

COMMUNITY AS/AND EXPERIENCE AMONG U.S. HISPANICS

The theme of this workshop, moderated by Orlando Espín (University of San Diego), was the experience of community as a *locus theologicus* of U.S. Hispanic theology. Roberto S. Goizueta (Loyola University Chicago) presented a paper on the relationship between community and *mestizaje*, the historical confluence of cultures and races that has created the U.S. Hispanic people.

Goizueta suggested that for U.S. Hispanic theology, community is both an aesthetic and a sociopolitical category. Consequently, this theology represents a sublation of two major currents of Latin American thought, the aesthetic philosophies of the first half of the twentieth century, and the liberation theologies of the latter half of this century.

In the early part of this century, a number of major Latin American philosophers wrote important works on aesthetics. These scholars saw the aesthetic paradigm as an epistemological antidote to Western European rationalism. Among the most influential of these philosophers was the Mexican scholar José Vasconcelos, who argued that, by virtue of its essentially unitive or synthetic character, aesthetic experience must ground both reason and ethics, which impose artificial limitations and, hence, divisions on human experience. In so far as the "aesthetic fusion" unites subject and object, it forms the basis for intersubjectivity and community. Embodying an aesthetic unity of cultures and races, the *mestizo* community represents, in turn, the ideal community, one which neither excludes nor completely assimilates otherness.

In his emphasis on the unitive character of aesthetics, however, Vasconcelos was unable to account adequately for the historical experience of disjunction, conflict, and oppression. Liberation theology represents—at least by implication—a critique of Latin American aesthetics. Liberation theologians insist that an aesthetics of community must be grounded in a preferential option for the poor, that is, in a recognition of the reality of disunity.

U.S. Hispanic theologians are called, in turn, to appropriate the insights of these two Latin American traditions in a communal praxis that is both aesthetic and sociopolitical. In so doing, they would value the ideal of the *mestizo* community, while recognizing that such a community is not yet fully realized, either in society as a whole or within our own U.S. Hispanic communities, where sexism, racism, and classism remain.

A lively discussion followed Goizueta's presentation. Themes addressed in the discussion included the pastoral implications of this notion of community, the differences between the Latin American and United States contexts as impacting the notion of community, and future directions of U.S. Hispanic theology.

ORLANDO O. ESPÍN
University of San Diego