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Sixto J. García

*St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, Florida*

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# Hispanic Theologians as Actors, Poets and Prophets of Their Communities<sup>1</sup>

*Sixto J. Garcia*

St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, Florida

## *Introduction*

This essay is a much revised version of a topic I first addressed as part of an essay published in 1992, in *We are a People*, a collection of essays on U.S. Hispanic theology, edited by Roberto Goizueta.<sup>2</sup> The idea is not entirely new. The idea of the theologian as a protagonist and prophet of God's People has been explored and approached in diverse ways by Latin American Liberation theologians as well as some U.S. Hispanic theologians elsewhere. Although I have drawn from several different sources, the main idea was initiated by Robert Schreiter's classic work on contextual theologies.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to offer some considerations of method concerning my exposition. First, the phrase or label "Hispanic theology" requires an explanation. Hispanic theology is the concrete, specific mode of engaging in rational, critical reflection on God's self-communication to humanity as experienced in and through Hispanic cultural and historical categories. Hispanic theology is a local, contextual theology. It is one concrete mode of practicing theology. The legitimacy of Hispanic theology as a way of doing critical theological reflection is predicated on the same principle that legitimize African American, Native American, African, Asian, and European theologies. This principle says that women and men who are the recipients of God's revelation do not exist as abstract, non-historical, non-cultural beings, but rather, as indicated above, as very concrete and identifiable historical and cultural beings.

<sup>1</sup>This paper was originally presented on April 6, 1999, as a lecture at Harvard Divinity School under the sponsorship of the Nueva Generación student group.

<sup>2</sup>Sixto J. Garcia, "Hispanic Approach to Trinitarian Theology: The Dynamics of Celebration, Reflection and Praxis," in Roberto Goizueta, ed., *We are a People: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986) 18-19.

The theologian, then, can only practice his/her craft by interpreting the history and culture that the men and women who claim to experience the self-disclosure of the sacred live within.

My next observation flows from the first: what I will say about and predicate of Hispanic theology and theologians will be, for the most part, applicable to other contextual theologies, that is, to African American, Native American, African, Asian, and European theologies. This leads me to my next consideration: I will appeal to Non-Hispanic as well as to Hispanic sources. My choice is dictated by several considerations. First, I submit that Hispanic theologians are not above and beyond the demands of the wider and global theological tradition, that requires an ongoing dialogue across cultural and historical boundaries. Second, Hispanic theology will always benefit by the critical and delicate retrieval and reformulation of categories from other theological traditions. Finally, I make no pretensions to finality and definitiveness in this presentation. It is, indeed, it cannot help but be, incomplete and open-ended, and begging to be enriched and corrected by the critique and response following my delivery.

### *The Hispanic Theologian as a Participant in His or Her Community*

The first point I would like to consider is the Hispanic theologian as a participant in his/her community. At first blush, this would seem to be a self-evident proposition: the Hispanic theologian cannot write from the peripheral comfort of a computer-heavy room, theological and emotional light-years from the anguish and yearning of his/her people. Hispanic, and indeed, any form of theology, presupposes an awareness of the faith-experience, or if you will, the presence of the sacred experienced by the people. Yet, for the Hispanic theologian, the demands of his/her participation are not always clearly set forth. Allow me to attempt to do so in this section of this essay.

The Hispanic theologian must provide a voice for his or her community. At first glance, this sounds arrogant and pretentious. How can a theologian, even a Hispanic theologian, *provide* a voice to the vicissitudes, sufferings and celebrations of a community, since the primary voice she must listen to is not hers, but the voice of the community? We must, then, qualify the pretentiousness of this first statement. The voice the Hispanic theologian must "provide" to his or her community is the community's own voice as carefully listened to, lived, experienced and prayed upon by the theologian, and then surrendered in turn by him or her back to the community, a voice now more deeply unveiled, that is, more clarified, more reflectively nuanced, more vulnerably intensified,

