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# Elbows on the Table: The Ethics of Doing Theology Reflections from a U.S. Hispanic<sup>1</sup> Perspective

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Metaphors and narratives are multivalent and how one understands them is related to one's experience and social location. The feminist critique of God language, for example, uncovered the paternalism, patriarchy and kyriarchy imbued in terms like "Father" and "Lord." However, calling God "Parent" or even "Mother" does not resolve the problem. All of us do not share common experiences of parenthood or being parented and the same holds true for the metaphor "table." While it is frequently used, it cannot be assumed that all share a common understanding or even a universal, let alone a positive experience of table.

My own understanding is grounded in and shaped by three experiences of table: a noisy and growing *chorizo-filching familia*, eighteen years of high school cafeterias, and nine ACHTUS colloquia. Within each of these contexts the necessity for having elbows firmly planted emerges as essential for engagement, if not survival.

Some of my earliest memories are of sitting around the dinner table with my parents and siblings and my favorite occasions are those where our ever-expanding family gathers around the same table for

<sup>1</sup> Personally, I identify as Hispanic or *hispana*. "The denomination *hispano* in early twentieth-century New York City was widely used as a sign of solidarity among working-class immigrants of Hispanic Caribbean and Spanish descent" in Agustín Laó-Montes, "Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) 5. My mother's parents came to New York City from Spain via Cuba in the early part of the twentieth century. My father, also a first-generation New Yorker, was the first in his family of Czech-Slavic immigrants born in the U.S. My siblings and I are part of that unique New York *mestizaje*.

holidays, celebrations, or for no particular reason. My most fluent Spanish remains the simple table blessing taught to us as children by my mother and still faithfully prayed before each meal especially by my Czech/Slavic-American father. All have a seat and a voice at our table from the most senior to the youngest, and the exchanges are noisy and spirited. My poor *tía's* stories take forever to finish because her nieces and nephew can't resist interrupting with embellishments, and the taboo areas of religion and politics are sure to ignite passions. There is a degree of exclusion to our very family-oriented table, yet there is always room to welcome a last minute or unexpected guest. If *empanada*<sup>2</sup> happens to be on the menu, every semblance of civility is gone, at least amongst us now-grown children, as the prized morsels of *chorizo* are liberated from passing or unguarded plates, and where no matter the occasion, enough food is generated for "nice sandwiches" and "doggy bags" for my brother's dog and cat. It seems that an appreciation for the value of the table has even been communicated to the next generation if my six-year-old maitre d'-in-training nephew is to be heeded.

During my years as a religion teacher, campus minister and administrator (the majority of which were spent in Washington metropolitan area boys' Catholic high schools), I logged countless hours of cafeteria duty. What I have observed is that lunchtime is too brief, that there is not enough quality time for interaction and engagement. Some tables are tight and boisterous and others are strikingly sparse as lonely kids consume their lunches in isolation. High school cafeterias follow a code of inclusion and exclusion that disturbs adults more than students. Usually worded as "why are all the (*insert racial or ethnic category*) sitting together," voluntary self-segregation is more often than not perceived by administrators and faculty as a problem. Psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum raises the question in the title of her book and suggests that it is necessary to understand racial self-segregation within racially diverse settings as a positive coping strategy, "racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism."<sup>3</sup> I would add that sometimes it is just a reflection of shared experiences, neighborhood friendships, and common interests. The racial and/or ethnic composition of a table, because it is visually apparent, tends to distract attention from the reality that the segregation runs along even

<sup>2</sup>*Empanada* is a regional dish of Galicia, Spain, a stuffed bread filled with meat and onions. Beef, pork or chicken may be used, and *chorizo* is also used. *Empanada* may be prepared using either a circular or a rectangular pan. Thanks to my *tía* Connie Fernández for this explanation.

<sup>3</sup>Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* and *Other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) 62.

deeper lines, i.e. Latino athletes, African American artists, “white” music lovers, gay computer techies etc. The cafeteria table for some is the place where one is free to be oneself and for others a reminder of one’s loneliness. It is ground zero for all too many fights and an expression of exuberant communal life; it’s a mess in all senses of the term!

In some ways my experience of nine ACHTUS colloquia reflects a combination of the *familia* and cafeteria tables. The gatherings are passionately spirited yet too brief, intentionally exclusive yet necessarily inclusive and there’s always a mess left behind for the *enlace* folks to clean up! The animated bilingual conversation flows continuously, if not boisterously, from meeting table to dining hall table to banquet table and hopefully back to our respective home, communal, academy and eventually writing tables.

It can be argued that theology done from the perspectives of U.S. Latinos/as has in the past decade slowly and forcefully edged its way from the marginal “children’s table” of the academy where proponents of so-called dominant theologies perhaps hoped to contain the growing ranks of contextual theologians. It can certainly be argued that to be represented at the table by others is unacceptable, to merely have a place at the table is inadequate, to tolerate separate and unequal tables is abhorrent and destructive. But full participation requires elbow room for engagement as well as table manners.

Real engagement among theologies and theologians would mean that a multiplicity of methods would be examined, that different social locations would be analyzed, and that the theological praxis of different communities of struggle would become intrinsic to theological education. Engagement among different theologies would prevent us from falling into total relativity and individualism since all engagement is, in a sense, a calling to accountability. . . . Engagement is not a matter of convincing the other but rather a matter of contributing elements to be considered when reassessment of thinking is going on.<sup>4</sup>

If, in the simplest terms, epistemology is about how we come to know, then ethics is about how we come to do. Therefore ethics requires modeling. It is not enough to talk about ethics, as theologians, our theologies need to reflect our ethical stances, in other words how we do our respective theologies must be ethical. What then does table etiquette shaped by firmly-planted and fully-engaged U.S. Hispanic theological contributions look like? In creating a more inclusive table,

<sup>4</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Strangers No Longer,” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, eds. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 373–4.

what elements emerge from the reflections and praxis of Latino and Latina theologians that inform an ethical doing of theology?

*From Baseball to Béisbol:  
Vida cotidiana and Globalization*

One of the major contributions of U.S. Hispanic theologians to the “doing” of theology is the privileging of *lo cotidiano*, daily lived experience. The significance of *lo cotidiano* and the need to reflect theologically on it was initially and primarily developed by Latinas.

In the words of María Pilar Aquino,

There may be other languages that reflect critically on our practices, but what makes Latina thought *theological* is that it formally focuses on our day-to-day practices sustained by the liberating visions and traditions of Christian religion and faith . . . what makes Latina thought *liberative* is that it deliberately focuses on our daily activities aimed at transformation toward greater justice.<sup>5</sup>

Aquino challenges androcentric influences that ignore the effects of daily life on theological endeavors. Instead she posits that theology done from Latin American feminist perspectives recognizes “that active paradigms, traditions, and categories supporting the social construction of reality reside and operate in the daily life of people. . . . In the daily life of people reside the values and categories on which social consensus is based.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, she maintains that *lo cotidiano* serves to critique dehumanizing and polarizing social systems, institutions and relationships. “*Lo cotidiano* is understood as a *dynamis* that seeks to make hegemonic and universal the logic of human rights—including the rights to friendship, bread, employment and beauty.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> María Pilar Aquino, “Latina Feminist Theologies: Central Features,” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, ed. María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado and Jeanette Rodríguez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) 152. See also María Pilar Aquino, “Perspectives on a Latina’s Feminist Liberation Theology,” in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992) 23–40.

