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RECASTING "UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY" FROM *LA FRONTERA* IN LIGHT OF THE AUGUSTINIAN ACCENT ON RADICAL PLURALITY

John Francis Burke
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Abstract

Protestant criticisms of Catholic social teaching have focused on the latter's undue optimism and its insensitivity to the struggle and strife that characterizes life. This article traces the roots of this argument back to Augustine's pessimistic political theory in *The City of God* and then as rearticulated by Reinhold Niebuhr in the twentieth century. As much as mid-twentieth century Thomists such as Yves Simon strive to counter this critique in their engagement of democracy, the Augustinian stress on radical plurality has resurfaced once again both in postmodernism and Samuel Huntington's accent on the "clash between civilizations." Therefore, this essay contends that Catholic social teaching by drawing upon the vibrant articulation of analogical spiritual imagination by David Tracy and the ethos of "crossing borders" stressed in U.S. Latino theology can illustrate how the disclosure of differences and the engagement between seemingly agonal alternatives can contribute to a greater universality.

Catholic social teaching, especially over the past century or so from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to the present, has been a robust contributor to discourses on social justice and the pursuit of the common good. However there is a critical narrative that contends that the key principles and positions of Catholic social teaching manifest an undue optimism and insensitivity to the struggle and strife that characterizes life. The argument goes that Catholic social teaching, especially when it comes to the issue of difference, renders the social world in a very organic fashion: plurality is recognized, but in a way that every sector of society simply has its place in the overall community structure, along the lines of a medieval corporatism. Supposedly there is little appreciation seemingly of the ways plural groups both transform and are in contest with each other. Thus, the

optimism of Catholic theology and political theory overlooks how much ambiguity, difference, and conflict are intrinsic to the human condition.¹

This article will assess the merit of this critique and then suggest how aspects of this narrative rather than undermining Catholic social teaching can be recast, especially through the contributions of David Tracy’s theology and U.S. Latino theology, to provide a more dynamic articulation of “unity-in-diversity” that is steeped in the ontological communitarianism of Catholic thought. I contend that, within the Catholic tradition, especially U.S. Latino theology offers an engagement of plurality that moves in-between agonal renderings of plurality on the one hand and static renderings of community and order on the other.

In the initial section of my paper, I present the above-mentioned critique of Catholic social teaching. Then, in the second section, I show how it is very much rooted in the theology and political theory of Augustine, especially as conveyed in *The City of God* and then revitalized in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr in the twentieth century. In the third section, I review counter-examples within the Catholic tradition that suggest there is more sensitivity to plurality than maintained by the above Augustinian critique. Whereas in these three preceding sections the focus is on the shortcomings of excessive unity, the fourth section acknowledges the need to incorporate practical strategies for dealing with political conflict into Catholic social teaching yet also cautions against the relativist presuppositions of reducing the engagement of plurality just to conflict in both realist international relations theory and postmodern political theory. The fifth section will then suggest how the emerging narratives of the U.S. Latino theologians project a dynamic conception of plurality in a way that animates rather than denigrates a substantive sense of community.

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The Critique of Catholic Organicism and Optimism

The critique of Catholic thought as organic and static in its engagement of pluralism comes from several sources. For instance, the document that initiates modern Catholic social teaching, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) draws upon the work of groups of socially conscious educated Catholics in the mid-to-late 19th century such as the Freiburg Union. The Freiburg Union, in view of rapacious capitalism on the one hand and the

¹ Jeanne Heffernan, “Acknowledging Ambiguity and Difference in Politics: A Christian Realist Challenge to Thomists,” in Timothy Fuller and John Hittinger (Eds.), *Reassessing the Liberal State: Reading Maritain’s Man and the State* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 2001, 87-98.

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communist rejection of private property on the other, aspired for a return to a medieval corporatism in which various sectors of society worked in harmonious combination in terms of a larger good.² Furthermore, the clear enunciation of Leo XIII at the end of the document, that the Church will speak out on social justice issues, though well-intended, did nothing to calm the fears that such pronouncements were a return to the hierarchical entanglement of church and state in the medieval period.

Even sympathetic defenders of the Catholic tradition, such as Andrew Greeley, articulate that the Catholic vision has an organic character – one that, in my view, gives advocates of pluralism from the Protestant, liberal, or postmodern persuasion cause to shudder. In discussing *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), for instance, Greeley contends as opposed to “the efficient, rational, mechanized atomized society” of the twentieth century, “it looks backward to an organic, ‘corporative’ society in which the intermediate networks between the individuals and the mass society (or the state) were respected, honored, and invested not only with the informal power they always had, but also with formal political and social authority.”³ Instead of the stark separation of the mass collective from the individual in the modern period, Greeley accents that Catholic social teaching renders persons “as social actors in a dense, overlapping, interlocking, organic network of relationships in which the individual is integrated more or less painlessly into the social whole.”⁴ Indeed, due to this corporatist focus on intermediate associations between the individual on the one hand and the state or large collectivities on the other, Pius XI had to fend off criticisms that Catholic articulation of corporatism was a rational justification for fascism. Greeley, on a positive note, considers the “messy, confused, uncertain, and unpredictable network of relationships” in the Catholic vision nevertheless to be one of pluralism.⁵

In turn, as much as Catholic social teaching has accented the dignity of labor and the importance of labor unions, there is a general leanness in church documents about the right to strike. Rather than articulating solidarity as a confrontation with those who control capitalist economic forces, the institutional church tends to emphasize that labor and management sit around the same table and collaboratively work out their differences. Even when church documents call for redistribution of especially land in the developing world, the method accented is for

... the institutional church tends to emphasize that labor and management sit around the same table and collaboratively work out their differences.

² Marin Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 5-17.

³ Greeley in Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 85.

⁴ Greeley in Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 85.

⁵ Greeley in Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 85.

governments to do the redistributing, when in fact many of these governments are controlled by the economic elites who are responsible for the ill distribution of wealth in the first place. Finally, even though community based organizers have had great success in the United States organizing church congregations through invoking the principles of Catholic social teaching, the strategies and tactics employed are coming from social science studies whose connection to Catholicism is limited, if at all.