but the voice, first and foremost, of the community, not the theologian's.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, theologians must keep, in order to be responsible to their craft, a critical distance from the community. How to keep this critical distance, while being at the same time an intimate participant of the community will remain an ambiguity, an inevitable tension built within the craft of the theologian. To pursue this topic further, I submit that the Hispanic community, in its practice of popular religiosity, that is, in the totality of symbols and expressions it uses to celebrate and express its relationship to God, its experiences of brokenness, discrimination and journey, is indeed structured, constituted by God, as a "hearer of the word," to use Karl Rahner's designation of the Christian as articulated in his book by that title.<sup>5</sup> To paraphrase Rahner's own terminology (which, may, perhaps, be deemed alien to the Hispanic community's experience), the metaphysics of experience of the Hispanic community, always craving a redemption and a fullness beyond its present oppression, also affirms its deeper essential reality, that is, its ontology, as a community open to words of liberating renewal.

The participation of the Hispanic theologian in the dynamics of her or his community is not a matter of theological strategy, nor is it merely a matter of moral perception. The theologian must enter into what Hans-Georg Gadamer called, in reference to the interpreter of a text, *Zugehörigkeit*,<sup>6</sup> for want of a better word, belonging, the deep, essential, intimate dialogue of love and justice that the theologian, in full gratitude for the gift of his or her community, and the gift of being allowed to participate in its dynamics, must sustain at the peril of losing his or her theological life.

I would like to close my reflections on the participating character of the Hispanic theologian by briefly pondering on the thought of the French philosopher, Maurice Blondel. Blondel holds that the believer, and also the theologian, needs to experience and live religious truth as the ultimate test of their validity.<sup>7</sup> Blondel's arguments take their point of departure from the dynamics of the human will, which always transcends its concrete objects of desire and moves on craving an absolute answer to its unfulfilled yearning. In Blondel's terms, the willing will

<sup>4</sup>Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 17–19.

<sup>5</sup>Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 75.

<sup>6</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New York: Crossroad, 1975) 416ff.

<sup>7</sup>Maurice Blondel, *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Olivia Blanchette (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 314–62. Also see Idem, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 182–208.

(*volonté voulante*) always transcends the willed will (*volonté voulu*). Blondel accords priority to the category of action. For him, action includes thought and desire, intellect and will. Action is always transcending itself, always possesses a surplus or excess that points beyond. But its pursuit demands committed engagement. Blondel argues that the truth and legitimacy of dogma and institution are predicated on personal engagement. Translated and retrieved into Hispanic theological and other contextual theological categories, this excess or surplus of the human action, presupposing committed personal engagement, expresses the 'always going beyond' of the suffering and broken communities that demand the precarious balance of committed engagement on the one hand, and critical distance, on the other language expresses an open-ended yearning for redemptive liberation.

### *The U.S. Hispanic Theologian as Poet of His or Her Community*

I will readily confess that, in revising and rewriting my first essay on this particular topic, I felt considerably less trepidation than I felt seven years ago. At that time, perhaps through the limitations of my own ignorance, I feared that the category of poetry, as applied to Hispanic theology, would elicit negative responses, pointing mainly to the irrelevance of such themes for a theology rooted in cultural and communal suffering and limitation.

Things have changed. In recent years, a number of U.S. Hispanic writers, among them Alex García-Rivera and Roberto Goizueta, have voiced the necessity of rethinking aesthetics and poetics as necessary categories to interpret the theology and experience of Hispanic communities.<sup>8</sup> Among the non-Hispanics, I have already acknowledged my debt to Robert Schreier. Concerning the role that poets play in their communities, Schreier says:

The poets in the community, who can capture the rhythm and contour of the community's experience—cannot their work be considered a genuine local theology? Is not some of the more authentic theology, especially that which captures the imagination of the majority of the people, to be found in their work, rather than in theological monographs or in church documents? What role does the poet play in capturing the soul of the community?<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995); Alex García-Rivera, *San Martín de Porres: The 'Little Stories' and the Semiotics of Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 18–19.

