

TWO PLACES AND NO PLACE ON WHICH TO STAND:
MIXTURE AND OTHERNESS IN HISPANIC
AMERICAN THEOLOGY

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One of the fundamental developments in contemporary theological thinking and biblical interpretation has been to point out and emphasize that neither the task of theologizing nor the task of interpretation occurs in a social vacuum: that both theologian and critic are related in a direct but complex way to the social context or location out of which they come, in which they function, and to which they speak. Indeed, in the last twenty years or so, the myth of a systematic and universal theology, as well as the myth of an objective and universal interpretation, have been exposed as highly uncritical constructs which reflect a very definite, though largely implicit, ideological stance which ultimately involves the universalizing of one position or reading (and hence one social location) over all others, favoring and exalting thereby the one reading or position (and thus social location) in question while bypassing and denigrating all others in the process.¹

In this regard, the rise of contextual theologies on one hand, and the emergence of a wide variety of critical interpretive approaches on the other, have played a key role. The theological movements—including liberation theologies of the Third World, feminist theology, and minority theologies of the First World—have focused on the role of context in the task of theologizing. The critical currents—involving both literary and social approaches to the biblical texts—have emphasized not only the social location and ideology of the biblical texts but also, and more

recently, the social location and ideology of the readers and interpreters of such texts.² As a result, the issue of perspective or standpoint has come fully to the fore in both theological and critical disciplines, with a corresponding and sustained critical focus on the theologian or interpreter and his or her social location.

To be sure, this issue of perspective and social location was not altogether absent from the traditional theological or interpretive enterprises, though it was never explicitly addressed or analyzed as such: systematic theology always exhibited a profound regard for its own religious or ecclesiastical tradition—that sense of and search for a proper grounding in Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, or Evangelical theology; similarly, historical criticism constantly emphasized the *Sitz im Leben* or historical matrix of the text in question, uniformly conceived in terms of theological content, i.e., how the message or teaching of the text presupposed, reflected, and addressed a particular historico-theological situation or problem at hand.

However, recent theoretical developments have led to a radical expansion of this concept of perspective and social location. In effect, social location is now seen as going well beyond both religious affiliation and historico-theological matrix to include a wide variety of identity factors such as gender, ethnic or racial background, socioeconomic class, sociopolitical status and allegiance, sociocultural conventions, educational levels, and ideological stance. All of these factors are now perceived as shaping or influencing the theological and interpretive tasks, and thus subject to critical attention and analysis. Consequently, neither task is seen as reflecting or yielding a universal perspective, as speaking for and to the world; rather, both tasks are seen as pointing to, and reflecting the richness and dignity of, the local perspective, howsoever defined: as speaking for and to the local context, though also, to be sure, in critical dialogue with all other such voices in the world, and thus as speaking ultimately to the entire world as well.³

HISPANIC AMERICANS AS SOCIAL LOCATION

One such configuration of social location, presently giving rise to its own theological and hermeneutical voice, is that of Hispanic Americans, circumscribed both in terms of ethnic background (Hispanic) and sociopolitical status and allegiance (American): individuals of Hispanic descent, associated in one way or another with the Americas, who now live, for any number of reasons, on a

permanent basis in the United States.⁴ This group further reveals a complex twofold character: on one hand, it is quite distinct and readily identifiable; on the other hand, it is also quite varied and thoroughly diverse. Thus, it would be quite improper to regard it, whether from the outside or the inside, as a monolithic or uniform entity, except for specific and clearly articulated analytic or strategic reasons. In effect, I believe that Hispanic American theology must always be keenly mindful of the many similarities that bring us together, as well as the many differences that set us apart. In other words, I conceive of Hispanic American theology as a rich theological locus or matrix within which a wide variety of vibrant theological currents can be found; a rich theological voice within which a broad variety of distinctive inflections can be perceived.

In what follows, I should like to pursue a number of fundamental similarities and differences to be found within the group as a preliminary step towards a beginning elaboration on my part of an autochthonous, self-conscious, and critical Hispanic American theology and hermeneutic—a theology and a hermeneutic that I see as characterized by a radical sense of mixture and otherness, of *mezcolanza* and *otredad*, both unsettling and liberating at the same time.⁵

Hispanic Americans: Binding Similarities

One finds a very clear and pronounced tendency from outside the group to describe all Hispanic Americans in terms of an undifferentiated and highly uncomplimentary sameness. While we certainly do have many and profound characteristics in common, Hispanic American theology must address and analyze in an open, direct, and critical fashion both the image of the group in the wider society—what is attributed unto us by way of stereotype and prejudice; and the image of the group that we ourselves have—what we consider to be our truly distinctive similarities.

