

**From 1968, through 1988, to 2008:  
A Call to Action for Latino/a American Religious and  
Theological Studies<sup>1</sup>**

*Fernando F. Segovia*

The year, 2008, is a year that those of us in Latino/a religious and theological studies ought to celebrate, and celebrate *en grande*. It is a year of truly landmark commemorations. Most pointedly for us, certainly, 2008 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the launching of the Hispanic Summer Program in 1988. This is a magnificent achievement that not only has endured to this day, as our gathering today vividly testifies, but also has grown better with the years, more soundly established and more academically daring than ever before. Most decisively overall, without doubt, 2008 will also mark the fortieth anniversary of that fateful year, 1968, which actually stands for an era of profound social and cultural turmoil and transformation. This is a time that has come to loom large in the collective imaginary of the world and that proved quite consequential for our own Latino/a community and discourse as well.

---

<sup>1</sup>This essay constitutes a revised version of the address delivered at the Convocation of the 2007 Hispanic Summer Program, held at the Divinity School of Duke University. For this kind invitation I stand in profound gratitude to its Director, Professor Otto Maduro, Professor of World Christianity and Latin American Christianity at The Theological School of Drew University.

Indeed, these two anniversaries, I would submit, are not at all unrelated, despite their separation by a full two decades. The epistemic and practical changes made possible by 1968—by all that this year and era comprehends and symbolizes—brought about, in both theory and action, a host of subsequent developments, such as the creation of the Hispanic Summer Program and the Latino/a religious and theological movement for which it was designed and from which it has drawn its guiding spirit and driving energy.

Let me turn, to begin with, to the Hispanic Summer Program. It was in the summer of 1988, on the campus of Andover-Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, that the Program was held for the first time. This initial gathering was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Orlando Enrique Costas, the Judson Professor of Missiology and Dean of the School, who had passed away the previous fall (1942-1987). Dr. Costas, a native of Puerto Rico and a member of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the mainland, had been a highly influential educator and theologian of national and international renown and a key figure in the early years of the Latino/a religious and theological movement.<sup>2</sup> The initiative itself was the result of a major grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts that followed upon the

---

<sup>2</sup>On the life and work of Dr. Costas, see the fine piece by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, of Claremont School of Theology, “Christian Educators of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” in Talbot School of Theology’s web site: ([http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cfm?n=orlando\\_costas](http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cfm?n=orlando_costas)). Among his best known works are *Christ outside the Gate: Mission beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982) and *Liberating News! A Theology of Contextual Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

publication of a stark report on the state of Hispanic theological education in the country commissioned by the Fund for Theological Education and entrusted to our distinguished colleague, Dr. Justo González.<sup>3</sup>

This report, which bore the title of *The Theological Education of Hispanics: A Study*, established, in the sharp and thorough fashion so distinctive of all his work, a number of basic findings. First, the paucity of Latino/a scholars in religious and theological studies. Second, the difficult situation facing Latino/a students in religious and theological education—across the entire educational spectrum, from the undergraduate to the doctoral level—in the course which they experience little contact, if any, with Latino/a instructors and researchers.

Third, the consequent estrangement of all such students from Latino/a reality and experience and marginalization within Euro-American experience and reality. This was a situation that those of us who had pursued our studies in the 1970s and the 1980s could readily identify with and testify to. A situation not only invariably characterized by institutional isolation, social-cultural invisibility, and material-discursive melting but also often marked by racialized-ethnicized constructions and attitudes, resentment and hostility, even psychological and verbal abuse.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Justo L. González, *The Theological Education of Hispanics: A Study* (New York: The Fund for Theological Education, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>Such a situation I sought to capture in my Presidential Address to the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians, later published as “Theological Education and Scholarship as Struggle: The Life of Racial/Ethnic Minorities in the Profession,” *Journal of Latino/Hispanic*

In response, the Pew Charitable Trusts awarded a generous grant to the Fund for Theological Education toward the creation of two major organizational and educational endeavors. On the one hand, the Hispanic Theological Initiative, designed to generate a substantial increase over the years in the number of Latino/a students in professional and doctoral programs, and thus, ultimately, in faculty ranks as well.