Schreiter takes pains to distinguish the roles of the poet, the prophet and theologian. While accepting Schreiter's necessary distinctions, I propose a closer identification between the U.S. Hispanic theologian as both theologian and poet. To do so, I would like to consider the following points:

First: The language of poetic symbols is, as it were, the primary language of a community. Martin Heidegger and others have argued that poetic language is the *Ursprache*, the original language of humankind. This is the language that at the dawn of history expressed the original human experience of awe and wonder before mystery unfolding in the works of creation. If we accept this insight, we can then argue that poetic language best expresses the deepest and most foundational experiences of brokenness and suffering, and this would certainly be reflected in the experience of the Hispanic communities.

Hispanic theologians, called to full engagement in the symbolic dynamics of the community, must be committed to affirm, articulate, voice the primary, foundational existence of the community as a community of symbol expressing itself, first and foremost, through and as poetry. The Hispanic community is the (often broken, interrupted and incomplete) poem of God's insatiable love for God's own people (again, this applies to other local communities). Paraphrasing the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, we can say that in brokenness, we dwell poetically.<sup>10</sup>

Second: The theologian's and the poet's language intersect at many points. Both theologians and poets will use, at one point or another, metaphor and symbol. I will first consider the use of metaphors, and I will accept, for the sake of conversation, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's definition of metaphor. A metaphor, of course, is a figure of speech literally denoting an object or idea is used in place of another, to suggest an analogy between them (computers have memory; a ship plows the sea). Paul Ricoeur argues that metaphors hold an inner tension that makes them more than "mere figures of speech." Ricoeur argues that:

. . . Metaphor is an instantaneous creation, a semantic innovation which has no status in already established language, and which exists because of the attribution of an unusual or an unexpected predicate . . . When Shakespeare teaches us to see time as a beggar, he teaches us to see time as. . . to see time like a beggar . . . *A metaphor is not an ornament of discourse . . . (it) tells us something new about reality.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, trans. Richard Sieburth (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984) 249. Hölderlin's original text reads: "Poetically, man (sic) dwells on this earth."

<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) 50-53. Emphasis mine.



The Hispanic theologian appeals to the metaphors that best retrieve the spirit of his/her worshiping community. Mexican-American communities, for example, may invoke and venerate Mary, the mother of Jesus, under the title Our Lady of Guadalupe, calling her "la dulzura que baja del cielo" (sweetness that descends from heaven) or refer to a bloody image of the crucified Christ, carried in a Good Friday procession, as "el rostro ensangrentado de Dios" (the bloody face of Christ). These metaphors, retrieved by the theologian, will speak of a deep reality that is not just a step or two removed from cognitional assent by the metaphor, but that are given, presented, as it were, by the metaphor itself. The metaphors I have just used as example convey and create, in the first one, a sense of consolation (sweetness) that is experienced as real, and in the second, the grief-filled awe of Jesus surrendering his life. The language of the Hispanic theologian, like that of his/her community, is suffused with metaphors begging for interpretation.

The metaphor, as Ricoeur says, tries to make sense of the more powerful category of the symbol. The symbol's power derives from its attachment to creation; the symbol. This means that the symbol always belongs to the realm of concrete creation and humankind. The symbol can be touched, seen, smelled, etc. Yet the symbol always communicates not only an immediate meaning, but something always beyond. The symbol always communicates, and is filled with, what it symbolizes. Yet, what it symbolizes is always *more*, in excess of, the symbol itself. As such, a symbol's immediate meaning is always transcendent toward its higher, and in a sense, non-semantic meaning, what Ricoeur calls the surplus of meaning. This surplus of meaning will forever remain inaccessible to the outsider, to the non-participant. Only one who participates intimately within the life of the community can attempt to enter into this surplus of symbol.

How do we retrieve and apply this to Hispanic theology? If I may use the examples I used before, and apply them to our idea of symbol, we can say that the sense of commitment, justice and love offered by the icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe constitute a vast surplus of meaning to what the icon itself might communicate to the outsider. The image of a bleeding Christ communicates totally undefinable depths of love and co-suffering to the people, that the oppressor or the indifferent spectator will not sense. This is related, in a sense, to what we said before about Blondel's theory of human action. In both symbol and human action there is always the surplus, the excess.

