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CHAPTER 3

Attributes of a Mestizo Democracy

Anzaldúa's and Elizondo's depictions of mestizaje provide the basis for realizing a unity-in-diversity that culminates neither in assimilation nor separatism. In this chapter, I put forward and discuss the following attributes of a mestizo democracy that I find embedded in the works of Latino theologians and scholars:

- an engagement of reality as both/and, not either/or;
- the permeability of borders in contrast to the inelasticity of frontiers;
- the political countercultural implications of popular religion;
- an affective, aesthetic rendering of rationality and epistemology;
- a relational as opposed to a possessive rendering of morality and community;
- the transformation of relations of domination into relations of empowerment;
- the engendering of hope in the struggle for justice for all peoples.

To develop each attribute at length, I draw specifically upon the work of María Pilar Aquino Vargas, Ana María Díaz-Stevens, Allan Figueroa Deck, Virgil Elizondo, Orlando Espín, Ismael García, Sixto García, Roberto Goizueta, Justo González, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ana María Pineda, Harold Recinos, Jeanette Rodriguez, Fernando Segovia, Samuel Soliván-Román, Anthony Stevens-Arroyo, and Eldín Villafañe, in addition to other scholars

writing in this rapidly expanding discipline. In particular my exegesis emphasizes, on the one hand, the process and manner of inclusion (the affective dimensions) and, on the other hand, the realization of just political, social, and economic arrangements (the effective dimensions) of this alternative politics. Engaging the above seven normative attributes in combination will suggest why a mestizo democracy is crucial for realizing an inclusive and just politics of crossing borders.

The Primacy of the Latino Experience as Both/And, not Either/Or

Even though Latino theology is indebted to the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez and other Latin America liberation theologians over the past four decades, mestizaje as either theology or political theory is not just a northward projection of liberation theology. In contemporary political theory, philosophy, and theology informed by cultural hermeneutics, being sensitive to the particularities of context, place, and situation is very important. Both Anzaldúa and Elizondo, as shown in the previous chapter, capture the experience of being caught between worlds: being neither Mexican nor U.S. American, yet simultaneously both/and. As also reviewed in the previous chapter, the attraction of the Chicano movement to Vasconcelos's notion of *la raza cósmica* is provoked by this predicament of being situated in a nexus of cultures. As suggested by the title of Fernando Segovia's essay, Latinos find themselves between "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand."¹

Thus, a mestizo democracy is a challenge to frameworks that squeeze the multicultural reality of the United States into either a European American orientation, on the one hand, or a Latin American framework, on the other.² Instead, Goizueta suggests we engage in a "critical appropriation" of these diverse theological traditions in the light of Latino experience: "Such a task requires that we approach and critique traditional theological sources and methods, whether European or Latin American, from the perspective of U.S. Hispanics in order to be able to articulate the significance of that perspective for the life of our communities, the church, and society."³

Taking Goizueta's insight a step further, my critique of both Bellah's and Geyer's articulation of community in the first chapter is not that their emphasis on cultivating heartfelt mores is unimportant to the health of U.S. democracy, but rather that their renderings of these mores and values are too exclusively rooted in the European American experience. In a country increasingly characterized by the vital contributions of African Ameri-

cans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans—and as dealing with the ‘other’ becomes, increasingly, a daily experience—our core community values need to be rooted in the concrete experience of simultaneously engaging multiple traditions, a long-standing reality for Latinos.

Displacing the Frontier with the Border

The Latino experience with crossing borders, both literal and figurative, is vital for dealing with multiculturalism in a constructive fashion. As Segovia suggests, the Latino experience is “a radical sense of mixture and otherness, *mezcolanza* and *otredad*, both unsettling and liberating at the same time.”⁴ Moreover, this radical dynamic ensues not only when Latinos mix with other U.S. cultural groups, but also when Latino groups intermix. Consequently, “barriers of exclusion” are antithetical to a mestizo democracy.⁵

Conceptually, Justo González’s distinction between “borders” and “frontiers,” based on the different character of the respective Spanish and English colonizations of the Americas, illustrates in cultural terms the difference between collaborative and heterogeneous “mixing,” on the one hand, and oppressive and homogeneous domination, on the other. The English conquest, according to González, manifested a frontier mentality in which peoples deemed alien were pushed back or eliminated as English colonists spread “civilization” westward across the North American continent:

What the northern colonists wanted was land. The original inhabitants were a hindrance. So instead of subjugating the Indians, they set about to push them off their lands, and eventually to exterminate them. If the myth in the Spanish colonies was that the Indians were like children who needed someone to govern them, the myth in the English colonies was that the Indians were nonpeople; they didn’t exist, their lands were a vacuum. In north Georgia, in the middle of Cherokee Country, there is a monument to a white man who was, so the monument says, “the first man to settle in these parts.” And this, in a county that is still called “Cherokee!”⁶

Not surprisingly, according to González, it became the “Manifest Destiny” of this “civilization” to enter and give significance to this void.⁷

A “border mentality,” by contrast, according to González entails mutual interaction and enrichment. He suggests that the Spanish conquest of

the Americas, was illustrative of this mixing, albeit with the Spanish in control of political and economic relations:

Today in a plaza in Mexico City, which marks the place of the last great armed struggle between the Aztecs and the Spanish, there is a marker that attempts to explain what took place there: “There were neither victors nor vanquished; it was rather the painful birth of the new race which is the Mexican people.” . . . This is too rosy a picture, for the Aztecs were indeed vanquished, and for many generations had to pay dearly for it. Nevertheless, it is true that from the moment the true growing edge of Mexican life was not the geographic frontier, but rather the other less discernible though real border at which people of different cultures thrown by history met, clashed, rebelled, intermarried, and eventually produced a new, *mestizo* reality.⁸

Whereas a frontier, he continues, is “unidirectional” and clearly demarcates progress from backwardness, a border is “bidirectional” and growth ensues through “mutual enrichment,” not “conquest.”⁹

A border, in contrast to a frontier, suggests a lateral interchange of equal cultures and an openness to differences whose intersection does not have to culminate in uniformity. Granting that the Spaniards did conquer Mexico and most of Latin America, González’s point is that with *mestizaje* the engagement of the ‘other’ is a positive encounter, in contrast to notions of impurity and defilement that characterize the assimilation or annihilation ethos of the frontier. Indeed, this multidirectional ebb and flow of cultures underlies Elizondo’s notion of a synthesis that can bring contradictory forces together.

In contrast is the position that views U.S. culture as a possession requiring defense from foreign contamination, as in Geyer’s *Americans No More*. “English only” proposals, the militarizing of the U.S.-Mexico border, and a call for increased immigration restrictions are contemporary manifestations of “frontier” thinking. When that frontier reaches its geographic limits, then it will have to be defended at all costs from “inferior” races and cultures that threaten its hegemony.