On the other hand, the Hispanic Summer Program, meant to bring together Latino/a students—along with non-Latino/a students, in itself a most enlightened and effective move—from around the country to pursue religious and theological studies from the perspective of Latino/a reality and experience and under the leadership of Latino/a scholars and instructors. These programs, both of which were subsequently reconfigured along different financial and organizations lines, have been immensely successful, beyond anyone's imagination.

From the point of view of the Hispanic Theological Initiative, presently under the institutional aegis of Princeton Theological Seminary and with firm backing from many doctoral programs in the nation, the number of Latino/a instructors and scholars in the academy has witnessed a steady and dramatic rise. Indeed, some of these are now beginning to break into the faculty ranks of doctoral programs across the country.

Still few and far between, to be sure, and barely represented in the elite institutions, Protestant and Catholic alike. These remain, as usual, closely guarded and ever protective regarding

---

*Theology* 2 (1994) 5-25. It was a piece that was itself written in a situation of professional duress as a minority faculty member.

their “borders,” even despite protestations and demands from within at times, but this too is only a matter of time.

From the point of view of the Hispanic Summer Program, now under the leadership of its own Board of Directors and with solid support from a host of independent seminaries and divinity schools, ever-growing numbers of Latino/a and non-Latino/a students have been exposed to Latino/a concerns as well as Latino/a faculty in religious and theological education.

As a result, such concerns have become an integral part of their overall training and have been exported, through them, into their respective institutions and programs. Moreover, many of its alumnae and alumni have gone on to graduate studies, and some have now begun to return to the Program to take their rightful place among its faculty.

To celebrate such achievements, twenty years after their commencement, is thus very much in order. In so doing, however, I should like to insist that none of this would have or could have happened had there not been a 1968, again broadly conceived. That year, and that era, constitutes a classic example of a defining Moment—a historical turning point; a social and cultural marker of rupture and reorientation; a global referent. Let me turn, then, to this other anniversary.

Now, I fully realize that, in invoking such a date as a landmark, I am not only unambiguously dating myself, my formative context and perspective, but also irretrievably confining myself to the realm of ancient history. It is evidently the case, as I look around this gathering today, that not many of us assembled at this Convocation have a living memory of that year and era. In

fact, it is probably the case that most here today had not a few years to go yet before conception and birth. Thus, what is a defining Moment for a few has, for most, become a distant historical referent. Such is life. Such it has been, and such it will be. Allow me a generational rumination on this score.

For my own generation, born at the very dawn of what seemed, from within its very depths, a seemingly unending Cold War, the defining Moment of my parents' generation had largely become a referent out of sight and out of mind, on the way to ancient history. I am speaking, of course, of the years comprising the Second World War. This was a conflict unto death involving three modern political ideologies: state Fascism; internationalist Communism; and industrial Capitalism. A clash, moreover, that dragged the whole of the non-Western world, in one way or another, into one more civil war within Western civilization.

For your generation, born toward the middle of what turned out to be a fortysome-year-long Cold War, your defining Moment will become, among those whom you will teach and to whom you shall minister in the not too distant future, a referent out of sight and out of mind as well, belonging in the annals of ancient history. Here I have in mind—and you may disagree with me on this score, but I see no viable competitor—the set of events extending from 1989 through 1991: the collapse of Real Socialism, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), and the breakup of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

To wit, the end of a conflict unto death between the two ideological survivors of World War II: on the one hand, Communism, with its centralized political economy, totalitarian system of government, and emphasis on social rights; on the other

hand, Capitalism, with its market political economy, democratic system of government, and focus on human rights. A clash, again, that dragged the entire non-Western world into yet another civil war within Western civilization, now between its eastern and western counterparts.

For my generation, therefore, I am arguing, it was 1968 in particular and the 1960s in general that constituted our defining Moment, regardless of anyone's role in and evaluation of that period, whether at the time or in retrospect. These years represent our pivotal turning point, marker, referent—now largely out of sight and out of mind, a piece of ancient history. I hasten to remind you, however, that yours too will also pass on, and soon.

The generation after yours, I need only mention, forms the bulk of the incoming freshman class of the 2007-2008 academic year, having been born in 1989, at the beginning of what I have characterized as your defining Moment. As such, they shall have no living recollection whatsoever of the Cold War, just as you have no such memory of 1968 and the 1960s and I have none of World War II. They shall turn instead, I would venture to say, to the events surrounding September 11, 2001: from the Persian Gulf War (August 1990–February 1991); through the crusade against Al Qaida, the invasion-occupation of Afghanistan (2001-), and the subsequent invasion-occupation of Iraq (2003-); to what has tragically turned into a seemingly non-ending and perhaps not-so-unwitting War of Civilizations.

