

THEOLOGY AS INTELLECTUALLY VITAL INQUIRY: THE CHALLENGE OF/TO U.S. HISPANIC THEOLOGIANs

In this age of postmodernism and multiculturalism, a key methodological question confronting U.S. Hispanic theologians and the larger theological academy is that of the relationship between particularity and universality: How does one remain attentive to the historicity, or particularity of every theological enterprise *and* to the universal implications or, as I will suggest, the universal condition of the possibility of that particularity? Underlying this question will be that of the relationship between theory and praxis.

For U.S. Hispanic theologians, the particularity-universality and theory-praxis questions surface in the tension we experience between our identity as U.S. Hispanics and our identity as theologians. To the extent that we simply assimilate uncritically the dominant theological paradigms and criteria of argumentation, we deny the historicity and, thus, undermine the very adequacy and meaningfulness of our reflection. On the other hand, to the extent that we conceive our task as limited to that of developing and articulating a *U.S. Hispanic* theology as such, we condemn ourselves to the solipsism of self-justification and, therefore, to irrelevance vis-à-vis the larger academy. The academy will respond accordingly: it will provide appropriate fora within which U.S. Hispanics can speak to each other, and it may even invite us into the broader theological dialogue, but usually with the underlying suspicion that U.S. Hispanic theology is only that, *U.S. Hispanic* theology, and thus unable to make any claims on so-called mainstream theology, much less to present an effective critique of the latter.¹

In the specific case of U.S. Hispanics, this suspicion is magnified by the prevalent stereotype of Hispanic culture as inherently anti-intellectual, as preferring sensual vitality to intellectual vitality. The temptation of many U.S. Hispanics is to sacralize the stereotype, thereby setting our own values, however important in and of themselves, over against the "inhumane" values of the dominant culture. In the case of U.S. Hispanic theologians, the temptation is to go beyond a critique of the Western intellectual tradition to an outright rejection of that tradition or, indeed, the intellectual enterprise per se as intrinsically oppressive, opting instead for a commitment to "praxis," understood not as the ground of theory but as the alternative to theory. The blanket rejection of Western intellectual tradition would represent a denial of our praxis as *U.S. Hispanics*, for whom *mestizaje* is a reality

¹This form of marginalization is what Mark Kline Taylor has called "repressive tolerance"; see his *Remembering Esperanza* (Maryknoll NT: Orbis, 1990) 61. On the notions of adequacy and meaningfulness, see David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Crossroad, 1975) esp. 43-87, 172-258.

that encompasses every aspect of our history, including our intellectual history.² The rejection of theory in favor of praxis would unwittingly perpetuate the stereotype of Latinos and Latinas as people with big hearts but small intellects, while surrendering the intellectual enterprise to the very conceptualist, rationalist, and instrumentalist epistemologies that have for so long legitimated the oppression of U.S. Hispanics. In the process, both praxis and theory would be distorted. It is my contention that, instead, the particularity of U.S. Hispanic experience can help foster a retrieval of theory and praxis which, in its holism, would be an important contribution both to our communities and to the larger society, including contemporary intellectual movements.

The theory-praxis question is at the core of the U.S. Hispanic theologian's self-identity, for it is precisely the theory-praxis dichotomy, as reflecting an epistemological dualism, that U.S. Hispanic theologians must challenge as fundamentally inadequate for addressing the question of particularity and universality. The theory-praxis dichotomy has historically functioned to legitimate the idealization/marginalization of U.S. Hispanic experience while, at the same time, preventing that experience from making any claims on the dominant culture. U.S. Hispanic culture has been simultaneously idealized and denigrated as a culture of the body, a culture of fiestas, over against the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture of the mind, a culture of reason, science, and technology. It is only recently and after much struggle, for example, that Spanish has begun to be accepted as an "academic language."³

The task of U.S. Hispanic theologians, then, is not to reject reason, science, and technology, but to demonstrate the irrationality of restricting our epistemological criteria to those provided by metaphysical, scientific, and technological paradigms, as well as postmodern paradigms. In this way, by grounding our task in the praxis of our communities, by making a self-conscious, preferential option for the poor, we can contribute to the retrieval of reason as communicative and emancipatory.⁴ By engaging the particularity of the U.S. Hispanic experience, while avoiding the temptation to acquiesce in the idealization of that experience, we will be able to engage critically the broader social and intellectual context.

