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A Critique of the "Aesthetic Turn" in U.S. Hispanic Theology: A Dialogue with Roberto Goizueta and the Positing of a New Paradigm

Manuel J. Mejido
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Tha sun ablaze as Maria's foot touches the surface of sand on northern land as human contraband. . . . She clutches her cross. . . . Sweat and vomit are thrown, and she prays and suffocates upon the memories of home. . . . And now she got a quota. . . . Tha needle and thread crucifixion, sold and shipped across the new line of Mason Dixon. . . . Rippin' through denim, tha point an inch from her vein. . . . Tha foreman approach, his steps now pound in her brain. . . . No minutes to rest, no moment to pray. . . .

Maria
Rage Against the Machine

Aesthetics looms large in U.S. Latina/o theology.¹ Yet lurking behind the beautiful is the monstrosity of a marginalized and oppressed people which for the most part U.S. Hispanic theology has chosen to idealize. This is analogous to the ataraxic theology that abstracts out the beauty of the resurrection from a totality that includes the wretchedness of Gethsemane and Golgotha. But as G.W.F. Hegel argues in the following well-known passage, abstractions commit a violence which reduces reality to the phantasmagorical:

Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive,

¹Consider, for instance, the following two points: first, most of the recent literature published by U.S. Latina/o theologians have in one way or another—i.e., theoretically and/or empirically—aesthetics as their central theme; and second, the motif of the 2000 Annual ACHTUS Colloquium is "*Flor y canto: El arte de la teología.*"

which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.²

U.S. Hispanic theology does not tarry with the negative, the monstrosity of marginalization and struggle. While it acknowledges the socio-economic struggle of U.S. Latinas/os, it *sublimates* this struggle into an aesthetic praxis which gives pride of place to the procession over the necessity of production, which accentuates the liturgy while eclipsing the reality of labor, which underscores the fiesta while ignoring the daily eight-to-five of the factory. But by doing this, theology remains an abstraction, an intellectual idea. Stated in another way, rather than formulating an aesthetics that is grounded and shaped by the totality of reality—which for the majority of Latinas/os includes the real, everyday struggle of "making" a living—U.S. Hispanic theology either deduces an idea of struggle from an a priori aesthetics or, worse, it brackets the dimension of struggle altogether. But if U.S. Hispanic theology aims to become more than an abstraction and accepts to tarry with the totality of U.S. Hispanic reality, both positive and negative, then it must attempt to overcome the praxis-poiesis dimension which it itself posits; it needs to do this, for example—if we are talking "aesthetics"—through an aesthetics of struggle which only later can be *sublated* into an aesthetics of celebration. However, if U.S. Hispanic theology opts not to accept this task of overcoming, then it must heed the lesson of Kant's critical philosophy and stay within the epistemological limits of its narrowly defined program. Put more concretely, U.S. Hispanic theology must refrain from aestheticizing the monstrosity of marginalization and struggle, it must refrain from reducing the totality of U.S. Hispanic reality to an a priori aesthetics of celebration. Will the coming-of-age of U.S. Hispanic theology necessarily result in the distancing of theological discourse from the everyday struggle of the Latina/o community?

This essay endeavors to grapple with some of the issues just raised apropos U.S. Hispanic theology's use of aesthetic theory, specifically the problem of the relationship between theological discourse and the everydayness of Latina/o reality in the United States. The purpose of this piece, then, is to critically reflect upon the nature and purpose of both U.S. Hispanic theology's appropriation of aesthetic theory and

²G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 19.

U.S. Hispanic theologians' focus on the aesthetic experience of Latinas/os as object of analysis. But, this having been said, let me make it clear that my contention is not that a theological aesthetics is bogus, or that the experience of the beautiful by U.S. Hispanics is a projection of this or that, and thus a mystification that is unworthy of theological reflection. Rather, my thesis is that U.S. Hispanic theology is currently undergoing an "aesthetic turn" which is having the onerous effect of distancing theological discourse away from the everyday struggles of an economically, culturally, and politically dominated U.S. Latina/o community—an effect which could in the long-term alienate U.S. Hispanic theologians from their community.

Two moments of this "aesthetic turn" need to be highlighted at the outset. The first moment is *epistemological*. The fact that an overwhelming amount of attention is being dedicated to aesthetic theory suggests that little attention is being given to other ways of knowing, such as social scientific and critical theoretical approaches. The second moment is *ontological*. By biasing the aesthetic, Latina/o theologians are implying that the defining characteristic or element of U.S. Hispanic reality is the experience of the beautiful. For to deny this presupposition would be to admit that U.S. Latina/o theological discourse is an intellectualized abstraction which does not correspond with the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality. But how about the reality of domination? When these two moments are combined and the "aesthetic turn" in U.S. Latina/o theology is considered comprehensively, the following concern arises: the coming-of-age of a theological discourse dominated by a theoretical and empirical concern for the aesthetic that consequently has a tendency of reducing the complexity of U.S. Hispanic reality to the beautiful.

In what follows, then, I will attempt to critically explore this "aesthetic turn" in U.S. Hispanic theology. This will be done in two parts. In the first part, I will marshal a critique of Latina/o theological aesthetics by engaging Roberto Goizueta, in particular chapters 4 and 5 of his *Caminemos con Jesús*.³ I have chosen Goizueta as my interlocutor not because he is ready fodder for my critique, but rather because his book represents, on the one hand, what is perhaps the most thorough elucidation of a U.S. Hispanic theological aesthetics and, on the other hand, the book attempts to develop a comprehensive theological project grounded in aesthetic praxis. In this second sense, Goizueta's book exemplifies the "aesthetic problem" to the extent that it oversteps the limits of the aesthetic theory it deploys. In the second part I begin to

outline a paradigm which I believe provides a more solid ground for a U.S. Hispanic theology that aims to reflect the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality. Let us turn now to our conversation with Goizueta.

A Dialogue with Roberto Goizueta

The work of Roberto Goizueta has been central to the advancement of theological discourse in general and U.S. Hispanic theology in particular, making significant contributions to both the critique of a hyper-intellectualized Enlightenment theology uniformed by historical reality—and thus bereft of content—and the methodology of a U.S. Hispanic theology which, historically caught in between European and Latin American discourses, has not been able to adequately reflect on its own historical, social, and cultural conditions. Goizueta's scholarship has brought into conversation an impressive breadth of traditions, including the methodological contributions of Latin American liberation theology, aesthetic theory, the anthropological and sociological insights of U.S. Hispanic popular religion, and philosophical reflections on the nuanced meaning and usage of the term "praxis." The fruits of this conversation have more recently been crystallized, for instance, in the thesis that a "theo-poetics" grounded in U.S. Hispanic popular religiosity is a "necessary propaedeutic to any U.S. Hispanic theology."⁴ Central to the overall trajectory of Goizueta's project has been the book *Caminemos con Jesús*, and, in particular, its two pivotal theoretical chapters: "Beauty or Justice? The Aesthetic Character of Human Action" (chapter 4) and "Beauty and Justice: Popular Catholicism as Human Action" (chapter 5). Through a critical retrieval of the nomenclature, praxis, and an appropriation of José Vasconcelos's aesthetic theory as developed in *La raza cósmica*, in these two chapters Goizueta ambitiously attempts to synthesize "the central insights of liberation theology, concerning the social transformative, or ethical-political character of praxis, and those of Vasconcelos, concerning the aesthetic character of praxis," in order to transcend their limits. On the one hand, what Goizueta argues is the tendency of liberation theology to instrumentalize praxis by making social transformation the *sine qua non* of human action, and, on the other hand, the tendency of Vasconcelos's aesthetics to idealize or ahistoricize praxis by divorcing human action from the concrete particulars and vicissitudes of historical reality.⁵ Although he

⁴Roberto S. Goizueta, "U.S. Hispanic Popular Catholicism as Theo-poetics," *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 269.

⁵Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 100.

³Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

deserves much merit for identifying and systematically engaging one sided—both materialistic and idealistic—understandings of praxis that have plagued theological discourse, this argument which Goizueta develops in chapters 4 and 5 of *Caminemos con Jesús* is not without problems. In the final analysis one must wonder if he achieves the goal he sets for himself: the development of a more comprehensive notion of praxis that adequately balances the aesthetic, ethical-political, and poietic moments of human action. For it appears that Goizueta's appropriation of Vasconcelos's aesthetic theory, although originally intended to counter what he argues is the modern occidental tendency to instrumentalize praxis, in fact eclipses ethical-political and poietic action. This tendency, as we shall see below, is rooted in the dichotomy between praxis and poiesis which Goizueta establishes at the outset of chapter 4. Thus, it appears that when all is said and done Goizueta has embraced an over-intellectualized understanding of praxis understood as "pure," non-instrumental aesthetic action, which is not adequately informed by the fact that, for example, historically U.S. Hispanics have practiced their religiosity in a context of social inequality and marginalization. Indeed, in the final analysis, one wonders whether Goizueta's understanding of praxis trumps what Otto Maduro has called the "denouncing, witnessing, confronting, demanding, bridging, and networking" functions of U.S. Hispanic religion—this is to say, the socially empowering dimensions of U.S. Hispanic religion.⁶

Let us now, then, trace the trajectory of the argument Goizueta develops in chapters 4 and 5 of *Caminemos con Jesús*, undergirding the aporias and keeping on the horizon its aim: to transcend one-sided reductionistic notions of praxis by developing an understanding of this nomenclature that properly conceptualizes what he calls the "intrinsic interrelationships among aesthetic action, ethical-political action, and poiesis. . . ." As we shall see, however, a discrepancy exists between Goizueta's attempt to integrate these three moments of human action and the dichotomy he sets up at the outset between praxis and poiesis. In the end, his attempt to bring together these moments of human action remains problematical as suggested by the nebulous formula: "Human [aesthetic] action implies ethical-political relationships mediated by economic relationships."⁷ In the context of his overall argument, this formula, as I have already suggested, over-emphasizes the aesthetic moment of praxis at the cost of ethical-political and poietic action.

⁶ Otto Maduro, "Notes toward a Sociology of Latina/o Religious Empowerment," *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, 165.

⁷ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

CHAPTER 4: "BEAUTY OR JUSTICE?"

THE AESTHETIC CHARACTER OF HUMAN ACTION"

Goizueta's point of departure in chapter 4 is the methodological insight developed by Latin American liberation theologians of the primacy of praxis over theory.⁹ This insight, he argues, was developed by Latin American theologians as a critique of an over-intellectualized European theology that was blinded to the particularities of Latin American historical reality. "It was precisely in the context of the Latin American experience of injustice and oppression at the hands of the European conquistadors and missionaries," Goizueta writes, "that Latin Americans began to challenge European theologies that presupposed the primacy of theory, or beliefs, over praxis, or action."¹⁰ In its most general terms, then, this notion of the primacy of praxis over theory can be understood as an attempt to move beyond the Cartesian-Kantian dualisms that historically have given ontological and epistemological primacy to mind over body, ideas over materiality, the noumenal realm over the phenomenal realm, subjectivity over objectivity, reflection over existence. With the liberation theologians Goizueta endorses the primacy of praxis in order to transcend these antinomies and develop a theology that is grounded in the U.S. Hispanic socio-historical context.¹¹ Having identified praxis as his *terminus a quo*, the question now becomes: How are we to understand this nomenclature "praxis"?¹²

Thus Goizueta next turns to elucidate the development of the term "praxis" in Western thought. He begins by pointing out that since the Enlightenment, a tendency has emerged in Western thought to instrumentalize praxis by reducing human action to "technique" or "practicality."¹³ "This notion of praxis as instrumental action (action-as-manipulation, defined by its usefulness and practicality)," Goizueta maintains, "has functioned as the interpretative horizon for all modern Western interpretations of human action."¹⁴ For him Marx is the quintessential example of this Enlightenment tendency to instrumentalize praxis, having been the first modern thinker to systematically develop an understanding of human action rooted in production. With the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in mind, Goizueta writes: "According to Marx, it is through the act of production, through the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

creative process of working upon our physical environment, that we quite literally create ourselves as human persons: our products are the concrete, objectified expression of our very selves."¹⁵ Thus, he argues, Marx reduces human action to poiesis, the human person to *Homo faber*, and anthropology to economics. But this reading of Marx, which is more a reductionistic Marxist reading of Marx than a sophisticated and nuanced reading of a complex and prolific thinker, is problematic. Indeed, we must be attentive to the multiple notions of praxis within Marx's thought. Overall, Goizueta argues that Marx reduces praxis to poiesis insofar that Marx defines the first in terms of human being's productive capacity through labor. While this interpretation may capture the spirit of orthodox or "vulgar" Marxism, one should note that the young Marx defined the individual not so much in terms of productive labor, but more generally, in terms of "free, conscious activity,"¹⁶ the "relations" of production,¹⁷ and the dialectic between consciousness and society;¹⁸ developed an aesthetic theory grounded in the humanization of nature and the naturalization of humanity;¹⁹ and recognized the importance of language.²⁰ In a word, the young Marx did have a theory of intersubjectivity. In fact, for Enrique Dussel, the stress on intersubjective relationships is central to Marx such that "the essential relation is not subject of labor/object-nature, but the relation subject/subject as a practical, ethical relationship."²¹ Jürgen Habermas,

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978) 76.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *ibid.*, 157.

¹⁸ For instance, according to Marx: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society." Third thesis on Feuerbach, in *ibid.*, 144.

¹⁹ The following passage where the young Marx lays out his aesthetic understanding of human being: "Only through the objective unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form—in short, sense capable of human gratifications, sense confirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental sense—the practical senses (will, love, etc.)—in a word, *human* sense—the humanness of the senses—comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present." *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *ibid.*, 88–9.

²⁰ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *ibid.*, 158.

²¹ Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricouer, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996) 220.

in contradistinction, tends to read Marx as having a tendency to reduce interaction to labor, communicative action to instrumental action, praxis to poiesis, yet, at the same time, he recognizes, for instance, through his thesis of the "colonization of the *Lebenswelt*," that the problem is not labor/instrumental action/poiesis, but rather its reification.²²

Although we cannot go into specifics here, suffice it for now to undergird a few points that are not by any means intended to do justice to the complexity of Marx's thought, but only muddy the waters, so to speak, in order to move us away from the simple equation which Goizueta adopts: Marx = praxis → poiesis. First, while Marx did over-emphasize production and material conditions, he did not do this to any greater degree than, for instance, Kant and Hegel de-emphasized them; or stated positively, to any greater degree than Kant and Hegel over-emphasized reflection and ideal conditions. Second—and related to the first—for hermeneutical reasons, it is critical to point out that Marx was writing in reaction to German Idealism and the naïve "Robinson Crusoe" assumptions of classical economics. This fact must be taken into consideration when interpreting and/or retrieving Marxian thought. Third, Marx provided us with what perhaps was the first critical theory of the instrumentalization—or to use his parlance—the "commodification" of nature, the individual, and society. Taking as his point of departure the vantage point of the oppressed and marginalized wage-laborer, he unmasked the exploitative logic of the capitalism of his day. At this point we can begin to see the affinities that exist between Marx and liberation theology, in particular liberation theology's emphasis on a critical and liberating praxis conscious of material deprivation and institutional oppression, the marginalized other, and the like. For these reasons it is disconcerting that Goizueta uses Marx only as a foil, failing to engage him constructively. Here, with this reading of Marx, we have in germ the dichotomy between praxis and poiesis that, as we shall see, will unfold as Goizueta's argument develops.

Having exposed the Enlightenment tendency to instrumentalize praxis, and having shown how the work of Marx epitomizes this tendency, Goizueta next turns to Aristotle in an attempt to retrieve a non-reductionistic understanding of the term that could serve as a corrective to modernity's instrumentalist bias. Aristotle understood praxis, argues Goizueta, as intersubjective action, or in other words, as

²² The theory of the relationship between labor and interaction is a central thread that runs through Habermas's entire corpus. See, for instance, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" *Toward a Rational Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970). Thomas McCarthy provides an excellent synopsis of this theme in *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996) 16–40.

"all human activity whose end is internal rather than external to itself, i.e., all human activity which is an end in itself."²³ For Aristotle, then, praxis is diametrically opposed to poiesis or production, which he understood as all human action having an external or instrumental end. "When we produce, or make something," Goizueta explains, "the activity of producing or making has no intrinsic end. The end of production is not the action itself, but the object (product) which results from the action after the action is already completed. Whereas praxis is its own reward, the reward of poiesis is in its results, what is left over after the activity of production is completed."²⁴ Thus we have the Aristotelian dichotomy between praxis and poiesis. Goizueta provides several examples of this dichotomy: For instance, he suggests that analogous to the dichotomy between praxis and poiesis is the difference between the activities of "making a home" and "making a house," and "playing a musical instrument" and "making a musical instrument."²⁵ For the value of making a home and playing a musical instrument, Goizueta argues, are intrinsic to the activity and, thus, are praxeological. In contradistinction, the value of making a house and making a musical instrument, he posits, are extrinsic to the activity, having to do with the technical or instrumental action and the manipulation and transformation of nature, and thus are poietic. But, in addition to the polarization of praxis and poiesis which, as we shall see, is already problematic to the extent that it is an intellectualization of reality, problematic too is the normative move inherent in this dichotomy where the first, praxis, is a priori valued more than the second, poiesis. Thus, according to this Aristotelian framework which Goizueta is endorsing, on the one side we have the more "pure" and "valuable" intersubjective activity understood as an end-in-itself and having as its object interaction or communication. And, on the other side, we have the more "vulgar" and technical or productive activity understood instrumentally, the purpose of which is the transformation of nature qua materiality.