In effect, a confrontation unto death between the triumphant ideological survivors of the Cold War, entertaining dreams about the end of history and a defense bonanza, and a suddenly geo-religious and geopolitical presence: global

Capitalism and extremist Islam. On one side, then, an immensely powerful yet eerily insecure West: leading the charge of a globalized free-market political economy; religiously Christian by tradition, at times invoking a “Judeo-Christian” heritage, and secular-pluralist in fact—spearheaded by a self-anointed Christian hyperpower; on the receiving end of large-scale non-Western migration; and increasingly threatened with and by acts of mass terrorism.

On the other side, a demographically massive yet politically diffuse and economically fragile Islam: in tune with globalization, but only at the level of the elite; religiously committed, in various and conflicting ways, patchily secular and hostile to pluralism; on the producing end of large-scale migration to the West; and the source of militant extremist groups devoted to holy war and mass terrorism. A conflict, once again, pulling the rest of the world, non-Western and non-Islamic, into its ongoing civilizational abyss and conflagration.

At the same time, I should like to argue, generational banishment to ancient history, while an inevitable and recurring phenomenon, proves in the end but partly effective, for, while on the surface Moments of definition come and go, their historical traces remain and continue to impact, in highly significant ways, the generations that follow.

That was certainly the case with the aftermath of World War II—from the generation before mine. Such shall also be the case with the trail left behind by the end of the Cold War, from your generation, the one after mine, as well as by the sequel of the War of Civilizations, from the generation after yours. Needless to say, such is the case as well with the legacy of 1968 and the 1960s—from my own generation.



To unpack this last assertion, I draw on the brief but keen theorization of 1968 offered by the eminent Mexican author and critic Carlos Fuentes in his recent volume *Los 68: París, Praga, México*.<sup>5</sup> The title itself should be noted, given its use of the plural article—best captured in English as “the 68s”—to convey the sense of a multifarious or diffracted 68 throughout the geopolitical world of the time: the West, signified by Paris; the East, by Prague; and the Third World, by Mexico City. The work as such actually brings together a series of earlier writings on the events in question and a new reflection on their joint character and transcendence.

The previous pieces, three in all, are dissimilar in nature. Two are journalistic reports, rather extensive, written at the time and from personal witness of the events in Paris and Prague. This was a Fuentes already enjoying widespread literary recognition: having published *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* in 1962; having experimented with a broad variety of narrative styles; and having launched in 1967—alongside such other figures as Alejo Carpentier of Cuba, Julio Cortázar of Argentina, and Miguel Otero Silva of Venezuela—the project *Los Padres de la Patria*, which was intended to be a series of biographical accounts of Latin American *caudillos* but which ultimately remained unfinished.

The third, fairly succinct, is a fictional recreation of the events in Mexico City as narrated in a historical novel of 1999, *Los años con Laura Díaz*. This was a Fuentes in full literary maturity and splendor: having produced a significant corpus of work, in

---

<sup>5</sup>Carlos Fuentes, *Los 68: París, Praga, México* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2005).

both literature and criticism, and having received a number of prestigious international awards, such as the Premio Cervantes in 1987 and the Premio Príncipe de Asturias de Literatura (1994).

The introductory essay provides a critical analysis of 1968 as both a Constellation-Year (*un año-constelación*) and a year of Pyrrhic reversal (*una derrota pírrica*). Its title, “El 68: Derrota Pírrica,” should be marked as well, given its turn to the singular article—best rendered in English perhaps as “The one 1968”—to signify a sense of underlying simultaneity and interlacing across the geopolitical world behind the surface variety or diffusion.

The piece casts a critical look back at the twentieth century from the threshold of the twenty-first. This is a Fuentes in possession of literary and critical consecration: having functioned as a pointed political commentator in national as well as international affairs for many a decade and having joined the pantheon of founding figures behind the Latin American Boom of midcentury, alongside such other luminaries as the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez and the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa.