1. A first similarity has to do, therefore, with external perception. There is no doubt that from the outside, from the point of view of the dominant culture, a rather monolithic and highly disparaging perception of Hispanic Americans does prevail.⁶ Each and every member of the group has myriad tales to tell in this regard, many of which are remarkably and frighteningly similar. Sad to say, such stories also abound in our churches, our seminaries and divinity schools, our graduate programs in religion—right across the full breadth of the ecclesiastical and theological spectrum, from left to right and right to left.⁷

What is this popular conception of the Hispanic American? I should like to summarize it in what is perhaps its most outrageous and virulent, though not at all uncommon, variation by means of a cumulative series of adjectives with corresponding popular images: (a) lazy, unproductive, unenterprising—the sleeping Mexican with the wide *sombrero*, drinking tequila and whiling away the day against a wall, or a bunch of open-shirted Caribbean men drinking beer and playing dominoes at a local, rundown park; (b) carefree, fun-loving, romantic/sensual—latin-lover types with bushy mustachios and beguiling *señoritas* in bright-colored, low-cut dresses; *maracas*-swinging trios and voluptuous vedettes with plenty of flowers or fruits upon their heads; (c) disorderly, undisciplined, violent—uncontrolled progenitors, breeding like rabbits, and knife-wielding gangs, killing one another like animals; (d) vulgar, unintelligent, unteachable—short, swarthy, and primitive people, with funny broken accents and happily occupying the most menial and servile of occupations. Aside from the extreme character of such a formulation, the overall perception of the group is clearly that of an inferior, uncivilized, and uneducated people.

In a very real sense, therefore, this is the first and immediate characteristic that unites all Hispanic Americans, regardless of geographical origins, social status, or educational attainment: the perception that the dominant culture has of us; the place to which we have been relegated and consigned; the expectations and possibilities that have been granted unto us.

2. A second similarity has to do with who we are, with our culture, our history, and our language. It is an identity that is inherently and uniquely mixed—we are indeed a hybrid people, a *mestizo* and *mulato* people, whether in biological or cultural terms, or both.⁸ It is this identity that has been traditionally celebrated throughout Hispanic America on the 12th of October, a holiday known as the day of *La Raza* (the race).

On the one hand, we are the children of Spain and thus of Europe, Mediterranean and Catholic Europe—deeply rooted in Western civilization as mediated by the language, the history, and the culture of Spain. On the other hand, we are also the children of pre-Columbian America and Africa—deeply rooted as well in other ancient cultures, histories, and languages. Thus, we are neither European nor Amerindian nor African, but rather *criollos*, the native children of the white and the black and the brown, of the conquerors and the conquered, the masters and the slaves, the North and the South.⁹ Such *mestizaje* and *mulatez*

permeates our art, our music, our language, our food, our religion, our very way of constructing and functioning in the world. Thus, biological and/or cultural miscegenation lies at our very roots and stamps our very praxis, sharply distinguishing us in a society that still thinks of itself by and large, even today, in terms of black and white.¹⁰

3. A third similarity concerns our sociopolitical status and allegiance, both past and present. On the one hand, we stand in a tradition that has known the political realm at its worst, a long tradition characterized, with very few exceptions, by political oppression and instability—colonial and neocolonial dependency and exploitation; totalitarian and despotic governments, usually centered around the personality cult of singularly unenlightened *caudillos* (national leader; *führer*; *duce*); widespread corruption and injustice; and systematic violation of all human rights. It is a tradition at once tragic and hopeful, predestined and changeable, utterly despairing of politics yet firmly committed to life and freedom.