However, beyond just the fear that modern Catholic social thought remains a restoration of medieval Catholicism, critics contend that it does not come to grips with the tragic and ambiguous in life. For instance, the Protestant ethicist James Gustafson contends Cardinal Bernadin’s “consistent ethic of life” does not accent that “adhering resolutely to the consistent ethic of life can lead to the suffering of innocent persons and in some instances even to tragic outcomes for the sake of morality itself.”⁶ In the same vein, Edna McDonagh, in commenting on *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), contends the document engages the world as simply a matter for liberal development and insufficiently addresses social sin, the evil that inscribes many events in human history, and the degree to which the world needs liberation, not improvement:

... Catholic social thought has a tendency to render the world in a very orderly fashion ...

And this from a dominantly European-American gathering whose members had been through two world wars in this century and still have to live with the responsibility of the Holocaust. The sense of the tragic is largely missing from its world-view as the cross is from its theology.⁷

Robert McAfee Brown, in turn, similarly adds regarding *Gaudium et Spes* that it renders the Gospel as completing “the life of natural man” and insufficiently captures that this same Gospel is “a challenge to, and judgment upon, that life.”⁸ Clearly, from this standpoint, Catholic social thought has a tendency to render the world in a very orderly fashion and downplays how both sin and in turn conflicting codes of ethics inject a great deal of messiness, if not sadness into this order.

⁶ James M. Gustafson, “The Consistent Ethic of Life: A Protestant Perspective,” in Joseph Cardinal Bernardin and Thomas G. Fuechtmann, eds., *Consistent Ethic of Life* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 208.

⁷ Edna McDonagh, “The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*)” in Adrian Hastings, ed., *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 110

⁸ Brown in Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 130.

The Impact of Augustine

The intellectual roots of this critique of the penchant for order and harmony in Catholic social thought lie especially in the thought of Augustine, most notably in *The City of God*, and its more contemporary recasting in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. Writing at a time of political transition and chaos – the fall of the Roman Empire – Augustine articulates a political theory that challenges the classical association of politics with seeking justice and subordinates politics to the larger concern of seeking one's salvation in the next life. Directly refuting Cicero's claim that Rome had achieved a true commonwealth, oriented by virtuous citizens, Augustine underscores the degree to which conflict and discord nevertheless characterized Roman politics. Centuries prior to Machiavelli's articulation of a realist vision of the political world, Augustine calls our attention to the degree that the desire for power, glory, honor, and material success animates not just politics, but human relationships.⁹

First, Augustine accents the sinful character of human existence. Even if we strive for just and righteous conduct in this life, he emphasizes such undertakings will more than likely be corrupted by our proclivity to sin unless redeemed by the grace of God. For Augustine, the City of Man, this life as we know it, stresses *cupiditas*, or the love of self. Therefore, it should not be surprising that earthly politics should be characterized by competition and conflict. The City of God, by contrast, he argues, stresses *caritas* – a giving of self – and is a place of grace whose full realization will ensue only in the next life. According to Augustine, although members of both cities share a common existence in the current life, those who devote themselves to a moral life and endure the many trials and tribulations in this life will realize the full amplitude of the City of God in the next.

In light of these "two cities," Augustine maintains Rome never achieved a true commonwealth because it offered false gods and pursued earthly goods. Thus, the role of the state, he contends, is not to realize an ideal classical order as in Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, but simply to sustain order among ambitious and rapacious human beings. The state, albeit rife with sinful inclinations, provides at best an approximation of justice. In other words, rather than trying to realize an ideal order, the

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⁹ My reflections on Augustine are very indebted to R.W. Dyson's analysis in his *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality* (New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield 2001),

state for Augustine serves to keep the peace and to prevent the complete disintegration of human affairs into chaos. Long before James Madison in *The Federalist Papers*, Augustine, realizing that sinful inclinations cannot be eliminated in this life, seeks to temper and channel the self-interested inclinations of humans toward a minimum order.

Christian political obligation, for Augustine, therefore is to submit to the state. Although he suggests that Christians can resist the state when the latter’s actions run contrary to the Gospel, Augustine articulates a political quietism. Because God intends the state to provide a discipline on the chaos of the City of Man, it is likewise God’s intention that Christians obey the state. Put another way, although we may catch glimpses of true justice and righteousness in this life, they will only be realized fully in the City of God. For Augustine, preoccupation with forms of government or extensive deliberation on what constitutes justice is not crucial, as long as the state provides a relative sense of peace and order. Therefore, modern Catholic social teaching’s accent on the possibility of pursuing a higher standard of justice, with all the consequent institutional and policy changes, seemingly is a futile exercise, if not rather naive.

In the 20th century the Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, updates and recasts Augustinian political theory. Reiterating Augustine’s caution regarding what government or other social institutions can achieve in terms of justice, Niebuhr specifically pinpoints the different threats posed by what he terms the “children of light” and the “children of darkness.” The latter, principally characterized by groups such as militant fascists, fully acknowledge the strife intrinsic to the City of Man, and therefore unreservedly engage in conquest as part of the “survival of the fittest.” The “children of darkness” make no pretensions about their aims nor are they seeking some higher ideal. On the other hand, the “children of light,” a play on the European philosophy that emerges with the Enlightenment, is too confident about the capacity of human beings to achieve schemes of rational perfection in this life. Be it anarchistic, socialist, communist, or even liberal politics, Niebuhr contends that the proponents of such perspectives are blithely unaware of how ambition and self-seeking can undermine these idealisms. The “high expectation” politics of the “children of light” is much more tragic, according to Niebuhr, for it does not come to grips with the political limitations of the City of Man. If the “children of darkness” are evil yet wise, the “children

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of light" are virtuous yet foolish.¹⁰

Niebuhr also amplifies Augustinian realism with his recognition that group life compounds the tendency of individuals toward ambition and willfulness. In larger terms, human beings almost inevitably seek to impose their order on the world instead of the one inscribed by God's. Building upon this insight, Niebuhr articulates the need for balance of power schemes both between political groups within nations and between nation-states. To borrow James Madison's language, since one cannot cure the causes of factions, one needs to design institutional schemes that control "its effects."¹¹