But this dichotomy, although heuristically useful for the scholar and the intellectual, becomes dubious to the extent that it does violence to the praxis of everyday reality—which is to say, the everyday praxis of the average individual. For in reality praxis and poiesis are interrelated. On the one hand, poiesis is a condition for the possibility of praxis. For instance, in order to engage in intersubjective action, one must meet certain metabolic conditions, which consequently must be

²³ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 82.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

produced. In order to make a home one must have a house, apartment, shanty, or some kind of space that provides the family with the material and spatial conditions needed for interaction; this residence must be produced. In order to play a musical instrument, one must first have a musical instrument, i.e., one must directly produce or purchase (indirectly produce) the musical instrument. On the other hand, no poietic action is completely bereft of praxis, or, stated in positive terms, poietic action presupposes praxis to the extent that production is a social and thus communicative activity. And this holds a fortiori for the industrialized society with its complex division of labor, what Durkheim termed "organic solidarity," to emphasize its interrelated nature.²⁶ What we are trying to suggest here is that this antinomy which Goizueta adopts between praxis and poiesis, between intersubjectivity and production, between Aristotle and Marx, starts to become fuzzy as we move away from an intellectual analysis and attempt to grasp the concrete and particular real praxis of everyday life, what Ada María Ísasi-Díaz has termed *la lucha* to describe the daily struggle of the U.S. Hispanic community.²⁷

We should add, furthermore, that the Aristotelian distinction between praxis as interaction and poiesis as production is not a given. Consider, for instance, Martin Heidegger's understanding of poiesis as a bringing-forth '*Her-vor-bringen*,' and *techne* as a mode of revealing, i.e., of actively—via human action—bringing-forth truth (*aletheia*).²⁸ This interpretation blows-up Aristotle's distinction, conceptualizing poiesis against a radically different hermeneutical horizon. Moreover, from another angle, granting Aristotle his dichotomy, it nevertheless becomes problematic when we consider the fact that this dichotomy

²⁶ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

²⁷ Ada María Ísasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

²⁸ Heidegger continues thus: "Aristotle, in a discussion of special importance (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, chaps. 3 and 4), distinguishes between *episteme* and *techne* and indeed with respect to what and how they reveal. *Techne* is a mode of *aletheuein*. It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another. Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth, according to the perspectives of the four modes of occasioning. This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. Thus what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing forth." Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 13.

was only possible given the division of labor that existed in the Greek polis where the slaves, which were responsible for all production, produced the conditions for the possibility for the free (male) Athenians to engage in the *bios politikos*.²⁹ We can begin to see that, although Goizueta wants to transcend—as we already suggested—the dichotomy between theory and praxis by taking as his point of departure the second, he ends up with another one: the dichotomy between praxis and poesis. But, as we shall see, this is not Goizueta's intention; this is explicitly clear at the end of chapter 5 where he argues for their integration.³⁰ Thus the question remains: How can, on the one hand, Goizueta endorse the Aristotelian dichotomy between praxis and poesis, and, on the other hand, seek to synthesize these? This aporia is problematical indeed.

Having purged praxis of instrumentalization through a retrieval of Aristotle's praxis-poesis dichotomy, Goizueta next moves to an assessment of how liberation theologians have traditionally appropriated the nomenclature praxis. He argues that due to their emphasis on liberation as social transformation, liberation theologians, like Marx, are plagued by an ambiguous understanding of praxis as social transformation.³¹ Although Goizueta maintains that the central contribution made by liberation theologians to theological discourse is the notion that "the lived commitment to social justice is itself an essential, intrinsic dimension of any authentic Christian faith,"³² at the same time he argues that when social transformation (in the sense of trying to achieve a more just society) is viewed as the "result" or the "product" of praxis, then the problem emerges in the form of the instrumentalization of praxis. But here we must point out some difficulties with Goizueta's argument. Granting him the dichotomy between praxis and poesis, which, as we already intimated, is disputable and which we will take issue with later, first, Goizueta's treatment of liberation theology remains vague. For instance, other than Gustavo Gutiérrez who he directly engages, which other liberation theologians does he have in

²⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), see especially chapter 4: "The Public and the Private Realm," 22–78.

³⁰ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 131.

³¹ Goizueta explains: "In liberation theology, the emphasis on liberating praxis, or liberating social action, reflects a similar ambiguity [as the one present in Marx]: Is liberation the *result* of praxis, that is the product of our struggle to transform society? Or, is liberation a *concomitant*, or *byproduct*, of praxis—i.e., the change that takes place in us as we engage in that struggle? Do we become liberated only *after* and *as a result* of our social action, or do we become liberated *in the course* of action? Is praxis, or human action its own end and, thus, valuable in and of itself, or is praxis valuable only insofar as it leads to a liberated society?" *Ibid.*, 86–7.

³² *Ibid.*, 88.

mind? For as Goizueta rightly suggests, the term "praxis" has been used in numerous and diverse ways.³³ Thus, we must ask if it is even possible to develop, as Goizueta does, a critique of liberation theology in the general sense without being reductionistic.

Here there emerges a hermeneutical tension analogous to the one present in Goizueta's treatment of Marx. For just as the view that Marx over-emphasized the notion of praxis as production has to be placed in the context of his critique of German Idealism and his point of departure, viz., the exploited wage-laborer, so too the view that liberation theologians over-emphasize social transformation, and thus, instrumentalize praxis, has to be placed in the context of liberation theology's critique of an intellectualized Enlightenment theology and its point of departure, viz., the marginalized poor. Second, Goizueta is unclear as to who is the subject of liberation. Is it the Other who lives in wretched poverty and will go to bed hungry tonight? Or is it we, who, as good Christians, are committed to social justice and thus "become liberated in the course of action"? Third, Goizueta's understanding of what we could call the intentionality of liberation is problematical. This becomes clear with his distinction between liberation as a "product" or as a "concomitant" of praxis.³⁴ In other words, if praxis is instrumentalized, as Goizueta argues, when liberation is understood as the explicit "result" or "product" of praxis, then how are we to understand the Christian "commitment to social justice" which seems to imply a conscious and active struggle for a certain understanding of liberation via social transformation? It seems that here, by arguing that liberation cannot be the conscious intention of individuals, or stated positively, that it has to be a "concomitant" of praxis, Goizueta is undermining, or at least problematizing, agency. Fourth, how does Goizueta understand the relationship between "liberation" and "social transformation"? On

³³ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 86. Later in chapter 5 Goizueta more explicitly develops this notion as follows: "Social and personal improvement are certainly desirable goals. Paradoxically however, if we view human life as but a means to those noble goals, we will never attain them. If our goal is a just society, where all human persons are valued, affirmed, and loved as an end in themselves, as genuine 'others,' we cannot arrive at that goal through an instrumentalization of persons which contradicts the very goal itself. At its most basic level justice, like happiness, is not a product but a concomitant, or *byproduct*, of human life when that life is lived and valued as an end in itself. Like human happiness in general, social justice and personal growth or transformation are not directly-intended 'products' of the 'work' the individual person undertakes respectively 'on' society, or 'on' himself or herself. Rather, these are but *byproducts* of the person's interaction with *others*. In short, the only justice and the only true self-improvement or personal growth is that which is the unintended (directly, at least) consequence of the person's active *love* of others. This is simply another way of expressing the paradox of the cross." *Ibid.*, 107.

the one hand, he agrees that the Christian's commitment to social justice is essential, but, on the other hand, he is critical of liberation theologians' tendency to instrumentalize praxis through their focus on social transformation. But how can there be social justice without some kind of social transformation? Furthermore, how can Goizueta argue that "the poor become liberated in the process of the struggle itself"?³⁵ For this seems to presuppose another understanding of liberation—perhaps a kind of spiritual liberation—which moves away from the notion of historical liberation via social justice that is so central to liberation theology.