On the other hand, through our permanent presence in the United States, our miscegenation has begun to acquire yet another and radically different dimension: we are now also becoming the children of Europe, Nordic and Protestant Europe, as mediated by the Anglo-Saxon world. Through this tradition we have not only begun to acquire a new language, culture, and history, but have also come to know a very different and much more benign political tradition, marked by freedom and stability—national independence and self-determination; democratic and multiparty governments, with free elections, the right of opposition, and peaceful changes of government; a system of justice based on the rule of law; and widespread respect for human rights.¹¹ It is a pragmatic and optimistic tradition, where our deep commitment to life and freedom can at least hope to take root and flower.

4. A final similarity concerns our present social conditions in American society. The statistics clearly show that, as a whole, the group is truly marginalized and disadvantaged.¹² It is politically underrepresented and ineffective—an enormous and crippling disadvantage in the American political scene, where lobbying and pressure constitute the very essence of political life; economically hard-pressed, with almost a quarter of its population living in conditions of poverty, as defined by the government, and many others on the borderline; and educationally precarious, with an alarming rate of failure at all levels of the educational system and severe underrepresentation in all skilled or professional

lines of occupation.¹³ At the same time, recent trends and developments also show the group as a whole becoming increasingly conscious of itself as a group within the society, more and more willing to act together as a united force in the light of similar perceptions and conditions, a growing and extensive interaction at every level of life, and a variety of common goals.¹⁴

Such fundamental similarities constitute a central part of the Hispanic American reality and experience, and provide a basic point of departure for a Hispanic American theology. We are a people living in two worlds: away from our traditional home, creating and establishing a new home; firmly tied to a rich cultural past, yet ready and struggling to take on yet another dimension of cultural miscegenation; accustomed to intolerable levels of political oppression and instability, searching for a measure of political peace and freedom; rejected and denigrated, poor and ignored in our new home, culture, and country—in the very midst of the land of promise and plenty. We are thus a bicultural people at home in neither world—the permanent “others.”

Hispanic Americans: The Unavoidable Differences

Just as one finds a definite tendency from the outside to lump all Hispanic Americans together as one undifferentiated mass, so does one also find a certain tendency from the inside, among Hispanic American theologians themselves, to view the entire group in terms of their own image and likeness.¹⁵ To be sure, these two tendencies are radically distinct: while the former is quite negative in thrust and results, the latter is quite positive and thoroughly well-intentioned. Nevertheless, there are many and profound differences within the group, differences which Hispanic American theology must acknowledge and incorporate, if it is to avoid its own version of the “melting pot” theory.

1. A first difference has to do with our sociocultural identity. While we are the children of biological and/or cultural miscegenation, the nature of the mixture in question differs considerably from area to area and country to country. It should be pointed out in this regard that no one group feels fully comfortable with the title “Hispanic Americans” or any other such nomenclature. On one hand, such appellations are not of our own making, but are rather given unto us. On the other hand, we are all used to identifying ourselves by country of origin, e.g., Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, etc. Each geographical area, as well as each country within each area, have their own distinctive history, culture, conventions, and mixture.

It would be foolish to pretend, therefore, that the Mexican tradition is parallel to the Caribbean, or that the tradition of the upper Andes, of Peru and Ecuador, corresponds to that of the lower Andes, of Chile and Argentina. Similarly, it would be foolish to pretend that all Caribbean peoples share the very same tradition, be they Cubans, Dominicans, or Puerto Ricans. Such diversity of traditions lends enormous richness to our theological voice and should not be submerged.

2. A second difference concerns the nature of, and rationale for, our present socio-political status and allegiance. One finds among Hispanic Americans many who are first-generation immigrants, who have come to this country for political and/or economic reasons—for this group, exile tends to override minority status as the fundamental reality. Many others are the children, immediate or distant, of immigrants—for this group, minority status tends to be the predominant reality. And there are many, who, to the great surprise and amazement of the dominant culture, are not immigrants at all, but rather acquired subjects through expansionism and annexation—for this group, minority status is sharpened by a history of previous or ongoing colonialism as the fundamental reality.¹⁷

Again, it would be foolish to pretend that the most recent experience of Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, or Salvadoreans fleeing for their lives in the midst of civil war is similar to that of the great migration of Puerto Rican families to the cities of the Northeast in the 1940s and 50s, or that the massive exile of Cubans in the 1960s and 70s is similar to the situation of Mexican Americans born in the borderlands of the Southwest, or Puerto Ricans living on the island. Such experiences provide the many hues and tones of our theological voice and should not be ignored.