<sup>6</sup> María Pilar Aquino, “The Collective ‘Dis-covery’ of Our Own Power,” in *Hispanic / Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, 256.

<sup>7</sup> María Pilar Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium,” in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, ed. Orlando Espín and Miguel Díaz (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999) 38.

For Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *lo cotidiano* is descriptively, hermeneutically, and epistemologically significant as it pertains to Hispanic women, effectively rendering this daily living its rightful place among that which is considered important.<sup>8</sup> Descriptively, *lo cotidiano* entails such factors as race, class, and gender, as well as relational interactions, faith expressions, and experiences of authority.<sup>9</sup> Hermeneutically, *lo cotidiano* serves as an interpretive lens through which the “stuff” of reality, “actions, discourse, norms, established social roles and our own selves”<sup>10</sup> are perceived and evaluated. Epistemologically, *lo cotidiano* “is a way of referring to Latinas’ efforts to understand and express how and why their lives are the way they are, how and why they function as they do.”<sup>11</sup> The use of *lo cotidiano* as a theological source exposes knowledge in general and theological knowledge in particular as being fragmentary, biased and provisional and for Isasi-Díaz this affirms its use as an act of subversion.

For Orlando Espín, the foundational experience of *lo cotidiano*, daily life as it exists and is lived, is the “birthing place” of “an authentically U.S. theology of grace from a Latino/a perspective.”<sup>12</sup> Espín is careful not to reduce *lo cotidiano* to living that occurs primarily within the private or domestic sphere and acknowledges the impact on daily life of such macro factors as violence, poverty, global economics, information technology, politics, education and media. “It might be argued that the so-called macro or public sphere only influences people’s lives if, when and to the degree that it existentially affects them at the daily or micro level. It may be conversely argued that there is no real-life substance or consistency to the macro sphere. Real life exists in the concrete, the local, the familial and communal, the micro.”<sup>13</sup>

The focus on *lo cotidiano* has tended to favor a more positive or even hopeful interpretation of daily living including that living which is marked by struggle and marginalization.

Theologically, daily life has salvific value because the people themselves, in *lo cotidiano* of their existence, let us experience the salvific presence of God here and now in their daily struggles for humanization, for a better quality of life, and for greater social justice. At the same time, daily life

<sup>8</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996) 66–73.

<sup>9</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 66–7.

<sup>10</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 67.

<sup>11</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 68.

<sup>12</sup> Orlando Espín, “An Exploration into a Theology of Grace and Sin,” in *From the Heart of Our People*, 125.

<sup>13</sup> Orlando Espín, 126.

urges us to join actively in the long march toward a new humanity and a future of fulfillment still latent in the heart of creation, until we reach God's definitive salvation.<sup>14</sup>

Whether understood in terms of grace, salvific transformation or *la lucha*, discourse about *lo cotidiano* more often than not conveys an optimism that may unwittingly disguise a more sinful reality than we care to admit. Even Espín acknowledges "if daily relations constitute the foundation and image for the totality of social relationships, then we must also arrive at the conclusion that the daily relationships of Latinos/as must be understood as experiences of sin."<sup>15</sup>

While daily-lived experience is accorded foundational significance in theologies by U.S. Latinos/as, the interaction between *lo cotidiano* and the forces of globalization remains underexplored. The impact of the global on *vida cotidiana* and the shaping of global and local forces as result of that continued encounter invites further theological reflection and articulation if we hope to avoid abstraction. As Aquino has noted, "The abstraction made of daily life also appears in the priority given to the transformation of the global socioeconomic structures, while overlooking the changes that ought to take place in daily life. This in turn has caused a deviation in the understanding of reality, underestimating the transforming potential found in the personal and private arena."<sup>16</sup> Daily life may indeed be where transformation takes place, and needs to take place, but how is daily life transformed by globalizing influences and how are globalizing forces impacted by *lo cotidiano*? While attention has been given to the interaction between global and local, underestimating the impact of the global on personal lived experience will render our theologies irrelevant, especially in the eyes of the young whose engagement is necessary for both the present and future. Globalization is not a disembodied process: the changes it brings "wield a powerful impact on everyday life, transforming gender roles, exacerbating generational conflicts, and limiting and creating possibilities for community life."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, underestimating the power of

<sup>14</sup> María Pilar Aquino, "Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium," in *From the Heart of Our People*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Orlando Espín, "An Exploration into a Theology of Grace and Sin," in *From the Heart of Our People*, 130.

<sup>16</sup> María Pilar Aquino, "The Collective 'Dis-discovery' of Our Own Power," 256.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Peterson, Manuel Vásquez, and Philip Williams, "The Global and the Local," in *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas*, ed. Anna Peterson, Manuel Vásquez and Philip Williams (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 219.

daily living to effect the global market of goods, ideas and trends is to ignore the complexity of a relationship that is a locus of sin as well as grace. Globalization is “not something that occurs *outside* us” rather it occurs “within and among all of us, and beyond us,”<sup>18</sup> and its outcomes “are profoundly ambiguous and rife with injustice.”<sup>19</sup>

*Time* magazine pop-music critic Christopher John Farley observed, “The first moments of the 21st century have been haunted by the specter of globalization, of a star-spangled world in which a parade of powerful letters—the U.N., the WTO, the IMF—hammers the diversity of the planet into homogenized goop.”<sup>20</sup> Absent from his list of powerful acronyms are those letters shaping the lived experiences, dreams, and struggles of the young in particular: MTV, AOL, CNN, HBO, WB, NBA, WWF, ESPN, WWW. For Robert Schreiter, “the experience of homogenization in global cultures is heightened by a hyperculture (that is, an overarching cultural proposal that is in itself not a complete culture) based on consumption and marked by icons of consumption derived from the most powerful of homogenizing cultures, that of the United States.”<sup>21</sup>

A full-page ad in the *New York Times* the week before the beginning of the 2002 Major League Baseball season clearly illustrates that the letters “MLB” deserve to be added to that list of U.S. born, influential global acronyms. With text wrapped around a globe-baseball the ad boasts that

Next week people in 224 countries will begin watching an event some people mistakenly call “America’s game.” In cities all over the world, Major League Baseball will consume the hearts and minds—and inflame the passions of—more people than football, basketball, and hockey put together. . . . By the time the World Series is over, in the United States alone, people will have tuned in to Major League Baseball over 1.5 billion times. . . . In Japan alone, 21 million people will have watched the World Series on TV. In South Africa, 300,000 youngsters play organized baseball.