Moreover, the notion of "social transformation" can be approached from many different angles and can mean many different things—for instance, it can vary in terms of scope, degree, and participation. Thus, for reasons we just noted, Goizueta cannot categorically reject the aim of social transformation and at the same time endorse the Christian commitment to social justice; yet he is critical of the emphasis liberation theologians give to social transformation. Therefore, what kind of transformation troubles him? What kind would he accept? This he never clarifies. These aporias present in Goizueta's critique of liberation theology undergird, from another angle, the problems that exist with the dichotomization of praxis and poiesis. For if one takes seriously the Christian commitment to social justice, then some degree of what Goizueta would call the instrumentalization of praxis is inevitable. Similarly, if one takes seriously the everyday praxis of the average individual, then it becomes clear that the difference between intersubjective and instrumental action are fluid. For this reason, lest we desire to fall captive to abstractions and intellectualizations as, for instance, the idea of the thing or value *in-itself*, the dichotomy between praxis and poiesis must be sundered. In this sense, Goizueta's notion of praxis is problematic because rather than allowing the reality of human action to shape his idea of praxis, instead he tries to shape the reality of human action with his idea of a non-instrumentalized praxis. And in this sense, he is making the same mistake which, according to Marx, Hegel made: confusing the things of logic for the logic of things.³⁶ But we will come back to this below; now let us continue with Goizueta's argument.

In an attempt to rescue liberation theologians from what, as we saw, he argues is the "ambiguity" of an instrumentalized praxis, Goizueta turns to Latin American aesthetic theory for a retrieval of an

intersubjective understanding of human action. He turns in particular to Jose Vasconcelos whose aesthetics provide us, Goizueta argues, with a framework for conceptualizing a non-instrumentalized praxis in its concrete particularity, and in this sense taking us beyond the Aristotelian understanding of the term. According to Goizueta, for Vasconcelos "logical reason is the most abstract human operation. . . . Ethics is less abstract, since it concerns concrete human acts, rather than ideas or concepts. The least abstract, however, is aesthetics, which concerns not the separate acts, but the living itself. Thus, reason is superseded by ethics, but ethics is superseded by love, i.e., aesthetic, affective union."³⁷ It is the "aesthetic sense" that allows us to grasp life as an end-in-itself, as something free of instrumentalization. This is why Goizueta goes on to argue that "play, recreation, and celebration are the most authentic forms of life precisely because, when we are playing, recreating, or celebrating we are immersed in, or 'fused' with the action itself, and those other persons with whom we are participating."³⁸ From a theological perspective, this sense of life-as-celebration is exemplified in the liturgy. Thus Goizueta sees in Vasconcelos's aesthetic theory the ground and horizon for the notion of praxis he aims to develop, i.e., intersubjective human action viewed as an end-in-itself. Moreover, as we already mentioned, he also views Vasconcelos's aesthetics as a promising paradigm because of its emphasis on the "emphatic fusion" of concrete particulars which he sees as an assuring safeguard against abstractions and intellectualizations of the kind liberation theologians critiqued.³⁹

But with this notion of "aesthetic praxis," and this talk of "celebration," "recreation," and "play," we seem to have significantly distanced ourselves from the Christian commitment to social justice. Indeed, the horizon established by aesthetic praxis of a non-instrumentalized intersubjective action understood as an end-in-itself, and grounded in the concrete particularity of an emphatic fusion, seems to be diametrically opposed to the horizon established by the liberating praxis of liberation theology's commitment to social justice, which, as we noted above, always implies a certain kind of social transformation. In other words, we now have, according to Goizueta's paradigm, on the one hand, aesthetic praxis which recognizes life as an end-in-itself and which fully manifests itself in the liturgical celebration, and, on the other hand, we have liberating praxis which explicitly recognizes the need to bring about or "produce" social justice. But at this point in the argument,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990) 17.

³⁷ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 93.

³⁸ Ibid., 94.

³⁹ Ibid., 97–9.

having argued a few pages earlier that an ambiguity exists in liberation theology's notion of praxis, and having retrieved the notion of aesthetic praxis as a corrective, Goizueta brings out another ambiguity: the ambiguity inherent in Vasconcelos's project, which he later, in chapter 5, will argue is due to the fact that Vasconcelos "pays little attention to the economic, or poietic dimensions of human action."⁴⁰ How are we to make sense of this? For we seem to be caught in between the recognition that liberation theology instrumentalizes praxis by emphasizing social transformation (i.e., poietic action) and the recognition that Vasconcelos idealizes praxis by failing to ground his aesthetic praxis in the socio-historical conditions.⁴¹ If, as we have already suggested, Goizueta's ultimate aim is to develop an integrated understanding of praxis that can push beyond one-sided reductions, then why does he continue to labor under the assumptions of the praxis-poiesis dichotomy? Why not from the outset work within a paradigm that recognizes the poietic conditions of praxis and the praxeological conditions of poiesis? Or, in other words, why not work within a paradigm which recognizes the fact that in reality praxis and poiesis exist interlocked and cannot be so neatly segregated, except *via theoria*? For if Goizueta would begin with the reality of a human praxis that, from the subjective side, is understood ontogenetically, i.e., understood as morally and cognitively changing through a dialectic with other subjects, with history/society and with nature, and, from the objective side, is understood as immersed, and thus conditioned by the social conditions of existence, then he would not be able to conceptualize praxis and poiesis as separated. Thus, the question that looms large at the end of chapter 4 is: Will Goizueta be able to overcome this dichotomy he has established between praxis and poiesis, beauty and justice, Aristotle/Vasconcelos and Marx, intersubjectivity and production, celebration and transformation?

CHAPTER 5: "BEAUTY AND JUSTICE:
POPULAR CATHOLICISM AS HUMAN ACTION"

Goizueta begins chapter 5 with the claim that popular religion—and given the scope of his book, specifically popular Catholicism—has come to be understood by U.S. Hispanic theologians as "*foundational praxis*, that paradigmatic human activity which grounds our theological reflection."⁴² For according to him, the human action that defines

⁴⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁴¹ Goizueta writes: "If, in liberation theology, the identification of praxis with liberation contained latent ambiguities, Vasconcelos's interpretation of the Spanish conquest reveals the dangerous ambiguities inherent in his own project." Ibid., 99.

⁴² Ibid., 102.

popular religion is an emblematic manifestation of what we described earlier as aesthetic praxis. First, popular religious action is sacramental as it is always mediated by physical symbols,⁴³ pointing to the fact that our relationship to God is always expressed in concrete particularities, i.e., it always "involves embodied *action* in the world."⁴⁴ Second, popular religious action is dramaturgical, i.e., it is a performance, an acting where participation in a liturgical ritual of commemoration is an end-in-itself. Third, popular religious action is intersubjective, i.e., an interaction among subjects. Thus, given these characteristics, Goizueta argues that the human action that defines popular religion safeguards against the reduction of praxis to poiesis and against technological or productive relationships. This is why, he argues, "popular Catholicism is the liturgical celebration of life as an end in itself, life as *praxis*."⁴⁵

But given the dichotomy between praxis and poiesis which, as we saw, he appropriated in chapter 4, and his understanding of popular religion as the *locus* of aesthetic praxis par excellence, Goizueta now perpetuates, through an analysis of popular religion, the polarization between intersubjective celebration and social transformation specifically in the religious sphere. From within this rubric religion is reduced to the end-in-itself of an idealized (aesthetic) celebration bereft of all social awareness, and thus bereft of its socially empowering and liberating dimension. But this is a view that is grounded on the presupposition of a human action that seeks an idealized non-instrumentalized praxis and which avoids poiesis like the plague. However, as we have been saying all along, this is an abstraction, for in reality, as Otto Maduro maintains, religion is "immersed in a complex and mobile network of social relationships,"⁴⁶ i.e., it is a "socially situated reality."⁴⁷ Similarly individuals do not go through life differentiating between interaction and labor. Rather, in everyday practice, the individual lives in the fuzzy in-between of interaction and labor. In a word, praxis and poiesis, as we have already suggested, cannot be segregated except through a *via intellectiva*.

⁴³ "Such as the bread that is shared and the flowers placed on Jesus' corpse, by physical gestures, such as kissing the crucifix or kneeling alongside Mary, by physical movement and processions, by singing songs and playing musical instruments, and by the very physical effort exerted in preparing the church for the celebration." Ibid., 103.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁶ Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982) 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 43.