3. A third difference has to do with our socioreligious affiliation. While traditionally, to be sure, Roman Catholicism, in any of its various forms and expressions within a broad syncretistic framework, has been the basic religious matrix for the vast majority of Hispanic Americans, such is no longer the case; indeed, to the great alarm of the Catholic clergy and episcopacy, recent years have seen a phenomenal growth, both here and in Latin America, of the Protestant churches. From an ecclesiastical point of view, therefore, the group is not only extremely diverse, but also (and regrettably), minimally ecumenical.

Again, it would be foolish to pretend that the world of Roman Catholic Hispanics, deeply steeped in popular religiosity, corre-

sponds to that of Protestant Hispanics, for whom the Bible constitutes the guiding light, or that the vision of Hispanic Protestants in the mainline churches is the same as that of Hispanic Protestants in evangelical or pentecostal churches. Such perspectives provide the many subtle and not-so-subtle colors of our theological voice and should not be overlooked.

Such fundamental differences also constitute a central part of the Hispanic American reality and experience, and provide a further point of departure for a Hispanic American theology. Thus again, we are a people who live in two worlds, but find ourselves at home in neither one. As such, however, we share a world of the past, but we do so with many homes, many mixtures, many traditions, and many conceptions of reality. We further share a world of the present, but again, we do so with many faces, many histories, and many visions of God and the world. We are thus not only a bicultural people but a multicultural people, the permanent others who are also in various respects others to one another.

A HISPANIC AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Out of this rich, complex, and rapidly growing social configuration, a strong theological voice has begun to emerge in recent years, a voice that I like to describe, in deliberately ironic terms, as a manifest destiny—self-confident, vehement, and unstoppable. In keeping with the larger theological and hermeneutical developments outlined above, it is a voice in search of freedom, independence, and autonomy; a voice that seeks to speak in its own terms and with its own visions in mind; a voice that wishes to lay claim to its own reality and experience, give expression to its own view of God and the world, and chart its own future.¹⁸

In what follows, I should like to articulate some of the fundamental lines and contours of a Hispanic American theology, as viewed from my own angle of vision within the Hispanic American reality and experience—a first-generation immigrant of Caribbean descent, specifically from the Cuban experience of political exile, and grounded in a Roman Catholicism much more at home in popular religiosity than in a historically intransigent and politically retrograde institutional church. The theology that I envision is a theology of mixture and otherness—of *mezcolanza* and *otredad*.

1. Such a theology cannot but be a theology of struggle, liberation, and self-determination.¹⁹ Given the overwhelming cultural

barriers faced by all members of the group (the dominant perception of an inferior, uncivilized, and uneducated people), and the enormous social barriers faced by a vast majority of the group (e.g., political, socioeconomic, and educational), such a theology inevitably involves a path of struggle, liberation, and self-determination. The theology of mixture and otherness is a theology that is very much on the way—from exclusion to inclusion, from passivity to action, from silence to speech, from marginalization as an inferior other to an autochthonous, self-conscious, and critical irruption of an other that does not regard or present itself as superior—that would be a tragic mistake, in the divisive tradition of colonialism²⁰—but rather as an equal.

First, such a theology must engage in an active and sustained struggle against the reigning social perceptions and conditions, exposing them for what they are, their rationales and consequences, openly and without fear. This is a struggle that must also be waged in ecclesiastical and theological circles. As such, it is a theology that demands conscientization, education, and sophistication. Second, it must have liberation in mind, a compelling and eschatological view of a different world with different possibilities and alternatives, a world in which human dignity, respect, and rights prevail. This concept of liberation must be extended as well to the ecclesiastical and theological realms. As such, it is a theology that demands commitment, strategy, and *savoir-faire*. Third, it must strive for self-determination in the retrieval and retelling of its own history, in the articulation of its own view of reality, and in the expression of its own future dreams and visions. This sense of self-determination is likewise imperative in all theological and ecclesiastical circles. As such, it is a theology that demands self-confidence, self-definition, and self-direction.

These three essential components of the Hispanic American theology envisioned—struggle, liberation, and self-determination—I do not see at all as separate or sequential but rather as thoroughly interrelated and interdependent, though any one element may predominate at any one time, depending on the circumstances and the strategic aims in question.

