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*Liberation and Engagement: Toward a U.S. Latino/a
Diaspora Missiology*

Abstract

Diaspora missiology is emerging in some evangelical circles as the new paradigm that would complement traditional missiology. In this article, I will describe and analyze the writings of three first generation Cuban-American theologians and their understanding of how to construct theology in diaspora. First, I will present the multiple origins of the Latino/a population. Second, the metaphor of the Promised Land will be described and assessed through the lens of the prosperity gospel. Third, the writings of Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Justo González, and Fernando Segovia on theology in the diaspora will be described and analyzed. Finally, a Latino/a missiology of social engagement will emerge out of the three theologians discussed.

Key Words: diaspora missiology, Cuban-American, theology, social engagement

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Introduction

According to Sadiri Tira, diaspora missiology has emerged as a biblical and strategic field of missiology and is defined by the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation as a “missiological framework for understanding and participating in God’s redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin.”¹ One of the biggest proponents of diaspora missiology is Enoch Wan, professor of missiology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. For Wan, the missiological constructions in the American Society of Missiology and the Evangelical Missiological Society represent the “traditional” way of doing missiology.

Wan sees traditional missiology as polarized and dichotomized in terms of their continual separation between evangelism and social action and the ambivalent attitude between Western paternalism and contextual self-theologizing. For Wan, traditional missiology follows the colonial patterns of assigning geographical spaces to mission, from here (the West) to there (the rest of the world), in which sending is more important than receiving.² Contrary to traditional missiology, Wan argues that diaspora missiology is contextual and holistic by integrating evangelism and social action, and by erasing all geographical boundaries. It follows the lead of God in going wherever God places people spatially and spiritually.³ Nonetheless, at closer examination, diaspora missiology seems more of an attempt to resurrect the “people groups” theories dating back to the 1970s than an effort to really struggle with the theological developments of diaspora communities already present in the United States or Europe. For example, Wan points out, “Research has been carried out on the unreached people who are seen as living in a borderless world where they move in from everywhere to everywhere. Diaspora missiology is a new research area that not only studies the phenomena of the diaspora but also finds strategies and practical ways to minister to them.”⁴ Thus, Wan is targeting people on the move who are not Christian, but who are coming from one of the “unreached peoples” areas in the world. It is ironic that this is exactly one of the points in which diaspora missiology is supposed to contrast and present a better option than traditional missiology. Wan argues, “In the paradigm of traditional missiology, priority is given to the ‘unreached people groups’ in the most ‘unreached’ regions of the world over ‘reached people.’”⁵ Is not this what Wan is advocating, this time targeting “unreached people groups” in the United States, Canada, and Europe? What happens when the group in diaspora has been there for a while, and has a long Christian history? Is diaspora missiology an evangelical invention to renew the quest for the unsuccessful 10/40 Window Program? Do people groups still matter? The Latino/a diaspora should be taken as an

example of how people in diaspora have been doing missiology in North America for generations.

Multiple Origins of the Hispanic Population in the USA

The increasing growth of the Hispanic/Latino population during the last five decades is staggering. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1950 approximately four million Hispanics lived in the United States, most of them in New York, Florida, California, and Texas. The most recent figures coming from the Census Bureau in 2011 revealed that there are more than fifty million Hispanics in the United States representing 16.7% of the total population.⁶ However, Hispanics are not a monolithic or homogenous group. Instead, Hispanics are a highly diverse population representing twenty Spanish-speaking nationalities as well as some of the earlier settlements in the United States.⁷

Within this constituency, Mexicans outnumber any other Hispanic group with over 60%; followed by Puerto Ricans with 9%, Cubans with 3.5%, and Dominicans with 2.8%, while people from South and Central America account for 13% of the Hispanic population respectively. Excluded from the term Hispanic are Brazilians, Guyanese, and Surinamese from South America.⁸ According to the 2010 Census, the population of the United States grew by 27.3 million people, or 9.7%, between 2000 and 2010. By contrast, the Hispanic population grew by 43%, rising from 35.3 million in 2000 to 50.5 million in 2010.⁹ Geoff Hartt mistakenly claims that immigration is the fuel for much of this growth.¹⁰ In reality, the growth of Hispanics has been a natural increase in the existing population. In a reversal of past trends, Latino population growth in the new century has been more a product of the natural increase (births minus deaths) of the existing population, than it has been of new international migration. Of the 10.2 million increase in the Hispanic population since 2000, about 60% of the increase (or 6 million) is due to natural increase and 40% is due to net international migration, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures.¹¹

For some people, the increasing number of Hispanics in the United States provokes fear of a threat to the life of the nation. Samuel P. Huntington's statement can summarize this fear:

The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two poles, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream US culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the

Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge to its peril.¹²

One great example of this type of paranoia or xenophobia regarding stereotypes of Hispanics in the United States happened in the NBA finals. The National Basketball Association (NBA) finals always bring the excitement of teams competing for the ultimate prize, the Larry O'Brien trophy. In the 2013 finals, the San Antonio Spurs and the Miami Heat battled for the prestige of being the NBA champion. On game three of this series on Tuesday, June 11, something transformational and revealing happened. A fifth grader, 11 year-old Sebastien de la Cruz sang the national anthem. Fans in the arena exploded with applause as Sebastien finished the anthem while other fans in twitter posted hateful remarks about the singer. Even though Sebastien de la Cruz was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas, people saw a brown boy wearing a traditional mariachi costume and assumed he was an illegal alien. Tia Ermana Jordan, an African American tweeted: "Why do they have this illegal immigrant singing the National Anthem?" Jackson Wadden tweeted, "What's up with this little Mexican kid singing the anthem at the Heat game." Ben Koeck tweeted, "This kid is Mexican why is he singing the national anthem. You are not American # Go Home!" The reaction of these Americans begs the question: what does it mean to look illegal?¹³ How can his or her physical characteristics, actions, or demeanor determine someone's legal citizenship status? From the hundreds of hateful tweets against de la Cruz, it seems that he was judged as an illegal immigrant by his physical appearance and demeanor. Is his brown skin the signifier of illegality? Or was the mariachi clothing he was wearing the signifier of non-citizenship?

Apart from bigotry and ignorance, what triggered these people to react so hatefully against someone they considered to be an illegal alien? Cisneros argues, "citizenship and civic belonging are continually reenacted, reiterated, and read (lacking) on certain bodies through their individual and social performances."¹⁴ In other words, to demonstrate citizenship is to act in a certain way that is acceptable to the norm. To perform any type of difference could compel people to judge the performer as alien and not belonging to the core or center of power. Cisneros points out, "In contrast, U.S. citizenship and civic identity are enacted through a 'national affect' that connotes American-ness, which includes the English language, public displays of nationalism, and certain markers of socio-economic class and race."¹⁵ In the midst of suspicion, stereotypes, and discrimination, Hispanics should adopt a strategy of thriving in the Promised Land by formulating missiological principles of liberation.

Hispanics/Latinos in the Promised Land

One of the greatest challenges that Latinos/as face is to be absorbed into the main operational frameworks of North American culture. For example, many Latino/a congregations are composed of recent immigrants that see the United States as the Promised Land. The metaphor of the Promised Land, to designate the United States as providentially chosen by God to accomplish God's purposes on earth, has been part of the North American experiment since its very beginning.¹⁶ The Puritans of New England had a clear vision on how God was directing their steps to tame the American wilderness through the providential guidance of God.¹⁷ Election became one of the most fundamental themes to understand the relationship of God to the new forming nation. The identification of the emerging nation with the Israel of the Old Testament prompted the assurance that the Promised Land given by God to God's people was reenacted in the American experiment. This identification led to the notion that North America had a 'manifest destiny' to spread its blessings to the rest of the world.

The heyday of North American expansionism and imperialism was in the 1880s. Until this period, 'manifest destiny' was conceived as continental expansion. However, as Gerald Anderson argues, "when the United States reached the limits of prospective continental expansion, there developed agitation for expansion beyond North America."¹⁸ One of the biggest proponents of manifest destiny in the 1890s was Josiah Strong. In *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Current Crisis*, Strong analyzed the conditions in the United States as playing a major role in world history, guided by the providence of God to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.¹⁹ Strong believed that [men] of that generation in the United States (1890s) would determine the course of the future of humanity. He proposed that the progress of Christ's kingdom in the world for centuries to come depended on the actions of American Christians in that decade. Apart from all of the technological developments that took place during the nineteenth century, Strong showed another conglomerate of evidences in "the great ideas which have become the fixed possession of men within the past hundred years."²⁰ He highlighted individual liberty, honor to womanhood, and the enhanced valuation of human life as the prevailing tendencies in U.S. society.²¹

For many of the people who received the gospel from North American missionaries, the United States was constructed as the Promised Land, the land that flows with honey and milk to prosper the world. Therefore, the imagery that many people have of the United States in the world is one of technological, economic, social, cultural, and religious prosperity. Eliazar Fernandez describes the experience from a Filipino context:

Since colonization entails political and economic control as well as mental control, the coming of Filipinos to the shores of America has been driven not only by the search for ‘greener pastures,’ the primary factor, but also by their image of America. For them, America represents the land of endless opportunities and coming to America the fulfillment of that to which they aspire in life. White America represents what is good and beautiful, noble and laudable, while brown Philippines represent what they despise in themselves.²²

Hiram Almirudis, a life-long Hispanic Pentecostal pastor and educator from the Church of God, Cleveland, TN, argues that one of the biggest challenges within the Latino/a Church of God is the promotion of a philosophical and theological language that blesses the secular tendencies of the United States. For him, Hispanic/Latino Pentecostals see everything in terms of production, prosperity, success, and statistics which are the indispensable factors of corporations.²³ According to Almirudis, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, and Robert Tilton are more quoted in Latino/a Pentecostal sermons than Jesus Christ himself.²⁴