To begin with, 1968 is assigned to the category of Constellation-Years. For Fuentes, such years are unique insofar as unexpected and separate events, movements, and personalities coincide without a ready explanation. They are set apart not because the developments in question cannot be accounted for, for they can and in multiple ways, but rather because their very coincidence defies reason. It is a category so unique, in fact, that only two other examples are invoked, both from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

First, 1810, when revolutionary movements arise throughout the Spanies colonies in the Americas, from one end of the continent to the other, in search of independence from the

Spanish crown. Second, 1848, when nationalist revolutions break out in Europe, throughout the range of the subcontinent, bearing a contradictory mix of nationalist projects (from Italy through Hungary to Germany) and internationalist aspirations (ideals of reform and progress).

Then, 1968 is given a Pyrrhic rendering. For Fuentes, Constellation-Years are further characterized as marked by a highly ironic mix of immediate and obvious as well as unexpected and long-range consequences, along Pyrrhic lines: apparent victories that represent actual defeats and/or seeming defeats that constitute postponed victories. Thus, neither in 1810 nor in 1848 did the results match the visions of the movements in question.

On the one hand, the year 1810 did bring independence to much of Hispanic America, but produced neither the freedom nor the prosperity envisioned. In fact, Fuentes argues, the promise of 1810 has yet to be largely realized in Latin America. Since then, tyranny and anarchy have marked and continue to mark the region, its peoples and states.

On the other hand, the year 1848 only served to strengthen the monarchies of Europe, yet at the same time unleashed a wave of political developments heretofore unimaginable—social legislation, political democracy, national unity. However, Fuentes points out, the given contradiction between nationalist programs and internationalist ideals has yet to be reconciled in Europe and, given the legacy of its imperial reach, throughout the world as well. Since then, the struggle between the local and the universal has characterized and continues to characterize the region, both the community itself and its many others across the globe.

The immediate and obvious ramifications of 1968 are beyond dispute. The student demonstrations in the streets of Paris against the established order of the state—conservatism, capitalism, consumism—and in search of a grand alliance with the French workers were betrayed by the Communist Party through its labor organization, the Confédération générale du travail (CGT), into the hands of the political establishment as embodied in President Charles de Gaulle.

The liberalizing reforms introduced by Alexander Dubcek, first secretary of the Communist Party, in Prague in the face of Soviet domination were trampled by a joint military intervention on the part of the Warsaw Pact, under orders from a rigidly doctrinaire and unremittingly stalinist leadership at the imperial center in the Kremlin.

The student protests in the streets of Mexico City against the undemocratic and repressive policies of a self-baptized revolutionary party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), long fossilized by then, were suffocated by the massacre carried out at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas by the security apparatus, under the direct command of the highest echelons of the party leadership, including President Gustavo Díaz Ordáz.

The unintended and long-range ramifications of 1968 are no less beyond question. In France, May of 1968 and the student calls for a return to the humanist ideals of modernity did see, eventually, the emergence and coming to a power of a renovated Socialist Party.

In Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring and the official attempt, echoed in the streets, to put a human face on socialism did experience, eventually, the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the

constitution of a Czech Republic, and the formation of the European Community. In Mexico, the Night of Tlatelolco and the student claims for openness and justice did witness, eventually, the electoral sacking of the PRI and the turn from authoritarian one-party to democratic pluralist rule in the presidential elections of 2000, in which the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) won under the leadership of Vicente Fox Quesada.

Such was the significance of 1968 for Fuentes. I stand in fundamental agreement, but I also see the need for an expansion of its reach and import, and hence of its character as a Constellation-Year crisscrossed by Pyrrhic reversals.

First, as already indicated, I would expand by way of temporal elongation. I would stretch the one, and undeniably climactic, year of 1968 into a longer period of time, upon which I would not be adverse to bestowing the familiar mantra of “the Sixties,” although I would not posit a precise numerical correlation between the period envisioned and the actual decade. The given demarcation I adopt both as a critic of society and culture and as a critic of religion and theology.

As formal point of departure, I would actually propose 1959, indeed January of 1959. In so doing I follow the keen insight of David Tombs in his thorough account of the economic-political and ecclesial-theological framework behind Liberation Theology in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> From a social and cultural

---

<sup>6</sup>David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Boston-Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002). Tombs first traces the historical background, material as well as discursive, leading up to the 1960s and the rise of Liberation Theology. This first section—Power

perspective, January 1 signals the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, an event of unmatched import for decades to come, not only in Latin America but also but also throughout the world. From a religious and theological perspective, January 25 marks the call of Pope John XXIII for a Second Vatican Council, an event of enormous significance for decades to come, not only for Catholicism but also for the entire Christian world as well as the religious globosphere. A pivotal month, indeed.