Nevertheless, toward the middle of chapter 5 Goizueta is still insisting on the dichotomy between praxis and poiesis. This allows him to claim: "Only when intersubjective human action is lived out as an end in itself, as something to be affirmed and celebrated regardless of the 'outcome,' can relationships become sources of individual empowerment and human liberation."⁴⁸ This claim highlights at least three problems which, as we have been pointing to from the outset, are related to a dichotomy that embraces praxis and snuffs poiesis. First, the notion of a self-sustaining intersubjective action is an abstraction, for all interaction has a poietic dimension in the form of food, drink, shelter, social stability, and the like (just as the inverse is true: all production has an interactive dimension). Second, the notion of an intersubjectivity that is completely at peace about "outcome," i.e., completely at peace about social transformation and material conditions, is also an abstraction, for it presupposes—and here we go back to the first—that the material (poietic) conditions for the possibility of interaction exist or, better, have been met. For who could deny the intrinsically poietic implications of an interaction where the Other makes it known that she is hungry or that the social structures—e.g., the labor market, immigration policy, etc.—are oppressing her? Third, and analogously, the notion of "empowerment and human liberation" not concerned with "outcome" which Goizueta speaks of is of a spiritual nature and must be distinguished from material and social empowerment and liberation which always imply poietic action.

Although Goizueta had been arguing all along for a dichotomy between praxis and poiesis as a safeguard against the instrumentalization of praxis, toward the middle of chapter 5 he makes a radical break with this logic, and argues for the interrelationship of praxis and poiesis or what he more specifically calls the "intrinsic interrelationships among aesthetic action, ethical-political action, and poiesis,"⁴⁹ which he argues follows from the fact that "cultural symbols and practices are always mediated by political and economic structures and relationships."⁵⁰ But this claim which emerges *ex nihilo*, that aesthetic action always implies some kind of "ethical-political responsibility . . . expressed through transformation of unjust relationships of production," is diametrically opposed to the dichotomy Goizueta developed for more than forty pages, from the beginning of chapter 4 through most of chapter 5.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 111.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵¹ Goizueta states: "If the ethical-political dimension of human action is subordinated to the aesthetic, as a prior, inferior stage, in the latter's development, ethical-political struggles for justice and against exploitation will be subordinated to the

Two questions arise at this juncture: First, why did Goizueta appropriate the praxis-poiesis dichotomy if his aim all along was to develop an understanding of the interrelationship between praxis and poiesis? Second, given this shift, what paradigm does he offer us to justify this move? These aporias loom large at the end of chapter 5, and this is why the following formula which Goizueta deploys as a way of integrating the moments of human action—aesthetic, ethical-political, and economic—remains vague:

Human intersubjective action is "beautiful" and, as such, is its own end; the fundamental nature of human action is thus enjoyment, celebration, and worship; and human action implies ethical-political relationships mediated by economic relationships; the intrinsic beauty of life is experienced only *in* the struggle to make these more equitable. Worship and celebration are always aesthetic and ethical-political acts that are mediated by economic products and structures.⁵²

In light of the aporias we have been suggesting are present in Goizueta's argument, consider the following two reflections by Marx and Bourdieu on the spurious *visio dei* of a *theoria* unformed by the real or actual conditions of existence. First Marx on the genesis of the intellectual bias:

Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.⁵³

Now here is Bourdieu in a less reductionistic tone, building on Marx:

The unanalyzed element in every theoretical analysis (whether subjectivist or objectivist) is the theorist's subjective relation to the social world and the objective (social) relation presupposed by this subjective relation. Intellectualism is, so to speak, an "intellectualocentrism" in which the

desire for affective union—rather than seen as the necessary mediation of empathic fusion. If the highest form of human action is the ability to 'feel with' another person, the ethical-political *responsibility* entailed in that empathy can too easily be evaded: true empathy is rooted and issues in ethical-political action, which must, in turn, be expressed through a transformation of unjust relationships of production. Empathy implies and is made manifest in ethical-political action." *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵³ Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 159.

observer's relation to the social world, and therefore the social relation which makes observation possible, is made the basis of the practice analyzed, through the representations constructed to account for it.⁵⁴

These two citations serve as a propaedeutic to the new paradigm that will be sketched in the following section. For as we maintained above, on the one hand, with the liberation theologians Goizueta recognizes the need for taking praxis as his *terminus a quo* in order to overcome a hyperintellectualized Enlightenment theology; in this sense, Goizueta recognizes the need to correct the intellectual bias of a "pure" theology. On the other hand, however, Goizueta understands praxis as idea, and, in this sense, he still remains captive to the intellectual bias. For, as we argued above, Goizueta begins with an a priori notion of praxis as intersubjective action understood as an end-in-itself and then wants to make this notion shape reality, rather than beginning with reality, i.e., with human action in everyday practice—and have this point of departure shape his understanding of praxis. It is this intellectualized understanding of praxis that allows Goizueta's praxis-poiesis dichotomy to hold sway. From a more concrete perspective, if Goizueta would begin with the concrete everyday reality of a historically marginalized U.S. Hispanic/Latino community, and allow the everydayness of this reality to illumine his notion of praxis, then he could never divorce the aesthetic praxeological moment of U.S. Hispanic popular religion from its socially transforming—and thus socially empowering and liberating—moment (i.e., what Goizueta refers to as the poietic or ethical-political and economic moments). For in reality, as we stated earlier, and as shall now be developed, praxis and poiesis, communicative and instrumental modes of action, the aesthetic and the economic are interlocked and exist as one complex reality.

Toward a New Paradigm

After having critically engaged the central argument of what is perhaps the chief contribution of one of the leading U.S. Hispanic theologians, the query raised at the outset must again be posed: will the coming-of-age of U.S. Hispanic theology necessarily result in the distancing of theological discourse from the everyday struggle of Latinas/os in the United States? If we take Goizueta's project as emblematic of the current trend in Latina/o theology, then this query must be answered in the affirmative. For, as we have seen, U.S. Hispanic theological discourse is marked by a bias to abstract the religious

aspect from the everyday totality of U.S. Hispanic reality. This is to say, instead of allowing U.S. Hispanic reality to shape theological discourse, Latina/o theology in the United States begins with certain conceptual a priori and fits Hispanic reality into these concepts. And this is precisely what I called above the tendency to "intellectualize" the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality. Both the disproportionate amount of attention being dedicated to theological aesthetics and the religio-aesthetic experiences of U.S. Latinos and the attempt to ground U.S. Hispanic theology in an aesthetic theory—i.e., what I have referred to as the two central aspects of the "aesthetic turn" in U.S. Hispanic theology—are symptomatic of this state of affairs. Which Latino theologian would deny that U.S. Hispanics are an oppressed people? Who would deny that those asymmetrical power structures that keep the Latina/o down need to be transformed? But how, I ask, does U.S. Hispanic theological discourse reflect the monstrosity of oppression? How does it contribute—albeit intellectually—to the critique of unjust structures and to the creation of a society where the Latino worker would be freed from the yoke of an oppressive labor market that is held in place by the ideology of "minimum wage," a society where the Latino culture would no longer be colonized, instrumentalized, and reduced to, for instance, the fast-food aphorism "Yo quiero Taco Bell"? Indeed, I fail to see how U.S. Hispanic theology speaks to the monstrosity of oppression which defines the everydayness of Latino reality in the United States. A theology that consecrates a chimerical thing- or end-in-itself and marshals an a priori critique of poietic action is one that is held captive by the idealistic tradition of Western philosophy and deserves to be called "the *opium* of the people."⁵⁵ Such a theology, moreover, has no right to call itself "liberationist." Indeed, the distinction needs to be made between oppressive and emancipatory poietic action. Yes, no doubt, the procession, the liturgy, and the fiesta are important objects of theological reflection, but when these become the only objects, or when these are reified to such a degree that they eclipse the everyday reality of production, labor, and the factory, then U.S. Hispanic theology no longer reflects the *daily struggle of the Latino people*, but rather it reflects the *religious practices of a struggling Hispanic people*—and these represent two radically different projects.

However, U.S. Hispanic theology explicitly claims to reflect upon the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality in its multiplex totality, does it not? Is this not why Latina/o theologians have opted to make popular religious beliefs and practices their primary unit of analysis, have

⁵⁴ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 29.