In her article “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?” Hanna Rosin corroborates Almirudis remarks by quoting Billy Gonzalez complaining about the preaching of “apostle” Garay, pastor of Casa del Padre, which is “hard to get used to because Garay talks about money in church all the time.”²⁵ Garay’s preaching style and sermons come directly from the playbook of Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin. For example, he follows Hagin’s four laws for a prosperous life in his interpretation of Mark 5:25-34: “say it, do it, receive it, and tell it.”²⁶ Garay argues, instead of saying I am poor, say I am rich. Instead of saying I want a home, go and get a home. Once you put your faith into action God will grant you the home. After God grants you the home then tell it to everybody.²⁷ It is clear that what is promoted by Garay and the prosperity gospel asserts that Christians have the power to control their own destinies if they only have faith in God. As Hagin argues, it is about “how to write your own ticket with God” in which he claims having a vision of Jesus Christ telling him: “If anybody, anywhere will take these four steps, or put these four principles into operation, they will always receive whatever they want from Me, or from God the Father.”²⁸ According to the Pew document, *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion*,

the overall influence of renewalist Christianity is clearly evident in specific religious practices and beliefs. For instance, Hispanic Pentecostals are more likely than most other Christians to read the Bible regularly, share their faith with nonbelievers, take a literal view of the Bible and express belief in the “prosperity

gospel” that God blesses those who have enough faith with good health and financial success.²⁹

It is clear that one element missing in the descriptions provided above is that the promotion of social justice is lacking in the rhetoric of the prosperity gospel because it promotes only personal individualistic economic gain. As Fernando Segovia points out, “Indeed, it seems that, as core values, the pursuit of money and individualism could easily override and subdue, with their great power and allure, all other values of the society.”³⁰

Therefore, the greatest challenge that Latinos/as face is to be absorbed into the main operational frameworks of North American culture. For example, many of these congregations are composed of recent immigrants that see the United States as the Promised Land. The metaphor of the Promised Land is more appealing to immigrants who want a better future for their families in the United States. But as we know, the American dream is an elusive reality for many who never see that dream materialized. In this sense, the consumeristic, individualistic, and selfish attitude that predominates in North American mainstream culture is also active in Latino communities.³¹ Praising God in a strange land becomes easy for these communities as they try to make inroads and achieve the American dream.

Exile and Diaspora as Metaphors of Engagement

The first generation of Latino/a theologians who tried to develop a theological stance using their own contextual reality and experience were mostly Cubans. Among them, Fernando Segovia, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Justo Gonzalez are the most prominent. All of them have developed through the years some type of correlation between their own Cuban exile after Fidel Castro in 1959, and the exile of the Israelites to Babylon.³² An analysis of their hermeneutics of exile revealed an overriding commitment to a liberationist paradigm in which the authors see a particular correlation between their contextual reality and the reality experienced by the Israelites in the Bible. Segovia would depart from this type of correlation to propose a hermeneutics of otherness and engagement, while still working from within a liberationist paradigm.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz: Exile as a Way of Life

Ada María Isasi-Díaz was born and raised in Havana, Cuba. From an early childhood, Isasi-Díaz was part of the Roman Catholic Church. She did her primary education with the Sisters of Saint Ursula and entered their convent as a novitiate nun in 1960. After her education with the Sisters of Saint Ursula, Isasi-Díaz worked with the poor and marginalized in Lima, Peru, for three years. She argues that she was born a feminist in 1975 after

coming to a deeper understanding of the interconnections of sexism, ethnic prejudice-racism, and economic oppression-classism at a conference on Women's Ordination in Detroit. In 1983, she enrolled in the master of divinity program at Union Theological Seminary in New York and finished her PhD in Christian ethics in 1990. Since then, Isasi-Díaz has seen herself as an activist theologian struggling to defend the cause of Latinas in the United States and other women around the world.³³

For Isasi-Díaz, Psalm 137 has been a fountain of life in the midst of sadness in a strange land. Isasi-Díaz recounts how Psalm 137 became part of her life, when she first read it after arriving in the United States from Cuba. She points out,

Yes, I understand perfectly what the psalmist was trying to capture in the words of Psalm 137. Exile is a very complex way of life. The anguish of living away from one's country might seem to indicate how very much one remembers it. But then, an intrinsic part of the anguish is fear that, because life goes on, one might forget one's country. 'May my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not count Jerusalem the greatest of my joys.'³⁴