As formal point of conclusion, I would go along with 1968, certainly for all the reasons that Fuentes adduces, plus two others that I view as key harbingers of things to come, though in somewhat different ways. From a social and cultural perspective, I would highlight the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections — the beginning of the end at the very heart of the West.

From a religious and theological perspective, I would highlight the results of the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Colombia—a beginning seemingly without end, and thus an apparent exception to the worldwide trend. While

---

and Privilege: 1492-1959 (Part I)—is developed in terms of three major periods, decreasing in length: Conquest and Colonialism, 1492-1808; Independence and Neo-colonialism, 1808-1929; From Depression to Development, 1930-1959. Then, he follows the path of Liberation Theology, again both materially and discursively, from the 1960s through the 1990s.

This he does in terms of four phases, which in turn coincide with decades: Engaging the World: 1960-1969 (Part II); The Preferential Option for the Poor: 1970-1979 (Part III); The God of Life: 1980-1989 (Part IV); and Crisis of Hope: The 1990s (Part V). Throughout, Tombs artfully combines the account of each time-period in question by foregrounding and interweaving key developments in economic and politics as well as in church and theology.

the former signals a halt to and eventually a turn back in the winds of change, and for a very long time, the latter signifies a resolute turn forward, but only for a while.<sup>7</sup> Without question, a pivotal autumn/spring (depending on hemispheric location).

Second, I would also expand in terms of geographical scope. With respect to 1968 as such, one would have to include, at the very least, such happenings as the following: in Asia, the launching of the Tet Offensive (January) and the First Battle of Saigon (March) in South Vietnam; in Africa, the unrelenting spread of independence in sub-Saharan Africa, with Mauritius (March), Swaziland (September), and Equatorial Guinea (October); in Latin America, the previously mentioned gathering of the Conference of Latin American Bishops (August-September).

---

<sup>7</sup>The élan of Medellín, with its emphasis on critical analysis of the social context and its espousal of a preferential option for the poor, would bear immediate and much fruit in the emergence of Liberation Theology through the 1970s, but would begin to be deflated not long thereafter, through the 1980s, on a sustained and systematic basic by a series of parallel external developments: a Vatican increasingly intent on centralization and control in matters administrative as well as theological; the accumulated effects of national security states and policies throughout Latin America; and the inroads of politically conservative fundamentalist and pentecostal missions.

By the 1990s the movement found itself unable to advance its theoretical wherewithal in the light of internal and external critiques, to address a drastically changed political as well as economic order in the world, to enter into dialogue with a very different academic and discursive environment, and to regain a footing in religious and theological circles turned inwards and upwards. Ultimately, therefore, Medellín also joined the fate of 1968 and the Sixties, although leaving behind a trail of countless embers as well.

In terms of the Sixties as a whole, one could not bypass the process of decolonization at work through Africa and Asia, the emergence of liberation movements and military coups throughout Latin America, and the launching of such international organizations as the Movement of Non-aligned Nations in 1961 and the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Organization after the Tricontinental Conference (OSPAAL) in Havana in 1966.

Third, I would further expand by foregrounding the role of the United States as unquestionable leader of the West. With regard to 1968, the list proves long and tragic: the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (April); the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (April); the student takeover of Columbia University (April); the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles (June); the tumultuous Democratic Convention in Chicago (August).

With regard to the Sixties, the list is endless: countless marches on behalf of Civil Rights; countless demonstrations against the Vietnam War; countless student protests across colleges and universities; and countless innovations in society and culture as well as across the human sciences and the social sciences.

Lastly, I would expand by localizing, and here I want to get back to Latino/a reality and experience in general and the Latino/a religious and theological scene in particular.