2. Such a theology must be ultimately and radically grounded in our profound sense of otherness, our twofold experience of living in two worlds but at home in neither one, and always playing the role of others. This experience is both unsettling and liberating.

The experience is quite unsettling insofar as we find no true and permanent home anywhere—having left our traditional home, we find that our present home is alien, invariably disdain-

ful and hostile; leaving our present home, we find that our traditional home is also alien, largely uncomprehending and unsympathetic. We no longer fit where we came from, and we certainly do not fit where we are. Both our present and former compatriots regard us askance, as strangers, though a major difference is to be noted in this regard: while the latter do so, for the most part, benignly; the former, almost without exception, harshly. The experience is also quite liberating insofar as we perceive immediately the extent to which all reality has a social exterior, scaffolding, and foundation. We function relatively well in our traditional homes: we know its traditions and conventions; we also function more or less well in our present home: we have also come to know its conventions and traditions. We know what makes each world move, and we find that we can go from the one to the other and back again—in an endless process of social translation and retranslation—rather easily. We can thus compare and contrast such worlds: the things people do, the reasons why they do them, the overall framework that underlies and sustains such actions and rationales. We know, therefore, that we can to some extent pick and choose, and this forbidden knowledge gives us the rare ability to offer a fundamental critique of both worlds, an informed critique from the inside.

Consequently, the theology I envision is a theology that must not eschew otherness and alienation, but rather use it as a source of identity and affirmation, comfort and understanding, autonomy and criticism.

3. Such a theology must be ultimately and radically grounded as well in our biological and cultural mixture, in our own *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, in our own expansive and expanding *raza*. In a society ruled, on both sides, by a seemingly intractable white-and-black mentality, a Hispanic American theology must fully acknowledge mixture and rejoice in diversity. We, like few other people in this world, are not only bicultural but also multicultural. We can take delight in reading, as our very own, Cervantes, Guillén, and Asturias—and now Shakespeare, Dickens, and Whitman; in listening to a *zarzuela*, a tango, a corrido, or a mambo—a musical comedy, a country ballad, or a Negro spiritual; in gazing upon a Velázquez, an Arawak petroglyph, or a Mayan or Aztec figurine—a Reynolds or a Benton; in visiting Toledo, Teotihuacán, or Macchu Picchu—Cambridge or Williamsburg.

As such, the theology I envision can play the very important role of self-conscious bridge or translator between North and South, first world and third world, English and Spanish, white

and every other color under the sun. First and foremost, such a theology must be imbued with a deep sense of respect for the "other," moving beyond paralyzing stereotypes to understand other theological voices in their own terms and visions. Given its own perception as primitive and inconsequential, it must go out of its way to acknowledge and understand the identity and dignity of other theological voices. Second, it must go beyond an informed understanding of the other to a proper conversation with the other. Given its own tradition as mixed and marginalized, it must avoid provincialism and engage in global dialogue—giving and taking, sharing and appropriating, enlightening and being enlightened. Third, it must go beyond proper conversation with the other to critical exchange with that other. Given its own history of domination and sense of self-determination, it must be ready to offer and accept critique, straightforwardly and to the point, kindly but firmly.

In a world of increasing and irreversible theological pluralization and globalism, such a theology can indeed play a major and constructive role. It has many skins, many faces, many tongues, many mixtures. It knows them from within and without, and it is not ashamed of any of its components. It is a theology that cannot allow itself to override the other as it itself was overridden, or to shun mixture as it itself was shunned; its mission is to respect and affirm both itself and the other.

4. Again, such a theology must be profoundly critical: it must constantly engage in critical exchange with other theological voices, with its own theological ancestors, and with itself, in all its many forms and variations. Given its sense of mixture and otherness, it is ideally suited for this task—it must regard all "reality" as both nature and construction, life and interpretation, with an underlying ideological basis and program, and hence subject to analysis, critique, and change. Given its sense of origins, not only in a historical tradition of violence and injustice, but also in an ongoing context of marginalization and discrimination, it must develop a highly refined hermeneutics of suspicion at its very core, with a healthy and instinctive distrust of power and authority, a questioning of everything and everyone. Given its sense of silence and passivity, of expected docility and gentleness, it must express such suspicion and critique loudly and without cease. It is a theology that must embrace criticism as a vocation, and proceed to exercise it with aplomb and without reservations.

