes this concept beautifully. She writes:

> The bathroom looked like a bunch of girls have been having a water fight. Who would have thought that a cleansing, healing ritual had taken place at the altar of the sin? Minverva and Ana looked as if they had been baptized. By this baptism they had indeed died and been resurrected to a new life.[312]

This performative act opens up a path for women's struggle toward justice and converts non-sanctioned sexed/gendered identities into political agency. More than this, it illustrates the fluidity and vulnerability of *all* our representations of Christ. It demonstrates that re-citing Jesus is not simply about ordinate, ontological changes, but also about reenacting Jesus' ministry and continually performing God with us.

These themes of performativity and instability are well known in christological thought. As Kwok Pui Lan eloquently professes:

> The most hybrid concept in Christian tradition is that of Jesus/Christ. The space between Jesus and Christ is unsettling and fluid, resisting easy categorization and closure. It is the 'contact zone' or 'borderland' between the human and the divine, the one and the many, the historical and the cosmological, the Jewish and the Hellenistic, the prophetic and the

[311] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age,* 36.
[312] Conde-Frazier, "Latina Women and Immigration," 72.

> sacramental, the God of the conquerors and the God of the meek and the lowly.[313]

Similarly, Lisa Isherwood observes, Christianity inherently tells stories of "queer transformations, of unstable categories and bodies, all enacted through the body of a man who proclaimed 'God with us.'"[314]

Elizondo's work also notes the themes of hybridity and transformation in Christology. From its inception, he argues, Christianity has been about crossing borders for the sake of a new unity. Here, he points out that the eternal Christ crossed the boundary between the divine and the human to become Jesus of Nazareth. What is more, Elizondo proclaims, the place where this sacred event took place in a geographical-historical place where people were constantly forced to cross boundaries of identity and belonging in order to survive.[315]

Although I find Elizondos' connection between Jesus' *mestizaje* identity and the hybrid and plural subjectivity of U.S. Latina/os to be compelling, I contend that his Christological discourse remains at a similar impasse as those of the feminist theologies described above. For the most part, Elizondo's work adeptly illustrate the ways in which U.S. Latina/os already do resemble the historical Jesus in terms of their everyday border-crossing identities, but it offers little insight into how this border identity and new *mestizo* consciousness might open up the possibility to (re)cite Christ in those areas that pertain to his divinity. Here again, the notion of performing Christ is useful.

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[313] Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology,* 171.
[314] Isherwood, "The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology: The Spiralling of Incarnation," 145.
[315] Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders: Mestizaje and the Future of Humanity," 180.

Furthermore, by connecting the multi-sited subjectivity of U.S. Latinas found in their theological anthropologies with contemporary Christological conversations, I suggest a reconceptualization of the body of Christ in which difference is divinely ordained by God's preferential option for the in-between. Like the border between the United States and Mexico, difference cannot be the barbed wire that divides our communities and ourselves.

From the insights and challenges developed within U.S. Latina theologies we can learn much about the complex nature of identity—both personal and communal. The writings of Latina philosopher María Lugones, as explored in the work of Michelle Gonzalez and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, illustrate this point.[316] By focusing on multiplicity, Lugones is able to subvert the one-dimensional understandings of identity in the dominant culture, which silence the voices of those who understand their identities as extending across many different categories, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, race, and religion. In opposition to those cultural (and in the case of Machado and Gonzalez, theological) constructions of identity that demand we be one, Lugones suggests that ambiguity and a pluralist logic can function as creative strategies of resistance. Emphasizing the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, she suggests that by playfully exploring and travelling to the various "worlds" or contexts which people simultaneously inhabit, we can develop an ethical attitude of love and empathy toward those who are different, while, at the same time, transforming ourselves.[317]

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[316] Gonzalez, "Nuestra Humanidad: Toward a Latina Theological Anthropology ," 56-60, 68-69.
[317] Lugones, "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism." and Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception."

Likewise, just as *neptantlah* is an appealing conceptual category in which to articulate the plurality and fluidity of Latina theological anthropologies, I also find it to be a fruitful category for discussions in Christology. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this in-between state as, "that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or gender position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity." For me, Anzaldúa's description not only provides a useful framework for understanding the new identity that emerges in and through the incarnation and the ethical possibilities inherent in it (a la Lugones), but it also illustrates the way in which the divine affirms and perpetuates the interstices which result from the multilinguistic, multiracial, and multicultural world in which we live.[318] In essence, it disrupts dominant monolithic and monocultural perceptions of identity, by inhabiting and performing the dynamic borders where movement, displacement, and collusion occur. The result is the creation of a third, redemptive space in which we find Christ. As Conde-Frazier notes:

> The process of immigration shakes up the foundations and breaks petrified rocks, opening up cracks and splitting apart the very foundations. From these openings emerge hidden things…the resurrected Christ who manifests himself by way of his Spirit in the spaces opened up by the diaspora. The sleeping women are raised. They claim their callings and break the secret abuses in their lives. The apparent chaos of immigration gives way to the resurrection.[319]

Catholic theologian Michael Himes notes that the incarnation is *not* first and foremost the revelation of who God is, but rather the revelation of who we are. Quoting Irenaeus of Lyons, a second-century church father, Himes contends that, "The glory of

[318] Anzaldúa, "Chicana Artists: Exploring Nepantla, El Lugar De La Frontera," 39.
[319] Conde-Frazier, "Latina Women and Immigration," 75.

God is a human being fully alive."[320] To be fully human, I argue, is to contest the terms that allocate value to certain groups or individuals over others. It is to ask why certain bodies fail to matter and to reenact the divine and human ministry of Jesus in order to make political claims on behalf of these bodies.

Conclusion

At the end of her chapter on *Mujerista* Christology, Isasi-Díaz offers an example of lived Christology which I believe also illustrates the notion of women (re)citing Christ in and for one another. Recalling a story told to her by ecofeminist Latin American theologian Ivone Gebara, she explains that one night Gebara returned home to her poor neighborhood in Brazil, only to find one of her neighbor's waiting for her. This neighbor's son had ben very ill, but the neighbor was waiting to tell Gebara that God had visited her that day. Upon asking what she meant, Gebara learned that another neighbor had voluntarily given the woman her entire earnings for the day so that the woman could buy medicine for her son. Isasi-Díaz writes, "For Ivone's friend, the neighbor had become God, had become Christ. This generous neighbor did not merely 'represent' Christ but was indeed Christ made present in the poor neighborhood of Brazil in our own days."[321]

Returning to my initial question—whether visual and theoretical christological sex changes are powerful enough to challenge the negative situations of sexism in the

320Himes, *The Mystery of Faith : An Introduction to Catholicism,* 19-28.

[321] Isasi-Días, *"Identificate Con Nosotras:* A *Mujerista* Christological Understanding," 55.

church and contribute toward the flourishing of all persons—I conclude that the answer is a resounding "yes" when seen from a performative perspective. Rather than inserting a "girl" into a male-dominated role or altering the sex of Jesus without challenging the hegemonic norms of belonging and participation, a performative perspective opens up the doctrine of Christ in a way conducive to furthering the Body that performs him. It incorporates the multiplicity of one's identity into the divine in a new way, subverting the dominant discourses and offering an alternative way of being in the world.

The performative framework outlined throughout this essay challenges women to re-inhabit their place *in* but not *of* the Body (and body) of Christ. Rather than letting ourselves be put into boxes meant to categorize and dismiss, we can use the complexities of our lives to challenge the belief that any person or group is more righteous or deserving of identification with Jesus. While women will never be included in the Vatican body politic as currently structured, they can certainly loosen its hold over women's bodies by changing the boundaries of the community and creating a space from which differently sexed subjects can speak and act. So long as we uphold the artificial borders created by the dominant culture, our struggle for justice will never be complete.

Given these insights, I propose that Christologies should not be understood as hermetically-sealed entities, but rather as historically constructed formations, cited, re-cited, transformed, and performed anew in the pluralized identities of the Christian people. The struggle for justice is communal and can only be achieved if our stories are told, our histories are reclaimed, our experiences are shared, and new languages emerge which take seriously the border crossing experience of both humans and the divine.

Gloria Anzaldúa proclaims, "To survive the Borderlands / You must live *sin fronteras*, / Be a crossroads."[322] Anzaldúa's proclamation is not simply an academic construction. It is a movement of the Spirit captured in the everyday lives of women who are created in the image and likeness of God. As Proverbs 8:1-2 says, "Does not Wisdom call / And does not understanding raise her voice? / On the heights, beside the way / At the *crossroads* she takes her stand."[323]

[322] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 217.
[323] Emphasis mine.

CONCLUSION

In the fall of 2012, I showed the film *Higher Ground* to the students in my "Theologies of Liberation" classes. Often I have difficulty getting college-aged students to adequately understand the way in which women, who are part of patriarchal religious institutions, are not given the appropriate space to ask questions about their faith, God, and their roles in the church and the world. However, this film, based on Carolyn Brigg's aptly-titled book, *Higher Ground: A Memoir of Salvation Lost and Found*, provides an incredibly effective example of the pernicious effects of religiously sanctioned sexism. In her review of this film, feminist theologian Sarah Sentilles notes that submission to God and submission to men are one in the same in the close-knit New Testament church to which the protagonist, Corinne, belongs.