The ad alludes to the market value of the sport in consumer terms: “And another 72 million will have spent a memorable afternoon or

<sup>18</sup> Orlando O. Espín, “Immigration, Territory, and Globalization: Theological Reflections,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 7:3 (2000) 50.

<sup>19</sup> Orlando O. Espín, “La experiencia religiosa en el contexto de la globalización,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 7:2 (1999) 30.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher John Farley, “Introduction: The Beat of Freedom,” *Time* (Special Issue, Music Goes Global, Fall 2001, vol. 158 no. 14) 7.

<sup>21</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997) 10.



evening at a ballpark watching Major League Baseball while devouring 23 million hotdogs, 27 million sodas, and 5 million bags of peanuts." The ad concludes with an intriguing analysis of baseball's global popularity:

Maybe that's because baseball isn't like any other sport in the world. No, baseball is unique. It transcends languages and countries and cultures. And you don't have to know a darn thing about it to love it. You just have to root, root, root for the home team. Even if that team happens to be in Prague.<sup>22</sup>

The global reach of professional baseball is evident by the opening of the MLB seasons of 2000 in Japan and of 2001 in Puerto Rico. If baseball is, as it has been called, the civic religion of the United States,<sup>23</sup> then *béisbol* may well be a manifestation of popular religion in parts of Latin America. This reality and the interrelatedness of baseball and *béisbol* is demonstrated in the unprecedented visit of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter to Cuba in May 2002. If the image of Fidel Castro explaining to Carter the fine art of tossing the first pitch while sharing the mound at the Cuban League All-Star Game is iconic in its representation of the intersection of globalization and *lo cotidiano*, then the story of Danny Almonte and the Rolando Paulino All Stars serves as its parable.

In August 2001, the sports world was captivated by the feel-good story of young Danny Almonte, a twelve-year-old from the Dominican Republic with the arm of a future major leaguer. The story contained all the elements of U.S. underdog mythology perpetuated in Disney films: cute, poor kids from the Bronx, the big game, evil detractors, and jealous opponents with purses large enough to afford private detectives, unassuming immigrant hero pursuing the American dream, the purity of sport and the currently fashionable *sabor latino*. A media circus surrounded the Bronx Baby Bombers, as they were dubbed by the press, and a sponsor inflated youth event took on big-league proportions.

But as with all myths in this postmodern age, deconstruction ruled the day. The twelve-year-old hero was now a fourteen-year-old bully, the detractors became victims, cute young immigrants morphed into lying illegal aliens, the sanctity of a civil religion was blasphemed, and the Little League World Series was revealed to be less about innocent kids enjoying the national pastime and more about the creeping corrosiveness, corruption, and greed associated with professional sports.

<sup>22</sup>*The New York Times*, March 29, 2002, A19.

<sup>23</sup>Baseball as U.S. civic religion is explored in the anthology *The Faith of Fifty Million: Baseball, Religion, and American Culture*, ed. Christopher H. Evans and William R. Herzog II (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

The controversy surrounding Almonte was framed in markedly ethical terms, though no one could quite agree on the nature of the violation. The debate raged on talk radio and in internet chatrooms. From newspaper headlines to ESPN, the pundits blamed everything from bad parenting to cultural acceptance of lying and cheating in a post-Clinton nation. What most failed to notice is that indeed the globalization chickens had come home to roost.

In many ways baseball is an example of what Schreiter calls a hyperculture, "an overarching cultural proposal that is in itself not a complete culture."<sup>24</sup> Influenced and driven by U.S. images and models of consumption, "homogenizing as these systems might be, they do not end up homogenizing local cultures altogether. It is increasingly evident that local cultures receive the elements of the hyperculture and reinterpret them in some measure. . . . In other instances, the products of the hyperculture foster a certain cosmopolitanism, a sense of participating in something larger, grander, and more powerful than our immediate situation."<sup>25</sup> Retrieving the long-ignored story of *béisbol* and the context—also dismissed in the U.S., that frames Almonte's daily lived experience provides an overture for exploring the theological significance of the interaction between *vida cotidiana* and globalization.

The encounter between baseball and Latin America begins in the 1860s. Brought to Cuba by a variety of means, including Cuban students returning from study in U.S. colleges, sailors, and those involved in commerce, the game spread rapidly from the docks to the sugar mills, from the elites to the streets, and throughout the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

It is much the same as that which happened with Christianity. Jesus could be compared to the North Americans, but the apostles were the ones who spread the faith, and the apostles of baseball were the Cubans, they went out into the world to preach the gospel of baseball. Even though the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico were occupied by the North Americans, the Cubans brought baseball here first and to Mexico and Venezuela, too.<sup>26</sup>

However baseball as a manifestation of U.S. colonization cannot be ignored as "almost all the nations and territories producing Latin players

<sup>24</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Pedro Julio Santana in the Dominican Republic, quoted in Rob Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998; reprinted from Westport Conn.: Meckler Publishing, 1991) 1–2.

today have been invaded by U.S. troops in the last century: the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Panama, and Nicaragua. And if it wasn't an invasion by American troops, it was American business that organized the sport."<sup>27</sup> This neocolonial aspect of baseball is clearly expressed in the words of the sport's premier entrepreneur and "missionary" A.G. Spalding, who took a touring team across the globe in 1888–89, "Base Ball has 'followed the flag.' . . . and wherever a ship floating the Stars and Stripes finds anchorage today, somewhere on a nearby shore the American National Game is in progress."<sup>28</sup>

While the proliferation of baseball was viewed through U.S. eyes as part of the manifest destiny mandate, assimilation appears not to have been the response generated by the encounter with Latin America. Like globalization, colonialism reflects an intercultural encounter which inevitably changes all sides of the power equation for better and for worse. "The local situation can seldom keep globalizing forces out altogether (and frequently does not want to), and so it is inevitably changed by the encounter. . . . But local situations are not powerless either. They work out all kinds of arrangements, from syncretic borrowing to living in subaltern systems."<sup>29</sup> In Cuba the complexity of its relationship with the United States, "the despised but intimate other,"<sup>30</sup> is reflected in its rejection of U.S. influence while simultaneously defining itself by absorbing it.<sup>31</sup> "Baseball, an American game, established itself as the national sport of Cuba during an American occupation of the island because Cuban teams defeated American ones. The conqueror's mantle of superiority in economic and military power could not be denied, but it was removed in the mock battlefield of sports."<sup>32</sup> This experience was not exclusive to Cuba. Even though baseball was introduced to the Dominican Republic by Cubans at the end of the nineteenth century, "it was during the epoch of the North American occupation that baseball was really ignited. These games with North

<sup>27</sup> Marcos Bretón and José Luis Villegas, *Away Games: The Life and Times of a Latin Baseball Player* (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1999) 83.