While Latin American liberation theology has proffered a similar critique, and has thus functioned as a crucial, formative influence for U.S. Hispanic theologians, liberation theology itself has not completely escaped the sway of modern views of praxis, which have too often tended to instrumentalize human activity, defining it in terms of practicality and technique. Instrumental praxis is no anti-

²On the notion of *mestizaje*, see two books by Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1983) and *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Bloomington IN: Meyer-Stone, 1988).

³The stereotype of Spanish as a nonacademic language is reflected in one of the poems of Octavio Paz, where he recounts, with no little sarcasm, that the great Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset once advised him, "Learn German and start to think; forget the rest." Paz, "El Tiempo Mismo," in *Literature Hispanoamericana*, vol. 2, ed. Orlando Gómez-Gil (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971) 535-36.

⁴See David Tracy, "On Naming the Present," in *On the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, ed. The Foundation (London: SCM, 1990) 71.

dote to instrumental rationality. On the contrary, these are the two sides of the Enlightenment's coin. Once praxis comes to be understood as the action of the Cartesian ego upon an external object, whether that object be animate or inanimate, personal or social, human interaction comes to be viewed through the lens of a physicalist epistemology that necessarily implies movement, or matter in motion, thereby reducing praxis to mere technique.⁵

This danger arose as, influenced by the Marxian notion of praxis, liberation theologians allowed the distinction between praxis and poiesis to become attenuated. Clodovis Boff explains this process as follows.

Aristotle sees a neat distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*. Praxis is a form of activity characterized by its immanence: its development is its own end. . . . As for the second form of activity (*operatio-poiesis*) . . . we have a *transitive* activity: its finality is something other than itself. . . . In current usage, "praxis" means both types of activity discerned by Aristotle. . . . Primarily owing to the theological and historical pressure of Marxism, praxis is no longer understood as its own end, *Selbstzweck*, self-finalized activity, but on the contrary, as the production of an external result. Praxis is action resulting in an effect of transformation.⁶

The benefits of this shift from Aristotle to Marx have, of course, been undeniable insofar as it has made possible an appreciation of the sociology of knowledge, uncovering both the emancipatory and oppressive potential of knowledge. The Marxian critique of metaphysics and religion has ironically made social transformation a part of the theological lexicon, thereby making possible crucial insights into the meaning of the Christian scriptures and tradition.

Yet the modern call to praxis transcends mere physicalist, or even social, interpretations insofar as that call reflects an understanding of praxis as not only transforming the external world, but as also empowering the subject. In liberation theology, this latter dimension finds expression especially in the process of conscientization and in the base ecclesial communities. Consequently, liberation theologians have by no means discarded the notion of praxis as self-finalized activity. They have not, however, sufficiently attended to the contradiction latent in the two aspects of the modern conception of praxis, the contradiction between the external, practical ends of praxis and its internal, humanistic ends. This methodological lacuna has left liberation theology susceptible to modern instrumentalist and pragmatist distortions, especially at the hands of self-styled epigones who have seen in liberation theology a useful tool for the realization of their own social

⁵Matthew Lamb, "Praxis," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph Komonchak, et al. (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1987) 784-87.

⁶Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis* (Maryknoll NT: Orbis, 1987) 330-31n. Enrique Dussel also notes the shift from Aristotle, who defines life itself as praxis (*Politics* 1.4.1254, and *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.4.1140), to Marx; see Dussel, *Filosofía de la producción* (Bogotá: Editorial nueva américa, 1984) 33-114. On the differences between the Aristotelian and the modern notions of praxis, see also Victoria Camps, *Virtudes públicas* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1990) 104-22. To be sure, the notion of praxis as self-finalized activity is not altogether absent from Marx's thought, especially his earlier writings, yet this fact reveals an ambiguity latent in Marx's notion of praxis and inherited by later Western philosophy; see Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 330-31n.; Camps, *Virtudes públicas*, 109-10; Dussel, *Filosofía*, 71.

or political agendas. Once praxis is identified with practicality, and practicality is in turn identified with technique, modern praxis-based theories of social change encounter an insuperable dilemma: the achievement of freedom (for), that is, the humanistic end of praxis, is predicated upon the limitation of freedom (from) implicit in the coercive, because manipulative, application of technique. In other words, praxis, or self-finalized activity, is made contingent on poiesis, or production. When this happens, the nature of human praxis as an irreducible end in itself is undermined. Such a distortion undermines, in turn, the subversive nature of the person who, as irreducible to any external ends, resists being subordinated to those ends, however noble in themselves.⁷