In 1968 as such, three particular events, symptomatic of broader causes, should be recalled. In California, in March, the recently organized Chicano Brown Berets, under the leadership of Sal Castro, launch their East Los Angeles "blowouts" or walkouts



of thousands of students to protest on behalf of better education in the barrios. This could be looked upon, in retrospect, as the beginning of the Chicano urban struggle.<sup>8</sup>

Also in California, in July and August, as the strike and the boycott called by the National Farm Workers Association in 1965 goes into its third year, César Chávez begins his long fast to call attention to the plight and the cause of migrant workers.<sup>9</sup> In Chicago, in September, José “Cha-Cha” Jiménez, after a period of imprisonment and conscientization, transforms the Young Lords into a political human rights movement.<sup>10</sup>

In retrospect, this could be viewed as the beginning of the Puerto Rican urban struggle. Clearly, a year in which the struggle

---

<sup>8</sup>On Sal Castro and his role in the Chicano Movement, see Carlos Muñoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989); see also the research notes by Mario T. García, “Blowout: The Sal Castro Story,” in the following website: [chicano.ucla.edu/center/events/documents/csrrcp\\_CastroProgram.pdf](http://chicano.ucla.edu/center/events/documents/csrrcp_CastroProgram.pdf).

<sup>9</sup>On César Chávez, see Stephen R. Lloyd Moffett, “The Mysticism and Social Action of César Chávez” and “César Chávez and Mexican American Civil Religion,” in Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, eds., *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 35-51 and 53-64, respectively.

<sup>10</sup>On the Young Lords, see Michael Abramson, *Palante: Young Lords Party* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971) and Miguel “Mickey” Torres, *We Took to the Streets! Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords* (New Brunswick-London: Rutgers University Press, 2005); see also their website, <http://younglords.info>.

for civil rights among Latinos and Latinas is gathering momentum across the nation.

In the Sixties in general, a number of crucial developments, of various kinds, take place. Early in the decade, the first stirrings of a coming Latin American wave of immigration begin to be felt, as Cubans and Dominicans begin to arrive in large numbers, for different reasons. The Cuban exodus parallels the growing radicalization of the Cuban Revolution, as it moves from the neocolonial orbit of the United States into that of the Soviet Union. Within the context of the Cold War, the Cuban migration is welcomed by the U.S. government as political refugees from the orb of Communism.

The Dominican influx begins after the assassination of the long-time dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in 1961. Following the earlier model of Puerto Rican migration in the 1940s and 1950s, Operation Bootstrap, and with the specter of Communism in the Caribbean, the Dominican migration is the result of an officially sanctioned policy on both sides, designed to ease unemployment in the island, secure political instability in the region, and provide cheap labor in the mainland.

Toward mid-decade, the eventual turning of this early wave into a veritable flood of immigration is made possible through passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which abolished the restrictive quota systems of the 1920s and opened the gates to immigration from around the world.

Throughout the decade, the demands for Chicano Studies and Puerto Rican Studies are voiced across campuses on the West

and East Coast, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the emergence of a Latino/a cultural tradition is at work: from the early writings of José Antonio Villareal and Piri Thomas,<sup>12</sup> through the formation of El Teatro Campesino by Luis Valdez,<sup>13</sup> to the spread of Chicano murals in the Southwest and beyond.<sup>14</sup> Evidently, alongside the

---

<sup>11</sup>On this, see Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity. Popular Cultures, Everyday Lives* (New York-Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2000): 205-18 (“Latino Studies: New Contexts, New Concepts”).

<sup>12</sup>Villarreal publishes *Pocho* in 1959—a *Bildungsroman* involving a protagonist caught between two cultures in California and thus reflecting the Mexican American immigrant experience; in 1967 Thomas brings out *Down These Mean Streets*—an autobiographical account of his life as a young child and adolescent in the *barrio* of New York City and hence mirroring the Puerto Rican migrant experience.

<sup>13</sup>El Teatro Campesino comes into being in 1965, when playwright Luis Valdez joins César Chávez in his efforts to organize the farm workers of Delano, California, and creates a theater in the fields, calling upon the workers themselves for dramatizations of their lives and struggles. Eventually, it turns into a concerted move to create a theatre for the Chicano Nation, highly successful and with enormous influence throughout the country. See Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup>The Chicano Mural Movement, grounded in the Mexican muralist tradition of the 1920s and 1930s, took root throughout the *barrios* of the Southwest in the 1960s, seeking to retrieve and depict multiple facets of Mexican American culture throughout urban public spaces. The movement quickly spread to other parts of the country as well. See, e.g., Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez, *Signs*

burgeoning social movements, a demographic, discursive, and cultural transformation is brewing among Latinos and Latinas.