<sup>28</sup> Albert G. Spalding, *America's National Game: Historical Facts Concerning the Beginning, Evolution, Development and Popularity of Base Ball* with an introduction by Benjamin G. Rader (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) 14, as cited in Christopher H. Evans, "Baseball as Civil Religion: The Genesis of an American Creation Story," in *The Faith of Fifty Million*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 12. See also Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> I borrow this phrase from Jean-Pierre Ruiz.

<sup>31</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 187.

<sup>32</sup> González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 133.

American sailors and marines were very important. There was a certain kind of patriotic enthusiasm in beating them."<sup>33</sup>

Caribbean baseball distinguished itself from its U.S. counterpart in the area of racial integration. In post Spanish-American War Cuba, for example, the professionalization of baseball challenged racial barriers. While much is justifiably made of the integration of professional baseball in 1947 by Jackie Robinson, ignored is the reality that interracial teams composed of players from the Caribbean, Negro, and U.S. Major and Minor Leagues existed throughout the first half of the twentieth century and played winter ball together. "By the 1930's, Latin ball was a melange of native players, black Americans from the Negro Leagues, and white major leaguers playing winter ball as the game's national borders were pierced by the players' itinerant style."<sup>34</sup> The attraction to Caribbean winter ball by U.S. professional players was undoubtedly economic, motivated by financial remuneration in the off-season. However as early as 1908, in Havana, interracial baseball was more of a normative experience for U.S. players than U.S. baseball mythology cares to admit.

Once Americans left their native shores, they were able to shed racial prejudices long enough to risk baseball hegemony not only before the Cubans but also with their own black compatriots . . . a space was being created where pleasure and sport displayed all their evil lures but where certain divisions and animosities could be put aside temporarily.<sup>35</sup>

There was a degree of reciprocity to this relationship. While there were Latinos who played on U.S. major league teams prior to Robinson's breaking of the color barrier, the history of the U.S. Negro Leagues is also replete with Spanish surnames and curious team names. The racially ambiguously named Cuban Giants, later called the Cuban X Giants, and the Latino-owned New York Cubans hint at lost stories of Hispanic participation on "both sides of baseball's racial fault line," and reveals "how the story of racial exclusion is much more textured than a mere black-white dichotomy would allow."<sup>36</sup>

Since the turn of the twentieth century, U.S. baseball has been described in mythic proportions wrapped in religious language and reflected on in theological terms.

<sup>33</sup> Manuel Joaquín Báez Vargas, quoted in Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball*, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Adrián Burgos Jr., "'The Latins from Manhattan': Confronting Race and Building Community in New York City," in *Mambo Montage*, 78.

Caught up in liberal-Protestant currents of the turn-of-the-century Progressive Era, baseball epitomized both a faith in America's unique standing as a nation and the hope that the game could open a door leading to a better future. The kingdom of baseball contributed to the game's mythic stature by depicting the sport as a transcendent phenomenon that enabled Americans to clarify their nation's past, embrace a shared vision of the present, and affirm a common hope in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Baseball provided an opportunity for the development of moral and national character, served as an outlet for "muscular Christianity" promoting a triumphant yet decidedly male, rugged piety, and modeled a democratic paradigm where "Americans from different class and ethnic backgrounds could work cooperatively to build a better society."<sup>38</sup> From F. Scott Fitzgerald's allusion to baseball as "the faith of fifty million" in *The Great Gatsby* to the "church of baseball" reference in the film *Bull Durham* to Ken Burns'<sup>39</sup> television documentary *Baseball*, religious language and imagery abound in popular U.S. cultural appropriation of the sport. Yet absent from virtually every mainstream popular and scholarly reflection on baseball is the overwhelmingly significant and storied Latino contribution. "It is a story with muddled chapters and missing pages, significant events lost through the years because, until now, they were primarily known only in Spanish."<sup>40</sup> At best a few pages, though more likely a footnote, even in the histories of the Negro Leagues, at worst ignored, the Latino connection is viewed primarily as a post-integration experience noteworthy for the growing presence of U.S. Hispanic and Latin American ballplayers who now constitute approximately twenty-five percent of Major League Baseball.

The reality of *béisbol* poses a challenge to theological reflection on issues of globalization, daily lived experience and their points of inextricable intersection. Through Hispanic eyes baseball is an instrument of U.S. colonization that is transformed by subalterns into a symbol of nationalism when the Caribbean encounters in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic are taken into account. Through Hispanic eyes, baseball is a globalizing transnational reality that needs to address matters of corporate social responsibility, for example, with respect to players recruited in the Dominican Republic and the economic impact of MLB practices on Puerto Rican and Dominican Leagues.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher H. Evans, "The Kingdom of Baseball in America: The Chronicle of an American Theology," in *The Faith of Fifty Million*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Evans, "The Kingdom of Baseball in America," 38–40.

<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that Ken Burns' documentary on the history of jazz has also been criticized for ignoring Latino/a contributions.

<sup>40</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 94.

Through Hispanic eyes, the U.S. national pastime is not just a game with no larger point or meaning. Some would claim "there is no point to hitting a baseball . . . beyond the fact that it is intrinsically enjoyable, satisfying and beautiful. Work is not accomplished, mouths are not fed, the world is not improved."<sup>41</sup> Yet Hispanic eyes recognize "a passion shared by the thousands of impoverished boys who stake their lives on a deeper more poignant version of the American dream where baseball is their only hope."<sup>42</sup> Through Hispanic eyes, the Danny Almonte episode remains an example of disconnected discourse, interpreted in the U.S. through the lens of a flawed and narrow narrative with no appreciation for Dominican lived experience within a global context.

*Disconnected Discourse:*

*Views from the Luxury Boxes vs. Life in the Bleachers*

The furor in the U.S. that surrounded Almonte's age discrepancy reflects a pervasive and uncritical acceptance of baseball's national mythology and a failure to comprehend the implications of the sport's global presence and influence on daily lived experience. This was repeatedly evident in the language of the discourse, which was articulated within the contexts of this limited narrative and framed by U.S. experience, presumed normative, and in the ethical evaluation of the alleged offending behavior, and the subsequent assignment of blame.

The focus of many of the charges of unethical behavior was Danny's father Felipe de Jesús Almonte. The charges leveled against him demonstrated an all too common tunnel vision that presumes one's own context is normative. For example, the growing concern in the U.S. regarding the negative role of adults in youth athletic programs caused some commentators to view Almonte's situation as further proof of obsessive parental involvement.

What a piece of work Felipe Almonte must be. He moved his son to the United States, falsified birth documents and kept him out of school just so that he could dominate 12-year-old Little Leaguers on the diamond. Instead of raising his son, he took advantage of him and turned him into a little cheat. He, and any other adults who knew Danny's true age, are pathetic, the worst stereotype of the Little League parent sprung to life.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> David Heim, "Picking up the Signs," *Christian Century* (December 7, 1994) 1149.