⁵⁵ Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 54.

appropriated the notion of "praxis" from the Latin American liberationist tradition, and have developed concepts such as *la lucha*, *lo cotidiano*, and the like? But one has to seriously question whether U.S. Hispanic theology has been able to achieve the ambitious task of reflecting on the everyday reality of Latinas/os in the United States. For this task must be able to grasp the interrelatedness of the procession and production, liturgy and labor, fiesta and the factory, i.e., it must be able to grasp these as forming aspects of one complex reality. So, for instance, this theological project must attempt to, on the one hand, reflect upon how the internalization of the structures and symbols of the procession, liturgy, and fiesta are manifested and shape the structures and symbols of production, labor, and the factory; conversely, this theological project must attempt to grasp how the internalization of the structures and symbols of production, labor, and the factory are manifested and shape the procession, liturgy, and fiesta. For example, a U.S. Hispanic theology that aims to grasp the everyday reality of U.S. Latinos (as opposed to grasping the religious practices of a struggling Hispanic people) would need to explore what it theologically means for the Latino construction worker or security guard to carry a picture of the Virgen de Guadalupe in his wallet, or for the Latina to keep an image of the cross on her desk, or for the Hispanic couple to pray the rosary during their daily ritual of cleaning offices or picking vegetables. Moreover, this first kind of theological project would also need to investigate the way in which U.S. Hispanic religious worldviews and practices are affected by the fatigue of six days of loading and unloading trucks, or by the psychological violence produced by having to interact with non-Spanish speaking co-workers, or of having to rush off to work after the Sunday service or the Feast Day procession.⁵⁶ In short, a Hispanic theology that claims to reflect the everyday reality of Latinos in the United States has to be able to grasp the fuzziness of a religiosity that both shapes the daily struggle of the Hispanic people and is shaped by this struggle.

From what has been said thus far it would be most accurate to describe U.S. Hispanic theological discourse as a reflection on the reli-

⁵⁶ That I am not simply waxing elegantly, and that my concern is empirically justified, consider the following: Just a few Sundays ago, after the 11 A.M. mass at the Misión Católica in Atlanta, a conversation I was having with a man of Latino origin had to come to an untimely end because the brother had to rush off to work. As he was leaving he expressed his gratitude for having had half the day off which had allowed him to attend the service that day; yet in the same breath he expressed regret for not having been able to attend mass the previous Sunday, and, looking ahead, he lamented the fact that he was most likely not going to be able to attend mass the following Sunday—both because of work.

gious beliefs and practices of a struggling Latino community, rather than as a reflection on the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality. For how can a theology that does not tarry with the negative of oppression claim to reflect the totality of U.S. Hispanic reality? This is a contradiction as well as ideology. As it currently exists, U.S. Hispanic theology needs to accept the limits of its gaze. It needs to accept, for instance, the fact that when it talks about "praxis" it actually means explicitly religious praxis; when it speaks of *lo cotidiano* it in fact means *lo cotidiano vis-à-vis* the religious sphere. Indeed, if Latino theology wants to genuinely capture the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality, then it will have to break with those philosophical, theoretical, and/or methodological presuppositions which prevent it from engaging the oppression and struggle that is so characteristic of U.S. Hispanic reality.

In what follows I will begin to sketch in a strictly preliminary way a paradigm that attempts to overcome the idealism and dichotomies of U.S. Hispanic theology—a paradigm that aims to provide a more solid foundation for a theology that wants to reflect upon the everydayness of Latina/o reality. The first two stages of this paradigm will begin to be developed here, and the third stage will only be outlined. First, a new horizon will be opened up by Xavier Zubiri's insight on the primacy of reality over being and intelligence. Second, the metaphysical ground will be laid by Ignacio Ellacuría's notion of historical reality. The phenomenology of suffering as the proper point of departure of U.S. Hispanic theology will be outlined as the third stage.

XAVIER ZUBIRI AND THE PRIMACY OF REALITY OVER BEING AND INTELLIGENCE

Xavier Zubiri's critique of Western metaphysics loosens the philosophical problematic lurking behind U.S. Hispanic theology and in this sense brings forth the necessary material for the ground laying of the new paradigm. Here, given the nature and scope of the task at hand, no justice can be done to the complexity and genius of Zubiri's thought. A more systematic elucidation of his position will need to be left for another occasion. At this time only an outline of the general trajectory of Zubiri's argument can be provided, but this should suffice—at least it should point us in the right direction.

Zubiri's project can most succinctly be defined as an attempt to push beyond what he argues is the pernicious idealism which has plagued the Western philosophical tradition from the time of the Pre-Socratics up to Heidegger, an idealism which is embedded in the very structures of metaphysics and permeates all branches of philosophy—e.g., anthropology, ethics, and the like. According to Zubiri, this idealism is the result of two preoccupations which have misguided

philosophers throughout the ages: (1) the ontological preoccupation with the question of *being*, and (2) the epistemological preoccupation with the question of the *logos*. This double fixation with being and logos, Zubiri argues, has prevented philosophy from grasping *reality* as the most primordial of philosophical categories. Indeed, the history of Western philosophy according to Zubiri is the history of the reduction of reality to being and/or logos, i.e., the history of the spurious subsumption of reality under the intellectualized categories of being and logos. Parmenides and Plato, for instance, directed their ontological investigations toward the question of the dialectic between being and non-being, thus eclipsing the primacy of reality.⁵⁷ Aristotle, Zubiri argues, while moving in the right direction ontologically by understanding the problematic of being and non-being as ultimately a question of a physical totality,⁵⁸ balked on the epistemological side by reducing the knowing of a thing to an essence determined by its "definition."⁵⁹ With the help of Avicena and Averroes,⁶⁰ Aquinas appropriated the basic form of Aristotelian epistemology, but reinterpreted Greek ontology onto-theologically which allowed him—via the analogy of being—to reformulate the question of being and non-being as the question of being and existence, or being and becoming.⁶¹ Zubiri suggests that Descartes, like the Greeks and Scholastics before him, failed to grasp the primacy of reality over being, but rather understood the two as interchangeable. Unlike the other three traditions, he reduced being-reality to the *res extensa*, and subordinated this *res extensa* to the *res cogitans*, thus paving the way for Enlightenment "rationalism" and in particular "transcendental idealism."⁶² Kant, with his "Copernican Revolution" in metaphysics, radicalized Descartes by arguing that being was not a real category, and reduced ontology to epistemology, i.e., reduced reality-being to "concepts" consciousness brings to the manifold of sense impressions.⁶³ Not being able to push beyond the horizon of transcendental idealism, Husserl could not escape the biases of this tradition although this was precisely the aim of

⁵⁷ Xavier Zubiri, *Estructura dinámica de la realidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Fundación Xavier Zubiri, 1989) 11–15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

⁵⁹ Xavier Zubiri, *Sobre la esencia* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Fundación Xavier Zubiri, 1985) 75–94.

⁶⁰ For Zubiri's analysis of the influence of Avicena and Averroes on Western philosophy, see his *Sobre el problema de la filosofía* (Fundación Xavier Zubiri, n.d.), in particular the section entitled "La filosofía iranio-islámica," 71–9.

⁶¹ Zubiri, *Sobre la esencia*, 94.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 373–6.

his phenomenology. Indeed, according to Zubiri, Husserl failed to grasp the reality of objects, i.e., the real of reality, because he could not move past an understanding of consciousness as "intentionality"—thus he was never able to see that the most primordial function of consciousness is "actualization."⁶⁴ Finally, with Heidegger, Zubiri argues, there was a move in the right direction to the extent that he was able to break with the biases of the philosophy of consciousness—biases that had resulted in the forgetfulness of being or, more specifically, in the forgetfulness of the meaning of the being of beings. However, Heidegger was never able to grasp the primacy of reality, due to his early preoccupation with the analytic of *Dasein*, and the "ontic" and the "ontological." Indeed, he was never able to see that reality is prior to all three—*Dasein*, the ontic, and the ontological.⁶⁵

Zubiri suggests that the different nuances of idealism which have plagued Western philosophy can be understood according to two modes: (1) as the "logificación de la intelección," by which he means the reduction of knowing reality to knowing the logos, i.e., what we called earlier the epistemological preoccupation with the logos; and (2) as the "entificación de lo real," by which he means the reduction of reality to being, i.e., what we called above the ontological preoccupation with being. In the following passage Zubiri explains with exquisite economy the adverse consequences of the two modes of idealism and proposes what must be done to transcend them:

Logificación de la intelección y entificación de lo real convergen así intrínsecamente: el "es" de la intelección consistiría en un "es" afirmativo, y el "es" inteligido sería de carácter entitativo. Esta convergencia ha trazado en buena medida el cauce de la filosofía europea. Sin embargo, el problema no presenta el mismo carácter desde una inteligencia sentiente. El logos está fundado en la aprehensión sentiente de lo real; esto es, en intelección sentiente. Por tanto, en lugar de "logificar" la intelección, lo que ha de hacerse es, según dije, "inteligizar" el logos; esto es, hacer del logos un modo ulterior de la aprehensión primordial de lo real. El término formal del inteligir no es el "es," sino la "realidad." Y entonces resulta que realidad no es modo del ser, sino que el ser es algo ulterior a la realidad misma. En su virtud, como he dicho . . . no hay *esse reale*, sino *realitas in essendo*. No se puede entificar la realidad, sino que hay que dar a la realidad una ulterioridad entitativa. La ulterioridad del logos va "a una" con la ulterioridad del ser mismo.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 27–31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 438–54.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 225. For an excellent summary of Zubiri's critique of idealism understood through the modes of the "logificación de la intelección" and the "entificación de la realidad" see Ignacio Ellacuría, "La superación del reduccionismo idealista en