U.S. Hispanic theologians must first and foremost allow themselves to be encountered, attracted, summoned, as it were, by the symbols of their communities, otherwise they will remain outsiders, and thus, in a sense, participate more in a process of alienation than libera-

tion. The Hispanic theologian finds him/herself involved in this world of symbol that will necessarily be above and beyond the understanding of the non-participant. The theologian, then, to reiterate what we said above, prior to any reflective theologizing, must be an actor, a participant, one who enters into the world of the people and their expressions of suffering, joy, love and vulnerability. Yet, once again, the ambiguity proper to all theological practice enters here. The theologian can responsibly set about interpreting the communal symbols only if, within the necessary, intimate participation, he/she keeps a critical distance.

If we pursue this further, we may argue that the suffering, celebrating, oppressed community, as a symbol of God's presence, is a privileged place of the sacred. This epistemological priority that we accord the Hispanic (and all local, broken communities) is predicated on its identity as a symbol that possesses an *excess* or *surplus* of deep religious meaning that can be found in a privileged fashion in brokenness and limitation.

But if the oppressed, celebrating, and suffering Hispanic community is indeed a privileged place of the sacred, then the Hispanic theologian must say that the sacred dwells in the everyday of the community. Grace and life suffuse the brokenness and vulnerability of the people, not as a statement of indifference and complacency before oppression, but as an unceasing invitation towards liberation. Here the Hispanic theologian may hear the echo of Thomas Aquinas' principle on grace: *Naturaliter anima est capax gratiae*: The human spirit is naturally capable of grace (ST I-II q. 113 a. 10). The human spirit and the world that he/she participates in are capable, that is, in a real sense, dynamically open-ended towards grace, towards liberation.

This is a humbling thought for theologians. The dynamics of liberating praxis and its theological articulation have been set in motion by God's call to God's people, not by the theologian. Theologians concern themselves with the disclosure of communal reality that the community's symbol unveils poetically for them; they must allow themselves to be encountered by the symbols and by the inexpressible depths of reality that the symbol's surplus of disclosure power reveals to them. Only a poet can experience this *being-encountered* as the community's deepest identity, and only a poet can sing the deepest song of the community as liberating grace. A theologian who draws language from poetry can best voice and paint the realm of grace-in-brokenness that is the starting point of true Hispanic theology—of all theology. The theologian must humbly acknowledge his/her dependence on non-theological poets. Ultimately, the language of poetry is first, primary. It antecedes theological reflection. But, insofar as it speaks from the depths of being, from an inevitable metaphysical origin, poetry will always be, in a



sense, theological. The poetry of all cultures and ages displays this. In the preface to his translation of the *Popol Vuh*, the great Quiche Maya classic, Dennis Tedlock quotes one of the elder Maya daykeepers, or interpreters of sacred texts, of the Guatemalan highlands, where the *Popol Vuh* was written, as deprecating the separation between the divine and the profane that Christian missionaries preach. The daykeeper said: "Whoever makes an enemy of the earth, makes an enemy of his own body."<sup>12</sup> This anthropology is found echoed in the beautiful hymn-like structure of the *Popol Vuh*, especially at the beginning, in its account of creation, and at the end, in the hauntingly awesome "Cry of their Hearts."<sup>13</sup> These hymn-like songs speak of the emergence of humankind as lovingly crafted by the Plumed Serpent, to whom their hearts cry freely in joy and in despair. It is poetry, finely and delicately crafted, and yet it is also, in its own pre-reflexive, pre-critical way, theology.