<sup>42</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Jim Caple, available on the World Wide Web at [http://espn.go.com/mlb/columns/caple\\_jim/1246591.html](http://espn.go.com/mlb/columns/caple_jim/1246591.html) (Friday, August 31, 2001. Updated: September 2, 2001).

Other commentators chided him for selfishly prioritizing potential financial gain over the long-term value of an education:

. . . the thoughtlessness of a parent, which has left a child without innocence and, worse, without an education. In his efforts to cultivate a player who would someday—preferably someday soon—command a salary of millions. . . . Felipe Almonte neglected to enroll his son in school for the entire 18 months they both have lived in this country. According to his father, Danny has done nothing but “eat and play ball” since he arrived in America. Did it never occur to Almonte that his son might not achieve his father’s nearly unattainable dream of becoming a successful career ball player?<sup>44</sup>

Viewed from a privileged perspective, it seems easy to impose dominant-cultural values on others simply because they enter the U.S. But self-righteous sanctimony does not feed a family or secure a future. Attributing selfish motivations to Almonte’s parents and finding as his father’s greatest fault his failure to enroll Danny in school reveals how out of touch U.S. sensibilities are with respect to the conditions of one of its poorest neighbors in the hemisphere. Furthermore it portrays either ignorance or indifference to the role that Major League Baseball has played in creating the environment that fosters the limited options that shape daily-lived experience in the Dominican Republic. Did it ever occur to some commentators that financial success is a relative concept? Danny Almonte only needs to attract the attention of an MLB sponsored Dominican baseball academy to make more money playing ball as a teenager than most make in a year.

Even Dominican players who fail to reach the major leagues and play instead in American minor league cities are considered financially successful, and those who remain in the baseball academies for two years and do not play in North America at all still earn more money than they would in a decade on the streets or in the cane field . . . the young man who signs with an academy will receive a bonus and a first-year salary that together are roughly seven times his father’s annual income.<sup>45</sup>

Major League Baseball is a transnational entity, *béisbol* is an industry in the Dominican Republic, and the academies are outposts of colonialism, “the physical embodiment overseas of the parent franchise

<sup>44</sup> Danielle Stein, “One Father in Need of Some More Education,” *Cornell Daily Sun* (September 5, 2001) available on the world wide web at <http://www.cornelldailysun.com/articles/2947>.

<sup>45</sup> Alan M. Klein, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 59.

. . . it finds raw materials (talented athletes), refines them (trains the athletes), and ships abroad finished products (baseball players)"<sup>46</sup> The presence of MLB in the Dominican Republic has less to do with altruism and everything to do with business and the availability of a natural resource/cheap labor force, "because the island creates players born with the perfect combination of qualities desired by the major league scout—baseball know-how and a sense of desperation born in poverty horrific even by Latin American standards."<sup>47</sup> It's a story "of capitalism and cutthroat competition. It is a story in which opportunity is held out like a lottery ticket that most impoverished Latin kids will never cash in."<sup>48</sup>

In the Dominican Republic, education is often sacrificed on the altar of baseball to improve the lot of entire families and even communities. Compare the experiences of major league players, U.S. born Dominican-American Alex Rodríguez with Dominican-born and raised Miguel Tejada. For Tejada, a former shoeshine boy and garment factory worker from the barrio of *Los Barrancones*, completing school was not a reality.

No one from his barrio had ever finished school. . . . He didn't have college offers to use as leverage against his meager bonus, or agents who could protect his interests, or parents who could help him maneuver the land mines of modern-day major league sports. He was just a kid with precious few English skills and no other compelling options in his life but to play baseball.<sup>49</sup>

Alex Rodríguez, on the other hand, the number one draft pick in 1993, and the highest paid baseball player in the major leagues, was the top prep player in the U.S. He was able to negotiate a generous contract from the Seattle Mariners by threatening to attend the University of Miami if his conditions were not met. Rodríguez comments on the role his place of birth undoubtedly played in his fortune. Instead of educational options and guaranteed millions, had he been born in the Dominican like his immigrant parents, "I'm sure I would have been a top prospect but maybe I would have gotten \$5,000, or \$10,000. Or maybe \$4,000. . . . The point is, it would have been a much tougher road."<sup>50</sup> The difference between contexts is striking and their implica-

<sup>46</sup> Klein, *Sugarball*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Alex Rodríguez, March 12, 1996 cited in Marcos Bretón and José Luis Villegas, *Away Games*, 39.



tions for the future jarring, “if an American athlete—no matter how disadvantaged—fails in his quest to become a highly-paid professional, that athlete is still an American and has a far greater chance at making a decent living than a Dominican. Failure for him means becoming an undocumented immigrant in the United States or returning to a place like *Los Barrancones*.”<sup>51</sup> Even the unfulfilled prospects of the countless hoop dreamers in the inner cities of the United States are theoretically guaranteed an education through high school and possibly beyond as the ticket to the NBA is punched through college basketball.

In the U.S., the Almonte situation was described in terms of scandal. Even the usage of the phrase “say it ain’t so” in conjunction with commentaries on the incident raised the specter of the Black Sox scandal and the fixing of the 1919 World Series. The phrase, initially framed as the question of a child to “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, one of the alleged game-fixing ball players, is a stroke of imaginative journalism that some debate is fabricated propaganda that has perpetuated the scapegoating of Jackson.<sup>52</sup> This allusion harkens the popular imagination back to the Black Sox scandal intentionally creating a connection between Almonte and another event where the purity of baseball had been sullied by some form of cheating. The challenge posed to the grand narrative that supposedly shook baseball out of its innocence is reflected in the words of Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the judge who heard the case: “Baseball is something more than a game to an American boy. It is his training field for life work. Destroy his faith in its squareness and honesty and you have destroyed something more; you have planted suspicion of all things in his heart.”<sup>53</sup>

These sentiments return in the rhetoric surrounding Danny Almonte. The purity and moral simplicity once ascribed to professional baseball comes under a degree of scrutiny in a postmodern age exposed to millionaire owners and players, though the irony of the sport’s traditional relationships with gambling, unsightly spitting, alcohol, drugs and tobacco (both in sponsorship and in the notorious behavior of players including some with iconic status) is often minimized. The myth shifts focus and Little League becomes the new age morality play. Here too the disconnect between the privileged view from the U.S. luxury boxes and the daily lived experiences of those in the global bleacher seats is underscored.

<sup>51</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 36.

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed discussion of this see William R. Herzog II, “From Scapegoat to Icon: The Strange Journey of Shoeless Joe Jackson,” in *The Faith of Fifty Million*, 97–141.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns, *Baseball: An Illustrated History* (New York: Knopf, 2000) 142–3.

