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Reflections of a «Recovering Outer Catholic»

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Resumen

Este ensayo comenta la necesidad largamente postergada de que los teólogos católicos latinxs resistan la enseñanza católica romana sobre la sexualidad sacándola de los márgenes e integrándola como un tema de reflexión teológica en pie de igualdad. Basado en el discurso presidencial de 2014 del autor ante la Academia de Teólogos Católicos Hispanos de Estados Unidos (ACHTUS), revisa los desafíos —pastorales, teológicos, sociales y psicológicos— de confrontar la homofobia y la exclusión de las personas queer por parte de la Iglesia Católica Romana.

Palabras clave: Catolicismo romano, Sexualidad, Teología Católica Latinx.

Resumo

Este ensaio comenta sobre a necessidade, há muito distinta, de que os teólogos católicos latinos resistam ao ensinamento católico romano sobre sexualidade, retirando-o das margens e integrando-o como um tema de reflexão teológica de igual para igual. Baseado no discurso presidencial do autor na Academia de Teólogos Hispânicos Católicos dos Estados Unidos (ACHTUS) em 2014, ele analisa os desafios —pastorais, teológicos, sociais e psicológicos— de enfrentar a homofobia e a exclusão de pessoas queer pela Igreja Católica Romana.

Palavras-chave: Catolicismo Romano, Sexualidade, Teologia Católica Latinx.

Abstract

This essay comments on the long-deferred need for Latinx Catholic theologians to resist Roman Catholic teaching on sexuality by taking it out of the margins and integrating it as a co-equal topic of theological reflection. Based on the author's 2014 presidential address to the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS), it reviews the challenges — pastoral, theological, social, and psychological — of confronting homophobia and the exclusion of queer subjects by the Roman Catholic Church.

Keywords: Roman Catholicism, Sexuality, Latinx Catholic theology.

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Let's Talk About Sex!¹

In June 2014 I had the honor of organizing and presiding at the annual colloquium of the Academy of Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). A year before the meeting, as I started thinking about possible themes, I found it difficult to settle on any one topic. So many matters seemed to cry out for our attention as a scholarly organization: the massive challenge of migration at the southern U.S. border; the perpetually patriarchal refusal of women's ordination in the Roman Catholic Church; the unbearable invisibility of Afro-Latinx voices in our theologies; the violence of neoliberal capitalism as a global human crisis. But in 2013, as I unfolded these and other possible conference themes to our governing board, it became clear from reactions in the room that I had hit the motherlode when I suggested we do the 2014 meeting on «the continuing *queer omission* in U.S. Latino/a Theology.»

Invoking our «queer omission,» I was tipping my hat to a distinguished and wonderful colleague, James Nickoloff, who had challenged ACHTUS's silence on matters of sexuality in a memorable article published a decade earlier in the *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology* (Nickoloff, 2003). James B. Nickoloff (2003) decried the lack of «a sustained examination of the consequences for theology of a serious consideration of sexuality or sex» (p. 31) by Latinx Catholic theologians. And on the other side of the ledger, he noted, gay and lesbian studies had given little attention to religion and even less to systematic Christian theology. «Is this [an] innocent neglect on both sides,» he asked,

¹ This is a slightly expanded draft of the address I presented as newly installed President of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States for 2014-2015, at the ACHTUS Colloquium in San Diego, on June 3, 2014. The colloquium theme was «Redressing a 'Queer Omission': Latina/o-Catholic Perspectives on Sexuality.» The «queer omission» referred to our organization's longtime failure to address an entire colloquium on the challenging theme of sexuality (Nickoloff, 2003).

«or a mutual exclusion which serves a purpose?» (Nickoloff, 2003: 31). Furthermore, Nickoloff (2003) went on to note that U.S. Latinx theology is «well acquainted with the politics of exclusion and its consequences for theory» (p. 32). Therefore, the *queer omission* of reflection on non-hetero sexualities represented an unfathomable and unacceptable shortcoming for ACHTUS.