In sum, a Constellation-Year, indeed a Constellation-Period, if ever there was one. In the United States, this sense of ferment and promise, of excitement and hope, comes to an end with the November elections, as the Republicans defeat the Democrats and Richard M. Nixon edges out Hubert H. Humphrey.

The reversal does not happen quickly—as in Paris, Prague, or Mexico City—but gradually. It does not happen by outright betrayal, as in Paris; nor by brutal invasion, as in Prague; nor by bloody massacre, as in Mexico City. It happens, rather, by way of a long conservative backlash, the end of which we may only now be in the process of witnessing.

This backlash included such developments as the following: the early appeal to a Silent Majority and a national Tradition on the part of the Nixon camp—“Mother, Apple Pie, and Nixon,” as one of the campaign slogans put it; the southern strategy of the Republican Party—a deliberate and divisive sharpening of the racial gulf, drawing on post-Civil Rights white recalcitrance and resentment, for electoral gain; the return to the political domain of Evangelical Protestantism and the subsequent rise of the Christian Right—that supremely un-Protestant juxtaposition of church and state in the concept of a Christian America; and the sustained neo-conservative assault on federal social programs—not only the recent legislation behind the Great Society of Lyndon Baines Johnson but also the standing legacy

---

*from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Venice: Social and Public Art Resource Center; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

from the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

At the same time, a year and period of unmistakable Pyrrhic dimensions: what at first seem like victories or defeats can ultimately, in retrospect, be interpreted as defeats or victories, respectively. Thus, behind the conservative facade and crusade in the country, the embers of ferment and promise, excitement and hope, smolder and multiply, in a variety of ways. So much so, in effect, that 2008 may well come to mark the beginning of a return to the spirit of the Sixties, as the conservative programme crumbles in the twilight of what may well turn out to be the most arrogant and most incompetent administration in recent history, leaving in its wake a broad and tragic trail of destruction. One need only consider the legacy.

First, a country engaged in a disastrous war in Iraq—launched under false pretenses (weapons of mass destruction) and pretentious claims (spread of freedom), but meant to secure the oil deposits of the Middle East and to insure the safety of Israel; wreaking incredible havoc within Iraq itself, material as well as human; and bringing about perhaps irreparable convulsion throughout the region.

Second, a world power with a much-diminished standing in global affairs—facing rejection, even disdain, from throughout the Western and non-Western alike; dismissing all calls for responsibility in the face of ongoing climate change and mounting ecological disaster; and bringing out the worst of humanity through its adopted security policies of seizure, surveillance, and torture.

Third, a nation in profound moral disarray at home—a political economy that favors the few and in grand fashion; a

national identity mired in one of its recurring bouts of nativism and intent on gating itself from its others; and a public arena erisscrossed by failure, corruption, and hypocrisy.

Finally, a reigning political religion fatally enumbered by a triumphalist and exclusivist vision of a restored Christian America—proclaiming a Gospel of endless prosperity for the faithful believers; scapegoating its sexual others and dismissive of its religious others; and indulging in endless eschatological ruminations in the light of its appointed messianic mission and its coming apocalyptic rescue.

Given such legacy, it is no wonder that the embers of a different era continue to smolder and begin to spread. One such ember, now approaching the dimensions of a wildfire, is, I would argue, represented by our Latino/a community and our Latino/a endeavors in religious and theological studies.

First of all, compared to 1968, the shape of our community is unrecognizable. On the one hand, our numbers will have grown, dramatically, to past 15% of the population by 2010 and about 25% by 2048. On the other hand, our members have diversified from its beginning formations and early expansions—Mexican Americans in the Southwest and Puerto Ricans in the Midwest and the Northeast, alongside new contingents of Cuban Americans and Dominican Americans throughout the Eastern Seaboard—to include, at this point, every region, every country, and every area of Latin America, from coast to coast and from border to border.

In addition, the shape of our field, in contrast to 1968, is no less incredible. Indeed, our founding texts would not be written for over a decade yet. Here I have in mind: Anthony Stevens-Arroyo's *Prophets Denied Honor* (1980); Virgilio Elizondo's

*Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* (1983); Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz' *Hispanic Women Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (1983); Harold J. Recinos' *Hear the Cry! A Latino Pastor Challenges the Church* (1989); and Justo L. González' *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (1990). Look at us now: active in every field of research; present throughout all academic contexts and all professional venues; producers of voluminous scholarly literature, beyond anyone's ability to read and digest.

