

CATHOLIC HISPANIC THEOLOGY IN THE U.S.: DIMENSIONES DE LA OPCIÓN PREFERENCIAL POR LOS POBRES EN EL NORTE

ABOUT “YO”

Serendipity has me sitting at the “adults” table—and for the past four months, I have been feeling like I have bitten off more than I can chew. Convinced that the rising generation of theologians has much to contribute and should be encouraged to do so, the CTSA boldly decided to pair an emerging Latina ethicist with a senior servant of God, Fr. Allan, in an effort to actualize their resolve to transform their antiquated convention structure for the worthy goal of furthering Catholic theology in the U.S. Again, an overwhelming sensation of freefalling down a bottomless pit has brooded under me since I accepted the invitation to speak at this year’s convention on the topic of Hispanic Theology. For these experiences of dread and foreboding I am grateful, and so it is with great humility that I offer the following reflections on the *opción preferencial por los pobres en el Norte*.

My theological journey purposely tried to avoid liberation and Latina/o theologies in an effort to avoid being labeled as a “contextual” theologian. As a Puerto Rican woman doing a Master in Theological Studies at the Boston University School of Theology, I was asked repeatedly what I thought of liberation theology. I was both resentful and jealous that my white male colleagues were more versed in Latin American theologies than I was. Second, I found it offensive that they assumed that the Puerto Rican feminist would, of course, be well acquainted with the liberation movement. I did not want anyone else telling me what field I was supposed to be good at or interested in or, worse yet, that I owed it to “my people” to become their theological spokesperson. Focusing on systematic theology and the “true masters” of that field, early to mid-20th century dead European men, I wanted to be appreciated for being versed in “real” theologies—not the “flash in the pan” boisterous opining and theological whining of marginal peoples.

However, something happened while studying the dead European guys, Bonhoeffer, Rahner, Barth, R. Niebuhr, Congar, even C. S. Lewis, but especially Paul Tillich, whose *Systematic Theology* was the focus of my MTS program. Most of these authors shared historical experiences of systemic evil: World War I, totalitarian fascist regimes, World War II, the Jewish Holocaust. More specifically, these experiences of systemic evil left an epistemological imprint in their thinking that would shape their theologies. These theologians engaged the

anthropological question from the perspective of unjust suffering, a perspective that led them to highlight the inalienable dignity of the person and the idolatrous nature of absolutizing ideologies turned into systematic forms of oppression and death. Their insights spoke to my need to view salvation and liberation as effected in and affecting historical reality.¹ The dead German men had accomplished the paradigm shift I had originally denied to liberation theologians—opening my eyes to the privileged location of human suffering in the understanding of salvation and liberation in history. I then became committed to finding theologies that sought to speak from the privileged location of human suffering, thrusting me in the direction of those “contextual” theologies I had long abhorred. At the heart of these theologies is the preferential option for the poor, which has become for me a central spiritual and academic principle.

Coming into Latino/a theology was an even thornier affair. Had I not proven my cultural loyalties by adopting Latin American liberation theology? At any rate, I am not Latina; I neither immigrated to the U.S., nor was I born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. I am Puerto Rican, a U.S. citizen, here by my own birthright. Latina/o theologies were not my concern since I neither live on the border, nor struggle with language, nor seek legal citizenship. I hope you can recognize the irony in all these statements. For, Puerto Ricans are, by our very nature, a border unto ourselves. Here (in me) is where the U.S. and the Caribbean meet, where English and Spanish play and argue, where Christian-Muslim Moor-Taíno-Santero together honor the sacred, where African slave and free Spaniard violently coalesce, and, in a twist true to the *mestizo*, and where the movement of peoples, some by choice and many more by force, gave way to the Puerto Rican. Most definitely, the border, *mestizaje*, and the preferential option for the marginalized in the United States were my issues—elements of my existence that I would have to explore theologically. To explore the trajectory of liberation theology and the option for the poor in the U.S., I would have to look at the so-called “contextual” theologies. For it is in the theologizing from the people in the margins in the United States that we come upon powerful insights about the nature of poverty, the abuse of empire, the burden of suffering, and oppression, but also crucial and life-affirming insights into survival, solidarity, community, empowerment, beauty, and faith.

I offer this biography of my theological training as confession for the fact that I am neither an expert in nor a practitioner of Latina/o or Hispanic theologies. The focus of my research is class analysis in the U.S. and the option for the poor, middle-class identity formation and politics, and the diverse links between class, militarism, and the ethics of the use of force. I will return to these themes later. I do not call myself a Latina theologian for this is a question of both focus

¹Most especially through Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology*, Volume I (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951) and Volume II (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

of study and identity that is complex, emotional, political, academic, even spiritual, that I have only begun to explore. As Orlando Espín mentions most recently,

One question, for example, that needs to be asked and thoroughly discussed is, what makes Latina/o theology distinctly “Latina/o”? Evidently, until a consensus emerges as a reply to this question I do not see how we could determine the exact origins of U.S. Latina/o theology. Needless to say, logically and methodologically, the ethnicity of the authors cannot be the main source of or justification for theological *latinidad*.²

OUTLINE

I would like to first, introduce some of the history and central concepts of Latina/o theology as developed in the past 30 years or so. I do not pretend in any way to provide a comprehensive study of the field. Thankfully by now the body of literature produced by and about Latina/o theologians and theologies is prolific enough to make it a daunting and impossible task to attempt a full encapsulation in one volume, let alone a section of a paper.³ I will offer you, then, what I consider to be insights in Latina/o theology that are not only a gift and resource for developing relevant, prophetic, and affective Catholic theology that takes seriously the preferential option for the poor in the U.S. but downright essential to this task. Second, I will propose a reconsideration of some of these insights in light of the preoccupations of a new generation of Latina/o theologians that both critiques the scope of the original questions and insights while at the same time challenging this new generation with same said original insights. Finally, I en-

²Orlando Espín, “The State of U.S. Latina/o Theology: An Understanding,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo González* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 294.