The tendency towards instrumentalization has been counteracted by Latin American and U.S. Hispanic theologians insofar as, in parallel fashion, these have been paying increased attention to the role of popular religiosity as a principal mediator of historical praxis.⁸ The desire is not to diminish the importance of praxis as social transformation, but to explicitly ground social transformation in the sociohistorical praxis of our communities as an end in itself. As a principal way of "being in the world," popular religiosity is for us an important source of theology.⁹ In popular religiosity, the inherently *communal* and *aesthetic* dimensions of

⁷At the turn of this century, José Enrique Rodó warned against the dangers of utilitarian anthropologies and emphasized the need for a holistic understanding of the human person as an end in himself or herself; see his *Ariel* (Austin TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1988). See also Lamb, "Praxis," 785. In German political theology, Johann Baptist Metz has warned against the instrumentalist tendencies of Marxist notions of praxis and has guarded against such instrumentalization by distinguishing between moral praxis and social praxis, asserting that the latter is determined by the former, and insisting on the "pathic" structure of social praxis; see his *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980) 49-83, 116. The notion of pathic praxis represents a repudiation (as does the notion of aesthetic praxis) of the Nietzschean dichotomy between praxis and pathos; see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, vol. 6(3) of *Nietzsche Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1969) 3-47, and M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981) 226ff.

⁸Despite the great diversity among U.S. Hispanic communities, popular religiosity is a bond that, to one degree or another, unites us all. This is not to suggest that all U.S. Hispanics participate in religious devotions or even that all of us are "religious." What is true, however, is that, implicit in the praxis of U.S. Hispanics, is a certain spirituality that is communicated not only by explicitly religious devotions and practices, but, most importantly, by the very ways in which we relate to each other and to the world beyond our communities—as organically related, sacramental realities. U.S. Hispanic popular religiosity is thus historical praxis before it is explicitly "religious" praxis. As sacramental, however, historical praxis is implicitly spiritual. Popular religiosity is an expression of salvation history. See Orlando Espín and Sixto García, "'Lilies of the Field': A Hispanic Theology of Providence and Human Responsibility," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 44 (1989) 70-90, and Allan Figueroa Deck, *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the Evangelization of Cultures* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 113-19.

⁹In several papers presented to the CTSA, Orland Espín and Sixto García, have with great insight, developed the case for the theological and ecclesial significance of popular religiosity; see esp. their jointly authored papers "Hispanic-American Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 42 (1987) 114-19, and "Lilies of

praxis are revealed as epistemological criteria which allow us to transcend the Enlightenment's false alternatives of instrumentalized theory and instrumentalized praxis.

By virtue of its communal and aesthetic character, the *fundamental* end of popular religious praxis is not external but internal, not extrinsic but intrinsic. The principal end of popular religiosity is the participative affirmation of an essential social and cosmic solidarity over against the all-too-common experience of dislocation, fragmentation, alienation, and oppression. By participating in this ongoing community, especially in its history of suffering, one recognizes oneself as a person, that is, some-one who can resist dehumanization—even if at the hands of the community—because he or she now recognizes himself or herself as, indeed, a self.¹⁰

The praxis of popular religiosity would eschew exclusively extrinsicist, or physicalist notions of praxis which presuppose atomic Cartesian egos acting upon each other. In their stead, one finds the notion of praxis as an active participation, or indwelling, in a community that *already* forms, and thus dwells within, the person; it is the organic, mutual indwelling of person, community, and God. The family is the principal metaphor of this participative indwelling, which spans space and time.¹¹

the Field." See also Orlando Espín, "Religiosidad popular: un aporte para su definición y hermenéutica," *Estudios Sociales* 58 (1984) 41-56; idem, "Tradition and Popular Religion: An Understanding of the *Sensus Fidelium*," in *Frontiers of U.S. Hispanic Theology*, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, forthcoming); Jaime Vidal, "Popular Religion among Hispanics in the General Area of the Archdiocese of Newark," in *Presencia Nueva: A Study of Hispanics in the Archdiocese of Newark* (Newark: Archdiocesan Office of Research and Planning, 1988) 235-352. In the Latin American context, see Segundo Galilea, *Religiosidad popular y pastoral* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1979); idem, "The Theology of Liberation and the Place of Folk Religion," in *What Is Religion? An Inquiry for Christian Theology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and David Tracy (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980) 40-45; Ricardo Falla, *Esa muerte que nos hace vivir, estudio de la religión popular* (San Salvador: UCA, 1984); Juan Carlos Scannone, "Enfoques teológico-pastorales latinoamericanos de la religiosidad popular," *Stromata* 40 (1984) 33-47; and John A. McCoy, "Popular Religion in Latin America," *America*, 31 December 1988, 533-46. On the central role of women in popular religion and the profound implications of women's experience for an understanding of popular religious praxis, see A. Lapidra, "Religiosidad popular y mujer andina," in *El rostro femenino de la teología* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1986) 49-72; M. T. Porcile, "El derecho a la belleza en América Latina," in *ibid.*, 85-107; and Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). For an analysis of various ways in which popular religion has been interpreted, see Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1985) 122-43.