Such a theology cannot spare criticism with regard to other theological voices, even emerging and allied voices: to do so

would be to surrender its own sense of self-determination and autonomy—and ultimately underestimate and compromise all other voices as well. It certainly cannot spare criticism vis-à-vis its theological progenitors, whether by blood or adoption: to do so would be to perpetuate and foster the long tradition of colonialism and paternalism. And by no means can it afford to spare itself: to do so would be to yield to a new romanticism or even a new imperialism. Such a theology must be firmly grounded on the principle that the moment criticism is surrendered, the path to authoritarianism—to abuse, oppression, and injustice—becomes wide open.

5. Finally, such a theology must be a theology of and for life, a theology with an undifferentiated and fully intertwined realized and future eschatology, an unwavering commitment to the world with a driving vision of a different and better world, and a profound sense of joy in the midst of anguish. Born in violence and oppression, injustice and repression, such a theology must opt for a radically different future, and an enjoyment of such a future in the present to the extent that it can, be it by way of humor, *joie de vivre*, and/or resistance. Accustomed to paternalism and patronizing, it must opt for a sound and healthy critique, a criticism that follows the path of construction rather than destruction, unless the latter becomes absolutely necessary, as it sometimes does. Conceived in mixture, it must opt for the immense richness and diversity of life, not overwhelming the other, as it too was overwhelmed, but rather affirming the other as other, as it too struggles for such affirmation and dignity.

In conclusion, the theology I envision is a theology that, because of its very roots, cannot hide or disguise or reject mixture, for it finds that *mezcolanza* is life and gives life; a theology that, given its very reality and experience, cannot bypass, assimilate, or annihilate the other, for again it finds that *otredad* also is life and gives life. Just as Hispanic American theology finds itself but at its very beginnings, so have I but barely begun in this study to outline the fundamental foundations and contours of this theology of mixture and otherness. The task ahead—the manifest destiny of struggle, liberation, and self-determination—remains enormously demanding, but also supremely satisfying and life-giving.

NOTES

¹It is proper to speak, therefore, of an implicit but profound and far-reaching "colonialism" in the realms of theology and interpretation, a colonialism consisting of the Euro-American or North Atlantic "colonizers" and the

"colonized" of the third world or within the first world itself, who make up the rest of the Christian world. Within such a system, the true message of Christianity, properly interpreted and systematized, has to be imparted by the "civilized" or "missionary" churches to the "native" or "mission" churches, in order to avoid any sort of local and sullyng contact.

²While the social methodologies (e.g., sectarian studies; millenarianism; cultural anthropology) have emphasized above all the social location and ideology of texts, with minimal attention given to the social location and ideology of the readers of these texts, the literary methodologies have variously focused—in a roughly sequential manner—on texts as rhetorical and ideological products in their own right (e.g., narratology; rhetorical criticism), on the complex act of reading and interpretation (e.g., reader response criticism of the text-dominant variety), and on the social location and ideologies of contemporary readers of texts (e.g., neo-marxist analysis; reader response criticism of the reader dominant variety).

³Given the dominant system of theological and interpretive colonialism, it is proper to speak as well of a veritable rebellion or "war of independence" on the part of the "colonized," involving: (a) a thorough rejection of the claim of the "colonizers" to speak for all peoples with their own words and visions; (b) a radical claim on the part of the "colonized" to speak for themselves in their own visions and words; and (c) a sharp and painful reminder from the "colonized" to the "colonizer" that their visions and words are as concrete and local as any other.

⁴For a fuller explanation of this definition and the problems inherent in any definition of the group, see my "Hispanic American Theology and the Bible: Effective Weapon and Faithful Ally," in *We Are A People! Initiative in Hispanic American Theology* (ed. R. S. Goizueta; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming 1992).

⁵I am deliberately using the term *mezcolanza* rather than *mezcla* as a translation for "mixture" both because of its much more attractive character and its traditionally pejorative connotations (see María Moliner, *Diccionario de uso del español* [2 vols.; Biblioteca Románica Hispánica; Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1975] 2:408). The term *otredad* is a neologism, to be preferred to the perhaps more acceptable form, *el otro*, given the masculine gender of the latter term.