As a consequence, Niebuhr contends that the natural law approach, which is the principal philosophy informing Catholic social teaching prior to Vatican II, is much too optimistic about the possibilities of realizing true justice in this life and insufficiently comes to grips with the impact of sin in human action and politics. As Jeanne Heffernan summarizes, Niebuhr's critique of natural law has four points. First, that natural law has too optimistic an anthropology and does not have a "self-critical perspective."¹² Second, that natural law absolutizes "relative historical judgments."¹³ Third, natural law's absolutist inclination leads it to be "incompatible with the compromise and contingency of political judgments in democratic politics."¹⁴ Fourth, natural law historically has been connected to "absolutist regimes" and a "negative view of democratic institutions."¹⁵ Clearly, Niebuhr's critique provides an elaborate exposition of the contentions that Catholic thought is too preoccupied with organic order and insufficiently sensitive to the ambiguous and tragic character of ethics and politics.

Both Augustine and Niebuhr persistently remind us of the extensive differences, distances, and gaps both between individuals and between groups that defy cozy hopeful intersubjective interchanges. Seemingly, a fundamental "otherness" characterizes human relations that persistently defy cross-cultural attempts at understanding, let alone integration. Because of the ontological distances between people and peoples, the Augustinian perspective insists there will always be a propensity for strife

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¹⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 9-12.

¹¹ Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. *The Federalist Papers* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1961), #10, 78.

¹² Heffernan, "Acknowledging Ambiguity," 93-94.

¹³ Heffernan, "Acknowledging Ambiguity," 93.

¹⁴ Heffernan, "Acknowledging Ambiguity," 94.

¹⁵ Heffernan, "Acknowledging Ambiguity," 94.

and conflict in this life; therefore, there will be a need for a political order, no matter how sinful, to keep the peace.

Assessing the Critique

What should we make of this critique? Without a doubt Catholic social teaching is very indebted to a more Thomistic as opposed to Augustinian articulation of God’s relationship to the world and the type of order and justice that can be achieved. Writing at the highpoint of Catholic university life in the medieval period, Aquinas seeks to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Christian revelation and theology. More specifically, in terms of politics, Aquinas does discriminate between different types of regimes, both just and unjust, and seeks a common good that is more than just keeping the peace.

At the heart of this difference between Augustine and Aquinas is what both David Tracy and Andrew Greeley term respectively the dialectical and analogical/sacramental spiritualities. The dialectical spiritual imagination, closer to Augustine, envisions a God very powerful yet distant in a transcendent sense to the world; in turn the world is seen as corrupted by the negative propensities of human nature. Due to the conflict intrinsic to human undertakings, human beings need to be redeemed by this transcendent God who reveals his/her intentions in revelation and ultimately through Incarnation. Conversely, the sacramental imagination, closer to Aquinas, argues that there is an order intended by God for the world and that through use of our reason in conjunction with grace, we can come to some understanding of it. Therefore, through cultivating right relationships with each other and also with nature we can pursue, however imperfectly, God’s intended order. Consequently, the character of human networks and institutions are not simply sin-ridden, but are crucial to realizing a good, just order.¹⁶

But even taking the dialectical imagination on its own terms, there are ways Catholic thought manifests some sensitivity to the agonial critique. First, with regard to Thomism, Heffernan argues that Yves Simon’s articulation of natural law tempers “ontological optimism” with a “moral pessimism” that provides a substantive rejoinder to the heart of Niebuhr’s critique.¹⁷ Yves Simon, as she relates, does not employ a “catalogue of absolute principles” and contends that the ethical life entails “no easy

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¹⁶ Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 45-48.

¹⁷ Yves Simon in Heffernan, “Acknowledging Ambiguity,” 94.

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questions."¹⁸ In terms of politics, Yves Simon, she continues, accents the people as the foundation of civil authority. On this foundation, the form of government can be variable, but which certainly provides a justification for democracy in the modern era. The key issue remains that the government must be oriented toward the common good. Ultimately, the people retain the right to choose their governors and in turn remain vibrant participants in different levels of government. Contrary to Niebuhr's characterization of Catholic natural law as absolutist, as Heffernan captures, for Yves Simon, natural law stresses civil liberties, contests moral absolutism, and prefers persuasion to coercion. Heffernan concludes Yves Simon provides "an account of practical reasoning compatible with the challenges of democratic government in an age of pluralism."¹⁹

Indeed, Yves Simon, along with Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray, are the principal Catholic thinkers in the 20th century who seek to reconcile natural law thinking with democracy; in turn, their general philosophical deliberations have a substantial impact on the discourses of Vatican II. Indeed, as James Bacik puts it, Murray challenges the "barbarians" that "replace dialogue with monologue, reason with passion, and civility with harsh rhetoric."²⁰ Especially Maritain's notion of "practical consensus" and Murray's notion of the "growing end" are crucial to the task of confronting the challenges of pluralism in the modern era from the standpoint of natural law. Maritain, in the context of the discourse surrounding the 1948 *UN Declaration of Human Rights* and Murray, in his deliberations in *We Hold These Truths* (1960), contend that natural law provided a basis for civil discourse between diverse spiritual traditions.²¹

Second, in terms of U.S. political culture, U.S. Catholic groups have actually been able to pursue the aims of Catholic social teaching in the very diverse civil society. As opposed to a harmonious hierarchical and organic conception of the relationship of spirituality to politics, U.S. Catholics have formed a wide variety of publications and advocacy groups that have participated fully in the contest between interest groups

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¹⁸ Heffernan and Yves Simon in Heffernan, "Acknowledging Ambiguity," 96.

¹⁹ Heffernan, "Acknowledging Ambiguity," 97.

²⁰ James Bacik, *Contemporary Theologians* (Chicago, IL, Thomas More Press, 1989), 141.