³A number of volumes that attempt more comprehensive summaries or surveys of both Protestant and Roman Catholic Latina/o Theology include (in chronological order): *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, edited by Arturo Bañuelas (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1995); *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, edited by Fernando Segovia and Ada María Isasi-Díaz (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996); *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, edited by José David Rodríguez and Loida Martell-Otero (Louisville, Kentucky: WJK Press, 1997); *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín and Miguel Díaz (Maryknoll, New York, 1999); *New Horizons in Hispanic/Latino(a) Theology*, edited by Benjamin Valentin (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2003); *Hispanic Christian Thoughts at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, edited by Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta, and Eldin Villafañe (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005); *Handbook of Latina/o Theologies*, edited by Edwin Aponte and Miguel A. De La Torre (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2006). This list is by no means exhaustive. I have selected a variety of collections of essays that does not begin to include the number of articles in academic journals on this topic nor the single author volumes to the same.

gage the creative process of projecting possibilities for the future of Latina/o theology, or, at the very least, the future of this Puerto Rican's work. My main hope is the possibility for Latina/o theology to present an alternative set of symbols and language that opens space in the public square for conversations and practices guided by the option for the poor. In other words, a bit of theological gymnastics, indeed!

Allow me to close these introductory remarks with a significant caveat. *I* speak in the first person singular, which is anathema to the basic methodology of Latina/o theology of *teología en conjunto*—a practice that actually takes seriously the foundation of a hermeneutic circle or horizon composed of colleagues in the academy as well as the people about and for whom we write. I owe a great intellectual debt to the women and men I mention in these pages, Latina/o theologians from the first generation, but particularly to my own cohort, friends and colleagues that represent the wide theological spectrum of the Christian tradition. However, there is no “we” among Latina/o theologians, and therefore this is but my own reflection on this topic. I hope that as such it both honors and challenges my *hermanas y hermanos*.

“OUR STORY BEGINS . . .”

U.S. Latino/a theology is not a sub-theology, dependent on some North Atlantic theological paradigm, nor is it a translation of the Latin American theology of liberation . . . Latino/a theology has its own characteristics, which in turn have enriched the theological reflection of many in the third world with new methods, new intuitions, new epistemological premises and new fields of reflection.⁴

To engage appropriately with Latina/o theology we must combine history, statistics, social movements, and theological insights with the day-to-day experiences that mark one of the largest movements of people in recent history. Again, let us consider the following by Virgilio Elizondo:

Something new is happening and it needs to be conceptualized, verbalized, and communicated so that the new ideas may take on form and become a power within the life of the group. If the newness is not verbalized, researched by the various intellectual disciplines, and taught by the various media of popular communication at work in society it will continue to be viewed by those outside the social process as something primitive, exotic, or ‘cute’—and the danger is that it could become just that.⁵

⁴Ruy G. Suarez Rivero, “U.S. Latino/a Theology: A View from Outside,” in *From the Hear of Our People: Latino/a Explorations In Catholic Systematic Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín and Miguel Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 243.

⁵Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, revised and expanded (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 27-28.

ONE OUT OF EVERY FOUR

Latina/o theology speaks to the reality that by the year 2050 one out of every four persons living in the U.S. will be immigrant Hispanic or of Hispanic origin. This reality began with the conquest of the Americas in the 15th century and the expansionist violence of the U.S. in the Southwest. Latina/o theology is representative of 1492, 1848 for Mexican-Americans (Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo between U.S. and Mexico), 1898 for Puerto Ricans (invasion of U.S. naval forces on the island and Spain ceding the colony to the U.S.), and the 1950s-1980s for Latinos of Central and South American origin (key period of U.S. interventionism, civil wars, and so-called wars by proxy between the U.S. and the Soviet Union). The newness to which the previous quote refers was the daring step of a few Hispanic theologians to ‘conceptualize, verbalize and communicate’ in theological and ethical terms the reality of a significant portion of the U.S. population acknowledging “that in the last 500 years these people have been twice conquered, twice colonized, and twice oppressed.”⁶

As Ana María Díaz-Stevens clarifies, “Hispanic Catholics have always lived in what we today call the United States.”⁷ But this way of being Catholic—with its popular devotions, home altars, and feasts—was found to be “incompatible with an Americanizing way of life.”⁸ Anglo-American expansionism violently took over half of pre-war Mexico. The Mexican people saw themselves as having to assimilate—become like the winners.⁹ The Americanization of Hispanic Catholicism is also a phenomenon experienced in Puerto Rico where, within one year (1898), the promise of liberation from colonization from Spain was extinguished with the U.S. invasion and the subsequent parceling out of the territory for Anglo-Protestant evangelization. First generation Latina/o theologians were also responding to the overwhelming demographic transformation in the Church. Currently almost one out of every two Catholics in the U.S. is of Hispanic descent. The task of Latina/o theology is the task of relevant theology for the Church: “U.S. Catholic theology (and theological education) is at a turning point—either it speaks from the reality and faith of the Catholic community as it exists in the country [50% Hispanic], or it will become increasingly irrelevant to

⁶Virgilio Elizondo, “Toward an American-Hispanic Theology of Liberation in the U.S.A.” in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, edited by Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 50.

⁷Ana María Díaz-Stevens, “The Hispanic Challenge to U.S. Catholicism,” in *Cuerpo de Cristo: The Hispanic Presence in the U.S. Catholic Church*, edited by Peter Casarella and Raúl Gómez, S.D.S. (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 160.

⁸Ibid., 158.

⁹Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 14-15.

the U.S. Church.”¹⁰ Latina/o theology is therefore tackling a question of relevance as well as prophetic vision. In the words of Orlando Espín:

gone are the days when an authentically American theology of grace [or any other theological subject] could be elaborated solely from the European-American perspective, without serious regard for Latino/a Catholicism, culture, and social realities.¹¹

METHODOLOGY

One of the greatest strengths of the movement has been its emphasis on methodology. A significant part of its efforts has gone to developing an epistemological approach and methodology for exploring the experience of the Latino community in the U.S. The resulting insights became both tools of analysis as well as theological principles. One could suggest that there was an excess of attention on methodology, sometimes even at the cost of the critical analysis and theologizing to which this new movement was pointing.¹² The emphasis on process highlighted a particular characteristic of Latina/o theology; theology is a project best done in a community of colleagues that reaches from the academy to the churches and neighborhoods from which we come and which form and inform us. It is *teología en conjunto*, the idea that the individual theologian alone cannot adequately absorb the details of life in the margins in the U.S., let alone arrive at theological conclusions that do justice and offer hope to this reality. The length of this presentation does not allow me to entertain what I see as the most important contribution of *teología en conjunto* to the Catholic theological academy: the ongoing ecumenical collaborations that span the so-called mainline traditions as well as including the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. In fact, while I have tried to ground my reflection mainly on Catholic sources it is impossible to speak of Latina/o theology without ecumenical openness and the use of Protestant sources.