### *The Hispanic Theologian as Prophet*

I would like to address the third point of my reflections, that which considers the Hispanic theologian as a prophet of her or his community. I would like to offer the following observations:

The title "prophet" may well be one of the most frequent, commonly used titles that Hispanic theologians, pastoral agents and people involved in liberation processes, inside and outside the Hispanic communities, use. The reason is so obvious it hardly merits belaboring: the process of reflecting upon and initiating social, political and theological redemption in and from oppressed communities calls immediately to mind the calling and ministry of the great prophets of Israel, and seek to retrieve it within our contemporary situations. While this perception is surely valid, and even necessary for a theological understanding of the Hispanic theologian as a prophet, it will require further anthropological and theological reflection to become permanently valid.

I would like to attempt a reflection on the prophetic action of the Hispanic theologian through Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of the face.<sup>14</sup> Flowing from the rich symbolic world of his Jewish tradition,

<sup>12</sup> *Popol Vuh*, translation and commentary by Dennis Tedlock (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) 14ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Popol Vuh*, 221ff.

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 187-253; Idem, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1982) 85-92.

there is a definite prophetic dimension to Levinas' understanding of the face as the symbol of his ethical metaphysics, that provides, I submit, a rich foundation for our pursuits. For Levinas, the perception (access) to the face:

. . . is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward as toward an object when you see a nose, forehead, eyes, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way to encounter the other is not even to notice the color of his eyes.<sup>15</sup>

The face is the most helpless part of our humanity, and as such it is a symbol for powerlessness:

It is the most destitute also; there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time the face is what invites us not to kill.<sup>16</sup>

We see the face, then, as a symbol, if by symbol we mean that which is filled with what it symbolizes, and possesses always an excess of meaning not accessible to those outside. For the Hispanic theologian sensitive to her/his prophetic vocation, Levinas' affirmation on the destitution that the face is and conveys discloses, in rich nuances, as a symbol is supposed to do, the exposed and infinitely vulnerable face of the community, "as if inviting others to an act of violence." The face cries silently for help, and beckons prophetic involvement.

This powerlessness, vulnerability and brokenness of the face, the symbol of the broken person, and by extrapolation, of the broken community, speaks directly to the heart of the Hispanic communal experience. In his *Caminemos con Jesus*, Roberto Goizueta quotes the following experience narrated by the Dominican missionary Brian Pierce, in Lima:

I remember standing for hours as a young Dominican theology student, in Lima, Peru . . . holding a large crucifix, as hundreds and hundreds of mourners approached to adore and kiss the feet of the crucified Christ. The women wept as if their only son had just been gunned down by a death squad . . . Three days later, there was just a scattering of folks to celebrate the Resurrection. "They are obsessed with suffering," I screamed in my heart, trying to understand it all. "Where is the hope? Where is the promise of new life? . . ." Little by little, the scales have fallen from my

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *Ethics and Infinity*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 86.

eyes, thanks to the patient accompaniment of the people. It is now that I can see the failure of Jesus as a source for hope . . . There is no contradiction between the bloodied statue of Jesus in the Church and faith in the Resurrection . . . God is, like us, in a pilgrim journey. The Resurrection is experienced, not as final victory, but in recognition of the close presence of the living God who chooses to walk with and suffer with his people.<sup>17</sup>

Relating to what I said above, in the discussion of metaphor and symbol, the bloody face of Jesus speaks as a symbol, with the power of excess that symbols possess. The bleeding Jesus hanging from the cross and venerated on Good Friday by this community in Lima, is the vulnerable, broken face of the community, it is the community's symbol, crying to the forces that oppress the community: "Thou shall not kill, thou shall not humiliate, starve, manipulate, dispossess!" This face cannot be captured by systems or concepts; it requires the non-conceptual beholding, the contemplative, pre-thematic awe and wonder that sees deeply into the innermost recesses of suffering being. Ultimately, the face cannot, should not be manipulated. The text of Exodus 33:18-20 is hauntingly suggestive: Moses asks God to let him see God's glory. God replies that whoever sees God's face will die. This means: the face—the reality—of God cannot be manipulated, twisted, forced to fit the perverted theology of the oppressor. The face of God will always be the face of the suffering God who journeys with God's suffering people. The face requires, from the theologian, the charisma to look into the deepest layers of the mystery of suffering, and somehow, paradoxically, beholding the face of a compassionate God walking the walk of hope with God's people.