Envisioning cultural relations as borders to be crossed rather than as frontiers to be defended, suggests the possibility that diverse cultures can interact in a lateral, egalitarian fashion and that a democratic set of political relationships requires such interaction. For example, rather than insistence on “English only,” “Spanish only,” or “any-language-only”—all possessive renderings of identity—the emphasis should be on communication. Daily in

the U.S. Southwest, many peoples communicate through a combination of English and Spanish. These “border crossings” are not just out of necessity but involve an opportunity for mutual growth, as suggested by Carlos Fuentes:

There are different systems in the world. There are different nationalities, different cultures, different personalities. There are many people that are not like me in the streets, but that doesn't mean I can't communicate with them. On the contrary, it's a wonderful challenge to be able to communicate with what is not like you. What is terrible is when a nation with power says that what is not like me should be exterminated—Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, for example. But as long as you say, “I am what I am, but that doesn't mean I'm better than anybody else, it means I am different, and the other one is different too, and we can understand each other, we can talk, we can communicate”—that is the basic attitude that makes life civilized and communication possible.¹⁰

Indeed, contrary to those who have turned to the Bible to defend slavery, segregation, and “religious and cultural purity,” González points out that many stories in the book of Joshua, for instance, actually convey “fluid identity boundaries.”¹¹ In these narratives, mestizos employ a wily subversion rather than a direct confrontation of the frontier mentality. Moreover, González, from the standpoint of the border, views the exile or alien as a blessing for the dominant society, just as Joseph's gifts ultimately benefited Pharaoh and Egypt. Thus, counter to contemporary nativism that would exclude the alien or the foreigner, the contemporary waves of new “Americans” coming to the U.S. from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other places enrich our cultural, political, and social networks. Ultimately, from the standpoint of borders, not frontiers, González concludes that by excluding others, “we exclude ourselves.”¹²

But before waxing too romantic over this Latino crossing borders experience, we should recall from our previous examination of Anzaldúa that women and ‘others’ considered different have frequently been marginalized in Mexico. Similarly, machismo and other forms of domination are hardly foreign to the Latino experience. González emphasizes that part of the marginalization experienced by Protestant Latino Americans comes from the dominant Roman Catholic Latino culture in their communities. Each of these barriers must be confronted, and the notion and experience of crossing borders provide a vital, lived basis for doing so.

Another merit of the ethos of crossing borders rather than “expanding or preserving frontiers” is that it is applicable not just to relationships between diverse cultures, linguistic groups, and races, but to other categorizations too quick to separate people into “this group” and “that group,” with one group being dominant. *Mujerista* theology, especially as presented by Ada María Isasi-Díaz integrates González’s articulation of crossing borders with the feminist dimensions of Anzaldúa’s work. Isasi-Díaz, in particular, cautions that feminists, who struggle against patriarchalism within both Christian communities and society at-large, must ensure that they in turn do not dominate other women. For example, she takes to task European American feminists who do not treat women of color as co-participants in articulating feminism:

Somewhat naively I had thought that together we would decide not only how to garden but what the garden was to look like, what it would be. But the European American feminists, being part of the dominant culture, deal with Hispanic women—and other racial/ethnic women—differently from the way they deal with each other. They take for granted that feminism in the USA is *their* garden, and therefore they will decide what manner of work racial/ethnic women will do there.¹³

Instead, Isasi-Díaz stresses that mutual border crossings involve not just respecting what ‘others’ are saying, but giving those perspectives substantial consideration in articulating “what is normative for all feminists.”¹⁴ Thus, a genuine sharing of diverse perspectives in a lateral, collaborative fashion entails not just including previously excluded perspectives, but recasting the terms of the conversation to enable all interlocutors to carry on the dialogue.

Ultimately, the Latino experience and ethos of crossing borders is what Elizondo terms a mestizo anthropology. As opposed to the frontier mentality’s insistence on either assimilation or annihilation of ‘others,’ a mestizo anthropology involves an inclusive and progressive synthesis of different ideas and cultures that is not a melting pot. At the same time, this anthropology entails a universal respect for the differences of ‘others’ and exemplifies the Christian act of hospitality to the stranger.¹⁵ In a world in which heterogeneous, not homogeneous, identities are proliferating and continually shifting, crossing borders as a concrete engagement and combination of opposites moves beyond either uniformity or incommensurability.

The Portent of Popular Religion

The substantive basis of the capacity for crossing borders lies rooted in the extensive historical legacy of popular religion in Latino and Latin American culture. It is one thing to articulate a unity-in-diversity in the abstract, but truly heartfelt attachments and experiences are essential for such a notion to be realized as a concrete political culture. Popular religion provides such a concrete legacy and orientation.

Popular religion involves long-standing spiritual rituals performed by ordinary people: for instance, home altars, *el Día de los Muertos* (the Day of the Dead) celebrations, personal devotions to saints, and *las posadas* (a house-to-house pilgrimage held the nine nights before Christmas in which pilgrims join Mary and Joseph in their search for shelter at Jesus' birth). In the Caribbean the pursuit of Santería—a commingling of Christian and especially African rituals—is widespread. Popular religion as a people's spirituality is also a descendant of “the medieval fascination with saints, shrines, relics, images, miracles, and religious storytelling.”¹⁶

Within mainstream institutional Christian churches in the United States, Mexico, and other parts of Latin America, these popular practices have been disparaged as unsophisticated, if not uncivilized, supposedly needing purification and modernization. Such “civilizing” myopia does not grasp the profound way in which popular religion synthesizes supposedly distinct religious traditions into a mestizo spirituality. The inclusiveness, the people-centeredness, and the constructive embrace of the marginalized that all characterize popular religion also offer a more democratic vision of politics that can effectively engage unjust economic and social disparities.

The normative and historical sources for Latino popular religion are a combination of African, European, and indigenous practices. Espín contends that popular religion is a combination of the “sacral worldviews” of “pre-Tridentine Christianity” and “Amerindian and African religions” in the Americas.¹⁷ The originality of Espín's scholarship lies in his claim that this “sacral worldview of the village” derived in part from Spanish medieval Catholic practices that predate the Council of Trent.¹⁸ The Catholicism that comes to the Americas with the Spaniards, he maintains, is one that relies a great deal on “lay leadership at the local level” and “catechizing through symbols, stories, and dramas.”¹⁹ It is not until Trent, he adds, that rigidification of Catholic practices in the institutional church, in response to the Reformation, takes hold.

The sacral worldviews of pre-Tridentine Christianity, Amerindian spirituality, and African spirituality, Espín emphasizes, share a holistic and heterogeneous orientation that engages the distinction between the sacred and the profane as a border, not as a frontier, and does so through the aestheticism of *flor y canto* (flower and song). For instance, one cannot understand the deep meaning of the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac without appreciating the symbolism of flowers blooming out of season, the song of the birds enveloping her presence, and the specific colors adorning her visage. As Elizondo and others have shown, the recasting of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin as Guadalupe inculturates Christian revelation in a way perceptible in Nahuatl (indigenous) terms and incomprehensible to cold, linear rationalities. Consequently, Espín argues, Hellenistic Christian concepts like the Trinity become recast in the Americas in terms more akin to African or indigenous outlooks.

Several vital implications of this holistic and heterogeneous sacral worldview disclose the import of mestizaje for pastoral theology, political theology, and especially political theory. First, popular religion prompts a rethinking of what we understand to be Catholic Christianity, as it has existed over the past five centuries in the Americas. Historically in Latin America, at least until the 1960s, the institutional Roman Catholic Church had been aligned with the political and economic elites of the region. The reforms of Vatican II and the key meetings of the Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 and in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979 reoriented the formal church to “the preferential option for the poor” and to other central themes of liberation theology. Over the past two decades this radicalization of the church has been tempered by the appointment of more conservative bishops to the region by John Paul II. Catholicism in Latin America has simultaneously sustained a hierarchical institutional church and a “popular church” associated with Christian-base communities and the practices of popular religion.

The legacy of popular religion among the laity, and especially the poor, as an amalgam of African, European, and indigenous practices suggests that there have always been simultaneous Catholic churches in post-conquest Latin America. The poor—especially the indigenous—church has practiced popular religion alongside the institutional church and in some cases in lieu of it. As noted by González, it was the Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and Mercedarians, not diocesan clergy, who evangelized the indigenous peoples of the Americas; the diocesan clergy were content to minister to the Spanish colonizers and their indigenous servants in the towns and cities.²⁰

After the conquest, popular religion emerged as the heart of the poor peoples' spirituality. This orientation, especially, has identified with the suffering, crucified Christ, who is seen as being in solidarity with those who endure poverty, rejection, oppression, and marginalization.