As I watched the film with my students and asked them to view it from the perspective of our readings in feminist theology, I was struck by a sudden realization: the most faithful acts in this movie do *not* occur when the viewer might initially expect. For example, they do not occur when the pastor is preaching about how faith has little room for doubt, especially in the face of unspeakable tragedy, nor do they occur when the community is depicted as gathered together in the power of praise and worship. For in these instances, the behavior, clothing, and sexuality of the women in the community are disciplined or usurped by men, who claim to have more complete access to God's revelation. Rather, the most religious and faith-filled moments in the movie occur when Corinne and her best friend Annika are alone in private, circumscribed spaces, such as a hospital bed, their cars, washing dishes, or *locked in a bathroom.* Like the women in

Conde-Frazier's *testimonio*, it is only in small, private spaces that the two women, who have a common love for books, ideas, God, and the body, are able to share their stories, cry out to God in their struggles, experience crises of faith, and find their own voices.

I began this dissertation with two quotations from Ann Lamott, which describe her experiences of God in the bathroom.[324] While I firmly believe that God is encountered in the everyday and even in the women's bathroom, I also recognize the ways in which these encounters can be problematic insofar as they have the potential to keep the salvific experiences of women, such as Annika and Corinne, relegated to the private sphere. Regarding the ending of *Higher Ground*, Sentilles notes, "When there is no room in religious institutions for women's questions and spiritual authority, there is no room for people like Corinne."[325]

As Sentilles' statement indicates, it is not enough that women can gather together in the bathroom to perform Christ in and for one another. When women's questions and spiritual authority are pushed out of religious discourse and practice, then a large percentage of the population, who lives, moves, and has their being in God is foreclosed. In order that all may be truly free, the multiple structures of domination and oppression must be eradicated. The task of theological thought, as such, is to take into consideration questions of power, marginalization, cultural self-identity, experience, and the plural character of one's subjectivity.

In Chapter One, I looked at the insights and issues that I believe Lindbeck's work poses for constructive Christian theological proposals of meaning, identity, and difference in the twenty-first century. In particular, I focused on two aspects of

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[324] Lamott, *Plan B : Further Thoughts on Faith,* 161.
[325] Sentilles, "Women, Religion, and Film: *Higher Ground* Raises the Stakes."

Lindbeck's theological proposal: his cultural and linguistic understanding of religions and religious identity, which claims that the language and culture of one's religion shapes and defines human experience rather than the reverse; and, the communal-identity-defining function presented in his theory of religious doctrines. Although Lindbeck's intent is to preserve the distinctiveness of the Christian identity in the face of inter- and intra-religious differences, his attempt to maintain the distinctiveness of the Christian story, I argue, at times forecloses identity formation of the Christian. An understanding of these insights and questions, I argue, is ultimately necessary to bring about a transformed community that embraces diversity and plurality and, in so doing, participates in the resistance and subversion of identity-based oppressions.

In Chapter Two, I explored geographical and metaphorical understandings of borders as proposed in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, including the ways in which the violent legacy of these borders has contributed to issues of race, class, and nationalism. Drawing on the works of historians, political scientists, and sociologists, I touch on the immigration debates in the United States, focusing in particular on the rhetoric that calls for a return to a singular "American" language and culture. With the help of the historians and political scientits, I assert that this rhetoric has less to do with the economic and political ramifications of Mexican immigration, and more to do with the United States' desire to dramatically reassert its view of itself and its place in the world. Moving away from the monolithic Anglo-European frames of reference toward a hybrid and multidimensional mode of thinking, which provides a new way of articulating and formulating questions of identity, I explore a pluralist logic of identity inherent in the multi-voiced subjectivity of those who live at the borders of cultures, languages,

ethnicities, and so on. This *new mestiza consciousness,* I argue, holds potential for theological discourse and practice of identity.

In Chapter Three, I explored the diverse works of U.S. Latina theologians. In particular, I examined the ways in which the foundational categories of *lo cotidiano, mestizaje* and *nepantlah* offer a framework for understanding women's subjectivity based on a hybrid, multiple understanding of identity and belonging. This framework, I argued, not only provides a powerful form of resistance to dominant, monoculture theological understandings of identity, but it also offers new openings through which to see the active presence of God in our midst, especially in theological construals of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God. However, this chapter also points out that aside from Virgilio P. Elizondo's conception of the *mestizo Jesus*, which argues that, "By growing up in Galilee…culturally and linguistically speaking Jesus was a 'mestizo,'" this pluralist logic has rarely been applied to contemporary Christological conversations, despite the hybridity and fluidity inherent in the incarnational event. Because the question of the person and significance of Jesus Christ sits at the heart of Christianity and has come to represent an increasingly diverse set of interpretations, I argue that such an application is important for understanding Christian construals of meaning, identity, and difference