⁶See in this regard the most revealing results of a recent survey on the relative social standing of the different ethnic groups in the country (T. Lewin, "Study Points to Increase in Tolerance of Ethnicity," *The New York Times* 8 January 1992: A10). Out of thirty-seven such groups, including a fictitious group called the "Wisians," the last seven categories included, in order: Latin Americans; American Indians; Negroes; "Wisians"!; Mexicans; Puerto Ricans; and Gypsies.

⁷Given the system of theological and interpretive colonialism, such an attitude should not be at all unexpected or surprising. It is a universal feature of the "colonizers" to dehumanize, to underestimate and denigrate, the "colonized"; otherwise, the entire system collapses from within. A regular feature of such "colonialism" in our theological institutions of learning is the comment, "You do not look Hispanic" (i.e., you do not fit your assigned place and stereotype); whether the answer expected is a "Thank you" or an "I'm sorry," I have not yet been able to figure out. As I myself can attest from first-hand experience, prejudice and discrimination are indeed alive and well in the more liberal institutions; however, such discrimination and prejudice are very subtle indeed, and extremely resistant to change.

⁸Given the traditional understanding of *mestizo* and *mestizaje* as the mixture of European and Amerindian and of *mulato* and *mulatez* as the mixture of European and African, I do not like to use one term or the other. Thus, to refer to the mixture as such, which includes the union of Amerindian and African (*zambo*), I prefer to use such terms as miscegenation or hybridization. All of the possible mixtures were elaborately catalogued and named in the course of the colonial period; such mixtures were brought to the canvas in a most revealing series of family portraits painted in the 1760s by the Mexican artist, Miguel Cabrera.

⁹The term *criollo* has various connotations: (a) the children of Europeans born outside of Europe; (b) the children of Spaniards born in Hispanic America, the descendants of Spaniards in Hispanic America, or what is native to Hispanic America; (c) children of Africans born outside Africa. See M. Moliner, *Diccionario*, 1:803. I am using it in a very broad sense, along the lines of the third meaning of (b), with reference to all those born in Hispanic America, regardless of origins or mixtures.

¹⁰The claim is not that miscegenation has always been appreciated or even acknowledged, that racism is not present in our midst. The claim is that—whether we like it or not, whether we admit it or deny it, whether we embrace it or excoriate it—we are mixed to the core. I am reminded in this regard of a delicious and very ironic Caribbean song, entitled, "*Y tu abuela a'onde etá*" ("And where is your grandmother?"), involving an aspiring family that tries to hide a darker-than-tolerated grandmother in the kitchen of the house, while the chorus—the eyes of the neighbors—repeatedly asks, "and, by the way, where is your grandmother?" The song not only reveals the racism of our own societies, though very different from that experienced in U.S. society, but also the mixed nature of our people, further conveyed by the untranslatable aphorism, "*El que no tiene de dinga, tiene de mandinga*." If not from a biological point of view, then certainly from a cultural point of view, both saying and song hold true for us all. For the song itself, see the CD album entitled, "*Estampas de Luis Carbonell*" (Kubaney, CDK-165).

¹¹Such a contrast should not be seen in either/or terms. It does not take Hispanic Americans long to realize that the picture of the country traditionally exported abroad is only relatively true—not infrequently, freedom is curtailed, the democratic system compromised, injustice and corruption overlooked, and human rights violated. The streets are neither paved with gold, nor do the poor, huddled masses receive all that warm a welcome. Relatively speaking, however, the contrast does remain a significant one indeed. This contrast also has a much darker and troubling side as well, as Hispanic Americans begin to realize that their new country has been responsible, many times and in many ways, for the subversion of freedom, its process and its hopes, and for the propagation of injustice in their respective homelands—in direct opposition to the values and ideals of the country.

¹²The claim is not that there are no differences in social status or economic class among Hispanic Americans, but that the group as a whole shows a considerable lag with respect to the rest of the population, even among those who are citizens of the country by birth.

¹³On political power, see, e.g., David González, "Hispanic Voters Struggle to Find the Strength in Their Numbers," *The New York Times* 26 May 1991; on economic distress, see, e.g., Felicity Barringer, "Hispanic Americans Gain but Still Lag Economically, Report Says," *The New York Times* 11 April 1991; on educational problems, see, e.g., Karen de Will, "Rising Segregation is Found for Hispanic Students," *The New York Times* 9 January 1992: A9.