Nor has Catholicism in what is now the United States been spared the Latin American heritage of the hierarchical-popular church split. When New Mexico became part of the United States subsequent to the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848, Antontio José Martínez, the pastor of Taos, came into conflict with Jean Baptiste Lamy, the new bishop appointed by the U.S. hierarchy. Martínez defended his parishioners, accustomed to closer collaboration between the pastor and the people, against the attempts of Lamy to “Americanize” them. As a result of this impasse, Martínez ultimately formed an alternative Catholic Church in northern New Mexico that became legendary among the long-standing Spanish-speaking families, who, as González points out, understood Catholicism “as the faith of the people and not as the monopoly of the hierarchy.”²¹ González also points out in this context that the Spanish phrase “*soy católico, pero no creo en los curas* (I am a Catholic, but I don't believe in priests)” should not be construed as anti-clerical but rather as the conviction that “only those priests who live up to their vocation . . . are believable priests.”²²

Second, both the heterogeneous and counterinstitutional church orientation of popular religion, especially as elucidated in Espín's studies, suggests that the growing “conversion” of many Latinos from Catholicism to Pentecostalism, both in the U.S. and across Latin America, is more a change of label than one of spiritual worldview. The Catholic Charismatic movement and Protestant Pentecostalism, as practiced by Latinos, are the latest vestiges of the affective and aesthetic character of popular religion. In this regard González relates the story of how a seminary professor, a Mexican Protestant, responded to the negative remarks about Our Lady of Guadalupe made by one of his students: “Young man, in this class you are free to say anything you please. You may say anything about me. You certainly are welcome to say anything you wish about the pope and the priests. But don't you touch my little Virgin!”²³

At the same time, González does acknowledge that Latin American Pentecostals have historically envisioned their faith as liberating them from a “backward and anti-democratic” Catholic culture, as they look to the Protestant United States as a paragon of modernity and progress.²⁴ Still, this optimistic assessment subsequently has been revised by some Pentecostals who have come to realize the deleterious materialism and consumerism of

North American culture. The anticultural stance previously directed at Catholic North America is now being directed by some Latin American Pentecostals at Protestant and secular North America.²⁵

Third, the heritage of popular religion both as “the people’s church” and as a mixture of spiritualities constitutes a dynamic response to both Deloria’s critique of Christianity raised previously in chapter 1 and Anzaldúa’s critique of the same in chapter 2. Recall that Deloria contends that Christianity is an abstract universal religion that violates the sense of geography and place so sacred to indigenous religions in the Americas. Popular religion, as depicted by Latino theologians, suggests, to the contrary, that African, indigenous, and European practices have been mixing in the Americas in popular religion over the past five centuries without losing the sense of place, community, and nature so dear to Deloria. Contrary to Deloria’s contentions, Christianity and indigenous spiritualities can intersect and transform each other in a way that does not vitiate the vitality and integrity of either.

Anzaldúa’s charge that Spanish Catholicism fosters servility on the part of the indigenous peoples is cogent primarily in terms of the historic institutional church, but not the popular church. As discussed above, the popular church, both in its Catholic and Pentecostal varieties, has always been in critical engagement with repressive political, social, economic, and religious structures. As González points out, this countercultural legacy is leading especially to “a new ecumenism” in the United States in which Catholics and Protestants mobilize together on civil rights issues such as the state of migrant workers, community organizing, and access to political participation.²⁶ Finally, Anzaldúa’s vivid critique of the subordination of women in Latino and Latin American cultures is also being addressed by *mujerista* and *feminista* theologies.

Fourth, a well-known thesis in the field of sociology of religion in the United States, originally made by Will Herberg and Ruby Kennedy, is that as immigrant groups assimilate in the United States they are less likely to lose the religion of their native culture than its ethnicity and language. Hence, Italian, Irish, and Polish Catholics, supposedly within three generations, lose their distinctive ethnic identities but continue to remain Catholic as opposed to becoming Protestant or Jewish.²⁷ Latino popular religion, however, especially as captured in this “new ecumenism,” suggests that for Latinos the dividing lines between Catholic and Protestant, Charismatic and Pentecostal, and indigenous and Christian spirituality are not especially salient. If anything, the sacral worldview of popular religion manifests a capacity to

engage and eventually combine diverse spiritualities in a lateral, not hierarchical, fashion. This capacity for combining opposites is a valuable orientation for a twenty-first century United States in which Islam and non-Western religions are becoming more visible parts of the religious scene.

Similarly, Latino popular religion also reshapes David Tracy's and Andrew Greeley's delineation between the analogical and dialectical spiritual imaginations. On the one hand, according to Greeley, Protestants manifest the dialectical imagination, a point of view that sees "human society as 'God-forsaken'"; thus, believers can only be redeemed as individuals through their relationship with a sovereign, transcendent God. On the other hand, Catholics manifest the analogical imagination, which sees "society as a 'sacrament' of God and therefore social relationships reveal, however imperfectly, the presence of God."²⁸ Greeley, in turn, demonstrates through sociological surveys that these different spiritual imaginations lead Protestants and Catholics to have different social and political outlooks: Protestants tend to focus on individual rights and see social and governmental bodies as hostile, whereas Catholics tend to focus on the importance and goodness of familial and social networks.²⁹

However, a fault line is emerging in U.S. spirituality as a consequence of popular religion, as suggested by Espín's work. On one side stand primarily European American Catholics and Protestants, whose spiritual imagination is rooted in the Reformation-Counter Reformation debate and is closer to Tracy's dialectical outlook. On the other side stand Catholics, Protestants, and practitioners of indigenous rites, primarily Latinos, whose sacral worldview is closer to Tracy's analogical outlook. European American Catholics, despite their heritage of the analogical imagination, have had to contend with the extensive influence of the Reformation on the history of the United States and have had to accommodate themselves to subsequent Protestant ideals—John Winthrop's "city-on-a-hill," for example—that have played a powerful role in shaping U.S. cultural identity. In a sense, as Mark Massa contends, as liberal Catholics gained access to the social mainstream of United States in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, many became more zealous defenders of the U.S. way of life than their Protestant counterparts.³⁰

By contrast, up until the recent proliferation of Pentecostal evangelism, the religious divide in Latin America has not been between Protestant and Catholic or between Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but between the popular church informed by a holistic and heterogeneous spirituality and the hierarchical church oriented by the more elitist and formally rigid framework set in place after the Council of Trent. As Ana María Díaz-Stevens

and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo point out, before the Reformation Christianity provided a “buffer zone between the officially sacred and the daily experience of the mundane,” or what they term “a com-munitarian spirituality.”³¹ The Reformation, they continue, has had a “corrosive” effect on the Catholic sacramental rendering of this spirituality across northern Europe. By contrast, the isolation of “the Latino homelands,” has insulated Latin America from some of these developments.³²

Therefore, when Deck refers to the ongoing migration of Latin Americans into the United States, especially from Mexico and Central America, as “the second wave,” he intends more than just a historic and geographic discrimination from the “first wave” of primarily European immigrants to the United States.³³ Two very different substantive movements are meeting and clashing in the U.S. Southwest. The first wave—primarily European migration east-to-west across the continental U.S.—was driven by the frontier mentality whose intellectual origins lie in the Reformation and then the Enlightenment. The second wave—primarily Latino migration south-to-north—is keenly oriented by the “border mentality” whose intellectual origins lie in the heterogeneous and holistic worldview of popular religion.