¹⁰As Victoria Camps has argued, what is demanded, then, is not a rejection of the individual self but the creation of "a society which will foster the emergence of individuals" (*Virtudes públicas*, 27). See also Fernando Savater, *Ética como amor propio* (Madrid: Mondadori, 1989).

¹¹Espín and García, "Lilies of the Field," 78. As the authors point out, God and the saints are not seen as "powerful, sacred entities" somewhere "out there," but as "members of the family" (*ibid.*). For an analysis of popular religiosity as revealing the essential

If theology is done in the context of family, it is done in the context of a community that both temporally and ontologically precedes the individual ego; one is not "free to choose" one's family. Thus, to identify praxis with popular religiosity and, hence, with family is to privilege community as self-finalized activity that gives birth to authentic personality and to the ethical-political demand for solidarity.¹² Individual praxis will engender authentic solidarity and community insofar as it already presupposes these as the sources of personality. Consequently, far from ignoring the demands of social solidarity, the praxis of popular religiosity actually presupposes those demands. U.S. Hispanic popular religiosity presupposes ontological solidarity which, in turn, calls for a practical, ethical-political solidarity. The extrinsic, social transformative end of praxis is thus derived from and is interpreted in the light of the intrinsic, communal nature of praxis.¹³

solidarity not only among the different elements of creation but between creation and its Creator, see Orlando Espín, "Grace and Humanness: A Hispanic Perspective," in *We Are a People: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology*, ed. Roberto S. Goizueta (Minneapolis: Fortress, forthcoming). It is important to note, therefore, that, in their broadest sense, family and community include not only the natural world but also the supernatural world. The "natural family" is the particular manifestation of a universal reality. Consequently, communal praxis implies both worship and ethicopolitical, or social praxis. Community is not opposed to society; it is opposed to atomic individualism. See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without Allusions* (Chapel Hill NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991) 33-54, and cf. with Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (East Lansing MI: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1957). Insofar as popular religiosity presupposes a community that includes the saints and the dead, it presupposes a transhistorical community as well. This fact is significant for ongoing attempts to define praxis in terms of solidarity with the victims of history; see, e.g., Metz, *Faith in History and Society*; Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); and Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1984). Victoria Camps has underscored the importance of memory in the formation of identity; see her *Virtudes públicas*, 165-89.

¹²The sense of community reflected in U.S. Hispanic popular religiosity is what Michael Sandel has called a "strong" sense of community, as opposed to "instrumental" and "sentimental" notions of community; see his *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982) 147-54. See also Camps, *Virtudes públicas*, 165-89. Despite the primacy given to community in Hispanic popular religiosity, our sense of community does not yield a determinist view of the person. Insofar as community gives birth to personality, it also gives birth to the possibility of resistance; insofar as a family nurtures the development of children, it also makes possible their adolescent rebellion. As the adolescents become adults, however, they usually recognize that that rebellion was itself a form of dependence, and that for better or worse their family has become a part of their self-identity. Only then, through the critical appropriation of their social nature, are they capable of authentic autonomy—though of course never without a great deal of struggle. In this context, it is interesting to note that the Spanish word for "to nurse" and "to rear" children is "criar," which comes from the same root as "crear" (to create).

¹³For an analysis of contemporary Western attempts to demonstrate how, in the words of Richard Bernstein, "the type of solidarity, communicative interaction, dialogue, and judgment required for the concrete realization of praxis already presupposes incipient forms of the community life that such praxis seeks to foster" (175), see his *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) esp. 171-231. On the conditions of the possibility for a practical solidarity, see also Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology*, esp. 211-45.