²¹ Concerning Maritain's articulation of a "practical consensus," see his *Man and the State* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951) and *The Range of Reason*, trans., Pierre Brodin, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952). Concerning Murray's articulation of "the growing end," see his *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

that is so characteristic of U.S. pluralism. Historically, in contrast to Europe and Latin America where the Christian Democratic Parties were the political vehicle for articulating Catholic concerns, Catholic groups, both ecclesiastical and lay, have been able to mobilize effectively through multiple access points, especially in the area of community organizing.²² Anyone who has organized faith based congregations at the grassroots level, especially through the assistance of the Industrial Areas Foundation and PICO organizations, knows how agonal the politics can be.

Third, with Vatican II, Catholic social teaching incorporates a more hermeneutical methodology that moves beyond a “manualist Thomism committed to certitude, not understanding, veering toward univocity, not unity-in-difference.”²³ In this vein, those pre-Vatican II, neo-Scholastic approaches that render plurality in deductive, status terms vitiates Aquinas’ insistence that there are ethical matters that entail a thorough deliberation “of differing and changeable circumstances.”²⁴

This hermeneutical shift with Vatican II has five components. First, by articulating the Church as “the People of God,” Christians assume an active role in discerning how to engage social problems.²⁵ Second, by accenting the “signs of the times,” Vatican II maintains that history is “the place of ongoing revelation,” not just a reality in which “binding principles” are put into effect in a deductive fashion.²⁶ Third, post-Vatican II theology shifts from “defined absolutes” to a holistic approach that searches for objectivity “through personal histories, observation, memory, and general societal history.”²⁷ Fourth, love comes to supersede, not replace, reason as basis for moral conduct and the pursuit of justice, as reflected in Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est* (2005). Finally, as opposed to a “Catholic idealism” that isolated Catholic social teaching from the real world, Vatican II emphasizes that reason needs to be in “dialogue with experience, commitment, and social action.”²⁸ In sum, this more grounded-in-experience rationality is more hermeneutically disposed toward engaging radical plurality. A deductive manualist articulation of

A deductive manualist articulation of Thomism gives way to a more inductive, rich articulation of the sacramental imagination.

²² Joseph M. Palacios. *The Catholic Social Imagination: Activism and the Just Society in Mexico and the U.S.* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2007).

²³ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1981), 413.

²⁴ Philip S. Land, *Catholic Social Teaching As I Have Lived, Loathed, and Loved It* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1994), 208.

²⁵ Edward DeBerri, James Hug, Peter Henriot, and Michael Schultheis, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* (4th ed.) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 16.

²⁶ DeBerri et al., “Our Best Kept Secret,” 16.

²⁷ DeBerri et al., “Our Best Kept Secret,” 16.

²⁸ DeBerri et al., “Our Best Kept Secret,” 17.

Thomism gives way to a more inductive, rich articulation of the sacramental imagination.

In particular, the papal writings of Paul VI—*Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), *Justice in the World* (1971), and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)—offer a more cultural hermeneutical approach to issues of plurality and diversity. Substantively, these documents emphasize the preferential option for the poor and especially a decentralized pursuit of evangelization. As opposed to a static deductive abstract recitation of Catholic teaching, these encyclicals pay particular importance to the grasping of God’s purpose and order within the framework of the cultural bearings of particular places:

In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution that has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw reflection, norms of judgment and directives of action from the social teaching of the Church.²⁹

Aligned with this vision, over the past four decades subsequent to Vatican II a number of pastoral letters on social justice are written from various regional assemblies of bishops throughout the world, most notably the meetings of the Latin American bishops in Medellin (1968), Pueblo (1979), and Santa Domingo (1992) regarding liberation theology.

In turn, as much as Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) and *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), is more willing to speak of concepts such as the universal and transcendent truth, he renders his revision as fortifying, not vitiating, the elucidation of integral human development by Paul VI:

Benedict XVI... renders his revision as fortifying, not vitiating, the elucidation of integral human development by Paul VI.

The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development. This is the central message of *Populorum Progressio*, valid for today and all time. Integral human development on the natural plane, as a response to a vocation from God the Creator, demands self-fulfillment in a ‘transcendent humanism which gives (to man) his greatest possible perfection: this is the highest school of personal

²⁹ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), #4

development’ [internal quote from *Populorum Progressio*, #16].³⁰

In terms of the pursuit of inductive cultural hermeneutical understandings, Benedict draws attention to the reality that cultural intersections are much more extensive than in the day of Paul VI and therefore offer the opportunity of an “intercultural dialogue” steeped in “the deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of the various dialogue partners.”³¹

In summary, the Thomistic contributions of Maritain, Murray, and Yves Simon, the success of the contributions of U.S. Catholic groups and publications in a very pluralistic U.S. political landscape, and the more inductive, hermeneutical pursuit of theology and its implications for the political, socio-economic sphere brought about by Vatican II, suggest that the Catholic intellectual tradition and its social teachings provide a rich source of resources for dealing with contemporary pluralism. Contrary to the above-reviewed critics, Catholic social teaching can capably deal with the distances between persons and groups and the conflicts in human affairs.

Realist and Postmodernist Amplifications of the Augustinian Accent on Plurality

Still, the papal social teaching encyclicals largely make philosophical and theological moral appeals. By contrast, in Niebuhr’s work there is much greater recognition that power relationships at times entail conflict and at times coercion. Niebuhr actually organized auto workers as a young minister at the time of the Social Gospel movement and actually made systematic suggestions about how the African-American civil rights mobilization should proceed.³²

Indeed, Martin Luther King, in the course of his activism, came to realize that it was not enough to try to persuade the oppressor. King and the SCLC leadership came to realize, as made manifest in the protests at Birmingham (1963) and Selma (1965) that their nonviolent protest needed to provoke a violent response by segregationist law enforcement. This violent response on the part of police and state troopers toward nonviolent protestors would lead to media coverage that would incite people across

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³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), #18.

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), #26.

³² Thomas L. Schubeck, *Love That Does Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 145-46, 160-62.

the United States to put pressure on the President and Congress to pass legislation that would dismantle legal segregation practices.³³ This recognition of how conflict is an integral dimension of politics and that one needs to have strategies and tactics to deal with such conflict can be found in Niebuhr’s thought. This conflict dimension needs to be addressed much more deliberately in Catholic social teaching.

