

PENTECOST AT TEPEYAC?

Pneumatologies from the People

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Introduction

For many years I have been discussing a number of questions regarding the defining roles of culture and cultural symbols, as well as the roles played by contexts of conquest and dominance, in the formation and development of Latinoax¹ popular

¹ In this book, breaking with my own past usage, I choose to employ the neologism *Latinoax* instead of other parallel terms, because *Latinoax* allows pronunciation and recognition by most of us (i.e., by Latinoax generations, families, communities, and persons), while also and importantly being gender inclusive, non-binary, and non-conforming—and because it avoids the possibly surreptitious self-colonization conveyed by “Latinx” in the name of “equality” and “inclusiveness.” Being “equal to” or “fitting in” should be defined by us, in *our* terms. Furthermore, we very much need to understand “us” without replicating imported prejudices, assumptions, or marginalizations. The people in our communities are “us” as much as (more than!) our scholars, and as much as those of any one generation. *Latinoax* is a noun, singular and plural, and also an adjective, while *latina-mente* is the corresponding adverb. These terms refer *only* to United States populations of Latin American ancestry; therefore, “Latinoax” is *not* synonymous with “Latin American.” The still frequent use of “Hispanic” as preferred term over “Latinoax” is problematic for two reasons: 1. It assumes that the way to identify our communities is through the conqueror/colonizer, thereby again surreptitiously establishing the Eurocentric as the best identity-defining category or grantor of our identity; and 2. It hides the continued and clear presence and cultural contributions among Latinoax of Latin America’s

Catholicism. The consequences for theology (and not just for Latinoax theology) are too serious to ignore or downplay.

In the introduction to my *The Faith of the People*² I hinted at some of the pneumatological possibilities that could be unveiled in a careful cultural and theological study of some supposedly Marian symbols. The present (intentionally brief) book continues those earlier reflections, but has no pretension of concluding them. Years of thoughtful conversations with many families, scholars, students, and others are reflected in these pages.

I think it important, however, to begin by offering the reader the personal context that made me wonder about the pneuma-

Native peoples and of the Native peoples of the US southwest, as well as the presence and important contributions of millions of African slaves and their descendants. The post-independence histories of the Latin American peoples have also made an impact on today's Latinoax, their cultural identities, and their communal histories. Nevertheless, "Hispanic" is an appropriate adjective when referring to those persons of only Iberian ancestry, or explicitly to those elements of Latinoax cultures and communities that are clearly and unambiguously Iberian. There are serious consequences for theology resulting from the present—and rapidly increasing—Latinoax demographic and cultural presence in US society and the US Catholic Church (e.g., Latinoax are already nearly half of all US Catholics, and this fact *doctrinally* disrupts the naïve assumption that the "Church" is only or mainly coextensive with the Eurocentric). The US Catholic Church (especially its institutions, bishops, and clergy) sooner than later must confront its assumed cultural Eurocentrism, and its evident racial (white-privileging) and ethnic prejudices—because these contradict the necessary and non-negotiable doctrinal claim that *the Church is the People of God*.

² Orlando Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), esp. 6–10.

tological possibilities in some apparently Marian devotional expressions—and their potential theological consequences.

I was born in Cuba and in very early adolescence arrived in the US. I grew up surrounded by Marian devotions: the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity, patroness of Cuba, whose basilica is in the town of El Cobre in eastern Cuba), the *Virgen de Fátima*, the *Virgen de Belén*. Obviously, family history determined which Marian devotional practices were to be important for us. But in each and every one of these devotions it was also clear that the focus was Mary, the mother of Jesus.³ She was held up as the first disciple of her son, as a model of Christian living, and as the one to plead with her Son on our behalf. No other human ever had or will have the privilege of giving birth to the Christ. But there was more that was much more central to our being a Catholic family: standing up for the marginalized was a non-negotiable, as were daily Eucharist, annual Ignatian retreats, and serious religious education—much of it thanks to the Jesuits who had educated my grandfather and my father in Cuba and with whom my father remained close, which also led to both my brother and me studying in Havana's and Miami's Jesuit schools. Life later

³ As far as I know, no one in my family has been or is a member of the Lukumí religion (“Santería”), frequent in Cuba and among Cuban Americans. Hence, I did not grow up believing that the *Virgen de la Caridad* stands for *Oshún*, the Yoruba *orisha*, although I have always known that many believe so, because it is culturally impossible to be Cuban and not be touched by, or aware of, the Lukumí religion. I am unquestionably respectful of the Lukumí and their religious traditions, and my not participating in them cannot be interpreted to mean disparagement.

brought me to the Dominican Republic (and thus to the *Virgen de la Altigracia* and the *Virgen de la Merced*) and to Brazil (and to *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*).