Age scams plague Little League competition in the Caribbean region, particularly in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, where it feeds into the local industry of developing major league players for the U.S. market. But in America, the land of opportunity, perhaps no institution tries to speak more eloquently of getting a chance than Little League baseball. Girls and boys who won't be good enough for high school ball, never mind the pros, have their turn at bat and also the opportunity to build friendships, learn teamwork, grow.<sup>54</sup>

Losing teams do not make it to the Little League World Series and not all teams are created equally with access to fields, sponsors, finances, uniforms and equipment. Opportunities for youth to learn teamwork and grow do not draw a TV audience with ratings higher than some pro sporting events. Little League is a business and corporate sponsors follow the money. It is probably worth noting that the quality of the equipment and field used by the Bronx team only improved as they became known for their winning and determined ways.

The preoccupation in the U.S. with the perceived lying aspect of the Almonte situation further highlights the hypocrisy of the national pastime. The opening of spring training 2002 brought a flurry of activity regarding visa problems and age corrections. As a matter of illustration the following Dominican players were among the more than fifty in the major and minor leagues who aged post-Almonte, among them Rafael Furcal (Atlanta Braves); Timo Perez (New York Mets); Ruben Francisco (Baltimore Orioles); Ramon Ortiz (California Angels); Bartolo Colón, (Cleveland Indians); Delvi Cruz (San Diego Padres); Neifi Perez (Kansas City Royals); and Ed Rogers (Baltimore Orioles).<sup>55</sup> Why are these cases not regarded as "another sad saga of an overreaching parent undermining a cherished institution and abusing the trust of others"?<sup>56</sup>

What if these cases, as with Almonte's, demonstrate a pattern of response to the systemic injustices associated with the Dominican Republic's long and complicated relationship with the United States and baseball? What happens when consideration is given to the reasons behind age deception practiced by Dominicans? While a different standard of recordkeeping and reporting account for some discrepan-

<sup>54</sup>Robert Sullivan, "The Bronx Bummer," *Time* (September 10, 2001) 56.

<sup>55</sup>"Spring Training Roundup," *Washington Post* (February 16, 2002) D3. "Mets Notebook," *Daily News* (February 22, 2002) 98. Dave Sheinin, "O's Dominican Players Encounter Visa Problems," *Washington Post* (February 23, 2002) D4. Peter Slevin and David Sheinin, "An Age-Old Numbers Game," *Washington Post* (March 2, 2002) D1, D3. David Sheinin, "Rogers & Orioles: Older & Wiser," *Washington Post* (March 8, 2002) D3.

<sup>56</sup>"Say It Ain't So, Danny," *USA Today* (Friday, August 31, 2001) 11A.

cies, poverty's consequences such as malnutrition and its impact on physical development account for a need to level the playing field. A couple of years really do matter in the pursuit of the American dream, as the release of Marcus Agramonte by the Texas Rangers proves. He was an appealing prospect at nineteen but when it was discovered recently that he was twenty-five, he suddenly became marginal.<sup>57</sup> For many of the Dominican aspiring athletes *béisbol* is about work, putting food in many mouths and improving their local piece of the world. This interrelationship is captured in the expression that "embodies their competition against Americans for the precious spots on big league rosters: *Quitandoles la comida*."<sup>58</sup> The view from the bleachers reveals that for some baseball is about the basics necessary for survival.

Deception with regard to age, when interpreted through the lens of daily-lived experiences of Dominican youth and their families may well be responses of accommodation and resistance. Parallels can be drawn with Brian Blount's discussions of African American slaves and the moral distinction they made between "stealing" and "taking." "It was wrong to 'steal' something from another slave; it was, however, not only appropriate but also moral to 'take' from an owner . . . the underpinning came from their understanding of a God who could not tolerate the indignity of their oppression and who approved of whatever actions were necessary to survive it."<sup>59</sup> Blount cites the testimony of former slave Henry Bibb as an example: "I hold that a slave has a moral right to eat and drink and wear all that he needs, and that it would be a sin on his part to suffer and starve in a country where there is plenty to eat and wear within his reach. I consider that I had a just right to what I took, because it was the labor of my hands."<sup>60</sup> Blount goes on to point out that the ultimate form of taking from the master was escape, whereby the slaves raised "their own ethical ante" and each flight contributed to "a growing civil disobedience against the slave system" that each individual owner supported.<sup>61</sup>

Through Hispanic eyes, the view from the bleachers suggests that perhaps the Dominican masking of age raises the ethical ante in a manner compatible with racial masquerading as practiced by Latinos

<sup>57</sup> Peter Slevin and David Sheinin, "An Age-Old Numbers Game," *Washington Post* (March 2, 2002) D1.

<sup>58</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001) 40-41.

<sup>60</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 296, cited in Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh*, 41.

<sup>61</sup> Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh*, 41.

and African Americans in U.S. baseball in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The U.S. preoccupation with racial categorization was complicated by the existence of Caribbean Spanish-speaking peoples. "Members of the Caribbean world who would have otherwise been considered non-white, if not black, gained certified admissions to compete in the Major Leagues by using the power of cultural and racial markers to reconfigure social rules."<sup>62</sup> The racial ambiguity of these Caribbean players subsumed under more 'white-friendly' ethnic labels as Latin or Castilian allowed them to cross over the racial divide in U.S. organized baseball. However the nominal whiteness this identification imparted did not change their marginal status confirmed by their use of the Spanish language. "Latino participation in racial masquerade in North American baseball is more complex and varied than the shorthand word *passing* would denote."<sup>63</sup> On the other hand the use of Spanish was employed by some African Americans to acquire the more racially ambiguous labeling associated with their Spanish-speaking Caribbean counterparts. Two examples are worth citing.<sup>64</sup> African-American Albertus Fennar who was recruited in 1934 and played with the Havana Cuban Stars was given the Spanish pseudonym Roger Dario Fennar and taught some basic Spanish by his Cuban recruiters to complete the masquerade. The creation of the all African-American Cuban Giants in 1885 also suggests creative manipulation of racial categories. While there is debate over the veracity of the claim that the players spoke gibberish to each other in an attempt to appear Cuban, the fact that they assumed a Cuban moniker remains intriguing. Adrián Burgos suggests that convincing others of the authenticity of the players' identity is not the most important element, "rather, the coy manipulation of the possibility of being Cuban made the masquerade successful and posed the most significant challenge to U.S. racial categories by inserting consideration of nationality and ethnicity."<sup>65</sup>

### *Return to the Table: Insights and Etiquette*

As Latina and Latino theologians reflecting from within our varied U.S. contexts, how do we remain ethical in our engagement? What informs our table etiquette? Who is invited to our tables? Who comes to

<sup>62</sup> Adrián Burgos Jr., "'The Latins from Manhattan': Confronting Race and Building Community in New York City," in *Mambo Montage*, 84.

<sup>63</sup> Burgos, "'The Latins from Manhattan'," 85.

<sup>64</sup> Burgos, "'The Latins from Manhattan'," 84–6 and 77–8.