Conversely though, too exclusive a focus on conflict loses sight of the overarching Christian focus on how love and hope animates human relationships, not just in the next life, but in this one. As Benedict XVI accents in *Caritas in Veritate*, any pursuit of integral human development that is not animated by “the values of charity and truth” reduces politics in the era of global interdependence to a balance of power system dominated by the most powerful nations.³⁴ Indeed, two very different contemporary political theory perspectives reduce the dialectical spiritual imagination to just the agonal dimension of politics – realist international relations theory and postmodern political theory.

With regard to the former, Niebuhr had an intellectual impact on the realist school of international relations that emerges after World War II. In works such as *Scientific Man and Power Politics* (1946) and *Politics Among Nations* (1954), Hans Morgenthau builds upon Niebuhr’s checks and balances to articulate the following key principles of realist politics:

- free and peaceful societies are not just achieved through legal and moral norms;
- the pursuit of moral principles should be steeped in political reality;
- the complexity of international politics escapes a full scientific explanation;
- a perfect order in this life is not going to be established and one should not put too much stock in some inherent goodness of human beings;
- the pursuit of power and pride are frequently at the root of many conflicts;
- one should strive to achieve the lesser evil, not the absolute good;
- temporal peace and security should be the primary political and social ends;

... two very different contemporary political theory perspectives reduce the dialectical spiritual imagination to just the agonal dimension of politics ...

³³ David Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978).

³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), #67.

- the aggressive pursuit of power can be met only by countervailing power;
- one needs to pursue an approximate justice for this life and this entails using force;
- the world is a contest between conflicting interests and therefore it is essential to employ balance of power schemes for both domestic and international politics.³⁵

Essentially, since power politics will always defy an ideal, just order never as being realized, by lessening one’s moral expectations the nations of the world can counter each other in such a way that a proximate peace and justice can be realized.

Against this intellectual backdrop, Samuel Huntington’s contention in *The Clash of Civilizations* that there are nine disparate civilizations in competitive contention in the contemporary world, yet Western civilization can sustain its advantage through bolstering its alliance with Latin America, among other options, is very indebted to Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and ultimately Augustine:

Cold peace, cold war, trade war, quasi war, uneasy peace, troubled relations, intense rivalry, competitive coexistence, arms races: these phrases are the most probable descriptions of relations between entities from different civilizations. Trust and friendship will be rare.³⁶

The emphasis on civilizations, nations, and cultures in contest with the need for balance of power schemes to sustain a relative order again recalls Niebuhr’s admonition that God is not necessarily on the side of any nation and again that the best one can hope for both within nations and between nations is a proximate, not ultimate justice. The distances and disjunctures between individuals, groups, and countries reveal a radical alterity that makes conflict intrinsic to life.

This radical alterity also is vivid in postmodern and postcolonial discourses. These discourses call into question whether there can be universal norms or genuine “metanarratives” that are not in fact a group, a discipline, a culture, or a civilization superimposing its norms on “others.” As Michel Foucault is very good at capturing, as opposed to elites

... the real threat to personal freedom is the degree to which we ingest unthinkingly the norms and values of a variety of power structures ...

³⁵ William Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System: Classics of Political Thought and Modern Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978), 149-60.

³⁶ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

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manipulating the masses—an external imposition of power—the real threat to personal freedom is the degree to which we ingest unthinkingly the norms and values of a variety of power structures, whose proponents, if they can even be identified, themselves become likewise captive to these norms. In turn, as opposed to the claims by structuralists that there are identifiable universal structures that orient human conduct, postmodernism recognizes that there exists a plurality of structures and disciplinary norms that circumscribe our lives.³⁷

Therefore, for the postmodernist, freedom lies in resistance to these controlling structures without any aspiration to realize a set of norms or institutions that would cease this agonal contest. Accordingly, we are neither as free as a modernist individualism would contend nor are we as conditioned as a structuralist would contend.³⁸ The consequent accent on contest, resistance, and plurality is remarkably like the previously reviewed realist characterization of power politics, except that whereas realists look to balance of power arrangements as enabling a limited space of freedom to flourish, freedom for the postmodernist lies in resisting prevailing hegemonies. William Connally, for instance, following Friedrich Nietzsche and Foucault, articulates an ethical sensibility that accents “a contingent, incomplete, relational identity interdependent with differences it contests” as opposed to a realization of “a transcendental identity” or manifesting “obedience to a commanding/designing god.”³⁹ Once again, such emphasis upon ambiguity, plurality, and difference reflect Augustine’s agonal rendering of the City of Man.

In summary, both the realist and the postmodern renderings of ethics and politics cast a great deal of skepticism as to whether one can actually articulate a synthesizing perspective that is not a “mechanism of power.”⁴⁰ They respectively accent that a great deal of strife and contention characterize human relations and that underlying this reality is an ontological “otherness” that defies facile synthesis.

Still, what both the realist and postmodern perspectives miss (or choose to ignore) in Augustine, is the transcendent realm animated by a God of love. For instance, Connally seemingly thinks that Augustine was a more captivating figure before he became a Christian in so far as he wrestled with the leading Roman and Neoplatonic philosophies of his day.

... freedom for the postmodernist lies in resisting prevailing hegemonies.

³⁷ Leslie Paul Thiel, *Thinking Politics: Perspectives in Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Theory* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1997), 80-86.

³⁸ Thiel, *Thinking Politics*, 95-98.

³⁹ William Connally, *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 1993), 145.

⁴⁰ Connally, *The Augustinian Imperative*, 87.

By this line of thought, Augustine perpetrates a metanarrative—Christianity—when he converts and becomes one of the leading intellectual figures of the church. Indeed, the stress Benedict XVI places upon a transcendent truth, both in his theological writings and papal encyclicals, is in direct response to those who espouse conflict and relativism in and of itself. Still, the merit of the realist and postmodern perspectives is that they challenge cozy, comfortable articulations of unity that do not sufficiently engage the challenge of the differences that lie between us.