The correlation of her experience of exile from Cuba with the exile of Israel from Jerusalem opened her eyes to the reality of living in a strange land as a 'minority,' a Hispanic. According to her, it was this process of becoming a 'minority' that drove her to understand the ethnic and racial prejudices that operate in the United States. Therefore, her writings have shown a binomial hermeneutic of oppression/liberation.³⁵ This binomial hermeneutic of oppression/liberation is most clearly presented in her concept of *mujerista* theology. *Mujerista* theology is a liberation theology, which uses as its theological locus the cultural and contextual location of the religious experiences of Latinas living in the United States.³⁶ As Latinas struggle to create a new future as a marginal group who have suffered oppression because of their gender and race, they are aware that their past condition, as well as their present one, is rooted in a system that has worked against them throughout history. It is out of this struggle against an oppressive system that Isasi-Díaz finds hope, because hope makes the struggle possible. Consequently, Psalm 137 becomes cathartic in the way it helps *exiliadas* with their own pain of losing the place they called home. Even when the whole system is against them, Latinas see in Psalm 137 the possibility of change that rekindles their hope even when they do not see the expected results for their projects for liberation.³⁷ Therefore, Psalm 137 has helped Latinas to live an exilic existence as a 'vocation.' Exile becomes a vocation, a lifestyle that strives to create equal opportunities for marginalized Latinas, because it encompasses in itself the seeds of liberation. To live as an

exile in the land of plenty involves a countercultural project directed against the consumeristic and individualistic aspects of North American culture that is directly in opposition to the values of the kingdom of God.

Justo González: Exile as Mañana

Justo L. González was born in Havana, Cuba, August 9, 1937. There, he carried out studies in philosophy at the Universidad de la Havana and completed his Bachelor Degree in Theological Studies at the Seminario Evangélico de Teología in Matanzas, Cuba, in 1957. After obtaining S.T.M. and M.A. degrees, in 1961 he became the youngest person to be awarded a Ph. D. in historical theology at Yale University, and also became one of the few first generation Latino theologians in the USA to come from a Protestant background. In 1964, he was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament by the Methodist Church. Besides his passion for connecting theology with the life of the church through his publications, his most cherished and valued activity is the mentoring and encouraging of Hispanics and other minority scholars. No wonder he was the founding Director of the Hispanic Summer Program (now Director Emeritus), the founding president of the Association of Theological Education for Hispanics (AETH), the first Executive Director of the Hispanic Theological Initiative, and the founding editor of Hispanic theological journal *Apuntes* (now Editor Emeritus). No wonder he continues to serve as a consultant on Latino leadership training to seminaries and denominations in the USA and abroad.

González's book *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* describes the way in which Latinos/as in the United States are formulating a theological perspective grounded in their own traditions and cultures. In addressing the question of Latino/a identity, González describes Latinos/as as a mañana people, with long standing roots in the United States, a people in search of unity and solidarity, a people beyond innocence, and a people in exile.³⁸ First, González points out the long history of Hispanics in the United States. Actually, Hispanics have deeper roots in the United States than many of the dominant culture. As we mentioned already, Hispanics did not cross the border to come to this land, but rather, the border engulfed them in the expansionist vision of 'manifest destiny.' In this process of expansionism, the United States purchased, conquered, and annexed territories such as Florida, Texas, California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona.³⁹ According to González, the narrative of this history is important to understand, because it brings to light why some Latinos/as are bitter about such an expansionist ideology that robs their identity and subsumes them as second-class citizens in their own land. Therefore, Hispanics are a mañana people who were here before the settlers came, and will remain here for a long time to come.

Second, González perceives a growing sense of unity and solidarity within the Hispanic community based on similar socio-cultural developments. On the socio-political side, Hispanics are aware of their “meager participation as a group in the decisions that shape our lives.”⁴⁰ Even though González was writing over twenty years ago, the social conditions have not changed much. Hispanics are still on the lower strata of family income, with a high rate of unemployment and underemployment, and an alarming rate of High School dropouts. González points out, “Hispanic Americans are beginning to unite out of the sheer political necessity of presenting a common front against the powers that would otherwise keep us subservient.”⁴¹ On the other hand, there is a resurgence in adopting cultural patterns from their countries of origin. It is no wonder that culture became one source of doing theology for Hispanic theologians. It is not an idolizing of culture or a naïve adaptation of cultural patterns, but rather, the acknowledgement that cultures are both full of the grace of God, and are also human constructs ingrained with sinful tendencies that are detrimental to the wellbeing of the community, one such example being machismo.

Third, Hispanics are aware that their history is not that innocent, unlike many in the majority group who have a sense of history that covers up some of the most disturbing points of their own history. Most of these historical accounts are recreated with a mythical aura that seldom gets at the problematic nature of the original events. For example, we are told that the “pilgrim fathers” came to this land in their quest of religious freedom, and that is the reason why this land is constructed as a land of freedom. González points out, “that most of the early settlers denied that freedom to any who disagree with them is mentioned, but is not allowed to play a central role in the interpretation of events...the West was won, we are told. But how, and who ‘lost’ it, is not part of our national consciousness.”⁴² On the other hand, Latinos/as have understood that theirs is not an innocent history full of great heroes of mythical proportions. On the contrary, Latinos/as know the facts that our Spanish forefathers raped and killed our native foremothers, that their land and riches were lusted after, that we were the builders of a massive movement of slaves coming from Africa, and that injustice was not merely an occasional misstep, but rather it was systemic in our history. Therefore, Hispanics have always lived beyond the myth of innocence.