Finally, in Chapter Four, I explored the tension between feminist theology, which takes seriously the experiences of women and the flourishing of all persons, and androcentric interpretations of Christ in dominant theologies that have contributed to human indignities around the globe. Focusing on the marginal experiences of women in the church, I considered the ways in which faith in Jesus Christ has been troublesome for

feminist theologians, especially Catholic feminist theologians, within the interrelated issues of incarnation, ordination, and salvation. In order to carve out a space for feminist belief in Christ, I challenged feminist thinkers to move beyond imitation Christologies toward more performative ones, as proposed in the work of Karen Trimble Alliaume. Finally, I offered an example of a performative Christology, which emerges from the everyday lives and struggles of U.S. Latina women. This lived Christology, I contend, not only challenges the dominant theological discourses present within the doctrine of Christology, but it also reveals Christ with us in and through the multi-voiced subjectivities of U.S. Latina women, who inhabit the geographical and metaphorical borderlands.

The practice of faith seeking understanding often involves uncovering more questions as much as it does finding answers. From my dissertation research, several questions arise for future work.

First, James Cone's most recent publication, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* places these two symbols, separated by nearly two thousand years, in conversation with one another so as to empower Christians to take a stand against white supremacy and every kind of injustice. Similarly I would like to formulate a theological comparison between the cross and the border crosser. Comparing the blistered feet of immigrants who risk their lives trying to cross the desert from Mexico into the United States with the bloodied feet of Jesus on the cross, I would like to ask what the wounded feet of the border crosser say to us as Christians.

Second, I would like to explore the implications of the Wisdom tradition for an interstitial and intercultural Christology, rooted in a liberationist, feminist, and

performative perspective. Here, Sophia-Jesus inhabits the transient crossroads of cultures, nations, races, and religions, illustrating, as do the writings of Latina women, the ways in which collective identities are interactively developed through the support of one's multiple, overlapping communities. While the task of this project will be largely constructive, it will begin by sketching out the multiple, yet interrelated, portraits of Sophia found in the Hebrew Scriptures and intertestamental literature. Briefly tracing the history of this concept throughout Christian discourse, I hope to note the symbol's ambivalent and contradictory history, as well as its colonization and reclamation by Western feminists. Finally, drawing on the concept's past and present history, my goal is to retrieve and reconstruct the possibilities of Sophia-Jesus, imagining the way in which her interstitiality transcends the constrictive boundaries often associated with Western-European Christologies. Citing Sophia-Jesus as the redemptive, transient, intercultural, plural, and hybrid Body of Christ reproduced by shared communal practices, I seek to further highlight the fluidity and vulnerability of all representations of Jesus, opening up the terms of recognition and allowing those who have been pushed to the margins to be members in and of the Body of Christ. It is my hope that this Wisdom Christology will (re)create, redeem, and embody the interstices, subsequently widening the field for Christian discourse.

In sum, the goal of my dissertation research has been to illustrate the way in which a performative understanding of Christology, as embodied in the daily lives of U.S. Latinas, speaks to the daily struggle (*la lucha*) of those who live on the borders—be they geopolitical, spiritual, sexual, cultural, racial, and so on. I have demonstrated that religious identity construed only in terms of a one-dimensional culturally-linguistically

formulated processes of thought, drains religious belief and praxis of its natural capacity toward creativity, engagement, and embodiment with the divine. Moreover, it forces us to conform our actions to prescribed beliefs and ideals that often mirror the concerns of the powerful. Such an understanding, I suggest, neglects the practices and experiences of those who have been pushed to the margins.

Finally, I understand my work to have participated in the struggle for liberation and empowerment of all those whose identities have been subject oppression. Through God's preferential option for the in-between, the Lord the giver of life brings order out of chaos and new life out of death. Moreover, I argue, it contributes to the flourishing of all people and allows everyone—male and female, rich and poor, gay and straight, able-bodied and disabled, and of every ethnicity and race—to recite their membership in *and* of the Body of Christ

As Virgilio Elizondo notes, "The established centers seek stability, but the frontier regions can risk to be creative pioneers. The frontier people will be the trailblazers of the new societies. 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes" (Matt. 21:42)."[326] Let us begin our theological conversations for the borderlands. For, as Proverbs reminds us, "Does not Wisdom call/ And does not understanding raise her voice? / On the heights, beside the way / At the *crossroads* she takes her stand."

[326] Elizondo, "Elements for a Mexican American *Mestizo* Christology," 13.

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