Filling the breach, Nickoloff went on to review insights from queer theory in dialog with pastoral theology. His article called for «a *queer colloquium*: una teología ‘homo’ de conjunto,» that would take up three matters: (a) a theology of redemption for queer persons expelled from homophobic families; (b) reflections on «the relationship between self-actualization and self-denial,» and «the salvific value of self-sacrifice»; and (c) the challenge of «untruth in the construction of personal identities [...] faith, and [...] political commitments» (Nickoloff, 2003: 51). The article closed with an invitation to our scholarly community:

With Latina and Latino colleagues, we homo-Christians invite the Church to grow theologically —indeed, to reject dangerous falsehoods. Even more importantly, we ask our Hispanic colleagues to allow us to join them as equals in the common quest for more authentic faith, stronger hope, and more effective love (Nickoloff, 2003: 51).

Alas, ten years after his prophetic call, ACHTUS still had not answered with the sort of dialog he had envisioned. Of course, a great deal had unfolded in the ensuing decade. The turn-of-the-millennium nomenclature of «gay and lesbian studies» had widened into research and reflection on *queer* and *trans* communities.

My proposal to the ACHTUS board took up and expanded on Nickoloff’s call for a colloquium. First, we needed to acknowledge continuing resistances to the full inclusion of non-hetero identities and theological perspectives in our discussions. Second,

we should recognize and attend to the irruption of young, next-generation queer voices who were integrating a vast basket of new theoretical tools, and studying the intersections of gender, sexuality, and faith discourse in new ways. Finally, we needed to give space and place to hetero people who think in non-binarist ways about gender/sex, and particularly consider how to deconstruct and transform Catholic theological heterosexism. Above all, I hoped the meeting could open space for *everyone of every sexuality* to talk in truthful tones about the crossings between their sexual lives and their religious identities.

The enthusiastic embrace that greeted my proposal seemed to mean that the time had come —at long last(!)— *for us Latinx Catholics to talk about sex*. As the meeting approached I was entertaining a lot of crazy hopes and dreams for what would come — far more than a two-and-a-half-day meeting of Latinx Catholic scholars could possibly bear. I wondered if the Second Coming itself could bear all my hopes and dreams for the meeting.

That this was to be a meeting of Latinx theologians working mostly in the homophobic Roman Catholic tradition made things doubly dreamy for me. Those who know me know I have always struggled with my vocation to theological work — especially in my identity as a theologian who thinks mostly in the great stream of Catholic-Christian traditions. For much too long I have felt abandoned by a spirit I used to find in the Roman Catholic Church: the Spirit augured by the vision and teachings of the Second Vatican Council. I am a child of Vatican II — and have glorious recollections of middle-school days with the Benedictines of St. Louis Priory School. In the early 1970s, they sported long beards and played guitars during mass, singing oldie-moldies like *Kum-ba-ya*. My classmates and I —randy pubescent boys— would compete with one another to break the rafters of the school's Common Room with our singing. There was a lot of love and healthy fellowship, a powerful spirit in the Roman Catholic Church then. Those days seem far away.

In adulthood, the main anchors of my religious identity have been my love of critical theological reason, my passion for justice, and my lifelong experience in Catholic educational institutions. Those experiences eclipsed most of my feelings for life in any parish. And my experience of institutional Roman Catholicism has mostly left me cold. I am an alumnus of a slew of Catholic schools — from high school to my doctoral studies. So concerning my religious identity, I have long understood myself as a «recovering outer Catholic.»

My life in the ambit of Roman Catholicism has too often involved pain and feelings of inadequacy for me, perhaps as the by-product of the religious masochism in which I was steeped in church and school. A feeling of the sort that the late German theologian Dorothee Sölle (1986) wrote about so trenchantly. I was reared in a time when corporal punishment was a regular disciplinary practice. I was forever having authority figures tell me how far I had fallen with regard to matters academic, moral, or spiritual. Those litanies of shortcoming gave ground to a feeling that I was lost in more than a venial way — perhaps in a more ontological or genetic sense. *Damned, perhaps!* It did not help that I was the only Latino in a sea of privileged white classmates — plus maybe three or four African American students. The sense that I was spiritually fallen flowed into my sense of belonging unhappily to a fallen culture — a crypto-*Cubano* passing in Anglo North America! Growing up Roman Catholic and Latino in the United States, I got a double whammy.

We talk about *Catholic guilt* — and Latinxs have a particular investment in that guilt. Nevertheless, as a maturing scholar, I see that the ambivalences in my religious identity involved more than guilt. In the historical coloniality of Roman Catholicism, guilt is just the tip of an iceberg that runs down into our souls and freezes our agency in floes of inhibition, impotence, hesitation, anxiety, and the mortal fear of perdition. We are very supple putty in the hands of those who can exploit our feelings of moral shortcoming.