Finally, for González, Hispanics are an exile people. For some Hispanics this could be an actual and literal exile, which involves people coming for political, economic, or ideological reasons. For González, if a person has lost the hope of returning to his/her land of birth and has adopted the new land as his/her own, such a person should not be considered a Latin American in exile in the United States, but rather a Hispanic American,

because he/she has no other land. However, that person remains in exile, an exile in his new adoptive land with a new identity as a Hispanic American.⁴³ Also, for González, those who are born in the United States from Hispanic immigrants or Hispanic U.S. citizens are exiles in their own land. Ambiguity is the characteristic that defines both groups. Literal exiles are grateful for being in the United States, but they are also angry.

González gives two reasons: 1) because they have come to realize that they will always be second-class citizens, exiles in a land not their own; and 2) because they have come to realize that their land of refuge is the land that created the need for exiles in the first place.⁴⁴ Hispanic Americans born in the United States are also in a state of ambiguity.

González proposes that the experience of such ambiguity of living in between worlds as an exile people could be the most powerful hermeneutical tool for Latinos/as. He calls this strategy “reading the Bible in Spanish.”⁴⁵ For González to read the Bible in Spanish means “a reading that includes the realization that the Bible is a political book; a reading in the vernacular, not only in the cultural, linguistic sense, but also in the sociopolitical.”⁴⁶ In other words, reading the Bible in Spanish means reading it with a political agenda of salvation/liberation. It is a non-innocent reading of the sociopolitical realities that were confronted in the Bible by human beings who struggle in diverse circumstances.

There should be a reason why the Bible does not depict just the victories of its heroes such as David winning battles, but also his failures, such as killing Uriah and having sex with his wife. For González, such a story was not socially and politically neutral, because it revealed clearly who was in control, and who had the power to change the circumstances. This is what González means when referring to the Bible as a political book, because in it we encounter issues of power and powerlessness.⁴⁷ This is a vocative reading that seeks not so much to interpret the Bible, as to allow it to interpret our own context and ourselves as well. González points out, “reading is always a dialogue between the text and the reader. It is not only the text that speaks and the reader who listens, but also the reader who asks questions of the text, and the texts responds... It is I, from my context and perspective, who read the text. In order for there to be a true dialogue, the text must engage me, not as I would be had I lived at the time of the Babylonian exile, but as I am here and now.”⁴⁸ Therefore, doing missiology in Spanish should take into consideration how power is constructed in the Hispanic communities and how such power could be used for their own benefit or liberation.

Fernando F. Segovia: a Diaspora Hermeneutics/Theology of Otherness and Engagement

Fernando F. Segovia was born in Cuba in 1948. On Monday, July 10, 1961 at age thirteen, he began a journey from the world of Latin American civilization, by way of Cuba, to the world of Western civilization, the North American version; from the world of the colonized to the world of the colonizer, but most importantly, from a world that was his own to a world in which he became the stranger, the “other.”⁴⁹ He obtained his masters in theology (MA) in 1976 and his doctorate (PhD) in 1978 from the University of Notre Dame. He taught at Marquette University from 1977 to 1984. Since 1984 he has been professor of early Christianity at the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University.

Segovia has become one of the best known Latino biblical scholars of the New Testament. As a biblical critic, his interests include Johannine Studies, method and theory, ideological criticism, the history of the discipline, and its construction in early Christian antiquity. No other Latino writer has done more work on developing a Latino hermeneutics than Segovia. His proposal is a diaspora hermeneutics of otherness and engagement.

For Segovia, the diaspora is constituted by “the sum total of those who presently live, for whatever reason, on a permanent basis in a country other than that of their birth...though usually involving a combination of sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors.”⁵⁰ Diasporas are complex and multidimensional realities with a variety of meanings. Like González, Segovia distinguishes between a metaphorical and a literal diaspora. In its metaphorical sense, the term could be applied to those born in the country or those lands annexed or possessed by the country. In the literal sense, the term applies to first-generation immigrants who remember their country of birth, but live in the present in the country of adoption.⁵¹ Segovia situates himself in the literal sense of the term as a “flesh and blood first generation exile.” As a first generation immigrant to the United States in the 1960s from Cuba, Segovia knows too well that at the very core of his migration was a political reality rooted in the Cold War. He sees such a “cosmic journey” of migration as involving a variety of complex scenarios:

from the world of Latin American civilization, by way of its Caribbean version, to the world of Western civilization, in terms of its North American variant; from East to West, from the world of state-control communism to the world of capitalist liberal democracy; from North to South, from the traditional world of the colonized, with honor and shame as dominant cultural values, to the industrialized world of the colonizers, with the dollar at its core value; from a world that

was mine, which I knew and to which I belonged without question, to a world where I represented the “other”—the alien and the foreigner...the journey of exile has never ended; indeed, exile has become my permanent land and home—the diaspora.⁵²