The “logificación de la intelección” and the “entificación de lo real” exist to a greater or lesser degree in all idealist systems, argues Zubiri. If philosophy is to stay clear of both of these tendencies then it must begin by understanding the proper structure of intelligence, which for Zubiri means coming to understand that the most primordial function of intelligence is not reason or logos, but “sentient apprehension,” such that intelligence is first and foremost sentient intelligence. Zubiri argues:

Por su índole formal, la intelección es aprehensión de la realidad en y por sí misma. Esta intelección . . . es radicalmente una aprehensión de lo real que tiene caracteres propios. . . . La intelección es formalmente aprehensión directa de lo real, no a través de representaciones ni imágenes; es una aprehensión inmediata de lo real, no fundada en inferencias, razonamientos o cosa similar; es una aprehensión unitaria.⁶⁷

Thus, the first and most primordial function of intelligence, according to Zubiri, is the sentient apprehension of the real; then from here, through more complex operations which build on or combine with this sentient apprehension, intelligence is able to grasp reality as logos, and ultimately as reason.⁶⁸

For Zubiri, the ontological side of the problem of idealism, i.e., the historical tendency of Western philosophy to subsume reality under being, is inherently linked to this epistemological problem we have just summarized. Or stated more explicitly, for Zubiri, the “entificación de lo real” is inherently related to the “logificación de la intelección,” such that once the proper structure of intelligence is discerned—i.e., intelligence is understood primarily as sentient apprehension—then the illusion of an ontology grounded in being dissolves and reality is grasped as the most primordial and primary of categories, i.e., as the ground of being and intelligence. In Zubiri’s own words, “La realidad no es un modo de ser. La realidad es justamente algo previo al ser. Y el ser es algo que está fundado en la realidad como un *de suyo*.”⁶⁹ And in a more

Zubiri,” *Estudios Centroamericanos* (1988) 633–50. I would like to thank Robert Lasalle-Klein for having called my attention to this essay.

⁶⁷ Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia sentiente/Inteligencia y realidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Fundación Xavier Zubiri, 1980/1991) 257.

⁶⁸ A concise schema of Zubiri’s understanding of the structure of intelligence can be discerned in the organization and ordering of the three books he wrote on the subject: (1) *Inteligencia sentiente/Inteligencia y realidad*, (2) *Inteligencia y logos*, and (3) *Inteligencia y razón*. Taken together these writings form his epistemological trilogy.

⁶⁹ Zubiri, *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*, 30.

comprehensive fashion, in the conclusion to his second work on ontology Zubiri writes:

Quería tratar en este estudio mío no sólo de unos cuantos dinamismos sueltos muy importantes en el mundo, y cada uno de ellos muy interesante por sí mismo. Me importaba hacer ver cómo todos ellos constituyen una unidad interna, y además intrínseca, que es el dinamismo intrínseco, multivalente pero perfectamente claro, de la realidad en tanto que realidad. Una realidad que comienza por estar y no hace más que variar, que entra en sí justamente haciéndose misma; que a fuerza de ser misma se abre a la suidad, que se estatuye en forma de comunidad y se estructura en la forma de un mundo. Hasta un cierto momento y un cierto límite solamente, porque la realidad es caduca, porque tiene un límite en su propia realidad. . . . Esta es la estructura dinámica de la realidad.⁷⁰

Thus, for Zubiri, the ultimate object of both epistemology and ontology is the dynamic structure of reality. This is genuine transcendental philosophy—intramundane metaphysics.⁷¹

But how does Zubiri’s critique of idealism and his radical notion of reality prepare us for the task of laying a new ground for U.S. Hispanic theology? For it seems we have gone adrift in the vast and precarious waters of the history of philosophy. To this question the following response is given: Zubiri’s polemic provides the framework and language for a much needed critique of the intellectual genealogies of U.S. Hispanic theology. For at the very least, the conversation we had with Goizueta problematizes the relationship between the aim of Latina/o theology and the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological resources used by Latina/o theologians. Specifically our conversation with Goizueta raises the question of the appropriateness of these resources for a theological project that aims to reflect upon the everyday reality of Latinas/os in the United States. Does U.S. Latina/o theology fall captive to the idealist fallacies Zubiri called to our attention—the “logificación de la intelección” and the “entificación de lo real”? Do not the “aesthetic turn” in U.S. Hispanic theology and the failure of Latina/o theologians to engage philosophical, theoretical, and methodological resources that allow the monstrosity of oppression to shine through suggest that indeed the answer to this question is in the affirmative?

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

IGNACIO ELLACURÍA AND THE CONCEPT OF HISTORICAL REALITY

Building on Zubiri's transcendental realism, in his *magnum opus*, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*,⁷² Ignacio Ellacuría argues that *historical reality* is the proper object of philosophy as it is the preeminent manifestation of the dynamic structure of reality. With this appropriation and interpretation of the Zubirian system we have a shift from the critique of idealism—i.e., a critique of the history of philosophy—to an attempt to operationalize the form of this critique apropos the metaphysics of the interrelationship between human being, society, and history. Thus, in short, we encounter in Ellacuría a shift from the categories of reality, essence, intelligence, etc., to the categories of materiality, praxis, the social, the historical, and the like—a shift analogous to the move in the history of philosophy from Hegel to Feuerbach and Marx.⁷³ Given this, it should not be surprising that Ellacuría's philosophy provides the ground for a project that sets out to replace the traditional European theology of abstract consciousness with a theology of concrete everyday reality. That Ellacuría's notion of historical reality should function as the ground for the paradigm we are delineating here is not arbitrary but necessarily follows from the task U.S. Hispanic theology has set for itself: to reflect upon U.S. Hispanic reality in its everydayness. The inevitability of this link will become clear from what follows. But again we must state that no justice can be done to Ellacuría's thought in the limited space we have. A systematic treatment of the implications of the notion of historical reality for U.S. His-

⁷²San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1990.

⁷³Feuerbach argued that the starting point of philosophy must be not an abstract religious/theological presupposition, but rather a concrete anthropological fact, viz., "real" and "sensuous" human being. Thus, for instance, at the outset of his great work, Feuerbach writes: "This philosophy has for its principle, not the Substance of Spinoza, not the ego of Kant and Fichte, not the Absolute Identity of Schelling, not the Absolute Mind of Hegel, in short, no abstract, merely conceptual being, but a real being, the true *Ens realissimum*—man; its principle, therefore, is in the highest degree positive and real. It generates through from the opposite of thought, from Matter, from existence, from the senses; it has relation to its object first through the senses, i.e., passively, before defining it in thought." *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1989) xv. This critique which was directed primarily at the Hegelian system allowed Marx to move away from the philosophical tradition that understood the human essence through the primacy of consciousness, and toward a horizon that understood the human essence through the primacy of materiality and sensibility. But Marx radicalizes the Feuerbachian position, arguing that although on the right track, Feuerbach continued to function at the level of abstraction as understanding "reality" and "sensuousness" theoretically and subjectively. See, for instance, Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 143.

panic theology must be left for another time. Our aim in what follows can only be the circumscribed task of tracing—in broad strokes—the general contours of Ellacuría's notion.