That is particularly true in those we have entrusted with the power to mediate our salvation: our priests, religious, theologians, and those other adults on whom we rely for spiritual and moral tutelage. I have borne many religious wounds on the fleshy fabric of my spirit. Even well into midlife, I sometimes find myself wrestling with a strange sense of unconfessable guilt for some seven-story sinfulness that is not entirely my own. These feelings can perform a sort of self-excommunication on me, from the *inside* of my soul.

Therefore, in very contradictory ways, I am a subject of Roman Catholicism — subject to the beauty of the post-conciliar spirit I still sometimes feel; yet, also subject to the colonizing force of the Church's claims to moral authority, which manifests disciplinary violence that is epistemological in form and psycho-somatic in its self-abasing effects. Since I have never found a happy medium in my religious identity, I can hardly settle comfortably into my identity as a Catholic. Therefore, in my wildest dreams, I never imagined I would become tenured on a theological faculty at a Jesuit Catholic university.

I never imagined I might publicly address the issues presented in this article as president of a scholarly organization tied to the Roman Catholic Church. How could I? — since it is a simmering rage concerning things both Latinx and Catholic that paved my path to this point in life. I am —like so many other Latin Americans and Latinxs— brought up in the bosom of Roman Catholicism, who chafed under the myriad contradictions, violence, hypocrisies, cowardices, and excommunications of the Church. For me, though, those contradictions were also rich fodder, fertilizing the mad rage for justice and love that animates my theological reasoning.

Unnerved Marathon Men

A couple of days before I delivered the address from which this article is adapted, two Latino men approached the welcome table we had set up for the colloquium. They were part of a local marathon race that was being run around the harbor near the hotel where the meeting was taking place. These «marathon men,» evidently militant Roman Catholics, confronted my poor student assistant and asked her about the conference. They had seen the excellent colloquium marquis we had erected in front of her station, containing images from a number of Latinx artists whose work provocatively challenged the patriarchal heterosexism that runs rampant in Latinx and Chicanx cultures. Naturally, I intervened. Their body language suggested that these guys were suppressing a toxic mix of fear and rage, although they remained civil. They asked me how this could be a Catholic theological meeting. They wanted to know if we were promoting homosexuality: «Does the Church approve of this?» one asked.

I confess I was flummoxed by their questions. And there it was *in my body*, the very sign and countersign of my colonized Catholic identity. I repeat: *I was flummoxed by their questions*, viscerally so. The colonizing power of the historical violence of Roman Catholicism was manifesting before me as the harbinger of something potentially quite dangerous. I quickly ran through my «Orlando Espín 101» checklist, and addressed the following points to them:²

- ✂• The Church is more than just its teaching.
- ✂• The faith of the people, the critical mediation of theologians, and the doctrinal inscription of institutional

² Orlando O. Espín is a leading Latino theologian of culture. The mainstay of his work is his argument that revelation —and perforce theology— comes from, and through, the people and their cultures (Espín, 1997, 2015, 2019; Espín and Díaz, 1999).

Roman Catholicism must subsist as the three-sided economy of a larger *magisterium*.

- ✠ Our Church is not only its bishops or the Pope — nor does its authority rest in the ordained clergy. If anything, the institutional representatives of the Roman Catholic Church must behave more like humble servants than overbearing *kyriarchs*.
- ✠ Their edification of the People of God must entail a loving and self-critical dialog with the faith of the people. A circular dialog, rather than a top-down dictatorship.

However, my nerves failed me, and I stalled in the face of the questions of these two marathoning Roman Catholics. I can respect that their questions were sincerely held and offered in good faith. Yet, I also wondered how I could find a middle ground in dialog with them so that they could accept my belief that this «queer omission» of sexuality in theological discourse — especially in today’s world— does our Church no good. For them, matters seemed much more straightforward:

- ✠ The popes hold homosexuality to be sinful — and that’s it.
- ✠ What the popes say is law.
- ✠ There is no faithful ground from which to question papal teaching.