This experience of exile has grounded, informed, and shaped Segovia’s development as a biblical scholar. At the core of this description is the realization of biculturalism and otherness. Biculturalism and otherness constitute the fundamental way of life for Latinos in the United States. Biculturalism reveals two essential aspects: 1) that Latinos live in two worlds, the world of their former place of birth and the current world, operating quite at ease in each world, and dealing with the scenarios that each world presents; 2) while Latinos navigate between two worlds, they do not belong to either of them.⁵³ This paradoxical and alienating experience of living in two worlds and not belonging to either of them creates in Latinos/as a very ambiguous existence in which Latinos/as are always aliens and strangers.

The external perception of Latinos/as by members of the dominant culture encapsulates them in a bubble of sameness in which all Hispanics are the same, regardless of the diversity within the Latino/a community. Ironically, Latino/a theologians do the same by adopting the terminology of the dominant group and erasing intra-group conflict as if suddenly they had disappeared under the umbrella term “Latino/a.” Despite the negative descriptions of Latinos/as by the dominant group, this sense of otherness should be viewed as the source of their identity. Segovia argues, “We must claim our otherness and turn it into precisely what it is, our very identity, using it constructively and creatively in the interest of liberation.”⁵⁴

In this next step, the “otherness” of Latinos/as becomes a methodology of engagement because they realize that even though they do not belong fully to either world, they do stand in both worlds. This otherness embraces biculturalism as a positive force making it possible for Latinos/as to have two homes, two voices, or two faces.⁵⁵ In this sense, Latinos/as know these two worlds from the inside out and as such understand that both worlds are at the end constructions. In this paradoxical situation, Latinos/as possess a privileged knowledge in understanding that their own existence is a construction and as such it is in need of revision and recreation. According to Segovia this process of self-identity should have three foci: “a) self-appropriation, or a revisioning of our past and our history with our own eyes; b) self-definition, or a retelling of our present reality and experience in our own words; and c) self-direction, or a reclaiming of our future and self-determination in terms of our own dreams and visions.”⁵⁶ The biculturalism that Latinos/as experience leads them to the recognition of all “others”

(negative) as others (positive). In this process, Latinos/as must embrace and integrate those fundamental qualities that make them bicultural.

According to Segovia, Latino/a theology should be postmodern, postcolonial, and liberationist.⁵⁷ Thus, a Latino/a theology should be a theology of hybridity, struggle, and life. Such theology takes the sociocultural present as the principal condition to construct a discourse about God in the diaspora. Because it understands that the dominant group has constructed them under a label, “Hispanic/Latino,” it has the capacity not to define and construct others, but to let others define themselves. It should be postmodern in accepting the subjectivity of all knowledge, going beyond the modern myth based on objectivity and universality. Segovia points out,

I look upon it as inductive, contextual, and pluralistic. In other words, all socioreligious discourse about the world, the otherworld, and the relationship between such worlds is seen as tied to a perspective, as born out and forged in praxis- a construct grounded in reality and experience, contextual to the core- with a view of reality and experience as culturally and historically differentiated and in constant flux; and pluralistic at heart- with an acceptance of the multitude of constructs reflecting and engaging a variety of realities and experiences across history and culture.⁵⁸

The contextuality of the theological task makes it explicit for Latinos/as to reflect on their current existence in the diaspora in postcolonial categories. As people living in exile in the United States and at the margins in that society, Latinos/as “are becoming increasingly aware of the degree to which the United States, the land of our refuge, is also the land that created our need for exile in the first place.”⁵⁹ Therefore, Latinos/as are called to a process of decolonization, of critique against the current system and its dehumanizing tendencies. The dehumanizing tendencies of Latinos/as in the United States calls for a liberationist theology that takes the exile community as *locus theologicus* incorporating such an exilic present with a utopian vision of justice, peace, equality, and love.

Conclusion

Isasi-Díaz, González, and Segovia are all Cubans who came to the United States in a specific socio-political context of turmoil between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was the context for the Cold War, of two different worldviews combating for supremacy on how to build society. The context of the Cold War was so traumatic to Segovia that he even describes the experience of exile as a “cosmic journey.”⁶⁰ Isasi-Díaz has a deep indescribable sorrow because she was away from the land that

witnessed her birth. In her exilic condition, Isasi-Díaz uses Psalm 137 as a cathartic text that helps her to deal with the ongoing pain and longing to go back to Cuba. She correlates the biblical material of the Jerusalem exile with her own condition of exile in almost romantic terms, identifying Cuba with Jerusalem.⁶¹