The methodology employed by Latina/o theologians taps on its heritage from Latin American liberation theology in its attention to praxis and the life of

¹⁰Orlando Espín and Miguel Díaz, “Introduction,” in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín and Miguel Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 3.

¹¹Orlando Espín, “An Exploration into the Theology of Sin and Grace,” in Espín and Díaz, *From the Heart of Our People*, 125.

¹²Much of the literature by and about Latino/a theologians and theology painstakingly details the methodology and process that makes this movement a new and unique enterprise. In particular, I believe that Latina/o theologians were and continue to be conscious of the ‘hyper’ scrutiny to which the academy subjects what are labeled “contextual” theologies. Therefore, this focus was merited though it often took the place of broader theological development.

the poor. The “principle of coherence of an authentically Latino/a systematic theology . . . [is] the faith and daily experience of the Latino/a people.”¹³ *Lo cotidiano*—the daily living of the people in its fullness (in the family, spiritually, economically, politically, socially, and culturally)—is the main focus of reflection. It is, what I call, *the incarnational principle of the preferential option for the poor*. The epistemological turn of observing and, more importantly, sharing in the daily living, surviving, struggling, and thriving of the Latino people presents a wide stage from which to launch theological projects altogether different from Latin American liberation theology while maintaining a continuum with it through the centrality of the preferential option for the poor.¹⁴ According to María Pilar Aquino

with respect to the influence of Latin American theology on U.S. Latino/a theology: it is evident that U.S. Latino/a theology also declares its self understanding as critical reflection on the praxis of faith under the light of revelation; it is equally committed to the option for the poor and marginalized as fundamental principle; and it seeks to actualize salvation—within personal and social processes of liberation—as participation in God’s salvific act.¹⁵

¹³Espín and Díaz, “Introduction,” 2.

¹⁴Espín, *Ibid.*, 121: “Only that theology that seriously takes into account the impact of culture, gender and social position, and which methodologically acknowledges and incorporates the real, daily life situations of Latinos/as, can claim to be Latino/a.” Specific works on the centrality of the option for the poor in Latina/o theology include María Pilar Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium,” in Espín and Díaz, *From the Heart of Our People*, 6-48; Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, revised and expanded (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995); Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990); Carmen Marie Nanko, “Justice Crosses the Border: The Preferential Option for the Poor in the United States,” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, edited by María Pilar Aquino, Daisy Machado and Jeanette Rodríguez (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), 177-203. I can safely say that a large number of contributors to the corpus of Latina/o theology (from across the Christian spectrum) center or guide their work on the option for the poor, including: María Pilar Aquino, Orlando Costas, Virgilio Elizondo, Orlando Espín, Allan Figueroa-Deck, Roberto Goizueta, Justo González, Michelle González, Ada María Isasi Díaz, Loida Martell-Otero, Jeanette Rodríguez, Benjamín Valentín, Eldín Villafañe, and many others. Biblical scholarship by Latina/o authors—Efraín Agoston, Francisco Lozada, Jean Pierre Ruíz, Fernando Segovia, and others—also exhibits the centrality of the option for the poor.

¹⁵María Pilar Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium,” in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín and Miguel Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 27.

The use of a methodology grounded on the preferential option for the poor, uniquely applied as a “preferential option for culture,”¹⁶ and attentive to the ‘everydayness’ of life in the margins in the U.S. has yielded a spectrum of theological categories, experiences and insights unique to Latina/o theology:

- *Fiesta*: the celebration of life as gift, resistance to systems that deliver oppression and death, and marking “God’s entry into the drama of our lives”;¹⁷
- *Lo cotidiano*: attention to daily experiences of living in the margins that highlight a people’s approach to challenges, oppression, invisibility, and poverty through their cultural and religious strengths;¹⁸
- *Nosotros* and *Dignidad*: alternative visions of humanity that focus on an anthropology of being rather than making, presenting the human being as participant in networks of love and care involving family and neighborhood, honoring the privileged place of these networks in Hispanic culture and its role in sustaining and magnifying our God-given dignity;¹⁹
- *Mestizaje*: a category that examines the historical, theological, anthropological, and ethical implications of the history of violence and conquest that thrust the Latino identity into being;²⁰
- *Religión popular*: research and analysis on the religious practices that sustain Latinas/os in the U.S. amidst social, economic, political, and cultural oppression, practices which often fall outside the prescribed rituals of the Roman Catholic church.²¹

Other topics prominent among Latina/o theologians include reflections on Our Lady of Guadalupe or *La Morenita*, border (-crossings, -lands, -religion, etc.),

¹⁶Aquino, 3.

¹⁷Quote from Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 129; also in Goizueta, “Fiesta: Life in the Subjunctive,” in Espín and Díaz, *From the Heart of Our People*, 91-94.

¹⁸As epistemological lens and theological guide, *lo cotidiano* is used by most Latina/o theologians throughout our work. In my estimation, it was most adequately developed as a concept in Ada María Isasi Díaz’s *Mujerista Theology: a Theology for the 21st Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), and in her subsequent work, especially “Lo cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 10 no 1 (August 2002), 5-17.

¹⁹Roberto Goizueta, “Nosotros: Toward a U.S. Hispanic Anthropology,” *Listening*, 27 (Winter 1992), 55-69; and Ismael García, *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997).

²⁰Central to Latina/o theology, *mestizaje* was most prominently developed in the theology of Virgilio Elizondo in *Galilean Journey* (see note 14 above) and in *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988).

²¹Hispanic popular religion was most prominently examined in Orlando Espín’s *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), and in his subsequent works.

and *Nepantla* spirituality. I would like to dedicate the remainder of this presentation to the two topics with which I struggle the most and in which I see the most promise for engagement with U.S. civil society as it pertains to justice in Christian ethics in particular: *lo cotidiano* and *mestizaje*.