<sup>65</sup> Burgos, "'The Latins from Manhattan'," 77.

our banquets? Whose tables are we invited to? Espín reminds us that any theology of grace is dependent on the daily lived experience of the theologian and his/her local community,<sup>66</sup> in other words, our first ethical responsibility is to acknowledge and recognize how each of our own respective and specific *vidas cotidianas* impact and influence our individual methodologies, foundations and starting points for reflection. “*Lo cotidiano* makes social location explicit for it is the context of the person in relation to physical space, ethnic space, social space.”<sup>67</sup> Theologies that emerge from U.S. Hispanic perspectives bear an integrity marked by an openness to admit that our voices are situated and engaged. Fernando Segovia writes:

at a fundamental level I have used my life story as a foundation for my work as a critic in biblical studies, as a theologian in theological studies, and as a critic in cultural studies. . . . I have relied on both the individual and the social dimensions not as binary oppositions but as inter-related and interdependent.<sup>68</sup>

I reflect on *béisbol* not as a disengaged scholar or obsessed fan. Growing up in the Bronx I had two career paths in mind that did not appear either impossible or mutually exclusive: catcher for the New York Yankees and Archbishop of New York. I was raised on baseball; my dad taught us to play; my *tía* worked for the Yankees, and to this day their games can be heard in the background at most family gatherings. Summer afternoons and birthdays were often spent at Yankee stadium, occasionally Shea, or tossing a “spaldeen” in front of the house. When Jesus failed to deliver, I asked for the intercession of the Virgin on only one matter: a baseball glove. Like many of the kids in the Dominican Republic I too fashioned a glove from cardboard (in my case six pack soda cartons) and played catch with a found golf ball in these homemade contraptions to simulate hard ball. The praying finally paid off on my twelfth birthday, courtesy of my father. The gender line was eventually breached in Little League but it was too late for me, no manicured fields of dreams for ball-playing girls in the Bronx: we made due with softball and punchball on concrete and blacktop schoolyards. I have become a fan of Puerto Rican winter league ball in recent years and count amongst my treasures numerous baseball cards, an old wool Yankee cap, that very first glove, and one Wilson field ball from Hiram

<sup>66</sup> Orlando Espín, “An Exploration into a Theology of Grace and Sin,” in *From the Heart of Our People*, 126.

<sup>67</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Fernando Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000) 155.

Bithorn Stadium, home of the Santurce *Cangrejeros*, clearly marked *Liga de béisbol profesional de Puerto Rico*.

My concern for Danny Almonte in part arises from a shared youthful dream as well as a very intentional preferential option for the young. My commitment to this often-forgotten option, also proclaimed by CELAM at Puebla, is fueled by a profound respect for the young and their dignity, a solidarity deepened over eighteen consecutive years of interaction. The ethics of doing theology requires an honest acceptance of the inescapable reality that a theologian's *cotidiano* does impact the way theology is done, theology is never a disembodied enterprise.

An openness to our own lived experiences and the claiming of our own voices should in turn open us to the value of the stories, voices, and daily lived experiences of others. The privileging of *lo cotidiano*, by theologies done from the perspectives of U.S. Latinas and Latinos, can be heard today echoed in the challenges that emerge from those who toil from disparate marginalities in other disciplines. Gay U.S. philosopher Sean O'Connell reminds us that truly liberative praxis

cannot operate within the limits of promoting some normative ideal, or even of evaluating possible candidates for social action, such as the realization of social justice. Rather, it must expand its parameters to engage critically the stories informing people's lives, stories that likewise inform the social ideals pursued. For such critical engagement to occur, it must promote strategies that encourage vulnerability to the stories of others, for one cannot engage critically what one does not take seriously.<sup>69</sup>

The ethics of doing theology requires an appreciation for the reality that we do not toil alone and if we take seriously our engagement with the stories and contexts of others' lived experiences then we must be prepared to travel outside our own narrow contexts and venture into possible zones of discomfort.

The realization that in effect all theologies really are local and contextual and that the macro and micro, global and local, globalizing and daily lived are inextricably connected serves as correctives for tendencies that universalize the particular or that demonize and/or romanticize either side of these equations. Contextual theologies, like those that have arisen from the reflections of U.S. Hispanic theologians, unmask claims of those who confuse their particularity as normative.<sup>70</sup> However, as contextual theologians we too must avoid the very temp-

<sup>69</sup> Sean P. O'Connell, *Outspeak: Narrating Identities That Matter* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001) 91.

<sup>70</sup> The most recent work of Orlando Espín is especially promising in articulating these concerns.

tation we seek to address. African-American theologian Blount, at the conclusion of his book on New Testament ethics, honestly admits that the temptation to substitute a different cultural lens in place of the dominant lens, even a more liberating lens from a marginalized perspective, and to make it the source for drawing normative ethics would merely perpetuate what he calls the “monologue” method.

Though key players would have changed places . . . it would nonetheless have been ethics from a single lens masquerading as ethics for all. It may come to the point that liberation ethics does have such universal possibilities. But this is a conclusion that should be reached through conversation across cultural borders, not as has been historically the case, mandated as “ethical” from one culture to all others.<sup>71</sup>

The ethics of doing theology demands that we appreciate theologies’ universalizing function while comprehending the distinction between universalizing and totalizing. In the words of Schreiter, this entails the ability of theology “to speak beyond its own context, and an openness to hear voices from beyond its own boundaries. Universalizing is not totalizing, which entails a suppression of difference and a claim to be the sole voice.”<sup>72</sup>

With an openness to hear voices beyond the boundaries, U.S. Hispanic theologians, like other theologians engaged in liberative praxis, have accepted responsibility for bringing to the table voices from the margins. The embrace of our situatedness within specific communities allows Latina and Latino theologians to give space for articulation by those who have been silenced or whose voices have been denied the power—or their language the sophistication—to capture the attention all rightly deserve—and need—to be heard. Bringing voices to the table, insuring access, is not the same as speaking *for* or *in place of* those who need to be heard and heeded. Jean-Pierre Ruíz notes

if our theologies are going to make a difference in redressing the multiple structural and institutional oppressions of women, then we must do more, lest we continue to be even unwittingly complicit through silence and neglect. At the same time, our advocacy must avoid the sort of patronizing behavior by which Latino male theologians claim to speak *for* Latinas in ways that keep them from speaking *for themselves*.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh*, 187.