I offered what I now feel were weak responses: (a) that we at that meeting were all faculty and grad students from the nation’s top Roman Catholic institutions of higher learning, (b) that we have ordained religious in the group there, and (c) that scholarship is more about dialog and asking critical questions than defending anything in particular, other than a love of truth. And that was pretty much it. Reflecting on this today, it was a terrifying moment in which I was confronting the violent social forces we had been deconstructing in our scholarly sessions.

As I said, *I was flummoxed.*

Beyond that, I wish I had said that the Roman Catholic Church—a community claiming historical descent from nothing less than the historical incarnation of God— *needs no defense against anyone or anything.* Only when Christian churches ground themselves in a prophetically and critically proclaimed Gospel can they assume their places in the *quasi-eternal historicity* of the kin-dom of God. As a text of reflection for Christians trying to get by in their everyday *cotidianidad*, the Gospel is an open door, if it is anything at all. I wish I had said that Roman Catholic theological reason has to deploy a hermeneutic of love to give a proper compass to doctrine. For me, that principle is Jesus's *law of love*: Love not as law, but as an open door, an opening to the future, an opening to life, and an unbridled openness to the love of everyone around us. The eschatological reign of God is a beloved community, partly present, but historically unfulfilled and incomplete — an ongoing, unfinished project of socializing and universalizing the institutions and ethos of love. That, to me, is what the Gospel is all about: love unbound and unbridled. Love of every person for every other person, unto death!

The radicality of this notion of love was vividly illustrated in some artwork from the Chicano artist, Alex Donis, which one of our colleagues —Laura Pérez (2014)— reviewed in her conference presentation. Donis's visionary stained-glass installation, *My Cathedral* (2003 [1997]), offered up a series of frontally homoerotic images, with a number of mouth-to-mouth kisses between the most unlikely beloveds from sundry religious traditions: Mary Magdalen and the Virgin of Guadalupe; Jesus and the Hindu Lord Rama; Pope John Paul II and Mahatma Gandhi; Cesar Chavez and the Cuban revolutionary, Ernesto «Che» Guevara; and Martin Luther King, Jr. kissing a man wearing robes of the infamously racist Ku Klux Klan.

Not surprisingly, Donis's provocative work suffered a fate all too typical among many recent Chicax artists who dare to challenge heteronormative religiosity, as vandals smashed several of the glass images of *My Cathedral*. Donis's exhibit inspired in me a reinscription of the Christian scriptures:

And Jesus told them another parable, saying: "The Reign of the Heavens is like this: Martin Luther King, Jr., kissing a Klansman, welcoming him into his Beloved Community with a tender kiss on the mouth ...



Images from Alex Donis's installation *My Cathedral*. Left to right: (1) «Che Guevara and Cesar Chavez»; (2) «Martin Luther King Jr. and Ku Klux Klansman»; (3) «Pope John Paul II and Mahatma Gandhi.»

All images are oil and enamel on plexi light-box, 36"x24". © 2003 [1997], Alex Donis. Reprinted courtesy of the artist.

Donis's images —irreverent thought they be— take us light-years beyond the sclerotic imaginary of mainstream Roman Catholicism. Yet the spirit of Gospel truth is very much there in his art, presenting an eschatological vision of the Reign of God that is *way* off the charts: once antagonistic bodies resurrected, transfigured, and embracing a transgressive image of divine, unbridled love. His art demonstrated the impoverishment of our prevailing religious imaginary in just a few images.

My militant Roman Catholic marathoners went away quite unhappy — but so did I. They left me feeling again like I was not a proper Catholic. But this time my sense of moral and spiritual failure owed more to my inability to respond courageously to their questions. I sensed these men might be open to violence. They seemed to accept the logic —indeed, the necessity— of excommunication to regulate the supposed purity of their faith. Yet, to me, the very practice of excommunication —that is, the practice of most any sort of exclusion by human beings against one another— annihilates the salvific message of the Gospel.

The contradiction between the Gospel of love and the institutional violence of moral opprobrium, exclusion, and excommunication —too often inscribed in Roman Catholic teaching— marks the fault line of a stubborn split in my religious identity. For me —and I suspect many of my readers— being Roman Catholic involves living the sort of double-bind that Jesus and his people must have felt, being the ambivalent subjects of an empire that had colonized their religious institutions and imaginary.