LO COTIDIANO

Lo cotidiano is typically translated as “daily life” or “daily living.” There are no adequate translations for the meaning of this phrase in Hispanic culture for “everyday,” the adjective form of “everydayness,” means “appropriate for ordinary days or routine occasions,” and “commonplace” or “ordinary.”²² For Latina/o theology, however, *lo cotidiano* is a blend of the ordinary and the extraordinary of life as a gift from God. When attention is paid to *lo cotidiano* among Latinas/os in the U.S. a particular picture of joys and sorrows, achievements and struggles begins to emerge and it is this picture that informs Latina/o theology. Perhaps the ironic tragedy lies in the fact that the everyday or ordinary for many immigrants and other people in the margins in the U.S. is the suffering of persecution, of being branded aliens in their own land, of undergoing colonization and conquest again and again—including in their most intimate spiritual realm. It is not, to be clear, a romantic vision of Hispanic life and culture for within it we find reflected back upon us the sexism/*machismo* and its accompanying expression in domestic violence, homophobia, classism, and racism that are also part of our culture. *Lo cotidiano* can be considered a magnifying glass, a tool through which to engage in the sort of social analysis introduced by Latin American liberation theology. However, for Latina/o theologians it is also a principle of participation and incarnation in the life of the people for whom we claim to speak, a dimension that Latin American liberation theology did not discover until its second generation, and some would say, in response to its development in liberation theologies in the North.

Through participation and sharing in the joys and sorrows of life in the margins in the U.S., *lo cotidiano* allowed Latina/o theologians to highlight the plight of a daily existence marked by unjust detention and deportation, separation of families, language barriers, ‘day laboring’ and low wages, the threat of immigration raids, lack of access to educational opportunities, discrimination in housing, and all of this often after surviving the harrowing experience of crossing a river, a desert, or an ocean in what is often called “the universal quest for life.”²³ As the incarnational principle of the option for the poor it promotes

²²“Everydayness,” *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*, in (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/everydayness>), accessed 5/16/08.

²³Miguel Díaz, “Life-giving Migrations: Re-visioning the mystery of God Through U.S. Hispanic Eyes,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, June 2006 (<http://www.latintheology.org/2006/migrations>).

witnessing daily experiences of struggle and death also and sharing in experiences of salvation and hope, celebration, spirit, and accompaniment along life's journey. Latino Catholic popular religion or *religión popular* is a particular aspect of *lo cotidiano* that, in its social-cultural-political dimension, resists colonization by the Anglo-Protestant or Euro-American trend that had been imposed on the waves of Catholic European immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century and with the conquest of the Hispanic and Catholic Southwest.

Popular religion, then, is not the romanticization of, or, worse yet, turning into exotic or fashionable a series of practices or devotions particular to Latinos/as. The practices and devotions that crossed the border, or on which the border was imposed, present a new way of being religious and therefore of engaging with and knowing reality that stands in contrast to the backdrop of an Americanized Catholic Church. If, as an academy of Catholic theologians, we are to consider the preferential option for the poor as both theological principle and hermeneutical lens, then we "must make a methodologically serious study of the religion of the poor,"²⁴ and appreciate its contribution to the *sensus fidelium*.²⁵ The theological examination of popular religion by Latina/o theologians yields a range of elements about Latino spirituality and identity that take us far beyond the mere descriptive observations from cultural anthropology.²⁶

Mestizaje—In *Galilean Journey*, Virgilio Elizondo presents one of the first and most complete explanations of the term *mestizaje* in its historical and racial context, its political and cultural consequences, and its theological significance

²⁴Espín, "The State of U.S. Latina/o Theology," 108.

²⁵Orlando Espín, "Pentecostalism and Popular Catholicism: The Poor and Traditio," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, Vol. 3:2 (1995), 28.

²⁶Orlando Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997). For example, Roberto Goizueta's presentation of the Good Friday procession at the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio (*Caminemos Con Jesús*) gives the reader a profound appreciation of Hispanic spirituality as it ties into an operative anthropology and ethic of accompaniment. The walking with the "persons" of Mary and Jesus with the cross (as portrayed by members of the community) reflects a Hispanic Christology of God with us in our suffering (both the suffering of Jesus and of Mary). This Christology translates, in turn, into an ethic of accompaniment, the practices of a community to "be" with each other in struggle and celebration (an anthropology and ethic of 'being' over 'making'). Finally we arrive at the way in which Hispanic popular religion in the Good Friday devotions are acts of political, cultural, and even economic resistance in the way they present the Hispanic community (and the world witnessing these rituals) with alternative ways of being that resist an individualized and commercial or consumerist approach to religion and spiritual practices. While the dominant society often abandons the migrant in low wage jobs, lack of social services, and indefinite detention units, the Good Friday processions present an unconditional 'suffering with' that accompanies the dying Jesus and the mourning Mary into resurrection and life.

for Latina/o theology. His discussion begins with the violence originated by the events of 1492:

1492 launched an era of violence such as the world had not known before. Violence itself was not new to the world but the extent and depth of the dehumanization stemming from 1492 was, and remains without parallel.²⁷

The encounter between the European, native, and African peoples that resulted from the conquest of the Americas was dominated by the European understanding of superiority in the eyes of history and the eyes of God. *Mestizaje*, the racial and cultural mixing of these three peoples and their culture, is the product of historic and systemic violence. This is its negative and critical edge on which I will expand later. Elizondo and many other Latina/o theologians capture the tragic and complex identity of *mestizaje* to explore its positive implications for Hispanic identity:

As long as Mexican-Americans look upon their origin in terms of inferiority they themselves accentuate what the dominant society has been telling them. But if they can go back to their origins and see it in terms of birth pangs—something painful but full of potential for future life—they will see it not as a curse but as a blessing.²⁸

A positive reading of *mestizaje* stems from the diversity and inclusiveness embodied within. The product of imperial violence opened a space where a new people, a new spirit, a new culture, even a new Christianity (especially after the apparition of the Virgin Mary on the Mount at Tepayac)²⁹ would offer the gift of a radically positive self-identity.³⁰ Indeed, Elizondo's "Galilean principle" is the promise of making whole what humanity has broken: "what human beings reject God chooses as his very own . . . with each new *mestizaje* some racio-cultural frontiers that divide humankind are razed and a new unity is formed."³¹

"I TAKE EXCEPTION WITH . . ."

Lo cotidiano and *mestizaje* are insights that Latina/o theology has been able to cull from close examination of the experiences and context of the Christian

²⁷Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 8.