Yet, much remains to be done. I do fear that we have grown much too isolated in our disciplines and institutions, our concerns and pursuits. I should like to conclude, therefore, with a Call to Action. A call that I myself, I assure you, take to heart quite seriously, even as I enter what I hope will be, *Dios mediante*, my years of academic and professional culmination.

To begin with, Latino/a cultural production in general and academic studies in particular emerged out of social struggles and movements. This tradition of close connection between material matrix and cultural production is no longer as well-known or as duly sustained as it should be. We need to recover this tradition as a guiding and driving legacy, to continue such linkage in critical fashion in the light of subsequent developments, and to foster our own links to the community.

Second, Latino/a religious and theological production functions, quite often, without acquaintance and interaction with Latino/a cultural production in general or academic production in particular. We need to approach our endeavor as one among many interrelated and interdependent pursuits and to carry it out in sustained critical interchange with all such other dimensions.

Third, Latino/a religious and theological production invariably fails to see itself as well as a realm of cultural production from a minoritized group within the country and hence as an endeavor alongside other endeavors among other minoritized groups, such as African Americans and Asian Americans. We need to approach our work in full synoptic fashion in this regard: in keen awareness of and critical dialogue with the religious and theological discourse of other minoritized groups.

Fourth, Latino/a cultural production in general and academic studies in particular emerged in solidarity with social struggles and movements not only in the respective countries of origin but also in Latin America as a whole. Latino/a religious and theological discourse was no exception: the ties to a nascent Liberation Theology were numerous and explicit. We need to recover this sense of solidarity in our work with both our respective countries of origin and with that *otra América* to which we also belong.

Lastly, as minoritized discourse, Latino/a religious and theological production, like Latino/a cultural production and academic studies as a whole, finds itself always and without respite under the constitutive gaze of the dominant discourse.

We need to return the gaze in kind: to insert ourselves into all nooks and crannies of United States cultural, academic, and religio-theological discourse—calling into question categories, transforming frameworks, upsetting established opinion, muddying the waters. Not only on our behalf, I would add, but also with other minoritized groups in kind, and ultimately for the sake of the dominant as well.



Such, then, are some of the key components of my Call to Action. It is a Call to Action in the light of the Defining Moment of my generation, 1968 and the Sixties, its forthcoming anniversary and its historical trail of embers. It is a Call to Action with a view toward the forthcoming twentieth anniversary of the Hispanic Summer Program, in 2008, in itself one of many such embers of Latino/a conscientization and mobilization.

It is, lastly, a Call to Action in the midst of one of those recurring periods of nativism and xenophobia in U.S. society and culture, in which we Latinos and Latinas have come to figure so prominently, as objects of fear and attack. In all of this, our field and our profession, has an important mission and a crucial role to play.

Let us celebrate, then, and let us celebrate *in grande*, by taking up the challenge of our times and struggling for liberation and freedom, justice and well-being. Let us further recall, as we do so, that wonderful rallying cry that originated with César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, that echoed incessantly throughout the agricultural fields of California, and that was intoned in the meetings and marches of the United Farm Workers movement—*¡Sí, se puede!* Let us take it up, joining the many who have done so already in the movement for immigration reform, and respond in kind, *¡Sí, Señor, sí que se puede!*

## **Resumen**

*El año 2008 representa una fecha clave para la teología Latina. El autor, en este artículo presentado durante la apertura del Programa Hispano de Verano del 2007, traza las fechas claves desde el 1968, un año seminal para el comienzo de muchas teologías minoritarias, notable por los eventos relacionados al movimiento civil en los Estados Unidos, los asesinatos de Martin Luther King Jr. y Robert Kennedy, y el comienzo de la guerra de Vietnam en pleno. Por igual, otros eventos mundiales y sus repercusiones durante los siguientes años son analizados por el autor argumentando como esos eventos han afectado las generaciones y teologías que surgieron de esa época. Después del vistazo a la historia, el autor examina las consecuencias de esos eventos y como nos afectan hoy. Por igual, el autor toma nota de eventos más recientes y el impacto que tendrán en los años siguientes.*



Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.