What could be considered missiological elements in *mujerista* theology is explicitly delineated when the stories of Latinas in quest of their own destiny through the liberating praxis of the “historical project”, are assessed in light of the common denominator of salvation as liberation. Isasi-Díaz argues, “Latinas’ historical project is based on an understanding of salvation and liberation as three aspects of one process.”⁶² Following liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, Isasi-Díaz argues that there are not two histories, the history of salvation and secular history, but rather history is one reality in which the salvific action of God in Christ is always present in the here and now.⁶³ Salvation occurs in history as the liberationist work of Christ to free the captives from their oppression. The conceptualization of salvation as liberation is recapitulated in the manifestation of the kingdom of God, as this worldly reality, that is in opposition to the anti-kingdom, as conceptualized by the present condition of misery and oppression. Liberation as used by *mujerista* theology is a concept that enables people to deal with their religious practices in history as a subversive enterprise.⁶⁴

Unlike Isasi-Díaz who longed for Cuba and expected to return, González knew that he would live and die in Babylon. There is no turning back. Cuba is not Jerusalem. He points out, “Our Zion is not the lands where we were born, though we still love them, for us those lands are gone forever—and, in any case, since we have lived for a long time beyond innocence, we could never equate those lands with Zion.”⁶⁵ For González, the Zion that the Latino/a community should strive after is the Zion that comes in the eschatological reign of God, which is breaking in at every moment into history. He proposes, as a missiological strategy, reading the Bible in Spanish. As mentioned above, reading the Bible in Spanish means reading it with a political agenda of salvation/liberation. It is a non-innocent reading of the sociopolitical realities that were confronted in the Bible by human beings who struggle in diverse circumstances and we should gain wisdom from such stories to confront the present reality of living in a different land.

Segovia departs from the approaches of correlation used by Isasi-Díaz and González, and proposes a hermeneutics of otherness and engagement. This hermeneutics takes the biculturalism and otherness of Latinos/as as its starting point. Biculturalism and otherness constitute the fundamental way of life for Latinos in the United States. Biculturalism reveals two essential aspects: 1) that Latinos live in two worlds, the world of their former place

of birth and the current world, operating quite at ease in each world, dealing with the scenarios that each world presents; 2) while Latinos navigate between two worlds, they do not belong to either of them. This in-betweenness creates a new way of looking at otherness in a positive sense. This otherness embraces biculturalism as a positive force making it possible for Latinos/as to have two homes, two voices, or two faces. In this sense, Latinos/as know these two worlds from the inside out and as such understand that both worlds are at the end constructions. In this paradoxical situation, Latinos/as possess a privileged knowledge in understanding that their own existence is a construction and as such it is in need of revision and recreation. This process of recognition and recreation unfolds a new configuration in which Latinos/as engage others by embracing their mutual human condition in this world. This is done through a postmodern, postcolonial, and liberationist theology that bursts with hybridity and the struggle for life.

The three theologians discussed in this article represent the first generation of Cuban immigrants to the United States. Their contribution is priceless in the development of Latino/a theology in the United States. However, as all of them would say, they are just theologizing from their own experience of exile and diaspora rooted in the Cuban crisis of the early 1960s. Their experience is very different from that of Puerto Ricans who became a colony of the United States as a war prize in 1898 in the Spanish-American War. Also, these theologians all speak to only the first generation of immigrants in diaspora. Second and third generation Latinos/as who are completely assimilated within the dominant culture probably would have problems understanding diaspora in the same way that the first generation did. To complicate things farther, Latinos/as are marrying people of other nationalities creating a triangulation of cultures in which the Latino/a is part of a more fragmented whole. For these and other reasons, missiologist Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi prefers to use other metaphors to describe the work of Latino/a churches in the United States. Cardoza's metaphor of mission is walking the tightrope, to describe the balancing act in cross-cultural encounters. His use of the term 'border' as a place of interpenetration in cultural encounters, and his most recent metaphor of missiology at the shore, between the dry land and the sea, are cutting edge, and provide new potential to explore the future missional character of the Latino/a churches in the United States.⁶⁶

End Notes

¹ Sadiri Tira, “Diaspora Missiology,” The Lausanne Movement, http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11103#article_page_1.

² Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, Oregon: Institute of Diaspora Studies, Western Seminary, 2011), 98.

³ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/02/15/statistical-portrait-of-hispanics-in-the-united-states-2011/>.

⁷ Marta Tienda and Faith Mitchell, *Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2006), 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones and Roberto R. Ramirez, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010” 2010 Census Brief, 3. <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.

¹⁰ Geoff Hartt, “Case Study 6: A Journey North: The Hispanic Diaspora in the U.S.” in Enoch Wan, ed., *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland: Institute of Diaspora Studies), 250.

¹¹ Richard Fry, “Latino Settlement in the New Century” <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/96.pdf>.

¹² Samuel P. Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Affairs* (March—April 2004), 30.