Having acknowledged that conflict is an integral part of the human condition, I submit that one can recast the sacramental spiritual imagination which informs the Thomistic heritage and Catholic social teaching in a way that engages this agonal plurality in a way that neither reduces human action to sheer contest nor repudiates this dimension through an escape to an otherworldly order. In this way, one acknowledges Augustine’s articulation of plurality, yet projects hope for worldly affairs in a way that rejects the relativist conclusions of the realist and postmodern perspectives.

For instance, a genuine unity-in-diversity manifests, in Tracy’s description, an analogical spiritual imagination that discerns unity and harmony through the power of negation provided by differences. Rather than occluding differences, likenesses and harmony unfold by embracing the differences:

So too the theological emphasis, clarified by some manifested focal meaning, will focus upon the similarities-in-difference in the extraordinary variety of reality ... the interpreter must note that the likenesses discovered in variety, the emerging harmony discovered in order are produced by the presence of those moments of intensity, the necessary negations: similarity-in-difference, the negation of any univocity, the manifestation of sheer giftedness, the concealment in every disclosure, the absence in every presence, the incomprehensibility in every moment of genuine comprehensibility, the radical mystery empowering all intelligibility.⁴¹

... unity-in-diversity engages reality in a way that culminates neither in complacent order nor in utter strife ...

Rather than running away from conflict, he continues, “the analogical imagination’s own internal demand for ever new negations of its always tentative order, its similarity-in difference” entails open conversation and

⁴¹ Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 413.

contest.⁴² But in contrast to the low-expectation politics of Huntington or the foundationless pursuit of ethics by Connally, the pursuit of a unity-in-diversity, as Tracy has depicted, ultimately leads to "the communal and historical struggle for the emergence of a humanity both finally global and ultimately humane."⁴³ Again, as attractive as Tracy's vision is, it too does not provide any consideration of power dynamics.

Nevertheless, remaining on the philosophical level, we can envision and pursue intersections of cultures and civilizations that neither subsume differences in a univocal "one-size-fits-all" solution nor reject this universal endeavor in the name of particular self-interest (realism) or liberating resistance (postmodernism). A genuine pursuit of unity-in-diversity engages reality in a way that culminates neither in complacent order nor in utter strife and in turn, grasps how the disclosure of differences contribute to a richer universality.

U.S. Latino Spirituality and Politics

In light of Catholic social teaching's "hermeneutical turn" toward eliciting inductive, post-Eurocentric approaches to social justice issues, reinforced by Tracy's theological elucidation of engaging reality through the lenses of "similarities-in-differences," it becomes imperative to examine the contributions of U.S. Latino theologians. This growing literature, which is informed by a heritage that has been wrestling with both the European v. non-European and developed v. developing world dynamics for over five centuries, is indispensable for charting a hopeful course for Catholic social teaching that incorporates the merit of the Augustinian agonal articulation of politics yet does so in a way that is integral to a communitarian set of human relationships.

U.S. Latino theology is a descendent of liberation theology, insofar as it stresses the preferential option for the poor and marginalized, especially in light of the politics of conquest that stem from the European colonization of both what is now the United States and Latin America. But in distinction from the first generation of liberation theologians whose frameworks are quite indebted to European paradigms, especially the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, many U.S. Latino theologians in the United States also draw upon the postcolonial emphasis upon articulating non-European responses to the Eurocentrism of colonialism and neocolonialism. Given the extensive legacy of both indigenous (Native American) and African spiritual practices in Latin American spirituality,

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⁴² Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 453.

⁴³ Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 453.

these theologians have a wealth of experiences to draw upon in articulating a *mestizaje* or mixing of African, European, and indigenous practices as a counterpoint to the Eurocentrism of prevailing Christian theology. This cultural hermeneutical disposition of this “native turn” by U.S. Latino theology furthers the decentralized evangelization espoused by Paul VI and the pursuit a global humanity ethic posed by Tracy.

In turn, U.S. Latino spirituality and theology, in contrast to its counterpart south of the Rio Grande, is forged not just by the legacy of the initial Spanish conquest of Latin America, but also by the nineteenth century U.S. conquest of Florida, the U.S. Southwest, and Puerto Rico. U.S. Latinos whether they are descendants of those who were conquered or are more recent migrants, are negotiating not just the intersection of Catholic and non-Christian spiritualities of Latin America, but the interface between this Catholic/indigenous spirituality of the Latin American world and the Protestant/Puritan spirituality which animates the ethos of the United States. The U.S. Latino experience is not only the frontline economically speaking between the developed and developing worlds in the Western Hemisphere, but is also a crucible between Catholic Latin America and the pervasive Puritan spiritual legacy in the United States.

In my judgment, the historical experiences of many Latinos with mixing cultures, be it the initial Indian-Spanish nexus or the subsequent Anglo-Latino nexus, has been conceptually rearticulated by the U.S. Latino theologians into an ethos of “crossing borders.” In other words, per Tracy, this ethos elicits a universal what?, very much through the intersection of differences.

First, in contrast to the conventional rejection of mixing cultures as leading to “half-breeds” and mongrelization, the Latino experience has been characterized by mixing and matching identities—what Fernando Segovia terms “a radical sense of mixture and otherness, *mescolanza* and *otredad*, both unsettling and liberating at the same time.”⁴⁴ “Barriers of exclusion” therefore are antithetical to a politics oriented by *mestizaje*.⁴⁵ Instead, welcoming the stranger, not just as a measure of hospitality, but also as essential to the mutual well-being of the political community and its members becomes crucial.

⁴⁴ Fernando Segovia, “Two Places and No Place to Which to Stand: Mixture and Otherness in Hispanic American Theology” in Arturo Bañuelas, ed., *Mestizo Christianity: Theology From the Latino Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1995), 31.

⁴⁵ Arturo Bañuelas, “U.S. Hispanic Theology: An Initial Assessment” in Bañuelas, *Mestizo Christianity*, 59.

... a mestizo spirituality and politics accents what Justo González, a Protestant theologian, terms a “border” rather than a “frontier” mentality.