The ability of popular religion to endure—for at least five centuries in the Latin American instance—all the while remaining open to other outlooks and other spiritualities, provides a formidable alternative to the prevailing frontier mentality in the U.S., whose benign name is the “melting pot.” Although historically most immigrants to the United States have assimilated according to past U.S. norms within three generations, the deep cultural hermeneutical roots of popular religion in Latin America and its long-standing resiliency in the face of oppression by religious, political, and economic elites suggest that endeavors to “Americanize” Latinos may prove futile. Moreover, the historical presence of Latinos in the U.S. Southwest, the geographic proximity of this region to the rest of Latin America, and the dynamic ethos of integrating, not assimilating, traditions in popular religions combine to form a border ethos that could very well challenge the hegemony of the frontier ethos.

At the very least the intensity and depth of popular religion calls into question the Herberg/Kennedy typology reviewed above. In addition the spiritual imagination of popular religion will have an impact on U.S. political and social attitudes. We need more studies similar to Greeley’s to assess the content and contour of this impact. At a minimum, popular religion’s concrete integration of spiritual traditions provides a basis for:

- moving beyond the Christian-centric discussion of religion in the United States,
- engaging Islam and non-Western religions in a more inviting way,
- and realizing an “affective” politics of unity-in-diversity.

An Affective, Aesthetic Rationality

Popular religion captures in practice the affective, aesthetic rationality emphasized by Vasconcelos in the previous chapter. Vasconcelos’s work, however, remains that of an educator and a philosopher, whereas popular religion is steeped in concrete experience. Anyone who is active in Christian churches in the U.S. Southwest knows firsthand of the enormous turnout of Latinos on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The heartfelt fervor expressed by Latinos on *el Día de los Muertos* (All Souls’ Day) and even on Mother’s Day is likewise striking. The vivid raw reenactments on Good Friday of Christ’s suffering and resurrection in Latino communities illustrate that in the Latino worldview ideas and concepts must be realized and communicated first and foremost through the sensory realm.

Popular religion also overcomes one of the Eurocentric biases in Vasconcelos’s work. Although Vasconcelos elicits the notion of *la raza cósmica*, his presentation retains a notion of “civilizing” the indigenous peoples. This preponderance of Eurocentric thinking is even a problem in the early articulations of liberation theology of the 1960s and 1970s, the frameworks of which are still indebted to the Hegelian/Marxist project. The affective, aesthetic rationality communicated by popular religion and the mestizo experience of Latinos combine African, European, and indigenous outlooks in a lateral way that does not privilege any one tradition. Conversely, if Vasconcelos’s shortcoming is his Eurocentric inclinations, this heterogeneous juxtaposition of traditions also challenges Deloria’s or Anzaldúa’s privileging of the indigenous worldview over those stemming from Europe.

The affective, aesthetic rationality conveyed in the Latino worldview addresses the following pivotal question, as phrased by Elizondo: “How to reconcile the western world of individualism, materialism, and rational thought . . . with the ancient Mexican world of *divina providencia* (which appears as magical ideas to the outsider), mystery, and myth which are the

effective cause of our communion with God and God's effective intervention in our lives?"³⁴ Indeed, the concrete pursuit of this question is especially consonant with contemporary philosophical debates regarding how to move beyond Eurocentric modernity to realize a lateral truth between cultures without slipping into an anarchic cultural relativism or, conversely, into a tyrannically imposed communitarianism having little or no respect for differences.

In this affective, aesthetic rationality, truth is not something disconnected in an abstract way from the world but, as Elizondo conveys, something that "exists in the relational, the interconnected, the beautiful, and the melodic. . . ."³⁵ As opposed to the Cartesian separation of the thinking ego from the world of experience, Latino rationality makes use of "all the avenues of knowing: the senses, the mind, and the heart."³⁶ This affective, aesthetic rationality is steeped in intuition and a great deal of mysticism. Indeed, poets and other authors are integral to the expression of this rationality; the work of Anzaldúa, among others, comes to mind. In the words of Sixto García, poets capture "the ineffable mystery of the graced encounter."³⁷ The ruminations of Latino theology, in turn, are often poetic in character.

In simple terms, the affective, aesthetic rationality available in popular religion and in Latino theology has the following orientations. First, it manifests a relational, concrete, aesthetic portrait of truth akin to the analogical, sacramental imagination articulated by Tracy and Greeley earlier. Second, it emphasizes a lateral not hierarchical integration of cultures; the heterogeneous character of this rationality engages in both/and, not either/or, thinking. Third, it accents a universal respect of 'others' in their "differences"; indeed, such differences are not utterly separate from community life, nor are they to be subsumed under some convenient unity. Fourth, it emphasizes the revelatory character of concrete particulars. Truth realized "in the totality of events"³⁸ springs from the dynamism between subjective particular events and so-called objective universals—"the intrinsic connection between particular meaning and universal truth."³⁹

There are at least four immediate applications of this affective, aesthetic rationality for ongoing conceptual debates. First, this rationality, especially as realized in the popular church, looks askance at so-called objective perspectives and professional "credentialism"; as put by Isasi-Díaz, exercise of this rationality is "to be suspicious about what we have not participated in defining."⁴⁰ Specifically, Isasi-Díaz is referring to the exclusion of women from the definition of the spiritual and conceptual frameworks that affect their lives.

Nevertheless, the “suspicion” she raises is also relevant to the questions that the Latino affective, aesthetic rationality put to prevailing canons. More often than not, those who have power are those that *define* the standards of recruitment and advancement in workplaces and decision-making structures. This aesthetic rationality calls into question the legitimacy of precise, almost scientific compartmentalization of standards whose formulation occurs without the contributions of the people they will affect. So as to move beyond objectivity lorded over others, this rationality suggests that a much larger group of people must be included in substantive deliberations and that the contours of the deliberation must not be restricted to narrow scientific, technological, materialist, or especially “means-end” approaches. This affective, aesthetic rationality engages the ambiguous and contradictory dimensions of reality that escape instrumentalist rationalities.

Second, this affective, aesthetic rationality is highly critical of the individualism, materialism, and hedonism of the consumer culture that has come to characterize the United States and, increasingly, much of the world through the global economy. The globally constructed economy’s reduction of life’s values to quantitative terms, and the concomitant diminution of people to consumers, is the logical extension of the objective inclination of modernity. Recall that Vasconcelos’s articulation of *la raza cósmica* was as much intended to counter the spreading commercialism of what he termed Anglo-Saxon civilization as to celebrate the valuable mixing of cultures and races in the Latin American heritage. Indeed, it is precisely the virtues of heterogeneity and juxtaposing differences that enable an affective, aesthetic rationality to be a subversive yet constructive counterculture to the modernist, homogenizing model of McWorld.⁴¹

Third, in view of the prevailing modernization and secularization and the failure of this “civilizing project,”⁴² the affective, aesthetic rationality in popular religion and Latino theology offers an alternative to premodern, modern, or postmodern solutions. Like premodern perspectives, this rationality affirms a sense of the sacred and the transcendent but, unlike premodernity, rejects political, social, and economic arrangements that stress inequality and elitism. Like postmodern perspectives, this rationality affirms the importance of embracing differences and “distributing opportunities, resources, and benefits in an inclusive way”⁴³ but is more confident than most postmodern schemes in the capacity of opposites to combine in a heterogeneous sense of community. The fluid intersection of cultures in crossing borders moves beyond simply celebrating difference

and incommensurability to effect a substantive mutual engagement of perspectives in pursuit of the truth.