Throughout my life, until 1991, I lived mostly in an Antillean, Atlantic world. That year I moved to San Diego, on the US-Mexico border, and became a member of the theology faculty at the University of San Diego. I have remained on this border, even after retirement three decades later. Here I met the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, through the devotional expressions of both Mexicans and Mexican Americans. I have since married into a Mexican family, with members on both sides of the imaginary line that distinguishes, but certainly cannot separate, the two nations of Mexico and the United States.

I knew of Guadalupe before coming to San Diego, of course, but I had never witnessed the depth of devotion to her until I came to live among her devotees. For me, as a Cuban American, the devotional intensity I saw among Guadalupe's Mexican and Mexican American devotees appeared to be extreme—bordering, or so I first thought, on the idolatrous. How could anyone be a Catholic Christian and relate to Mary in ways reserved only for God? By 1991, I had already spent over a decade observing and studying popular Catholicism, but this Mexican devotion seemed too much! Until one day, three years after my arrival in San Diego, during Guadalupe's December celebrations at (and on the streets around) Our Lady of Angels parish church, in one of the most Mexican neighborhoods of San Diego, one of the grandmothers who belonged to the *Guadalupanas* women's group said to me, very proudly, "*Vea, maestro, ¡Dios se viste de mujer!*" ("Look, teacher,

God dresses up as a woman!”). At that moment, the proverbial lightbulb lit up, and I started wondering if instead of an overly exaggerated Marian devotion I had not been witnessing something else, very far from the idolatrous.

That moment led me to the pneumatological questions I first raised in *The Faith of the People*, and in a few later texts.⁴ I still cannot conclude my search for understanding, although this book will offer the reader an idea of where these many years of participant observation, conversations, study, and reflection have brought me. This intellectual journey is not finished.

This brief volume seeks to lead us to another possible understanding of the Guadalupe devotion. It also wants to recognize the limits and serious blind spots of many theological approaches and doctrinal assumptions that we have inherited from Eurocentric intellectual and religious traditions whose attempts at understanding the non-Eurocentric are conducted, at best, through a set of *lentes borrosos*,⁵ thereby leading to conclusions that are often insufficient, biased, or wrong. Guadalupe led me to question the need and possibility of another pneumatology—one that may lead to the subversion of hegemonies in this world. Guadalupe, I learned, subverts the assumed.

Before that 1994 Guadalupe procession in San Diego’s *Barrio Logan*, I thought I understood. But I clearly had not.

I will reflect here, however briefly, on human culture and power asymmetries, because all theology is human, cultural,

⁴ For example, Orlando Espín, “Mary in Latino/a Catholicism: Four Types of Devotion,” *New Theology Review* 23, no. 3 (2010): 16–25.

⁵ *Lentes borrosos* = “blurred lenses.”

expressed within the bounds of language, and inescapably crafted within the contexts of societies' asymmetric power struggles. In these pages we will study the possibilities and ways of *one* specific symbol that expresses faith in the Holy Spirit in manners both Catholic and Latinoax, but not Hellenic or Eurocentric.⁶ I will also reflect on the potential consequences of the implied pneumatology.

All pneumatologies, without exception, are limited and transient, perspectival, contextual and contextualized, stammering to understand and express the One who is beyond all human understanding or expression—and this attempt does not pretend to be otherwise. Think of these pages as “notes toward,” or “an outline for,” an inclusive dialogue on pneumatology, directly engaging culture, contexts, and social/ecclesial power asymmetries; but still a dialogue on pneumatology that I hope will point to the transformation of this world according to the core of Jesus' preaching.

For me it is important that by way of reasoned arguments, connections to broader issues, bibliographical references, and more, these pages elicit, invite, and suggest further thoughts, conversations, and life commitments. What I (or any other author) might propose is not and cannot be the definitive word on any aspect or consequence of pneumatology or of any other theological discipline. A contribution is only a contribution.

This is a volume within “western Catholic” theology.⁷

⁶ And I should also specify: in manners not androcentric, “white,” heteronormative, or hegemonic.