²⁸Ibid., 23.

²⁹Ibid., 12-13.

³⁰Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "A New Mestizaje/Mulatez: Reconceptualizing Difference," in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America From the Margins*, edited by Eleazar Fernández and Fernando Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 206: "The insistence in Hispanic/Latina theology, including *mujerista* theology, on seeing and using *mestizaje/mulatez* as a positive element and proposing it as an ethical choice is indicative of our preoccupation with understanding and dealing with difference."

³¹Elizondo, *Ibid.*, 91.

faith among Latinos/as in the U.S. As such, Latina/o theology has been qualified as a contextual theology in the same manner as Black liberation theology, min-jung theology, and queer theology.³² Contextual theology may be described as a “way of doing theology which seeks to explore and exhibit the dialectical relation between the content and the setting of theology.”³³ It is reflection on the Word of God from a particular time and a particular place—the relationship between content and setting—taking into account and acknowledging cultural, social, ethnic, gender, class and other elements of a theologian’s location.³⁴ Therefore, all theology is “contextual.” However, what we have come to know as contextual theologies in the past 20 years or so are the reflections and insights produced by particular experiences of marginalization, invisibility, and poverty. It has also been the case that the academy has treated these contextual theologies as elective or as ornamental, not pertinent to the substance of theological education, important for some, but nonessential for the business of serious theological reflection. Orlando Espín, reflecting on the state of U.S. Latina/o theology today, says it best:

Although some gains can be indicated, most of our denominations and most of the theological academy still consider us a fringe—unimportant to the otherwise “real” theology and at best a pastoral problem to be solved but not a theological partner to be engaged.³⁵

Contextualization arrives after the grand narratives have been dismantled. But it soon became a comfortable way to ignore or compartmentalize particular narratives of oppression. Therefore, a contextual theology becomes a theology for some—not all—in a tragic game of ignoring the suffering of the other. Rather than exposing the dominant or center paradigm to the other and his or her suffering, contextual theologies open a particular place of safety or comfort—narrowly understood as safe for the center—where dominant scholarship need not engage with the margins.

In my estimation labeling theologies from the location of suffering at the margins as contextual does a particular violence to both the Latina/o (and other) theological enterprises and the communities they represent. That Latina/o theology was originally read as contextual and cultural theology was not only a misreading but actively condemning it since the academy had already decided

³²Cyris H. Moon, “Models of Contextual Theology: The Struggle for Cultural Relevance,” (Book review) *Ecumenical Review*, July 1995 (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2065/is_m3_v47/ai_17386941/print), accessed on 2/21/2008.

³³Paul Lehmann, “Contextual Theology,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (April 1972) (<http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1972/v29-1-editorial2.htm>), accessed 2/21/2008.³⁴Orlando Espín, “Contextual Theology,” in *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, edited by Orlando Espín and James Nickoloff (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 278.

³⁵Espín, “The State of U.S. Latina/o Theology,” 107.

that theologies from the margins held relevance only to the groups that originated them. The context and the word “contextual” had already been preordained to designate quaint yet unimportant expressions of religiosity and theological reflection. It is my hope that the Catholic theological academy can disarm the term contextual in order to come into a full appreciation of these contributions. For this purpose, “what is needed is a profound conversion that occurs only when theologians are willing to listen to and be critiqued by the people of God.”³⁶

MI GENERACIÓN

A common critique of Latina/o theology has been that it has emphasized the cultural—popular religion, *fiesta*, language, *mestizaje*—over and above the political or economic. New generations, like me, ask for more political theology from Latina/o theologians.³⁷

Manuel Mejido calls this academic “assimilation” and it is a compromise of both the core of theologizing from the margins as well as the academic project of reflection and education for a new reality and a new horizon.³⁸ In the so-called “free market”-place of ideas we can all sit around a table, or faculty meeting, or bishop’s council, pleasantly nodding at presentations by the Latina or Latino theologian in residence and feel a proud sense of accomplishment because we have helped create a space where distinctive voices can freely speak—even if the result is a series of monologues with polite clapping at the end. This is why “contextual” does not sit well with me. In addition, in this process of academic assimilation Latina/o theology can fall prey to the domesticating tendencies of contextualization critiqued above. Not only does the academy not listen to our work, but we begin to produce work that is fashionable without the critical

³⁶Espín and Díaz, 3.

³⁷María Teresa Dávila, “Dignidad en la Lucha: Latina/o Ethics and U.S. Civil Society,” paper presented to the Latina/o Religion, Culture and Society group at the American Academy of Religion, Philadelphia, PA (Nov. 2005); Manuel Mejido, “The Fundamental Problematic of U.S. Hispanic Theology,” in *New Horizons in Hispanic/Latina Theology*, edited by Benjamín Valentín (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003); *ibid.*, “Propaedeutic to the Critique of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion: A Polemic against Intellectual Assimilation,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, Vol. 10:2 (2002); and *ibid.*, “A Critique of the ‘Aesthetic Turn’ in U.S. Hispanic Theology: A Dialogue with Roberto Goizueta and the Positing of a New Paradigm,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, Vol. 8:3 (2001); Ivan Petrella, *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005); Christopher Tirres, “Liberation” in the Latino(a) Context: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *New Horizons in Hispanic/Latino(a) Theology*, edited by Benjamín Valentín (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 138; Benjamín Valentín, *Mapping Public Theology: Beyond Culture, Identity, and Difference* (Harrisburg, VA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 4.