In addition to revealing the importance of community as intrinsic to human praxis, popular religiosity reveals the aesthetic nature of praxis.¹⁴ If the life of U.S. Hispanic communities is manifested in popular religiosity, U.S. Hispanic praxis cannot be fully understood without attending to its aesthetic character, its character as aesthetic performance. The popular religiosity of U.S. Hispanics mediates what for us is the highest form of beauty, namely, the life of the community itself, a life that spans both history and cosmos. What underlies our music, dance, and worship—indeed our whole lives—is a celebrative aesthetics of community. In affirming the intrinsic, aesthetic value of community, popular religiosity affirms praxis as self-finalized activity.¹⁵

¹⁴The sense of life itself as art permeates Latin American and U.S. Hispanic cultures; see, e.g., Baldomero Sanín Cano, "El Grande Humor," in his collection of essays, *Tipos, obras, ideas* (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca de Cultura Americana, 1949). As the notes that follow indicate, Jürgen Habermas and other exponents of critical theory represent, in their attention to aesthetics, potential dialogue partners for theologians attempting to retrieve the aesthetic dimension of popular religiosity. While Marcuse, Benjamin, and Adorno have been addressing the issue of aesthetics longer and more systematically than Habermas, the latter's approach to aesthetic praxis via his notion of communicative action can help link his aesthetics more directly to the ethicopolitical exigencies so important for U.S. Hispanic theologians. An illuminating analysis of the aesthetic as a form of praxis may be found in Shierry M. Weber, "Aesthetic Experience and Self-Reflection as Emancipatory Processes: Two Complementary Aspects of Critical Theory," in *On Critical Theory*, ed. John O'Neill (New York: Seabury, 1976) 78-103. Nevertheless, Habermas's aesthetics, like his theory of communicative action, is seriously weakened by his failure to ground aesthetics in the particular praxis of oppressed communities, that is, in a preferential option for the poor; see Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1978) 285ff., and Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims*, 44-46.

¹⁵On the relationship between aesthetics and community, see Joseph H. Kupfer, *Experience as Art* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1983) 73-78. Kupfer avers that beauty can promote the good and, in this sense, be "useful" only insofar as beauty is valued as an end in itself (78). Consequently, the notion of aesthetic praxis would not deny the productive and transformative dimension of the arts, e.g., poetry, drama, dance, worship, music, but would ground that dimension in the intrinsic end of artistic performance; see *ibid.*, and cf. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon, 1953) 169-70, 358-60. The distinction between an aesthetic object and an aesthetic performance is implicit, also, in Robert Ginsberg's distinction between "aesthetic experience" and "experiencing aesthetically." As organic in nature, the latter would be closer to what I mean by aesthetic praxis; see Ginsberg, "Experiencing Aesthetically, Aesthetic Experience, and Experience in Aesthetics," in *Possibility of the Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Mitias (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986) 61-78. Though the *objet d'art* is its own end, art-as-production (*poiesis*) remains ambiguous unless interpreted in the light of art-as-performance (*praxis*). In the wake of Marx, the exclusive identification of art with the production of objects too easily lends itself to the reification and, therefore, instrumentalization of art. Though Enrique Dussel, e.g., has made an extremely important contribution by drawing our attention to the material substratum of the aesthetic, his identification of art with production risks sacrificing aesthetic nonidentity to the socioeconomic function of aesthetic production; see his "Christian Art of the Oppressed in Latin America (Towards an Aesthetics of Liberation)," in *Symbol and Art in Worship*, ed. Luis Maldonado and David Power (New York: Seabury, 1980) 40-52. One should, therefore, avoid an ahistorical, uncritical appropriation of the Aristotelian definition of art as *poiesis* (*Nicomachean Ethics* 5.4.1140)

This is not a sentimentalized aesthetics of community, however, for it is the experience of alienation and suffering that reveals the fact that these are not foundational; the memories of suffering reveal the subversive nature of beauty.¹⁶ Aesthetic nonidentity must be grounded in sociohistorical nonidentity in order to avoid the danger of a bourgeois aestheticism. If, qua "aesthetic," aesthetic praxis resists dominative praxis and dominative theory, qua praxis, aesthetic praxis does not replace ethico-political praxis but implies it, since praxis can never be merely existential or sensual but is always sociohistorical.¹⁷ By unveiling the disjunction between an ontological solidarity and an unjust social order, popular religiosity calls for social transformation. Virgilio Elizondo speaks of devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe as helping overcome "the rigid dichotomy of the 'we versus they' mentality . . . in the eruption of a new and renovative alternative."¹⁸ And, in turn,

which could, if interpreted in isolation from the subsequent history of praxis and poiesis as concepts, contribute to such an instrumentalization. We might also bear in mind Nietzsche's critique of Aristotle for subordinating artistic performance to its results; see Larry Arnhart, *Aristotle on Political Reasoning* (DeKalb IL: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1981) 35, 163. In popular religiosity, beauty is lived before it is observed; the locus of the aesthetic is not the museum but the community itself. On the performative, dramatic character of popular religious praxis, see Espín, "Tradition and Popular Religion." Sixto García articulates the implication of the aesthetic character of popular religious praxis for the U.S. Hispanic theologian, who is called to be not only a thinker and prophet but also a poet; see his "Reflections on a Hispanic Approach to Trinitarian Theology," in *We Are a People*.