Langdon Gilkey, the famous Protestant theologian, has gone as far as to claim that Catholicism is better situated than liberal Protestantism to contend with the pernicious dimensions of modernization and secularization because of its focus on “ritual, symbol, and myth.”⁴⁴ If that is the case, Latino popular spirituality—with its aesthetic rationality and its sacral worldview of multicolored hues drawn from the African, indigenous, and medieval European worlds—is even better situated to grapple with the corrosive aspects of modernism, especially since this spirituality is steeped in the lives of the people.⁴⁵

Fourth, in view of Greeley’s insight that one’s spiritual imagination has a vital influence on one’s political and social actions, the affective, aesthetic rationality evoked in Latino popular spirituality can potentially grow into a counterculture more effectively opposing modernity than abstract ethical, philosophical, or theological schemes. It is unlikely that a unity-in-diversity is going to be realized by people studying Lawrence Kohlberg’s levels of moral development, engaging in Jürgen Habermas’s communicative practices, or wrestling with John Rawls’s exegesis on justice. These “ideas,” however admirable and modern in their own “right,” are too abstract and removed from the concrete lives of people and communities.

Instead, inscribed in Latino popular spirituality is a sense of community amid multiple identities—what Díaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo have termed a “cultural citizenship.”⁴⁶ This citizenship is not just a nostalgic turn to the past or a mere claim “that somehow the language, values, customs, or traditions of Hispanics can be preserved from the inexorable forces of Americanization.”⁴⁷ Instead, it provides a basis for effecting a concrete unity-in-diversity that *realistically* overcomes the negative aspects of modernity, while simultaneously and critically sustaining its liberating dimensions.

The Relational Character of Morality and Community

Given the above experiential and intellectual bases of the Latino sacral worldview, it should not be surprising that the accompanying conception of human relationships and community emphasizes a great deal of intersubjective interaction. Ismael García offers three key characteristics of the ethics of Latino culture. First, in contrast to the long-standing tradition of individualism in U.S. culture, Latinos stress the social and relational char-

acter of morality: personal relationships are more important than abstract rules. Consequently, Latinos “give priority to care, responsibilities, and connectedness over separation, individual achievement, and individual rights.”⁴⁸ Finally and most importantly in terms of politics, Latinos’ emphasis on “the interdependent nature of social reality” leads to an awareness of how their actions affect others, especially in terms of social justice.⁴⁹

During a political science discourse, I once referred to the political theory oriented by *mestizaje* as a “politics of relations,” to which a critic sneered, “How could it be otherwise?” Such cynicism ignores the Latino in-depth alternative to the Cartesian conception of reality—autonomous subjects examining and manipulating a world of objects—and to the ethic of possessive and aesthetic individualism, which, as pointed out by Bellah and others, is so inscribed in U.S. culture.

As Goizueta stresses, in Latino culture the community, not the individual, has “ontological priority.”⁵⁰ Because of the Latino experience and emphasis on the heterogeneous quality of life, this sense of community is not suffocating or coercive. Yes, relationships not rules are the priority, but this does not mean that community is forced upon individual Latinos. Instead, one learns to articulate one’s *persona* within the context of one’s place in a concrete sense of community.

Moreover, the Latino emphasis on community life does not imply simply a “chosen” community. In the liberal-communitarian debate over the past two decades in the United States, a subject I examine at greater length in the chapter 5, one salient notion is that of the individual choosing his or her community or “lifestyle.” For instance, Bellah, in a critical vein, depicts the spread of lifestyle enclaves in the United States—groups of people who choose to come together in the same neighborhood or locale around a common hobby or activity. As much as this is a liberal or individualist way of trying to articulate a community supposedly void of repression and censorship, it is not the Latino “border” sense of relationships.

Much of the difficulty in discussing community is the objective, possessive way we conceive of it. Either community is imposed upon others—Barber’s *jihad*—or it is something chosen by the individual—Bellah’s lifestyle enclaves. Note again the “either/or.” For Latinos, community is not an either/or but a both/and; it is a set of relationships into which one is born but that one can subsequently transform. Community life consists of interpretive relationships that precede one in time and to a certain degree shape one’s character yet, at the same time, extend beyond one’s life into the future upon which one’s actions will have a decisive impact. A community is

not just a set of tribal practices to be “pickled.” For instance, I have always been struck by the fact that one of the first questions a Latino will ask when he or she sees you is, “How is your family?” This is not just perfunctory courtesy but to ask, “How are the relationships that have fostered you, and are you being attentive to these relationships?”

Over the past two decades, especially with the rise of the religious right, a lot of platitudes have sprung up surrounding “family values.” In the Latino worldview, families are not warm, friendly havens in the midst of a competitive hostile world, but the building blocks—both lateral and mutual in orientation—for a sense of extended *relationships* in the world. Ironically, politicians who beat the family-values drum the loudest also push for economic practices, especially through the global economy, which disrupt the livelihood and close-knit character of families and neighborhoods.

The emphasis on *la familia* in Latino culture is just the first dimension of the complex network of relationships that form the basis of the Latino community. Families are “extended” not just by blood but by substantive relationship, especially by the roles of *madrinas/padrinos* (godmothers/godfathers). By becoming a godparent, one is literally joining another family; the commitment is in-depth, not just ceremonial. As opposed to the nuclear family stressed in mainstream U.S. culture, Latino culture emphasizes interdependent extended family networks.

This intersubjective mutuality is not restricted to families in Latino culture. The success of the *Encuentros* (encounters) movement in U.S. Catholic communities is rooted in such politics. Since the 1970s the U.S. Catholic Church has used small group meetings in predominantly Spanish-speaking parishes and communities to foster pastoral priorities and to develop leaders from within such communities. These *encuentros* or meetings start at the grassroots level and then continue through regional and national meetings to coalesce the substance of these discussions. The Catholic Hispanic Pastoral Plan of the 1980s and 1990s was generated through such a process. The most recent prominent example of this process was “*Encuentro 2000: Many Faces in God’s House*,” held in Los Angeles in July 2000 and whose participants were not only Latinos but members from the African American, Asian American, European American, Native American, and Pacific-Islander American Catholic communities.⁵¹

Ultimately, the mutual collaborative character of such encounters has the potential for transforming politics at large. This *pastoral de conjunto*, another name for the *encuentro* process, is not just an effort to empower Latinos through decision-making structures from which they were previ-

ously excluded or simply to make such structures more efficient, but to transform these structures in order to realize a politics of mutuality, not of domination: “Pastoral planning is viewed as a method of praxis ultimately concerned with bringing about serious, if not radical, change in conformity with a vision, a utopia. . . . Pastoral planning leads us to *historical praxis*—action geared to the transformation of society.”⁵² This conjunto/encuentro process seeks to move beyond competitive “zero-sum” political institutions and processes.

A striking example of this alternative political vision is the *mujerista* theology articulated by Isasi-Díaz. Isasi-Díaz conducts interviews and collaborative retreats with Latinas at the grassroots level. In particular these retreats try to elicit spiritual perspectives from *lo cotidiano* (lived daily experience). Given that both indigenous women and mestizas for at least five centuries have been subjugated by the double barrel of cultural and patriarchal domination, this lived experience has been the struggle for survival or, as Isasi-Díaz puts it, “¡La vida es la lucha!”⁵³ Consequently, this spiritual encounter comes “from within” and “from below” and accents “*permítanme hablar*” (permit me to speak), especially against long-standing oppression and marginalization.⁵⁴

These spiritual engagements among Latinas enable us to see the encuentro process with different eyes. Whereas traditional mores relegated Latinas to responsibilities within the home, Isasi-Díaz’s exegesis of Latina experiences and values suggests that the experience of the Latina with developing strong interdependent networks that value personal worth through family life prepares them for leadership roles in greater society. Moreover, they bring to these roles a vision that is highly critical of hegemonic relationships; they seek “win-win” as opposed to “win-lose” strategies. This vision seeks to effect an inclusive, nonelitist pluralism: “The coming of the kingdom of God has to do with a coming together of peoples, with no one being excluded and at the expense of no one.”⁵⁵

Another example of the collaborative praxis of mutuality from within the Latino experience is the work done in poor churches and communities in San Antonio by COPS, Communities Organized For Public Service, founded by Ernesto Cortes. COPS and its parallel organizations in Los Angeles—L.A. Metropolitan Organization—and in Houston—TMO (The Metropolitan Organization)—work with primarily poor church and religious communities to cultivate leaders and strategies that enable those communities to become active participants in political forums that determine the distribution of public resources and services, especially public school

districts, city governments, county governments, and special districts. As opposed to being mere advocates for poor people, COPS activists seek to train church community members how to organize, first, by clarifying what the church community hopes to accomplish and, second, by developing the skills and strategies necessary for realizing their goals. Similar to the conjunto/encuentro process, COPS stresses the importance of members of a community coming together in a lateral and collaborative fashion to initiate a transformation of political, social, and economic forums—a method guided by a Christian vision of hope, empowerment, and justice.