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Second, a *mestizo* spirituality and politics accents what Justo González, a Protestant theologian, terms a "border" rather than a "frontier" mentality. The latter is captured by the westward expansion of colonists across what becomes the United States. This perspective distinguishes between civilization and the uncivilized aliens that lie "beyond the pale." As civilization extends its boundaries, the aliens need to be exterminated or assimilated—the plight of the U.S. indigenous tribes. By contrast, a border mentality accents the ebb and flow of cultures across boundaries with mutual enrichment rather than domination being the norm.⁴⁶ In philosophical terms, a border mentality moves beyond uniformity v. incommensurability.

Third, as Orlando Espín relates, Latino popular religion manifests a holistic "sacral world view" that synthesizes African (brought by slaves), medieval Spanish, and indigenous spiritual practices.⁴⁷ In turn, Espín provocatively claims that this medieval Spanish outlook precedes the Council of Trent and therefore is not characterized by the more rigid, doctrinaire Catholicism that emerges post-Trent.⁴⁸ Much like the conventional derogatory renderings of *mestizos* as "half-breeds" or "mongrels," this popular religiosity has often been disparaged as unsophisticated and uncivilized, if not heretical. On the other hand, it provides a tangible heritage through which one can 1) counter the claim that there is a huge gap between indigenous and Christian spirituality,⁴⁹ 2) navigate the Catholic-Pentecostal divide within Latino spirituality, and 3) engage Islam and non-Western religions in a more inviting way. The latter point is especially crucial for providing an alternative to Huntington's aforementioned "clash of civilizations."

Fourth, in my judgment U.S. Latina/o theology evokes an affective, aesthetic rationality that in contrast to the Cartesian separation of the thinking ego from the world of experience, synthesizes rational reflection with the capacities of intuition, mystery, and myth. This aesthetic rationality is suspicious of modern objective standards and credentials. It is equally leery of the individualism, materialism, and hedonism of consumer culture, consonant with the heritage of Catholic social teaching and Thomistic ethics. Unlike modernism and postmodernism, this

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⁴⁶ Justo González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 85-86.

⁴⁷ Orlando Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 122 & 124.

⁴⁸ Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 127.

⁴⁹ Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native American View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1994).

rationality has a sensibility of the transcendent and unlike many premodern schemes, does not lead to hierarchical political, social, and economic schemes. Finally, in its affective countenance, it provides a realistic critique of the negative aspects of modernity while simultaneously sustaining the liberating aspects of the latter.

Fifth, as captured by Ismael Garcia, U.S. Latina/o spirituality accents a relational as opposed to a possessive rendering of morality and community. This relational ethics temper the emphasis on separation, achievement, and rights with a focus on care, responsibility and connectedness.⁵⁰ As opposed to the conventional separation of family life from the public arena, in Latino/a culture the network of relationships found in extended families can be a basis for a politics of mutuality, not domination, in the public sphere. In the pastoral arena, the *pastoral de conjunto*, manifests this relational ethics.⁵¹ In the political domain, church-based grassroots organizations, especially as cultivated by the Industrial Areas Foundation, have turned the Latino/a emphasis on extended networks into powerful political mobilizations.

Sixth, admittedly, a dwelling on aesthetic and affective sensibilities, be it Elizondo’s exegesis of Guadalupe or the heartfelt practices of popular religion, can lead to an “anesthetization” from politics. As opposed to an apolitical fascination with *flor y canto*—flower and song—the aesthetic, affective rationality elicited by U.S. Latino/a theologians focuses on engendering communities that overcome the hegemonic practices, especially of class, that presently thwart the capacity of the poor and the marginalized to participate fully in social, economic, and political decision-making forums. As put by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz: “The coming of the *kin-dom* of God has to do with a coming together of peoples, with no one being excluded and at the expense of no one [emphasis added].”⁵² The preferential option for the poor entails relations of empowerment that seek an egalitarian synthesis of human liberty and rights with caring, personal relationships.

Seventh, U.S. Latina/o spirituality accents a sense of hope in the pursuit of empowerment and justice. As accented by Arturo Bañuelos, a fiesta is not just a party, but a festive anticipation of a new universalism in which all peoples can engage each other as equals.⁵³ This hopefulness

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⁵⁰ Ismael Garcia, *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 17.

⁵¹ Ana Maria Pineda, “*Pastoral de Conjunto*” in Bañuelos, *Mestizo Christianity*, 126-31.

⁵² Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 65-66.

⁵³ Bañuelos, “U.S. Hispanic Theology,” 77.

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stresses not only the pursuit of equal representation in political forums and a narrowing of the gap in income and wealth between haves and have-nots, but also the belief that previously downtrodden people can discover their own power in civic participation.⁵⁴

The case of the mobilization of farm workers in California by Cesar Chavez provides a concrete illustration of how Latino spiritual sensibilities can be mobilized in a way that challenges dominant power structures so as to enable those on the economic margins to participate more effectively in these structures. In this fashion, practical protest and power politics à la Niebuhr and Martin Luther King is incorporated within a sacramental imagination.

As much as Chavez was trained as an organizer by the Community Services Organization, so much of Latino spirituality informs his conduct. First, Chavez prayed a great deal and particularly included liturgy as an integral, not ancillary part of this organizing life. Chavez deeply understood that the communion embodied in the Mass should lead us to transform the world with the love of Christ.⁵⁵ Second, he fasted, not just as form of protest, but as a way of centering the farm workers movement on the values of peace and justice. Third, and most importantly, his nonviolent march, especially from Delano to Sacramento in 1966, drew deeply from the practice of pilgrimage in Mexican Catholicism.

Pilgrimages are done regularly in Mexico to religious sites, especially those associated with the Virgin Mary—Our Lady of Guadalupe being the more prominent example. These pilgrimages usually take several days and involve a measure of personal sacrifice. In addition, even within the United States, many parishes comprised of Latinos on Good Friday stage a graphic reenactment of Christ's procession to and crucifixion at Calvary. The sentient participation of those participating in these religious rituals is not to dwell upon suffering and death, but concretely captures that such great trauma will not have the last word, but rather a Christian hopefulness.⁵⁶

Chavez was able to take these spiritual traditions and weave them into the Delano to Sacramento procession. Banners of Our Lady of Guadalupe were at the forefront of the marches. Pursuing a pilgrimage was transformed into a multi-day march. The sense of overcoming suffering through the reenactment of the Via Dolorosa was captured by the literal

The sense of overcoming suffering through the reenactment of the Via Dolorosa was captured by the literal suffering of the farm workers that they were seeking to change through the march.