¹⁶See Rubem Alves, *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet* (London: SCM, 1990) 114. A sentimentalized aesthetics would have especially devastating effects for Third World women, given the traditional identification of women with both "beauty" and "community." From the perspective of women, especially, community and family cannot be understood apart from the oppression which women have experienced within sentimentalized, idealized communities and families. On the double oppression experienced by Third World women, see Isasi-Díaz and Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Toward an Understanding of *Feminismo Hispano* in the U.S.A.," in *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience*, ed. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen et al. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985) 51-61; V. Fabella and M. A. Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1988); Elsa Tamez, *Teólogos de la liberación hablan sobre la mujer* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1986); Elsa Tamez, *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1989); María Pilar Aquino, ed., *Aportes para una teología desde la mujer* (Madrid: Biblia y Fe, 1988); María Pilar Aquino, "Doing Theology from the Perspective of Latin American Women," in *We Are a People*; and Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza*, esp. 76-149. On the danger of sentimentalized communities, see Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions*, esp. 33-54, and Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 147-54.

¹⁷In political theology, Johann Baptist Metz's notion of the pathic structure of social praxis performs a similar methodological function in that suffering and joy preclude a dominative social praxis while, at the same time, compelling us, in anamnestic solidarity with the dead, to oppose "the prevalent apathy of society" (57); see *Faith in History and Society*, 57-58, 100-18.

¹⁸Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 13. The same subversive sense of solidarity is expressed in other Marian devotions; see, e.g., the study of traditions surrounding Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre, in José Juan Arrom, *Certidumbre de América: Estudios de letras*,

"when individuals have become aware of their basic equality and see that it is not embodied in their society, they will work and struggle to bring about new lifestyles more reflective of the fundamental reality that all are children of the same mother."¹⁹ Aesthetic praxis mediates between aesthetic "experience" as such and ethicopolitical praxis, thereby counteracting the tendency toward individualist sentimentalism in the former and social domination in the latter. Like that of community, however, the subversive, sociohistorical "usefulness" of beauty is contingent upon its intrinsic value: aesthetic praxis will promote the good only insofar as beauty is valued as an end in itself, just as communal praxis will promote genuine solidarity and social transformation only insofar as community is valued as an end in itself.²⁰ One does not participate in devotions to Our Lady of Guadalupe in order to promote liberation, but Guadalupe has certainly been a liberative force within our communities.

Just as aesthetic praxis does not obviate the demands of social transformation, neither does it obviate the demands of reason. A theology grounded in aesthetic praxis would actually intensify these demands while expanding the parameters of reason; we cannot claim to ground our theology in praxis without begging the questions "What does it mean to ground theology in praxis?" and "Why can the-ory not be self-grounding?"²¹ U.S. Hispanic theologians must be able to articu-

folklore y cultura (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1971) 184-214. However, the solidarity presupposed in Marian popular religiosity reminds us that, despite the often powerful impact of Marian devotions on the lives of women, that impact has not always been unambiguously liberative; see, e.g., Ana María Bidegain, "Women and the Theology of Liberation," in Tamez, ed., *Through Her Eyes*, 15-36.

¹⁹Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 44. On the ethicopolitical implications of U.S. Hispanic popular religiosity, see also Espín and García, "Hispanic-American Theology," and Espín, "Tradition and Popular Religion." The cosmological character of aesthetic and communal praxis also has important ecological implications, which ought to be developed further by U.S. Hispanic theologians.

²⁰Kupfer, *Experience as Art*, 78.