Levinas emphasizes this point with insistence: the face cannot be reduced to definitions or concepts. It can never be the end of a process of speculative reasoning, that may result from categories or criteria that may hold the face in subjection. The face does not communicate a *content* (a prejudice, a stereotype?) that would seek to define it. The meaning of the face is . . . the face (the human being itself, above and beyond ontological conceptualizing:

. . . the face is meaning all by itself. You are you. In this sense, one can say that the face is not "seen." It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond.<sup>18</sup>

The face, then, is the symbol that unveils, but never fully yields, the mystery that the human person is. This mystery may be articulated,

<sup>17</sup>Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus*, 211.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 86-7.

babbled, perhaps, but never grasped. The awesome depths of human dignity, symbolized by the face, cannot be oppressed, mutilated, manipulated; they cannot be *killed*. The face, it would seem, is the highest poetry of the human person.

The destitution of the face invites the word—and the word, it invites discourse. Discourse, however, cannot be reduced merely to content (echoes of the poetic dimension we have just discussed?). Once again, the face is not what we find at the end of discursive reasoning on the human person. The face is a symbol of the powerlessness of the human person, with its own excess of meaning; as such, it can only be grasped, or rather, expressed, by a stroke of intuition, by an insight on being, hence, it can be entered into only in the immensity of a symbol offering excess of meaning:

In discourse I have always distinguished, in fact, between the *saying* and the *said*. . . . But the *saying* is simply the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The *saying* is a way of greeting the other, but to greet the other is already to answer for him. It is difficult to be silent in someone's presence; this difficulty has its foundation in the signification proper to the *saying*, whatever it is *said*.<sup>19</sup>

The saying, that is, the response, the participation, is already an affirmation of the other. The Hispanic theologian may then claim to fulfill, in radical vulnerability, a prophetic trust when he/she says (something) to the community, as a response to the cry of the communal face beckoning a liberating God to bestow justice and love upon it (here we dare insert a critique of Levinas' thought: it does not open itself adequately to the idea of community). To stand before the face of the oppressed implies a demand to respond, to say (something), where the act of saying will always exceed in signification the content of what is being said. Human words will always say more than they say, will know more than they know, will love more than they love, as the Christian theological tradition from Thomas Aquinas to the present, has said that human action always exceeds the categorical objects of the action. Thomas says: *In omnia cognoscentia cognoscunt implicite Deum in quolibet cognito*: In every act of knowing, the knower knows God implicitly in whatever is known (De Veritate q. 22 a. 2 ad. 1); and he adds, in this text, quoting Augustine: *Deum diligit quidquid diligere potest*: Whatever can love, loves God.

Levinas argues for this excess from the starting point of the face:

Now, in the face such as I describe its approach, is produced the same exceeding of the act by that to which it leads. In the access to the face there

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 88. Emphasis mine.



is certainly also an access to the idea of God . . . For my part I think that the relation to the Infinite is not a knowledge, but a Desire. I have tried to describe the difference between Desire and need by the fact that Desire cannot be satisfied; that Desire in some way nourishes itself on its own hungers and is augmented by its satisfaction; that Desire is like a thought that thinks more than it thinks, or more than what it thinks . . .<sup>20</sup>

The yearning for God's life and love, understood as the opening of God's own divine self-gift to us, always exceeds our conceptual and systematic activities. For the desire for *more*, be it liberation, redemption from social or gender oppression, or from self-destruction, always moves beyond our categorical desires. Ultimately, the Hispanic theologian acting as a prophet must be, primarily, he/she who can somehow create the space for self-encounter and affirmation, for liberating desire and begetting liberating thought, for a communal word that affirms, does not kill, the destitute and poor face.