⁷ See Orlando Espín, *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 13–38. There I explain that western Catholicism, in my understanding—and demonstrably in

Having that acknowledged as the theological location of this book, we must also acknowledge the frequent temptation of western Catholic theologians to assume that there is *one* “mainstream,” assumed by many to be the Eurocentric (androcentric or feminist) manner or method of doing theology. What many theologians do not notice, and thus do not acknowledge, is that what most regard as the “mainstream” seems too conveniently coextensive with the theological assumptions and methods of the culturally and socially dominant (i.e., white, Eurocentric, male, heterosexual—and also, too often, white feminist).

fact—is a *perspective* within which (historically speaking) most western Christians have understood and “traditioned,” and still understand, tradition and live their faith. Western Catholicism is a way of “doing,” living, and praying Christianity, and only secondarily a way of “doctrinizing” or explaining it. These are the reasons why I am convinced that western Catholicism cannot be reduced to a single denomination or a single ecclesial communion. I prefer to include under the label “western Catholic” the Roman Catholic, Anglican/Episcopal, Old Catholic, and (most of the) Lutheran and Methodist ecclesial communions (as long as by “communions” we do not understand “ecclesiastical institutions” or denominations). Most of today’s western Catholics, according to this broader meaning of the expression, are in countries of the so-called “Third [or Two-Thirds] World.” Many are also members of “minoritized” communities in the countries of the so-called “First [or One-Third] World.” Consequently, “western Catholicism” is not coextensive with or defined by the dominant (white, male or female, heterosexual, Eurocentric), despite their pretensions and explanations, because “western Catholicism” (in basic western Catholic ecclesiology) *is the People*—the majority of whom are demonstrably marginalized, dismissed, and/or abused by the dominant, sometimes with the acquiescence of the institutions of religion.

Many theologians do not notice.⁸ And consequently, the absence of elements of the expected dominant theologies' "mainstream" in the theological works of the "unimportant" tends to be viewed (by those "mainstream" theologians) as if there were something "important" missing, or as if this were a methodological flaw. The present volume does not claim a location within that self-appointed "mainstream." Latinoax theology does not imitate, and does not need to imitate, what the socio-culturally dominant have declared as "necessary" or "expected" by conveniently setting themselves as the best standard of scholarly quality or methodological rigor. Engagement and dialogue cannot be construed (ethically and/or academically) as attempts at imitation or colonization. If theology is *fides quaerens intellectum ad transformationem mundi*,⁹ then the expected methodologies cannot naïvely reproduce and maintain the current power asymmetries in the world.¹⁰ The

⁸ This also implies that many western Catholic theologians forget—intentionally or not—the foundational insight undergirding the claim that the Church is and needs to always be "catholic," or it stops being the Church. This insight is not about widespread geographic presence but, rather, emphatically about openness to and inclusion of all, not as guests but as equal partners with equal rights and obligations in the same community.

⁹ "Faith in search of understanding for the transformation of the world." I am convinced that Anselm of Canterbury would have agreed with this expanded paraphrase.

¹⁰ The reader might benefit from engaging Antonio Gramsci's notions of "cultural hegemony" and of "intellectual." See Antonio Gramsci, *Concepção Dialética da História* [trans. of *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*] (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Civilização Brasileira, 1981); Gramsci, *Os Intelectuais e a Organização da Cultura*

transformation of the world is the goal—because that is the core of Jesus’ message of the dawning Reign of God.

Because I am a Latinoax Christian in the western Catholic tradition, I have written this book as a theological construct grounded in, from, and on Latinoax communities; but it is not just for or about Latinoax.

Readers familiar with my previous work and publications will notice that I bring up in the following pages insights and thoughts that I have discussed elsewhere before. This proved inevitable in this intentionally brief volume. The point of these pages is not repetition but the elaboration of one insight I shared in *The Faith of the People*, and for that purpose I employ contributions I made via some earlier work.

* * *

The several quotations with which I open this book have been and remain important signposts in my theological work and have guided this particular reflection. Each of them merits the reader’s consideration and reflection.

I again thank those to whom I have dedicated this book. They have contributed to my life and thought over many years.¹¹ I am particularly grateful to the Mexican and Mexican American extended families who have, over the years, shared their reflections on their faith and lives with me; they too

[trans. of *Gli intelletuali e l’organizzazione della cultura*] (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Civilização Brasileira, 1979); and indispensably, Luciano Gruppi, *O Conceito de Hegemonia em Gramsci* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Graal, 1980).

¹¹ See also the Acknowledgments at the end of this volume.

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