²¹Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims*, 82. A theology by U.S. Hispanics would be characterized by what Lamb has called a "critical praxis correlation" (ibid.). For an analysis of critical praxis correlation as exemplified by Latin American liberation theology, see Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1986) 139-44. From a U.S. Hispanic perspective, Sixto García has been developing such a critical correlation; see his "Reflections on a Hispanic Approach to Trinitarian Theology," in *We Are a People*, ed. Goizueta. In that article, García addresses trinitarian questions from the perspective of a popular hermeneutics which relates community, celebration, reflection, belief, and praxis through the theologian's roles as poet, thinker, actor, and prophet. He thus contends that the theologian's role as thinker is linked to his or her other roles, and all are born out of the theologian's commitment to the community. As presupposing an ontological solidarity, the aesthetic praxis of marginalized communities would oppose an aestheticism blind to the demands of social justice as well as an emotivism blind to the demands of communicative rationality (see below). On emotivism, especially as it implies a noncommunal, unsituated self, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 6-34. The exponents of critical theory understand the aesthetic as "linking both reason and freedom on the one hand, and reason and sensuous experience on the other"; Weber, "Aesthetic Experience and Self-Reflection," 85. On the relation-

late the foundational import of praxis as ethicopolitical, communal, and aesthetic without succumbing to the prevailing, modern presupposition that these are necessarily antirational. Insofar as U.S. Hispanic praxis presupposes an ontological solidarity, it locates the roots of community not in common perceptions or "feelings," but in identity and, thus, in common understanding and interpretation.²² Ontological solidarity implies the possibility, indeed the obligation, of rational discourse and argumentation. If an ontological solidarity anticipates the possibility of ethicopolitical solidarity, it also anticipates the possibility of what Jürgen Habermas has called the "discursive redemption of normative validity claims," even if those claims are always fallible.²³

In the contemporary context, the temptation to reduce theory to praxis, and hence theological discourse to a Nietzschean will-to-power, is given special sal-

ship of aesthetics to theory and praxis, see Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. 1 of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) and Habermas, "Questions and Counter-Questions," *Praxis International* 4/3 (1984) 229-50. According to Habermas, "a reified everyday praxis can be cured only by creating unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements." Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981) 11. On the notion of aesthetic-practical rationality, see Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics," in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, ed. John B. Thompson and David Held (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1982) 249. For an analysis of Habermas's notion of aesthetic-practical rationality as a critique of subjectivist aestheticism, which is unable to provide for the necessary, "unconstrained interaction," see David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1987) esp. 54-59, 173-86. Ingram notes that "Habermas's recent expansion of communicative rationality to include a pre-discursive, aesthetic moment" results in a "broadening of the category of reason" so that "neither practical nor social rationality can be grasped apart from aesthetic categories" (173). Habermas's recognition of this aesthetic moment further strengthens the critique of instrumentalized praxis implicit in his distinction of communicative action from social strategic and instrumental action. It has been argued, however, that he leaves the door open to such an instrumentalization by failing to draw a clear distinction between the latter two; see Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Rationalism*, 254n.9. In order to promote a "broadening of the category of reason," U.S. Hispanic theologians might also encourage a more positive, if still critical reappraisal of Aristotle's notion of praxis insofar as, for Aristotle, the more important distinction is not that between action and thought, but that between types of action and correlative types of thought. See, especially, Aristotle's *Politics* 1.4.1254, and *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.4.1140; also Lamb, "Praxis," and Nicholas Lobkowitz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1967) 36. The Marxian emphasis on social transformation would remain important, however, as a necessary corrective to the sociopolitical implications of a premodern, static worldview.

²²See Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 147-83. By "understanding" I mean what Charles Taylor has called "strong evaluation," as distinct from "simple weighing" (see *ibid.*). Understanding would clearly include but would not be rooted in feelings as such.

²³Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon, 1975) 110. See also Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology*, esp. 163-245; Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, esp. 171-231; and Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 172-73. On the implications for U.S. Hispanic theologians, see García, "Reflections on a Hispanic Approach to Trinitarian Theology."

ience by the atmosphere of postmodern multiculturalism, with its radical challenge to monolithic reason. There is little doubt that certain aspects of certain forms of postmodernism would and should find receptivity among U.S. Hispanic theologians. There is much to be said for postmodernist emphases on aesthetics, difference, social location, and the decentered Western subject. The postmodernist repudiation of the self-grounding subject has a great deal in common with the U.S. Hispanic critique of modern liberal individualism.

Yet significant ambiguities remain in the postmodern project.²⁴ U.S. Hispanics should be wary of proclaiming the end of modernity, when our communities continue to bear the scars of modernity, thereby witnessing to its perdurability. Only the beneficiaries of modernity can afford to proclaim its demise; only they can *choose* to redistribute, or even surrender, their inheritance. Moreover, the Hispanic understanding of the concrete, organic relationship between personality and community ought to make us instinctively suspicious of the fundamentally fragmented world of postmodernism.²⁵ After a while, the view of humankind as a collection of selfless selves and multiple centers begins to look suspiciously like modern liberal individualism. Hispanics insist that community, or "social location," is not the graveyard but the birthplace of the self. We ask if it is mere coincidence that, at a time when women and Third World peoples are coming to be recognized as full-fledged historical subjects, we are now being told that the subject does not exist—or that, at a time when women and Third World authors are increasingly articulating effective, systematic critiques of modernity, we are told that the author does not exist.²⁶ What, then, becomes of the memories of suffering? What becomes of the lives sacrificed for what we are now told is an illusion? Postmodern nihilism presents the modern Western subject with an all-too-easy escape from the judgment of history.