### *Conclusion*

Allow me to offer a synthesis of this presentation: I propose that the Hispanic theologian (as well as the theologian of other local communities) is required, in a normative sense, to be a participant who dwells intimately within the dynamics of his or her community, and yet, is also called to keep within this living, active participation, a necessary critical distance. The theologian, ultimately, must ply his/her craft from the lived religiosity of her/his community; this means being sensitive to, and an interpreter of, the metaphors and symbols that communicate his/her community's experience of the sacred. This role of participant and poet finds its best expression in the prophetic mission and identity of the theologian, who looks at his/her vulnerable, powerless, violence-stricken community through the surplus-giving symbol of the face, and seizing its nakedness and brokenness in an act of vulnerable intuition, dares to look into the deepest recesses of mystery and being, and somehow see in these depths the face of a suffering God.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.



*Resumen:*

*El teólogo hispano como actor, poeta y profeta de su comunidad.*

Este trabajo desarrolla perspectivas expuestas anteriormente en un trabajo del autor, y publicado como capítulo en la obra *We Are A People!*, editada por Roberto Goizueta. El método observado en este trabajo es el siguiente: primero, explicamos teología hispana como una teología local, cuya validez se predica en el principio de que los hombres y mujeres que son los recipientes de la revelación divina no existen en un vacío, sino en momentos y contextos históricos y culturales concretos. Segundo, lo que decimos aquí del teólogo hispano se puede decir, en muchos casos, del teólogo en otras situaciones locales. Tercero, por lo anterior, citamos a autores no hispanos, debido al hecho de que la teología hispana no puede pretender sustraerse al diálogo con la tradición global teológica.

El teólogo hispano es un actor, es decir, un protagonista de la vida de su comunidad. Siguiendo la pista de Hans-Georg Gadamer, decimos que el teólogo está llamado a pertenecer de un modo íntimo a la comunidad, que en su sufrimiento y celebración es verdaderamente una oyente de la Palabra de liberación. Pero esto requiere que el teólogo hispano sea también una persona comprometida con la acción humana, con la praxis de la verdad, porque, siguiendo aquí al filósofo francés Maurice Blondel, solamente en la labor comprometida se hace verdad la doctrina y la teoría. El teólogo, sin embargo, debe también mantener, por honestidad profesional, una distancia crítica de su comunidad, que le permite confrontarla cuando sea necesario.

Robert Schreier ha hablado del poeta de las comunidades locales como el/la que articula la dinámica más íntima de su comunidad. Recordando aquí, por un lado, a Martin Heidegger, quien dice que el lenguaje poético es el lenguaje primario de la humanidad, y a Roberto Goizueta y Alex García-Rivera en sus trabajos de praxis estética, afirmamos que el teólogo hispano, debe ser, en cierta manera, un poeta, tanto en cuanto su teología le exige usar metáforas—que no son meras formas externas, sino articulaciones de nueva realidad—y símbolos, que son siempre realidades creadas que tienen *exceso* de significado, por lo tanto, comunican lo que simbolizan y más aún. Aplicando estos principios a la vida de la comunidad hispana, argumentamos que las metáforas que hablan de María de Guadalupe, o de crucifijos ensangrentados, dicen más de lo que dicen. La categoría del teólogo hispano como poeta, exige también la vivencia interior comunitaria para poder interpretar los símbolos comunitarios. El teólogo hispano, como poeta, es un intérprete de símbolos.

La sugestiva filosofía del pensador judío francés-lituano, Emmanuel Levinas, nos provee un fundamento para hablar del teólogo hispano como profeta. Levinas toma como símbolo de referencia la faz humana, la parte mas vulnerable e indefensa de la realidad personal. Aquí se oye el grito de ¡No matarás! La faz comunica un exceso de significado, inaccesible al mero espectador. Aquí nos ayuda a interpretar esta filosofía en contexto hispano, el relato citado por Roberto Goizueta de una comunidad de fe en Lima, que venera con intensidad al Jesus roto de un Viernes Santo, pero ignora el Domingo de Resurreccion. Para ellos, la faz ensangrentada de Jesús simboliza con penetración irresistible las profundidades de rotura de su comunidad.

La síntesis final nos sugiere las posibilidades abiertas que estas categorías le sugieren al teólogo hispano.