³⁸Mejido, “Propaedeutic to the Critique of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion,” 34-35.

dimensions that were present from the beginning. Again, in the words of Virgilio Elizondo: “If the newness is not verbalized, researched by the various intellectual disciplines, . . . it will continue to be viewed . . . as something primitive, exotic or ‘cute’—and the danger is that it could become just that.”³⁹

The suggestion from many in my generation is to return to the socio-political and economic analysis and critique used in Latin American liberation theology. Manuel Mejido suggests that *lo cotidiano* must be used in light of an epistemology of suffering, where we come to acknowledge that the everydayness of Latinos and Latinas is not a celebration of life—there is often no time for that when one is working 10 or more hours a day just to get by—but a constant struggle for survival amid incredibly oppressive forces.⁴⁰ There is a wave of Latina/o theologians who engage the phenomenology and epistemology of Xavier Zubiri, and his student Ignacio Ellacuría, in an effort to return to an engagement with everyday reality that is both honest about suffering and oppression as well as revelatory of a transcendent God who accompanies the suffering in the struggle for justice and liberation.⁴¹ Christopher Tirres offers a return to some of the “Marxian-based social theory” to move Latina/o theology away from a preferential option for a marginalized culture to the original preferential option for the poor in search for a clearer articulation of liberation within Latina/o theologies.⁴² In addition, there is a sense that Latina/o theologies, while being grounded in the U.S. Hispanic experience, must engage a global vision for reflection that relates the U.S. experience to the universal quest for life beyond our borders.⁴³

My own approach to what I have previously called a re-radicalizing of Latina/o theology,⁴⁴ is to take concepts like *lo cotidiano* and *mestizaje* and fully engage them in a critique of the systemic injustices that keep the majority of the

³⁹Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 28.

⁴⁰Mejido, “Propaedeutic,” 35.

⁴¹See for example, Michael Lee, “Liberation Theology’s Transcendent Moment: The Work of Xavier Zubiri and Ignacio Ellacuría as Non-Contrastive Discourse,” *Journal of Religion*, Volume 83, Number 2 (April 2003), 226-243; Mejido, “A Critique of the ‘Aesthetic Turn;’” and Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

⁴²Tirres, 139-141.

⁴³As Virgilio Elizondo has most recently stated: “Our theological work is the story of the universal human quest for life as lived and expressed by the Hispanic Christians of the United States;” from “Theology’s Contribution to Society: The Ministry of the Theologian,” in Espín and Díaz, *From the Heart of Our People*, 52. Second generation theologians engage this perspective in, for example, María T. Dávila, *Economic Mobility from a Latina/o Perspective: The Latina/o Middle Class and the Option for the Poor* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, forthcoming), and other volumes in the series “New Perspectives in Latino/a Religion.”

⁴⁴Dávila, “Dignidad en la Lucha.”

people of the world in oppressive and inhuman conditions. Upon re-reading some of the work produced by the first generation of Latina/o theologians, I am struck by the following: first generation writing held together the cultural and political as one. They presented cultural poverty as a form of oppression by the political powers with economic and social consequences. I believe that my own reticence about Latina/o theology stems from a *mis*-reading of its original reflections that caused me to miss the radical impact of works such as Elizondo's *Galilean Journey*, Goizueta's *Caminemos con Jesús*, Isasi-Díaz's *Mujerista Theology*, Justo González's *Mañana*, and Espín's *The Faith of the People*. This is what I mean by the domestication or assimilation caused by contextualization of theologies from the margins. The theological academy and the church miss the radical critiques clearly present in early Latina/o theology.⁴⁵

A re-reading and appropriating of *mestizaje* and *lo cotidiano* by new generations of Latina/o theologians can yield the type of theological critique of the political economy desperately needed in the U.S. theological academy. In *Galilean Journey* Elizondo describes the *mestizo* as "someone who is not," "not allowed to feel at home anywhere," and "feared by the established groups because it is perceived as a threat to the barriers of separation that consolidate self-identity and security."⁴⁶ The process of *mestizaje*, and the resulting identity, is grounded in violence and Elizondo made this clear in his development of the term as a theological insight. At the same time, he sustains hope in the newness of a people that embody a new universalism, one that can overcome the negative and violent dimensions of the false universalism of the European Enlightenment. I propose that *mestizaje* is, therefore, a historical and incarnational category rather than an ethnic or racial one, as it contains in its construction the wounds of a people "twice oppressed." I find Roberto Goizueta's address to the CTSA three years ago akin to this interpretation of *mestizaje*. He writes

⁴⁵Roberto Goizueta alludes to this, for example, when he evaluates the status of the preferential option for the poor in the documents of the Latin American bishops (CELAM) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on U.S. Hispanics (see Goizueta, "The Preferential Option for the Poor: The CELAM Documents and the NCCB Pastoral Letter on U.S. Hispanics as Sources for U.S. Hispanic Theology," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, Vol. 3:2 (1995)). He concludes that there is a development reflected in the three CELAM documents regarding the option for the poor. Whereas it was originally viewed as a privileged locus of revelation and "gauge of our following Christ," (71, quoted from the Puebla documents), the more recent documents and that of the U.S. bishops on Hispanics privilege culture over poverty as theological key, relegating the option for the poor to an ethical principle. The consequence is a separation of culture from class: "To make culture a *locus theologicus* while reducing socio-economic poverty to an ethical problem is, however, to separate culture from class; cultural expressions, symbols, rituals, institutions, each are unhinged from their intrinsic connection to the socioeconomic order." (75).

⁴⁶Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, x, 99, and 18, respectively.

The memory of innocent suffering, inscribed on the body of the resurrected Jesus, confronts the disciples not in order to condemn them but precisely to invite them to become reconciled, to invite them to participate in Jesus Christ's resurrection. In the mirror that is Jesus' body, the disciples see themselves convicted, challenged to repent, and invited to become reconciled . . . Yes, the resurrection will indeed ensure that our hope is not in vain, but not even the resurrection can erase the wounds . . .⁴⁷

Mestizaje, I sustain, is not quaint, nor cute, nor fashionable. It is arrogance, barbarism, and ultimately genocide inflicted on the already poor, on the already "less than" to make them nothing at all. It is theological foolishness to pretend otherwise or to try to recover its more positive, universalizing dimensions without holding it in tension with its violent origins. *Mestizaje* as a historical and incarnational principle would offer a strong corrective for a consumerist culture dominated by the historical now with very little appreciation of long-term memory and the legacies of a colonial and imperial history.