Religion always played that role in antiquity and continues to do so in modernity. From at least the Fourth Century until the Enlightenment, Western Christianity was the most influential shaper of the moral ideology of the West. My religious identity issues make more sense if I consider the instrumental role that Roman Catholicism played in the colonization of Western morality — especially in the history of the *Américas*. Because of the historical involvement of Roman Catholics in all sorts of colonial projects which divide, contradict, and dilute the Gospel's law of love, I cannot look uncritically at the *magisterium*. I must consider questions of Catholic identity —and critical ecclesial questions of «Who is a proper Catholic?» or «Who is 'Catholic enough' to be a member of ACHTUS?»— in light of the coloniality of power, gender, and sexualities in which the Roman Catholic church as an institution was historically invested.

In our times, Roman Catholicism is not as central to Western modernity's ideological deployment as it was in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Yet many of its perspectives and intimate disciplinary technologies —of the body, of gender identities and relations, of sexualities, and family relations— persist as tropics of struggle and renegotiation. Those tropics are deeply embedded in the lives of today's Latinx people.

Though Roman Catholic morality continues to play its role in the coloniality of power —especially in sex and gender— Latinx theology has scarcely begun to criticize it. Even the emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology —with its more radical anticolonial/anti-capitalist discourse— has been cited for the timidity of its limited notions of liberation. However, this theology —prominent as it is among Roman Catholics— is an ecumenical affair. From the end of the decade of 1990, scholars like the late Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008; also Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004), Ivone Gebara (1999, Gebara and Bingemer 2004; see also Nogueira-Godsey, 2013), and Elina Vuola (2002) have criticized what Vuola called the «limits of liberation.» Althaus-Reid pioneered a new genre of «indecent theology» to abet the liberation of the many sexualities repressed by Roman Catholic and Protestant Christendom.

This is why we have needed to make our braver stand in responding to challenges of the sort made two decades ago, by folks like Jim Nickoloff (2003), to redress the «queer omission» in Latinx theology: our collective failure to reflect on sexuality. This language of a «queer omission» understates the violence of excluding non-hetero sexualities as a recognized and supported node within the living matrix of the Roman Catholic Church. Queer folk has always been active as a life force in our churches, albeit mostly in shadow. Fortunately, a few Latinx Catholics have begun to take up the challenge. The most outstanding example is Miguel Díaz's recently published *Queer God de Amor* (Díaz, 2022), which takes up a penetrating reading of the theo-erotics laden in

the spiritual canticles San Juan de Cruz (1542-1591), particularly his poem «Llama de Amor Viva» [living flame of love] (1584-1585).

Motives for a Latinx Roman Catholic Conversation on Sexuality

Recalling some of my motives for pressing forward with this theme, three come to the fore. The first stems from my loving commitment to my San Francisco Bay Area students. It is probably easy for outsiders to imagine that students in San Francisco are brought up in an uncomplicated, liberated relationship concerning the city's diverse sexual cultures. This is more stereotype than truth. In reality, students in my classes are confronted with stark choices concerning their identities as members of most any mainline Christian church.

For Roman Catholic students, their everyday sense of what is good and moral clashes with whole categories of church teaching — especially teaching on gender and sexuality. The contradictions between the laity's moral life and its church's moral authority have often estranged them from the faith in which they were raised. That estrangement sharpens for students when they consider the flagrant abuses of power Church leaders undertook for many years concerning the global crisis of clergy sexual abuse. Let us further postulate that the theological rationales underwriting Roman Catholic teaching on sexual morality are unknown to the average layperson, if not incomprehensible. From this perspective, it is easy to see that Roman Catholicism is suffering a deeply rooted crisis of legitimacy.

My classroom experience shows more and more that my students consider same-sex love to be just as «normal» and «reasonable» —for those so inclined— as heterosexual loving. They do not judge it with the ferocity of *heteros* from earlier

generations. And for the many queer students in my classes, there is no question of the reasonableness and goodness of the sexual affections they enjoy. Most of my students —gay and straight— do not wonder whether same-sex love is sinful in God’s eyes. Instead, They wonder how Christian churches can preach love as their governing ethos while excluding queer persons from complete legitimacy and equal dignity. These exclusions are not merely external or political but far from benign. The main problem with so much Roman Catholic teaching on sexuality is that it can be *psychologically fatal* to those who continue to be told that their desire for someone of their own sex is an «intrinsic moral evil,» an «objective disorder,» or a biblical abomination. In presenting non-hetero love as a violation of God’s nature, the Roman Catholic Church amputates itself, suppressing forms of sexual self-expression that have always existed in every culture. The most pernicious result of this sort of teaching is the self-hatred, self-destructiveness, and suicide it fosters in queer Christians.