<sup>72</sup> Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Jean-Pierre Ruíz, “The Current State of Latina/o Theological Research: A Catholic Perspective, from *We Are a People* to *From the Heart of Our People*” (unpublished paper presented at “Grounding the Next American Century: A National Conference on Funding Latino/a Theological Research,” Center for the Study of

This is an issue with which even those who themselves belong to doubly marginalized communities grapple. Isasi-Díaz writes, "I have always been concerned not only about speaking 'for' all Latinas but even as speaking 'for' any Latina. But the fact is that because *mujerista* theology is about creating a public voice, there is no other way to proceed but to speak whether 'as' or 'for.'" <sup>74</sup> Gay philosopher O'Connell proposes another direction for liberative praxis:

it must engage in enabling those who have no voice and who have no language that can do justice to the stories that they might tell to gain voice and to appropriate language, which in turn means enabling the speakers in society to hear the silence required for listening and to develop an attunement to the disruptive power of poetry at work in transformative stories. <sup>75</sup>

Even the creation of space for marginalized voices to speak or be heard is not without nuances of privilege, as Sharon Ringe reminds us, "autonomy of agency or voice becomes even more complex. The very notion that we are in a position to 'let' other women speak for themselves maintains them in their role as 'subalterns.' Their speech is still instrumental to others' projects, even as that speech itself is channelled through the research and analyses of those others." <sup>76</sup>

The ethics of doing theology requires that we not further marginalize nor unwittingly perpetuate the very cycles of injustice we claim to challenge as theologians who are engaged in struggles for liberation with communities who often are on the margins. This is most difficult especially in addressing the absence of those whose voices lack sophistication or even coherence. However, creating public space for discourse, insuring access, and in limited circumstances representing others who have entrusted us with that responsibility, require the cultivation of the habit of listening. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once observed that ministers—and I would add theologians—"so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others; they forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking." <sup>77</sup> While much attention has been given to bringing the voices of the mar-

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Popular Catholicism, University of San Diego, February 25–26, 2000) 15, as cited in María Pilar Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theologies: Central Features," in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 6.

<sup>75</sup> O'Connell, *Outspeak*, 91.

<sup>76</sup> Sharon H. Ringe, "Places at the Table: Feminist and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 139.

<sup>77</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper, 1954) 97.



ginalized to the table, less has been done to shift the burden of responsibility to those who must do the hearing and listening. If we are to be ethical then we must take care to listen so as not to misrepresent what is being said or to reinterpret it through the lenses of our own agendas. The example of some in the loosely constructed antiglobalization movement serves to illustrate the point. "While often their protests may be made on behalf of the poor, some of what they oppose is what the marginal and poor want to see happen—economic expansion, more and cheaper consumer goods, wider access to the middle class affluence which many Americans experience."<sup>78</sup>

If we are to be ethical, then we must realize that even with the best of intentions we too can participate or collude in the process of silencing those very voices we hope to uphold. A tour group at an Immigration and Naturalization Service detention camp on the El Paso–Juárez border made its way through the medical clinic. The tourists were theologians engaged in *pastoral en conjunto*; their guide was a hardworking chaplain, and the current attraction was an examining room with a gregarious and dedicated medical professional. Left invisible and voiceless in plain sight, a young man sat on an examining table with a thermometer in his mouth. A lively conversation continued around him with no acknowledgment of his presence and no recognition that his privacy and dignity were in effect violated. He appeared to be no more than a teenager, invisible and nameless even to those who were most aware and even committed to justice at the borders.

Theologies emerging from U.S. Hispanic perspectives have been proactive in elevating the popular—that which is of the people—as a legitimate source of theological reflection, as locus of critiques of systemic injustices and as a means of hope fostering survival, often amidst dehumanizing conditions. We must take care not to limit the purview of what is considered popular and worthy of reflection to overt expressions of religious devotion. As the example of *béisbol* demonstrates, we cannot afford a complacency that allows religious language and theological reflection to remain restricted to the articulations of males operating from exclusively dominant-cultural U.S. contexts. *Béisbol* was, is and remains a significant part of pan-Latino identity and resistance to victimization across the Americas. "Consequently, whether as fans or as players, participation in baseball cultivated a sense of pride and commonality and helped assuage the toll of physical relocation, economic exploitation, and racialization in U.S. society."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup>Kenneth Himes, "Globalization's Next Phase," *Origins* 32 (2002) 21.

<sup>79</sup>Burgos, "'The Latins from Manhattan': Confronting Race and Building Community in New York City," in *Mambo Montage*, 76.

If we are to be ethical in the doing of our theologies, then we must remain open to other revelatory expressions within our own daily lived experiences and those of the communities to whom we are accountable. At the same time, that openness cannot be naive or uncritical. Popular expressions also participate in sinful structures as the interconnectedness of baseball and *béisbol* demonstrates. Globalization does not just happen to people, it is integrated within our daily lived experiences, and in turn, those experiences with their needs and wants feed the global marketplace. The fluidity between global and local, globalizing forces and daily-lived expectations cannot be underestimated. For example the colonizing impact of Major League Baseball in the Dominican Republic goes under challenged precisely because there appears to be little benefit in biting the hand that feeds. If poverty is the catalyst, then exploitation is its byproduct. Baseball dreams are first nurtured in the home. Academies, while sponsored by MLB, are dependent on local Dominican baseball experts and entrepreneurs. Professional baseball salaries feed the local economy. Sammy Sosa is both the source of hurricane relief efforts and the sponsor of his own baseball academy. A young boy is publically persecuted for his sin of age deception while jokes are made on televised MLB broadcasts about the number of cakes a recently outed professional Dominican ballplayer should receive on his birthday. While a number of high profile and very rich Dominican ballplayers are prominently featured throughout the major leagues, who cares about what happens to the ninety-ninety-five percent of all foreign-born players signed to professional contracts yet cut before making it in the *Grandes Ligas*? Where is the outrage from *la comunidad*?

By its very nature, the table metaphor implies exclusion. Tables can fit only so many guests. At the same time, tables create conditions for a depth of engagement not possible in other modalities. As theologians it is necessary for us to gather in and around a table that enables a level of sustained engagement, and as Hispanic theologians we cannot delude ourselves into thinking this table is inclusive; it is not. That is not necessarily negative, since inclusion for the sake of inclusion is not a value. "Inclusion touches upon the deepest human yearnings for belonging. But if inclusion means a complete erasure of difference, does it still remain an ideal?"<sup>80</sup>

If our doing of theology is to remain ethical, than we must be respectful of the varying voices and lived experiences each of us brings to the table. We must be open to inclusion, open to invitations to other

<sup>80</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 10.

tables particularly those that stretch our comfort zones, and we must be hospitable to those we invite to our tables especially when it is most difficult and uncomfortable. We must also be honest and realistic: comprehensive inclusion is never really possible. The truly inclusive table is an eschatological hope.

The ethical questions we grapple with as theologians are concerned with what are we to do *now* and how are we to live in *this* in-between time, especially

in those situations where our gender, race, class, nationality, or other factor has placed us in positions of power, or where we have been invited as “tokens” to tables set by others. Banquet tables ostensibly for fun and the celebration of our success and acceptance become for us work tables where we learn a method of resistant reading [and I would add living] that breaks through the “trained incapacity” that is the product of our ambivalent status as colonized and colonizers at the same time.<sup>81</sup>

How are we to live? Perhaps like the kids in barrios across the Caribbean who “pick up a stick, dig their toes into the scalding dirt, and stand ready for their pitch . . . with hope and resolve, and with all their hearts, they swing as hard as they can.”<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Sharon H. Ringe, “Places at the Table: Feminist and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, 149.

<sup>82</sup> Bretón and Villegas, *Away Games*, 245.