Re-reading *lo cotidiano* for the purpose of political theology can yield similar results. Manuel Mejido suggests that in *lo cotidiano* is embedded a phenomenology of suffering that can prevent Latina/o theology from "aestheticizing the monstrosity of marginalization and struggle . . . from reducing the totality of U.S. Hispanic reality to an a priori aesthetics of celebration."⁴⁸ *Lo cotidiano* is, in effect, honesty with the real, a place where Latin American liberation theologies and U.S. Latina/o theologies come together to vividly portray and reflect upon injustice, oppression, and marginalization. This is the place of praxis and the reason Latina/o methodology has been so important. Theology that does not look at *lo cotidiano* of the people of God in any number of settings is, dare I say, irrelevant and dead. Latina/o theologians claim to be grounded in the everydayness of Hispanic American experience either because we live in the community, pastor and preach in the community, teach in the community, or pray with the community. It is both honesty with the real and a way to keep *us* honest so that

⁴⁷Roberto Goizueta, "The Crucified and Risen Christ: From Calgary to Galilee," CTSA Presidential address, *CTSA Proceedings*, 60, (2005), 62-63; Also in *ibid.*, "Why are you frightened?" U.S. Hispanic Theology in Late Modernity," in *Cuerpo de Cristo: The Hispanic Presence in the U.S. Catholic Church*, edited by Peter Casarella and Raúl Goméz (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1998), 52-53.

⁴⁸Mejido, "A Critique of the Aesthetic Turn," 19. Mejido's critique of theological aesthetics within Latina/o theology is quite controversial. I am indebted to Peter Casarella for pushing me to clarify my appreciation of Mejido's work. While I am in agreement with Mejido's critique of the academy and some of the aesthetic turn among Latina/o theologians, his sweeping rejection of aesthetic symbols within Latino Christianity for the sake of political or economic critique partially results in the stripping away of the very symbols unique to Latino Christianity through which theologians seek to explore elements of liberation and radical critique of the dominant political economy that sustains a class of disenfranchised, "invisible" workers.

our theologizing does not suffer the fate of academic assimilation in the context of the liberal market-place of ideas. As Jan-Pierre Ruiz suggests, “the sort of authentic theological reflection that aspires to be *teología de conjunto* and that truly emerges from the heart of our people ought to bear this in mind, resisting the temptation to speak for the people in ways that reduce them to passive objects of our attention.”⁴⁹ *Lo cotidiano* needs to become both epistemological lens as well as theological criteria to insure the centrality of human experiences of suffering and hope. At the same time, *lo cotidiano* stands as a challenge to the dominant paradigms in the academy and society that would rather place the visions of *lo cotidiano* in the zoological category of “contextual” theologies.

VISIONES

All Latina/o theology seeks to be liberative. All Latina/o theologians are grounded on the preferential option for the poor.⁵⁰ The U.S. context offers a host of challenges different from those faced by Latin American liberation theologians. We are formed and informed by different populations, in a different context, with slightly (yet not so much) different dynamics of power and marginalization. Latina/o theologians of the first generation rose to the occasion of these new challenges, to describe new situations and articulate an appropriate theology, to engage the preferential option for the poor through the lens of *lo cotidiano*.

It seems to me that María Pilar Aquino, writing in 1999, set an agenda for Latina/o theology that has not been followed or at least not as intently as she put it:

We must reaffirm that the option for the poor and oppressed does not belong to a post theological paradigm; rather it remains a fundamental Christian imperative—a required norm for protection of our rationality . . . For U.S. Latino/a theology, the option for the poor and oppressed demands a *rigorous critique of neo-capitalist political economy, of its corresponding neoliberal utopization, of the laws of the marketplace, of its pretended globalization of a culture of exclusion, of its patriarchal and racist roots, and of its rampant ecological destruction.*⁵¹

As early as 1983 Elizondo was warning that one of “two major underlying problems facing our Hispanic church communities [] come from the unquestioned acceptance of capitalism as the only or the best economic system. Many of our people come to the United States seeking a higher standard of living and to them it is unquestionably what the U.S. free-enterprise system has made

⁴⁹Jan-Pierre Ruiz, “The Bible and U.S. Hispanic American Theological Discourse,” in Espín and Díaz, *From the Heart of Our People*, 116.

⁵⁰Aquino, 29.

⁵¹Aquino, 31. Emphasis added.

possible.”⁵² In 1995, Goizueta warned about the separation of the cultural from the economic and political as a false dualism that prevented U.S. Latina/o theology from a thorough critique of, for example, popular Catholicism and its relationship to class.⁵³

In light of my previous attempt at appropriation of *mestizaje* and *lo cotidiano*, I suggest a few areas that should be of current concern to the Catholic theological academy and for which Latina/o theology may offer a challenging yet critical methodology.

- I. Engagement with civil society: immigration and race—In my estimation and for many in my generation the current discussions on immigration and race in the United States could benefit significantly from a dose of historical awareness. Indeed, an important volume for understanding the relationship of Latinas/os and U.S. civil society, *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* begins with the historical background of the anglicizing of Hispanic Catholicism in the Southwest, a process that was at the same time culturally, socially, and religiously violent.⁵⁴ The fact that there have always been Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. was recently acknowledged during the papal visit of Benedict XVI. And yet, public discourse regarding immigration fails to acknowledge this fact. Hispanics seem to be always new, always moving in, but never really those who historically were there first. Every time this fact is ignored, we engage in the violence of *mestizaje* without opening space for hope or reconciliation. It is not just the *mestizaje* of the U.S. Southwest that we must contend with but that of the black South as well. We are, as I have stated before, 200 years past needing our own truth and reconciliation commission. The problem of history painted with the brush of short-term memory is that we fail to notice the wounds of our history, wounds that, in the sense of Goizueta’s appreciation of the wounds of Jesus, confront us with our complicity in the violence as a way of inviting reconciliation. We can contribute much to furthering the discussion on immigration and race in the U.S. if we offer within our theologies and our Church an honest engagement with the history of violence that is *mestizaje* in the U.S. and the cultural tokenism that results from the process of the American Melting Pot, where very evidently there are those who are stewed and those whose power and relationship to the center allows them to simply stir the pot.

⁵²Elizondo, “Toward an American Hispanic Theology of Liberation in the U.S.A.,” 51.

⁵³Goizueta, “The Preferential Option for the Poor,” 76.

⁵⁴Timothy Matovina, “Conquest, Faith, and Resistance in the Southwest,” in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, edited by Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19-33.