Much of the success achieved by Cortes and COPS has involved taking the ethos of the traditional familial networks in Latino culture and making it a basis for collaborative organization and mobilization outside the home. As articulated by Cortes, the institutions and forums in which poor people participate become a basis for mobilizing for access to public forums and resources denied them previously: “You take institutions—the family, the church—and you use them as a source of power, of confidence, of authority. If you get people to talk about what’s in the interest of their families, what are the threats to their families, what are the threats to the churches and community, they’re willing to look at things like zoning, and they’re willing to look at things like the school.”⁵⁶

The COPS orientation is very much a recasting of de Tocqueville’s stress on the importance of intermediate institutions that connect people to government as well as to private-sector organizations. Ironically, at a time when scholars such as Bellah and Robert Putnam are bemoaning the loss of civic virtues and a sense of public community, examples such as COPS and the conjunto/encuentro process in Latino communities are revitalizing civic engagement and the cultivation of political judgment.

However, even though Cortes acknowledges the indebtedness of his vision of organizing to Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), to de Tocqueville, and to Arendt—especially her notion of a citizenship focused on public happiness—COPS and related IAF organizations have tapped successfully into the Latino emphasis on extended families and relational networks. If freedom for Latinos, as Goizueta suggests, is “grounded in community,”⁵⁷ this ontological priority on collaborative relationships provides a fertile basis for successful organizing by groups like COPS. The organizers may bring the technical experience necessary for effective mobilizing, but the values of mutual interdependence and commitment to “staying the course,” essential to sustaining mobilization, are deeply rooted in the relational ethos of Latino communities.

As highlighted by Ismael García, authentic moral agency for Latinos entails a loyalty given to a community's values after careful moral deliberation by each person.⁵⁸ This commitment to collaborative decision making in community, as suggested by Pineda, provides a constructive counterculture to the excesses of U.S. individualism: "In a society fragmented by individualism, competition, consumerism, violence, and blatant disregard for human dignity, the concept and methodology of *pastoral de conjunto* is a contribution that Hispanics make to the church and society."⁵⁹ At the same time, this ontological sense of community is not repressive or suffocating, especially in terms of dealing with differences. As opposed to tightly-scripted communities in the manner of Barber's jihad, the border consciousness of mestizaje emphasizes how multiple identities intersect and transform one another against this backdrop of community.

Thus, in contrast to modernity's accent on the freedom of the self, postmodernism's preoccupation with difference, and conservatism's reduction of the self to the larger community, this mestizo sense of community asserts the realization of personal and community identity through concrete, lateral, intersubjective relations between persons and between cultures. Beyond just recognizing that personal and community identities are entwined, this outlook elicits fluid identities that are neither too self-driven nor too scripted by social relations and institutions.

Moreover, the spirituality that informs the Latino sense of extended family and community stresses the importance of "hospitality to the stranger."⁶⁰ As most Latino theologians stress, Jesus' ministry was especially to the marginalized—those in prison, those suffering from disease, those suffering from social discrimination and stigma, and those in poverty. As Goizueta makes clear, Jesus' basic political action is "transgressing boundaries, the act of walking and living with the outcast where he or she walks and lives."⁶¹

Consequently, the Latino practice of conjunto/encuentro relationships combined with the sensitivity of border consciousness is to engender a community that will be open "to everyone without exception."⁶² As Elizondo emphasizes, "compassion, understanding, tenderness, and healing" characterize such community and recapture the "original heart and face of Christianity."⁶³ The visage of Guadalupe especially, he continues, generates a feeling of inclusion and respect for the 'other': "In her eyes, we find recognition, acceptance, respect, and confidence."⁶⁴

Contrary to the either/or of individualism *v.* communitarianism, the Latino stress on a mestizo community imbued with the above Christian

ethic seeks extended political relationships that extirpate “racial segregation, classism, racism, sexism, enslavement, and exploitation.”⁶⁵ In contrast to the age-old paradigm of power politics characterized by conflict and strife, which is rooted in an Augustinian portrait of human affairs, a mestizo democracy projects the realization of an egalitarian, lateral multicultural politics.

*Seeking Justice: Transforming Relations of Domination
into Relations of Empowerment*

The exegesis of this affective, aesthetic rationality can take on romantic hues if it becomes detached from the emphasis in Latino political theology on the poor challenging and overcoming economic, political, and social marginalization. Without the backdrop of long-standing injustice experienced by indigenous peoples in the Americas, poor mestizos in Latin America, and many Latinos in the United States, the preceding concerns with crossing borders and mestizo community life quickly degenerate into a quaint idyllic retreat from the dominant culture. If the cultural focus on *flor y canto* (flower and song) in Latino theology becomes separated from a critique of political and economic realities, this affective ambiance becomes a fascinating but apolitical diversion from the harsh economic realities engendered by neoliberal economics.

Consequently, Latino theology repeatedly ties the realization of genuine community to the overcoming of onerous economic, political, and social practices. As captured by Ismael García, the essence of Latino theology identifies the Christian God with the poor and vanquished and calls for Christian communities to practice justice as solidarity, thereby welcoming and empowering “those kept silent and made passive.”⁶⁶

First and foremost, as Arturo Bañuelas points out, one has to grasp the impact of the “double conquests” in the Latino experience.⁶⁷ The first conquest was the colonization of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America by the Spaniards. Then, three centuries later, the U.S. Southwest and Puerto Rico were conquered by the United States, respectively, through the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848 and then the Spanish-American War of 1898. Indeed, Puerto Rican nationalists consider themselves members of a “conquered and colonized people.”⁶⁸ Among Mexican Americans, the feeling is more that of being strangers in one’s own land.

Therefore, as rendered by Segovia, Latino theology “cannot but be a theology of struggle, liberation, and self-determination.”⁶⁹ As much as the Latino experience is characterized by mixture and otherness (*mezcolanza* and *otredad*), Segovia insists that theology steeped in this experience strives to overcome cultural and social marginalization: “from exclusion to inclusion, from passivity to action, from silence to speech, from marginalization as an inferior other to an autochthonous, self-conscious, and critical irruption of an other that does not regard or present itself as superior . . . but rather as an equal.”⁷⁰

In this context of liberation, the two Christian figures that repeatedly come to the fore are Jesus Christ and Guadalupe. The crucified Christ as a “tortured, suffering human being” in Spanish, Latin American, and Latino iconography, as Espín points out, literally and graphically evokes solidarity and compassion.⁷¹ Goizueta, in turn, provides an arresting account of the literal identification by San Antonio Latinos with the suffering Christ on his road to Calvary, as reenacted in downtown San Antonio every Good Friday.⁷² Guadalupe, as discussed more extensively in the preceding chapter, appears not to the Spaniards, or even to the clergy, but to the downtrodden, indigenous peasant Juan Diego in symbolism that transforms but does not reject Nahuatl mythology. Indeed, Juan Diego is transformed from his downtrodden status into being an emancipated new person: “The old, defeated, victimized, ‘inferior,’ humiliated, ‘worthless’ self ceases to exist, and a new, confident, noble, self-assured, joyful human being arises.”⁷³ As Elizondo suggests, such transformation continually recurs as poor Latinos through their spirituality “defy the controlling and limiting rules and regulations of the dominant culture.”⁷⁴