⁵⁴ Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 80-86.

⁵⁵ Daniel Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY, 2008), 220.

⁵⁶ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*.

suffering of the farm workers that they were seeking to change through the march. And not incidentally, the march takes place during Holy Week, culminating on the steps of the Capitol in Sacramento on Easter Sunday.

But like Martin Luther King, Chavez used protest to reform, not overthrow the prevailing, political, socio-economic structures. In contrast to passionate opposition to the dominant U.S. system by Reies Tijerina’s land grant rebellion, based upon rather a curious hybrid of fundamentalist Pentecostal and Catholic spirituality, Chavez drew upon the sensibilities of Latino Catholicism to forge a constructive protest movement that enabled the farm workers to work through their suffering to aspire for a more constructive future.⁵⁷ Chavez drew upon Latino spirituality much in the way Martin Luther King drew upon both Black Christian and mainstream Christian to overthrow de jure segregation, but not the U.S. political compact. In Chavez’ case, one sees how a politics of protest that engages strife, struggle, and contest can be weaved into a sacramental spiritual imagination without culminating in excessive organicism or insensitivity to the tragic.

Fundamentally, the narratives of U.S. Latino theology, steeped in the struggles of the past five centuries are still able to elicit an ontological sense of community that holds people together.

Roberto Goizueta in particular articulates how in the face of struggle, strife, and oppression, there is a deep intersubjective sense of community that can deal with differences and distances between people.⁵⁸ And although Goizueta’s frame of reference is the U.S. Latino experience, I submit that this unity-in-difference is very much akin to Tracy’s articulation of a genuine global humanity informed by the sacramental imagination.

Forged from the conquests of the U.S. Southwest by first Spain and then the United States, this ethos of “crossing borders” evoked by U.S. Latino theology acknowledges the agonal character of challenging and seeking to overcome the conqueror-conquered dynamic. As an outlook shaped in the crucible of imperialism, this mestizo spirituality and politics knows first-hand how political, social, and economic domination and discrimination characterizes cultural intersections. Moving beyond “either-ors” in terms of culture, language, race, religion, or other categories at times entails conflicts and contradictions. Indeed, this ethos’

... it is possible to have dynamic mixing of cultures that persistently challenges hegemonies that posit one culture over another.

⁵⁷ Rudiger V. Busto, ““In the Outer Boundaries””: Pentecostalism, Politics, and Reies López Tijerina’s Civic Activism” in Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizono, and Jesse Miranda, eds., *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 72.

⁵⁸ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*.

recognition of particular (as opposed to universal) perspectives, decentered (as opposed to Eurocentric) discourses, and the ambiguous quality of cultural intersections illustrates its grasp of radical plurality and the potential for "clashes between civilizations." Yet given the Catholic propensity to stress unity and order over plurality and disorder, the recasting of the analogical spiritual imagination in U.S. Latino theology gives needed stress to plurality without culminating in realist fatalism or postmodern relativism.

Instead, this ethos contends that it is possible to have dynamic mixing of cultures that persistently challenges hegemonies that posit one culture over another. In this regard, "crossing borders" entails engaging ambiguity, difference, and pluralism in a way that embraces substantive interchange and mutual transformation between cultural and spiritual heritages. Such interaction, even if at times painful, can mutually expand the horizons of these intersecting groups and can engender a substantive unity that is distinct from, yet reflective of, the contribution of these groups, especially when the intersections ensue on an equal basis.⁵⁹ Both the mixing of African, European, and indigenous spiritualities in Latino popular religiosity and the present-day intersections of Catholic, Pentecostal, and Puritan spiritualities in the Latino sections of the United States, suggest the nexus of diverse cultures and civilization offers a richer collective life, not in spite of plurality, but through it.

Conclusion

Catholic social teaching according to both Protestant and Catholic critics has a tendency to be unduly optimistic about the possibility of realizing a right order in the political socio-economic world and insufficiently accents the tragic aspect of life and the centrality of the crucifixion to Christian theology. The intellectual roots of this critique lie in Augustine's political theory, especially in *The City of God*, and have been given renewed relevance by both international relations realist and postmodernist perspectives. Still, acknowledging that there is "trouble with unity" when such schemes homogenize different persons and cultures and downplay how intrinsic conflict is to politics,⁶⁰ there is also trouble with disunity when scholarly narratives and political programs, in

⁵⁹ Virgil Elizondo terms this interaction "an anthropology of inclusive and progressive synthesis." Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 132.

⁶⁰ Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble With Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the name of contest and resistance, shroud the communitarian dimension of human relationships.

Consequently, the post-Vatican II cultural hermeneutical orientation of Catholic social teaching especially enables this teaching to be much more sensitive to the implications of this radical plurality without leading to fatalist or relativist outcomes. Indeed, the ethos of “crossing borders” I have derived from U.S. Latino theology provides a very incisive, concrete engagement of “unity-in-diversity” or what Tracy terms “similarities-in-differences.”

Specifically, as opposed to manual-like recitations of neo-Scholastic treatises or even the stodgy tone of some official Catholic documents, this ethos of “crossing borders” is fully aware of the ambiguity, agonal experience, and tragedy ensuing from the events of colonialism and neo-colonialism. At the same time, this ethos does not give in to the temptation of despair and projects the hope for realizing a unity through plural differences that justifies neither notions of ethnic, linguistic, or racial purity nor extensive class disparities. Given that the vibrancy of 21st century spirituality is increasingly coming from the growth of Catholicism, Islam, or Pentecostalism in the developing world, and that 21st century politics increasingly has to deal with the postcolonial world, Catholic social teaching has everything to gain by cultivating this gritty yet hopeful engagement of radical plurality that moves beyond both sterile uniformity and anarchic relativism.