II. Engagement with civil society: class and the economy—Toward the end of *Galilean Journey* Elizondo challenges Latino/a immigrants: “as powerless as we Mexican-Americans might appear to be within the overall American population, we should not be scared to confront and question that sacred cow of the Western World: liberal capitalism.”⁵⁵ The immigrant’s dream, the movement of peoples in the universal quest for life, is the movement toward a better life, opportunities, and participation in the “American Way of life” by entering the middle class. There is dire need today for sophisticated theological and ethical class analysis in the U.S. and as it relates to global class structures and dynamics. I see this as one of two loci in my own work. If we truly want our theology to be at the service of the people of God we must link together and properly critique class and consumption, the liberal capitalist economy, its negative effects on the environment leading to coastal and other natural disasters and the international movement of peoples. If we fail to do this, we will fail in our mission as Christian theologians. We are at a time of economic crisis where many who immigrated to this country are being blamed for irresponsibly taking on mortgages they could not afford. What is seldom stated is that the financial and mortgaging tools developed in the last four to six years were irresponsible enough to bankrupt any society that preys on the economically weak and poor. Financial overcommitment, as reflected in many cases in the current mortgage crisis is an illness that afflicts all of us, after all, the single-family home in the suburbs remains the hallmark of middle class achievement and the siren song of the U.S. shores.⁵⁶ Latina/o theology is well poised to critique the dimensions of daily life that make the American Dream such a luring fallacy, and a devastating one as well. Is there not a relationship between what and how we consume, who produces it, and the eventual ICE raids on factories with undocumented workers? Is it possible that our way of consuming is complicit in the separation of families, something that the U.S. bishops have decried a number of times?⁵⁷ This is *lo cotidiano* of our economy. While Latin American liberation theologies urged us to examine the interrelationships of injustice based on global class analysis, Latina/o theology has a duty to perform this task in this context as well as to relate it to the greater human family.

⁵⁵Ibid., 112.

⁵⁶Nanko, “Justice Crosses the Border.”

⁵⁷“Love One Another As I Love You: A Statement on Immigration,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1996 (<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/pilla.shtml>), accessed on 4/18/2008.

III. Militarism, empire and the culture of violence—Latina/o theology that engages the issues of militarism, empire and the culture of violence are almost non-existent, though the topics seem tacitly present in much of its literature. It is my hope to produce an edited volume on this topic that would present the voices of my generation of Latina/o theologians moving beyond questions of methodology, engaging this very necessary topic in a critical and sophisticated way. Again, *lo cotidiano* and *mestizaje* can be tools for an honest engagement with this topic. The Christian theological academy must ask ‘what is the everydayness of life in Baghdad, in Kabul, in the West Bank, in Tibet, in Darfur?’ An exercise in *lo cotidiano* is not only descriptive—which is by itself an important contribution—but it is also a praxis of accompaniment, of experiencing the reality of the other even if for a brief moment, of understanding suffering and hope in an honest way. One Latina theologian, Elizabeth Conde Frazier, Assistant Professor of Religious Education at Claremont School of Theology, described to me her desire to share in the life of a local group of Muslim women shortly before 9/11. She began covering her head, praying with them, keeping their diet on certain days, and attending their markets. Then 9/11 happened. I asked her if this made her stop her practice. No, she said. However, the events made her commitment very hard and she suffered unto herself some of the scorn and retribution these women experienced during the period immediately after the 9/11 attacks. *Lo cotidiano* as an incarnational exercise or praxis puts us in a different place; maybe in the now militarized U.S. border with Mexico where some have suggested shooting randomly at anything that crosses the border onto private property in order to set a precedent; maybe in the island of Vieques in Puerto Rico where Catholic bishop Roberto González Nieves, along with the leadership of other Christian communities there, dared to accompany those protesting and being victimized by the U.S. Navy’s abuse of that island and subsequently helped broker their exit; maybe in the Army or Navy recruitment centers of blighted urban areas where many of America’s poor are seeking the only opportunities afforded to them through military enlistment. The majority of Latinos/as in the U.S. are against the war in Iraq and in favor of a withdrawal of troops,⁵⁸ which statistically should indicate that half or more of U.S. Christians are against military involvement in Iraq. The theological academy, and Latina/o theologians especially, can help embolden the church to address this reality more critically, to highlight *lo cotidiano* of life for victims of war and for soldiers alike, and to present alternatives to the imperial violent drive that put us there in the first place.

⁵⁸Pew Hispanic Center, “Survey on Latino Attitudes on the War in Iraq,” February 7, 2005 (<http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=37>).

CONCLUSION: HOPE AND RECONCILIATION

I am unsure that my use of *mestizaje* and *lo cotidiano* can offer the visions of hope and reconciliation presented by Elizondo or Goizueta. For Elizondo the tragedy of *mestizaje* is the birth pangs of a moment bursting with life, from that which humanity has rejected comes the hope of salvation—the Galilean Principle. For him to say that the *future is mestizo* is his subverting the tragedy of conquest, colonization, and oppression into a paradigm of universal human cooperation, fraternization, and solidarity. For Goizueta “to know the truth about reality, the truth about God, the truth about ourselves is to touch the wounds. And this is precisely what modern Western theologies have been afraid of doing; this is what U.S. Hispanic theologies invite us all to do.”⁵⁹ The invitation of Jesus to touch his wounds is not about resentment but about reconciliation and promise. Perhaps these visions of hope and reconciliation take much more grace than I have afforded myself to accept. Perhaps when my Anglo sisters and brothers in the academy look at the wounds with me in an honest practice of *acompañamiento*, I will be able to accept my own complicity, accept that we are all *ladrones* (thieves),⁶⁰ and move to a place of hope and reconciliation. Maybe when I see titles like *Galilean Journey*, or *En La Lucha*, or *Mañana* in comprehensive examination lists. Maybe when doctoral students wanting to use Elizondo, or Zubiri, or Espín, José Ignacio González-Faus, or the Good Friday processions at San Fernando Cathedral, or store-front Pentecostal churches as main interlocutors in their dissertations, stop being harassed about the lack of academic rigor in their choices. Maybe when seminaries begin to train church and community leaders who do not hold bachelor’s degrees in order to serve Christian communities better as they look, live, and pray today. Maybe then, I will be able to say that the future is *mestizo* and truly feel hope and reconciliation. I think these practices will be critical for developing theologies that are honest and that, like our Savior, reconcile the wounds of history with the promise of liberation. The promotion of the preferential option for the poor in the North depends on graced moments such as these.

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⁵⁹Goizueta, “Why Are You Afraid?,” 63.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 55. The reference here and in other works to *ladrones* comes mainly from its use by Justo González in *Mañana* to refer to the shared complicity into the injustices that plague Latinos/as in the U.S.