The situation of Latinos caught between the North American and Latin American worlds adds a dimension to the standard “option for the poor” stressed by Catholic social thought and in liberation theology. In the Latin American context, of course, there has been an institutional tie between the Roman Catholic church and the prevailing governments dating back to *los conquistadores*, a link between “Cross and Crown” that has only been challenged from within the institutional Church in the past four decades. The challenge before Latinos is how to reject this heritage of colonial paternalism and hierarchical relationships that prevent the realization of collaborative forums of decision making. The affective and relational dimensions of Latino culture unfortunately can lead to networks that are dependent on powerful leaders, as Deck illustrates in his review of different Latino church organizations.⁷⁵ Corporatist or organic schemes of politics do not advance

justice for the poor. By the same token, the movement of industries and job opportunities to places far afield in neoliberal economic development also disrupts extensively the familial and neighborhood networks crucial for sustaining both personal and community well-being. This shifting of resources, and of people in particular, often culminates in greater accumulation of wealth in the hands of the rich at the expense of a growing number of poor people.

González's discussion of the changing outlook of Latin American Protestants defines the drawbacks of both the corporatist and neoliberal models. Traditionally, Protestants in Latin America blamed the region's "backwardness" on the long-standing medieval and paternalistic Catholic culture. They looked instead to the North American emphasis on freedom of thought and religion, education for everyone, an economy that rewarded personal effort, and a government and society of merit rather than patronage as the path to progress.⁷⁶ Indeed, some Latin American Protestants went so far as to defend both the U.S.-Mexican War and the Spanish-American War on the basis that "Protestantism and the United States were seen by some as the forces of liberation from obscurantism and medievalism."⁷⁷

In contrast, González points out that once Latin American Protestants migrate to the United States, the supposed "land of milk and honey" proves disillusioning. Economic, social, and political discrimination against Latinos leads them to question the veracity of the above modernist "manifest destiny" outlook. González, in particular, is leery of enlightened liberals who welcome the marginalized "so long as there are not too many of them and they do not threaten the privileges of the center."⁷⁸

As a result, the countercultural critique of Latino Protestants has come to focus as well on the drawbacks of liberal society. This change of place and heart, combined with disillusionment generated by the fact that the U.S. civil rights movement pitted Protestants against Protestants, has led to "A New Ecumenism" between Latino Protestants and Catholics.⁷⁹ This has especially ensued in the context of Latino community organizing and political mobilization.

Thus, Latinos, regardless of religious denomination, have experienced both the best and the worst of both "worlds." Through political theology, however, they seek to bridge the gap between the U.S. emphasis on human rights and the modern values of liberty, equality, and democracy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the emphasis on human dignity, the vital importance of caring, and personal relationships in the indigenous and Latin American traditions. Whereas Latinos are a minority, albeit the largest mi-

nority, within the United States, Latinos and Latin Americans are a majority of the people of the Western Hemisphere. If genuine democracy is to prevail in this hemisphere in this century, neither premodern corporatism nor modern neoliberalism is the answer.

Realistically though, the growing global paradigm, even in Latin America, is neoliberalism. According to Aquino Vargas, Latino theology, especially in its *feminista* variety, challenges not just the outcomes but the underlying anthropology of neoliberalism. Specifically, the competitive individualism at the heart of neoliberalism dismisses as “inefficient, illusory, and irrational”⁸⁰ the attempt to recast human relations in terms of social justice and in solidarity with all of creation.

At the very least, the experience and vision evoked by Latino theology leads to an empowerment contrary to this prevailing neoliberal paradigm. As González stresses, the Bible gives Latinos “a new sense of worth and of hope” despite their experience of marginalization.⁸¹ In contrast to the poverty, exile, and worthlessness Hispanics experience in society, he adds, “The Bible tells us, no matter whether we have green cards or not, that we are citizens of the New Jerusalem.”⁸² Although this revelation seemingly has quietist implications, González maintains that the Gospel of Jesus Christ focuses on “bringing the marginalized to the very center of God’s love and God’s community.”⁸³

This empowerment rooted in Latino theology challenges repressive societal norms and practices. The alien, the half-breed, and the outcast thus become a blessing rather than a detriment to society. As Aquino Vargas poignantly argues, the communitarian basis of the Latino worldview projects “new ways of living” in which the measurement of human worth would no longer be reduced to the profits one has earned or the material goods one has consumed.⁸⁴

Thus, a mestizo democracy not only questions the disparity between European American and Latino access to political, economic, and social decision-making structures and the similar disparity in material wealth between these same groups, but projects an alternative politics characterized by people as genuinely equal partners in dialogue—Isasi-Díaz’s “kingdom of God.” In contrast to the dominant “white, male, Euro-American culture,” according to Aquino Vargas, “Latina communities in the midst of their oppression continue to envision a world in which we all can live.”⁸⁵

Ultimately, Guadalupe’s appearance to the conquered, marginalized peoples of Mexico does not merely accent a “preferential option for the poor” or a just distribution of resources in a Rawlsian sense. As Elizondo

expresses the matter, the Guadalupe event brings forth an “understanding of truth, beauty, and goodness that will overcome the multiple limitations, divisions, distortions, and oppositions by which men and women are made opponents, enemies, and slaves of one another.”⁸⁶ The Juan Diegos, marginalized by a politics of materialism and conquest, find in Guadalupe’s vision a sense of “recognition, acceptance, respect, and confidence.”⁸⁷ A mestizo democracy transforms political, economic, and social relations of domination into relations of empowerment.

Hope in the Struggle

Finally, the pursuit of this alternative collaborative politics, informed by an affective, aesthetic rationality and rooted in the relational character of Latino communities, projects and realizes hope, especially for those on the “underside of history.”⁸⁸ As insisted by Segovia, Latino theology entails “an unwavering commitment to the world with a driving vision of a different and better world, and a profound sense of joy in the midst of anguish.”⁸⁹

One of the principal practices within Latino popular religion is the reenactment of suffering, especially in terms of Christ’s path to Cavalry. Rather than merely encouraging a sense of mortification, the reenactment of this event is precisely to recognize that suffering does not have “the last word.”⁹⁰ The preoccupation with both the Crucified Jesus and the Virgin Mary in Latino popular religion, as Goizueta points out, arises because both manifest the message of hope. Elizondo, in the context of his exegesis of Guadalupe, puts the matter thus: “While others crucify us, she resurrects us.”⁹¹

Although Latino theologians stress that God cannot “be known apart from the practice of love and justice” for the poor and oppressed,⁹² equal emphasis should be placed also on the importance of empowering the poor through community activism. The hopefulness in Latino spirituality emphasizes not only the pursuit of equal representation in political forums and a narrowing of the gap in income and wealth between haves and have-nots, but also the belief that previously downtrodden people can discover their own power in civic participation.

A pivotal principle for radical mobilization, as accented by Alinsky and Cortes, is “never, ever do for people what they can do for themselves.”⁹³ Consequently, the community mobilizing done by the IAF has pointedly avoided focusing on organizers as paternalistic advocates for the poor and, instead, has always focused on enabling people to realize their own gifts

and their potential power in common with others. This “enabling” has been cultivated primarily by showing potential leaders how to network with other such persons in their respective religious and political communities.