U.S. Hispanic theologians should also be wary of accepting uncritically the postmodern antipathy toward reason, or universal claims, in order to commit ourselves to the particularity of U.S. Hispanic praxis, as if the two were incommensurable. If community, or social location, is not the end but the condition of the possibility of subjectivity, then it is not the end but the condition of the possibility of communicative rationality.²⁷ This is by no means to suggest that there are not, in contemporary society, *profound* structural obstacles to discourse that attend the

²⁴See Tracy, "On Naming the Present," 77-78.

²⁵While these traits are characteristic of what Hal Foster has called poststructuralist postmodernism, we can be little more sanguine about the neoconservative postmodernist return to community and history. As Foster has pointed out, this tends to be an escapist return to the history of the victors, which ignores the profound discontinuities in both history and community perceived through the eyes of the poor, from the underside of history; see his "(Post)Modern Polemics," *New German Critique* 33 (Fall 1984) 67-78. See also Habermas, "Modernity Versus Post-Modernity."

²⁶See Habermas, "Modernity Versus Post-Modernity," and Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions*, 148, 189.

²⁷See n. 21, above.

profound structural obstacles to community.²⁸ What I do suggest is that legitimating these oppressive structures is a modern dualistic epistemology which, having become institutionalized in social, political, and economic structures, has contributed to the marginalization of U.S. Hispanic culture. There is little difference between a rationalist depreciation of popular religiosity as *superstitious* irrationality and a postmodern idealization of popular religiosity as *liberative* irrationality; both deny the full humanity of Latinos and Latinas by denying us our minds.²⁹ Both distort popular religious praxis by characterizing it as rooted in feeling rather than in identity.³⁰

The option for irrationality is a privilege accorded those whom society has already deemed to be "rational." If Western Europeans who proclaim the death of reason are hailed as postmodern prophets, Hispanics who do the same will be dismissed as premodern simpletons—even as we are welcomed into the dialogue made possible by the so-called death of the modern Western self. Consequently, a U.S. Hispanic theology whose *only* claim to legitimacy is that it reflects U.S. Hispanic praxis, would simply reinforce the continued marginalization of U.S. Hispanics by a society that has already deemed that praxis to be irrational.

It is precisely the historical praxis of marginalized peoples which, in resisting the destruction of community, unmasks the irrationality of institutional and ideological distortions that continue to support that destruction. The challenge that confronts U.S. Hispanic theologians is thus that of accompanying U.S. Hispanic communities in their historical praxis, uncovering and articulating the theological richness latent in the historical praxis of our communities in order to bring that richness into critical dialogue with a larger society, which, whether premodern, modern, or postmodern, continues to deny the full humanity of U.S. Hispanics. By confronting this challenge, we follow in the footsteps of the great Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí, who reminded us that "to think is to serve."³¹

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²⁸What distinguishes U.S. Hispanic aesthetic praxis from postmodern aestheticism is precisely that, as the praxis of a marginalized community, the former cannot be understood apart from its ethico-political demands for the historical realization of the ontological solidarity implicit in praxis. Because they are not grounded in a preferential option for the poor, both poststructuralist postmodernism and neoconservative postmodernism can have reactionary political consequences. On the reactionary tendencies of the former, see Hal Foster, "(Post)Modern Polemics"; on the reactionary tendencies of the latter, see Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard," *New German Critique* 33 (Fall 1984) 103-26.

²⁹Both also presuppose the Kantian disjunction between "objective knowledge" and "merely subjective, private feelings"; see Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 126. That postmodernism is caught within the same disjunction is suggested, in his inimitable way, by Paul Feyerabend: "It is the paradox of modern irrationalism that its proponents silently identify rationalism with order and articulate speech and thus see themselves forced to promote stammering and absurdity." *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: NLB, 1975) 218. Popular religiosity reveals the *transrational* or *prerational* (not irrational) dimension of praxis.

³⁰See Sandmel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 180-81.

³¹José Martí, "Nuestra América," in *José Martí: sus mejores páginas*, ed. Raimundo Lazo (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1978) 92.