¹³ Josue David Cisneros, “Looking Illegal: Affects, Rhetoric, and Performativity in Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070” in *Border Rhetoric: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2012), 133-150.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁶ Conrad Cherry, *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 1.

¹⁷ Charles L. Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America*, 1976.

¹⁸ Gerald Anderson, “American Protestants in Pursuit of Mission: 1886—1986” in F.G. Verstraelen, ed., *Missiology An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 374-422 [374].

¹⁹ Josiah Strong, *Our Country, Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: The American Home Missionary Society, 1885). The first edition was published by Baker and Taylor in 1881.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²² Eleazar Fernandez, “Exodus-toward-Egypt: Filipino-American’s Struggle to Realize the Promised Land in America” in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on*

America from the Margins, Fernando Segovia and Eleazer Fernandez, eds., (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 170.

²³ Hiram Almirudis, “El Desafío Hispano en los Estados Unidos” *El Evangelio* (Julio-Septiembre 1988), 30.

²⁴ Almirudis does not offer any example of these preachers in his article to substantiate his case. Even though I take it to be an exaggeration, the point remains clear, Hispanic Pentecostals have appropriated the prosperity gospel as an interpretative Christian goal in North America.

²⁵ Hanna Rosin, “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?” *The Atlantic* (December 1, 2009). <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/12/did-christianity-cause-the-crash/307764/>.

²⁶ Kenneth Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith* (Greensburg: Pennsylvania: Manna Books, 1973), 94-116.

²⁷ Garay quoted by Rosin, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/12/did-christianity-cause-the-crash/307764/>.

²⁸ Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith*, 99.

²⁹ Pew Hispanic Center, *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of America Religion* (Washington: Pew Charitable Trust, 2007), 29.

³⁰ Fernando Segovia, “Introduction: Aliens in the Promised Land” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 26.

³¹ Rosin, “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?”

³² Fernando Segovia, “And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues: Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism” in *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States, vol. I*, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 35-56; “In the World but Not of It: Exile as Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, Fernando Segovia and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 195-217; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “By the Rivers of Babylon: Exile as a Way of Life” in *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States, vol. I*, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 149-164; Justo Gonzalez, “Reading from my Bicultural Place: Acts 6: 1-7” in *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States, vol. I*, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 165-148, and *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

³³ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Biographical Sketch” <http://users.drew.edu/aisasidi/>.

³⁴ Isasi-Díaz, “By the Rivers of Babylon,” 150.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁶ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, ‘Communication as Communion: Elements in a Hermeneutic of Lo Cotidiano’ in Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (eds.), *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katherine Doob Sakenfeld* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 27.

³⁷ Isasi-Díaz, “By the Rivers of Babylon,” 158.

³⁸ Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 31-42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 75-87.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁸ Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 13, 14.

⁴⁹ Fernando F. Segovia, “In the World but Not of It: Exile as Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora” in Fernando F. Segovia and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, eds., *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 207.

⁵⁰ Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement” in Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from this Place, Vol. I, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 57-73 [60].

⁵¹ Fernando F. Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 202.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 209-210.

⁵³ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics,” 61. This argument will focus only in the adoptive land and will bypass the experiences of Latinos/as when they go back home. For many of us there is no home to go back to. Segovia also describes the alienation and otherness that Latinos/as confront when they visit the world of their birth. “We realize that our traditional world is no longer ours: our association with it has become remote, at best intermittent, and passive. In fact, from the point of view of our former world, we encounter yet another script ready for us to play and follow, outside of which we can venture but not very far. The script has a name, emigrant or expatriate getting ahead in the land of freedom, justice, and opportunity; and an even more ironic value judgment: culturally disconnected but economically superior.” (Page 64). Samuel Solivan offers a good example of this perspective, when he points out, “In Puerto Rico we are not received as full fledged Puerto Ricans; we are really not Puertorriqueños. In New York City, our place of birth, we are also not received as true Americans, but as Puerto Ricans—that is, as foreigners. It is this crisis of identity that greatly informs much of our pathos.” Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos, and Liberation: Toward a Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁵ Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward Intercultural Criticism: A Reading Strategy from the Diaspora” in Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from this Place, Vol. II, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 322.

⁵⁶ Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics," 66.

⁵⁷ Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 198-201.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁹ González, Mañana, 41.

⁶⁰ Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 209.

⁶¹ Isasi-Díaz, "By the Rivers," 158.

⁶² Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 35.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁴ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "The Task of Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology—Mujeristas: Who We Are and What We Are About" in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, Ursula King ed., (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994): 88-102 [90].

⁶⁵ González, Mañana, 42.

⁶⁶ Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 89-99; "Gospel, History, Border, and Mission: Notes for a Missiology from a Hispanic/Latino Perspective" in *Los Evangélicos: Portraits of Latino Protestantism in the United States* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock), 173-181, and "Re-Discovering Caribbean Christian Identity: Biography and Missiology at the Shore (Between the Dry Land and the Sea)" *Voices from the Third World* 27:1 (June 2004), 114-144.

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