At the outset of *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* Ellacuría posits the following five theses which define his point of departure and make evident his appropriation of Zubiri's transcendental realism: (1) "la unidad de la realidad intramundana,"⁷⁴ (2) "el carácter dinámico de la realidad intramundana,"⁷⁵ (3) el carácter no universalmente dialéctico,⁷⁶ (4) "el carácter procesual y ascendente de la realidad,"⁷⁷ and (5) "la realidad histórica como objeto de la filosofía."⁷⁸ With the first four theses, Ellacuría emphasizes with Zubiri the dynamic and primordial character of reality. With the fifth thesis Ellacuría pushes beyond Zubiri, arguing that the "historical" is the fullest and most complex manifestation of reality, and thus it should be the ultimate object of philosophical investigation. Ellacuría writes:

En efecto, la realidad histórica, ante todo, engloba todo otro tipo de realidad: no hay realidad histórica sin realidad puramente material, sin realidad biológica, sin realidad personal y sin realidad social; en segundo lugar, toda forma de realidad donde da más de sí y donde recibe su para qué fáctico—no necesariamente finalístico—es en la realidad histórica; en tercer lugar, esa forma de realidad que es la realidad histórica es donde la realidad es "más" y donde es "más suya," donde también es "más abierta."⁷⁹

For Zubiri idealism could not be overcome until reality was understood as the primordial category. For Ellacuría a reductionistic understanding of history can not be overcome until the qualitatively different

⁷⁴Ellacuría develops this first thesis thus: "Toda la realidad intramundana constituye una sola unidad física compleja y diferenciada, de modo que ni la unidad anula las diferencias ni las diferencias anulan la unidad." *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁵He explains: "La realidad intramundana es intrínsecamente dinámica, de modo que la pregunta por el origen del movimiento es una falsa pregunta o, al menos, una pregunta secundaria." *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁶Or more explicitly stated, "La realidad siendo en sí misma sistemática, estructural y unitaria, no es necesariamente dialéctica o, al menos, no es unívocamente dialéctica." *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁷More concretely: "La realidad no sólo forma una totalidad dinámica, estructural y, en algún modo, dialéctica, sino que es un proceso de realización, en el cual se van dando cada vez formas más altas de realidad, que retienen las anteriores, elevándolas." *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁸By which Ellacuría means that "La 'realidad histórica' es el 'objeto último' de la filosofía, entendida como metafísica intramundana, no sólo por su carácter englobante y totalizador, sino en cuanto manifestación suprema de la realidad." *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 43.

moments of historical reality are grasped from the most basic—i.e., materiality—to the most developed—i.e., the historical itself. In a word, history cannot be understood as real history, that is, as historical reality, without understanding the material, biological, natural, personal, and social moments that constitute it as real history, as the historical moment of the dynamic structure of reality. So, for instance, a failure to grasp the way in which history is grounded in and unfolds from nature leads to an idealist understanding of this reality. Conversely, the failure to understand how history transcends nature, i.e., cannot be reduced to nature, leads to a vulgar materialist understanding of the same.⁸⁰ Similarly, a failure to grasp the way in which human praxis is grounded in and unfolds from poiesis leads to an idealist understanding of praxis; conversely, a failure to grasp the way in which praxis transcends poiesis leads to a reductionistic view of praxis.⁸¹ Thus, for Ellacuría to understand historical reality is to understand reality in its multiplex and totalizing character. He explains:

A este último estadio de la realidad, en el cual se hacen presentes todos los demás es al que llamamos realidad histórica: en él, la realidad es más realidad, porque se halla toda la realidad anterior, pero en esa modalidad que venimos llamando histórica. Es la realidad entera, asumida en el reino social de la libertad. Es la realidad mostrando sus más ricas virtualidades y posibilidades, aún en estado dinámico de desarrollo, pero ya alcanzado el nivel cualitativo metafísico desde el mismo subsuelo de la realidad histórica y sin dejar ya de ser intramundaneamente realidad histórica.⁸²

For Ellacuría, then, the grasping of historical reality is transcendental philosophy—it is intramundane metaphysics, but, unlike Zubiri's, Ellacuría's system has a praxeological intent.⁸³

⁸⁰ For example, at one point Ellacuría argues: "Creer que la historia no tiene que ver con la evolución biológica es una forma de idealismo y de falsificación de la historia; pero, al mismo tiempo, creer que la historia es sustancialmente lo mismo que la evolución es también una falsificación de la historia, un materialismo injustificado de la historia, una naturalización injustificada de lo histórico." *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸¹ Ellacuría writes: "Aristóteles contraponía la praxis a la poiesis, atribuyendo a la poiesis el carácter de una actividad que el hombre ejecuta sobre las cosas o sobre sí mismo en tanto que cosa, mientras que a la praxis le atribuía el carácter de una actividad, que no tiene más fin que sí misma. Esta concepción supone que el hombre puede hacerse a sí mismo sin hacer lo otro que sí, que puede crearse sin crear. Y esto no es así." *Ibid.*, 594.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸³ Although this point cannot be developed here, it should be noted that it was already implicit in what was said above by way of the analogy Zubiri:Ellacuría = Hegel:Feuerbach/Marx. See n. 73.

From what has been said it should be clear why Ellacuría's notion of historical reality provides the metaphysical ground for the construction of a theology that aims to reflect upon the everydayness of U.S. Latino reality: grounded in this notion and guided by it, U.S. Hispanic theology would not limit itself to the religious sphere and to religious praxis but, rather, it would attempt to grasp the religious dimension in all spheres—political, economic, cultural, and the like—as well as explore the way in which the economic, political, cultural spheres affect Hispanic religiosity. But such a perspective is not possible when the ground of the paradigm is aesthetic theory; indeed, it is only possible if we take as the ground historical reality.

LOOKING AHEAD: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF STRUGGLE AS THE PROPER POINT OF DEPARTURE OF U.S. HISPANIC THEOLOGY

Up to this point we have developed the notion of historical reality as a formal metaphysical principle. In the next stage of our paradigm which cannot be developed here due to the limited space available, we will need to move from a discussion of the strictly formal metaphysical treatment of this notion to an existential analysis of the historical reality of a specific group of people: U.S. Hispanics. This is to say, in other words, our next move must be an attempt to flesh out what we understand to be the historical reality of U.S. Hispanics. But, if we are to be true to the implications of Ellacuría's notion of historical reality, then we must begin to delineate U.S. Hispanic historical reality by searching for that existential characteristic that is not only present among a heterogeneous U.S. Latino population, but a characteristic that suffuses all regions of U.S. Hispanic life—familial, religious, economic, socio-cultural, political, and the like. In a word, we must begin to delineate U.S. Hispanic historical reality by searching for its most primordial characteristic. The trajectory having been outlined, I bring this essay to closure with the following claim: the primordial characteristic of U.S. Hispanic historical reality is the *phenomenology of struggle*. Thus, it is the phenomenology of struggle that needs to serve as the proper point of departure for a theological project that aims to grasp the everyday historical reality of U.S. Latinas/os. Hence, a future essay would need to: (1) elucidate what is meant by the phenomenology of struggle; (2) redefine relevant terminology given this new point of departure; (3) delineate the different regions or moments of U.S. Hispanic historical reality; and (4) develop a theological method that reflects the totality of this reality.

Resumen:

Hacia una crítica del giro estético en la teología hispano-estadounidense:

Un diálogo con Roberto Goizueta y el planteamiento de un nuevo paradigma

Esta ponencia pretende elaborar una crítica de lo que aquí llamamos el “giro estético” en la teología hispano-estadounidense, es decir, una crítica de las dos características que delimitan el quehacer teológico latino en los Estados Unidos hoy en día: (1) la reificación de las experiencias religio-estéticas hispanas y (2) el intento de fundar un discurso teológico en un sistema filosófico-teórico estético. Sintomático de este “giro” es: (1) la “intelectualización” (*qua* “estetización”) de la realidad cotidiana latina; (2) la escasez de investigaciones sobre la relación entre las condiciones de opresión—estructurales y simbólicas—y las prácticas religiosas de los hispanos en los Estados Unidos; y (3) la dicotomización de la realidad histórica latina entre la praxis y la poiesis, los campos seculares y el campo religioso, la procesión y la producción, la liturgia y la labor, la fiesta y la factoría.

En el primer apartado matizamos y concretizamos los desafíos del mencionado “giro estético” a través de una conversación con Roberto Goizueta sobre el argumento que éste elabora en los capítulos cuatro y cinco de su libro *Caminemos con Jesús*. En luz de este diálogo, concluimos que las limitaciones filosóficas, teóricas, y metodológicas que subyacen el “giro estético” no permiten a la teología hispano-estadounidense captar la totalidad de la realidad cotidiana latina—hito cumbre de este quehacer.

En el segundo apartado planteamos un paradigma que pretende superar dichas limitaciones—un paradigma que intenta fundar la teología hispano-estadounidense en simientos filosóficos y teóricos más sólidos y estables, simientos que permitirían que esta teología capte de una manera totalizante la realidad histórica latina. Hacia este fin, elaboramos las dos primeras fases de dicho paradigma y bosquejamos la tercera. Primero, apropiando la crítica de Xavier Zubiri en torno al idealismo filosófico occidental—esto es, contra lo que éste llama la “entificación de lo real” y la “logificación de la intelección”—desatamos el problemático trasfondo filosófico-teórico de la mencionado teología. Segundo, ubicamos y desarrollamos el concepto Ellacuriano, “realidad histórica,” como el simiento metafísico de dicha teología. Y tercero, trasladándonos del horizonte formal al horizonte existencial, abogamos la “fenomenología de la lucha” como el auténtico punto de partida de la teología latina en los Estados Unidos.