Among Latino theologians, Goizueta best captures this concrete, personal sense of empowerment when he distinguishes between the Aristotelian as opposed to the Marxist notion of praxis—the former stressing political activity as an “end in itself” as opposed to achieving particular ends outside the person. This notion of praxis as realizing an end in itself is also a cognate of Arendt’s “public happiness” reviewed in chapter 1. Although the Marxist notion of praxis engages the political, economic, and social marginalization experienced by Latinos, Goizueta contends that it too readily degenerates into an instrumentalist *techne*. Conversely, the Aristotelian end-in-itself praxis too easily ignores the impact that political, economic, and social structures have on realizing mutual collaborative relations: “Before there can be a genuine dialogue or conversation among different social groups (racial, cultural, gender, class, etc.), these must be recognized as equal partners in the dialogue.”⁹⁴

This and the preceding sections in this chapter have therefore focused on two distinct but integral dimensions of a mestizo democracy. On the one hand, the relational character of Latino ethics and extended family structures bears a sense of the Aristotelian praxis articulated by Goizueta: a relational sense that has proved valuable to community organizations aligned with Alinsky’s IAF, especially in poor Latino neighborhoods. On the other hand, the Marxist heritage of praxis with its focus especially on overcoming economic disparity and oppression is reflected in the preceding section’s emphasis on realizing relationships of collaboration, not domination. To reiterate an earlier theme from this chapter, it is not a matter of either/or but of both/and; that is, both types of praxis are integral to realizing a political community in which specific peoples, especially on the basis of culture, race, and religion, do not constitute a permanent underclass. Emphasizing solely one type of praxis leads either to a romantic aesthetic politics that never critically engages market and political hegemonies or, conversely, to a technical materialist politics, which, in spite of its grasp of exploitation, has no concrete presence in the lives of poor people through which to effect significant change.

Ultimately, however, this exegesis of different types of praxis remains pedantic apart from the affective sense of hope and liberation manifested in a mestizo democracy. As Bañuelas points out, fiesta in Latino culture is not merely a party but a festive anticipation of a new universalism in which all

peoples can engage each other as equals: “It [fiesta] proclaims who we are as *mestizos* and offers the possibility of a new universalism already beginning in a people who through rejection and struggles continue to proclaim *que la vida es la lucha, pero con victoria* (that life is a struggle, but with victory).”⁹⁵

In contrast to past universalisms scripted by political, economic, and social *conquistadores*, the universalism of “the *pueblo mestizo*,” as delineated by Aquino Vargas, mutually draws upon the creativity of its diverse cultural and, especially, indigenous heritages.⁹⁶ As Elizondo concludes, Guadalupe’s synthesis of cultural contradiction and her critical engagement of oppressive power structures pursues “a common home for all the inhabitants of the Americas and the world.”⁹⁷

Synthesis

The preceding seven parameters of a mestizo democracy project a unity-in-diversity that in a lateral fashion synthesizes diverse cultures without privileging any one culture or, conversely, exterminating contributing cultures. The relational focus on “both/and” and “border” not “frontier” consciousness acknowledges cultural and racial mixing as an intrinsic part of human history. Such mixing, in contradiction to philosophies that value purity and homogeneity, has a positive value, especially for the multicultural reality of the United States of the twenty-first century. If we treasure democracy as the access of each person to fundamental decision-making forums and processes, then this relational, community-centered orientation from the Latino tradition is an invaluable resource.

At the same time, as stressed by the latter sections of this chapter, this articulation of unity-in-diversity through mestizaje is not just a romantic appreciation of cultural differences and their creative potential. An essential part of a mestizo democracy is a genuine lateral mixing of peoples and cultures that obviates unjust distribution of economic resources and, especially, opportunities. As painfully reiterated over and over again by Latino and Latin American theologians, the majority of Western-Hemisphere people of indigenous, African, and Latino backgrounds are poor. Without apology, a mestizo democracy challenges this long-standing injustice and projects the vision of a genuinely integrated democracy in which “segregation and discrimination will have no place. . . .”⁹⁸

Indeed, the concrete, lived character of unity-in-diversity in the Latino experience, especially as conveyed in the preceding sections on popular

religion and the relational character of community, is vital for articulating and realizing a mestizo democracy. As discussed earlier, the call for increased community in the United States made by figures like Bellah and Putnam is not wrong per se, but it does not provide a concrete discourse relevant to the multicultural United States of the twenty-first century. Mestizaje, as an affective, heart-felt U.S. cultural and normative tradition, offers such a discourse.

By the same token, the indebtedness to the indigenous and African heritages of the Americas also distinguishes a mestizo democracy from the Hegelian/Marxist paradigm, which was so important to the gestation of Latin American liberation theology, a theme I address further in chapter 4. Recall too that although Vasconcelos's articulation of *la raza cósmica* recognizes the indigenous presence in Mexico, his vision still underscores the notion of purification by European ideals. The interpenetration of African, indigenous, and European traditions in popular religion, the corpus of lived Latino experience, and the intellectual framework articulated by Latino theologians not only compensate for this Eurocentric hangover in past calls for community and/or liberation, but also provide a basis for democratic engagement with the growing presence of non-Judeo-Christian cultures and religions, especially those from Asia.

To those previously uninitiated to Latino culture and spirituality, my characterization of a mestizo democracy as a constructive counterculture to the rapacious dimensions of neoliberal economics, assimilation schemes of multicultural relations, and zero-sum politics might seem impractically wishful. Contrary to such cynicism, Latino theology's extensive deliberation on cultural hermeneutics, popular religion, and a mestizo recasting of Tracy's and Greeley's analogical spiritual imagination elicits a concrete and tangible politics of unity-in-diversity.

Given the rising numbers of Latinos across the United States, a mestizo democracy has the potential to transform the normative bearings of U.S. politics. In particular, popular religion's capacity for synthesizing both Christian and non-Christian outlooks as well as African, European, and indigenous perspectives offers the possibility of engendering a substantive "rainbow coalition" between poor and minority groups in the United States, vis-à-vis public policy debates on every level of politics.

At the same time, the import of mestizaje is not just for minority or poverty politics. In the global economy more and more people are literally and figuratively crossing borders daily through intercontinental transportation and telecommunications networks to previously foreign locales.

Isolating oneself from the ‘other’ will grow increasingly difficult in the twenty-first century. Especially in the United States, most people have to contend with multiple cultures and juxtaposed identities on a daily basis.

The preceding discussion of the attributes of a mestizo democracy suggests that diverse cultures and groups can mix in ways that do not culminate in the ascendancy of one way of being over all others. Engaging reality as both/and, not either/or, displacing the frontier mentality with the border mentality, acknowledging the heterogeneous yet concrete temperament of Latino popular religion, and pursuing an affective, aesthetic practical rationality enable us to see the nexus of diverse cultures not as a locus of inherent conflict but as a web of intersubjective relationships that can effect unity precisely through diversity. Further, acknowledging the relational character of community, seeking a politics of collaboration rather than domination, and projecting a spirit of hope in political, economic, and social undertakings mutually underscore the vigilant pursuit of just political, economic, and social opportunities and resources intrinsic to a mestizo democracy.

Once in a church in Houston, Texas, I was struck by the ironic symbolism of portraits that faced each other from opposite walls. On the east wall was the victorious Christ the King, all too often misappropriated by the frontier mentality to justify military or economic conquest in spiritual terms. On the west wall was Our Lady of Guadalupe in her effulgent colorful countenance, symbolic of the border mentality in which the combination of differences need not conclude in assimilation. This “interface” captures the contesting paradigms increasingly encountered at every level and type of human association in the U.S. Southwest, if not the Western Hemisphere. Mestizaje as a political theory of crossing borders elicits a concrete yet vivid vision for dealing with *este futuro* in a just, democratic fashion. In the next two chapters I examine how a mestizo democracy connects to the modern-postmodern and liberal-communitarian debates over multiculturalism in contemporary philosophy and political theory.