¹⁴Such developments are at work as well in theological circles. For example, an ecumenical theological organization (La Comunidad of Hispanic American Scholars and Teachers of Religion), associated with the American Academy of Religion, has been formed, facilitating a much-needed forum for discussion and interaction. Similarly, in the fall of 1991, a highly successful ecumenical conference on Hispanic Theology took place at Auburn Seminary in New York City ("Faith Doing Justice: An Ecumenical Conference on Hispanic Theology"), the first of many envisioned for the future.

¹⁵See, e.g., A. M. Isasi-Díaz, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988)—a view of Hispanic women largely in terms of Catholic women; H. Recinos, *Hear the Cry! A Latino Pastor Challenges the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989)—a view of the Hispanic American reality largely in terms of the *barrio*, grounded in the Puerto Rican experience in the cities of the Northeast; J. González, *Mañana: Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989)—a view of the Hispanic American reality largely in terms of exile. Though in all cases explicit allowance is made for differences, nevertheless one reality, that of the author, tends to become representative of or paradigmatic for the others. On this point, see the sharp comments by J. Quiñonez-Ortiz, "The Mestizo Journey: Challenges for Hispanic Theology," *Apuntes* 11 (1991) 62-72.

¹⁶The claim is not that division and separatism should be preserved and fostered, whether within the group itself or in the country at large. Such a strategy would be absurd, not only unattainable, but also highly counterproductive. First, we already come, each and every one of us, from a tradition of mixture. Second, we have established a permanent presence in the country. Third, we can only find the social and political strength we need in union and numbers. The claim is rather one of enlightened integration, whereby we do not lose an essential part of our identity in and through such a mixture. The aim should be a respectful and liberating mixture—enriching for each group, for Hispanic Americans as a whole, and for the country at large.

¹⁷From a legal point of view, therefore, Hispanic Americans include born citizens, naturalized citizens, legal residents, and illegal residents. There are also many Hispanic temporary workers, both legal and illegal, but, given the absence of a permanent association with the country, this group does not qualify as Hispanic American.

¹⁸In terms of the traditional system of theological and interpretive colonialism, it is proper to speak further of an ongoing process of "decolonization," a process in which the voice and vision of the newly independent begin to take shape with a view towards autonomous self-definition and self-direction. This process involves of necessity a radical critique of the "colonizers," of the theological "masters," much to their surprise and consternation.

¹⁹For liberation as a fundamental characteristic of Hispanic American theology, see my "A New Manifest Destiny: The Emerging Theological Voice of Hispanic Americans," *Religious Studies Review* 17 (1991) 101-109; for liberation as a fundamental characteristic of Hispanic American hermeneutics, see my "Hispanic American Theology and the Bible: Effective Weapon and Faithful Ally" (see n. 4 above).

²⁰See in this regard Edward W. Said, "Yeats and Decolonization," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (S. Deane, ed.; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 69-95.

MUJERISTA THEOLOGY'S METHOD: A LIBERATIVE PRAXIS, A WAY OF LIFE

Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Mujerista theology is a liberative praxis—reflective action that has as its goal the liberation of Hispanic women. *Mujerista* theology reflects upon and articulates the religious understandings and practices of Hispanic women. *Mujerista* theology is a communal theological praxis that endeavors to enable Hispanic women to be agents of our own history, to enhance our moral agency, and to design and participate in actions that are effective in our daily struggle for survival.¹ *Mujerista* theology is a way of life, a living out of a divine call to participate in the unfolding of the kingdom of God in a very specific way.²

Claiming the lived-experience of Hispanic women as the source of *mujerista* theology calls for a theological method that not only explicitly identifies such experience, but also presents it as unmediated as possible. Coupled with this methodological requirement is the commitment of *mujerista* theology to provide a platform for the voices of Hispanic women. Such requirement and commitment have led to the use of qualitative research methods to gather information, and to present it and explore it with integrity.

This article presents a brief exposition of ethnomethodology, a critique of professional social sciences that focuses on the particularities of the persons being investigated. It discusses two qualitative research methods (ethnography and meta-ethnography) used to gather the voices and lived-experiences of Hispanic women. I argue here that Hispanic theologians, committed to the liberation of our peoples, must present in their writings par-