The cornerstone of Roman Catholic teaching on homosexuality is Cardinal Josef Ratzinger’s 1986 instruction, «Epistula Ad Universos Catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopos de Pastoralis Personarum Homosexualium Cura» (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986a).³ Not only does it castigate same-sex love as gravely sinful, it darkly suggests that gay-bashing may be *just desserts* for those seeking equality and civil rights for LGBTIQ+ communities. Students reading this instruction today are often horrified by its blunt language. As an instructor, I must recognize that for queer students an encounter with a document like this can be lacerating, even lethal.

³ The Latin phrase *homosexualium cura* is translatable as «care» or «cure» of «homosexuals.» It is worth noting that the Latin word *homosexualium* would not have existed in the time when Latin was a living language. The instruction is also posted to the Vatican’s website in English, under the more benign title, «Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons» (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986b).

Liberating the Sexual Roman Catholic

As a theologian, I have to ask whether there is any Christian defense of forms of exclusion that incite self-hatred, violence, and even murder. Participating in conferences like our 2014 meeting enabled us to critically situate the colonialities of gender and sexuality underwritten by Roman Catholicism and redress the liberation of healthy, open, and self-affirming sexualities.

A second motivation for that meeting had to do with my commitment to honor many queer friends, especially queer Roman Catholic friends who have given me so much love, friendship, and mirth for so long. Their courage in the face of sometimes terrifying adversity sets a high standard for me, one I hoped to meet by helping to promote the liberalization of Latinx Catholic sexual cultures, and calling for an end to homophobic discourse in the Roman Catholic *magisterium*.

A third motivation may be the most personally compelling, however: It has to do with my own struggle for liberation as a sexual subject. Having so many queer friends over the years has given me ample occasion to interrogate and deconstruct my sexuality — my *machismo*, my heterosexual orientations, my same-sex desires, and the abiding need for tenderness that grounds my spirit in this God-giving carnal body. As I age, I know that my formation as a *hetero-Cubano machista* was anything but a «natural» development. *Al contrario*, the more I come to know myself, the more my masculinity shows contradictions, masochistic violence, and the strands and braids of a most unnatural and socialized construction. I am sure that every Latino male reader could relate to me if I said that the wounds that bind up my most profound attachments to my masculinity came from other men who indicted or questioned my «manliness.» Such indictments made me feel that my dignity as a human being was being undercut. Sometimes those experiences were accompanied by the threat —or more than threats— of violence.

The sex education I got in my Benedictine boys' prep school did not help. We received fairly explicit —if clinical— instruction on the biological functions of sex and reproduction. However, we got nothing memorable or helpful about sexual arts or the emotional side of the erotic life. It is not hard to suspect why: Celibate Roman Catholic priests were in over their heads regarding sex and love. They could speak of conjugal love in the most superficial and euphemistic ways. But the nitty-gritty, down-and-dirty, funky side of love and sex? *No way, José*. Naturally, we grew up with little basis for understanding or celebrating eroticism. Today it is easy for me to say —as a matter of principle— that eroticism between people who are crazy about each other is one of the most beautiful things in the world. I have had to do a great deal of inner work —against the grain of my Roman Catholic sex education— to liberate my inhibitions and learn to love *a mi manera*.

Picking Up the Pieces

However to this day —as liberated as I feel about my own sexual life— there are freedoms I will never let myself enjoy: people I was moved by —men and women and trans people alike — yet never held even once in my arms. The loss of some of those lovers still haunts me. As a responsible adult, I know that no one can take responsibility for my sexual agency but me. However, I have also learned that some wounds damage us in ways that will prove *fateful* if they do not prove *fatal*. One part of my soul remains paralyzed by reflexive self-hatred in those rare and beautiful moments when I feel sexually moved by the spirits of other men.

Another part of my soul lodges a male masochism that drives my pursuit of scholarly excellence and career success. Those cleavages are underwritten by Roman Catholic teaching and the colonized cultures that come from them. Notwithstanding, in the faultlines I have discovered that I have been on a deeper journey, becoming a sort of *New Mestiza*, as described in the work of Gloria

Anzaldúa (1987). Though my spirit is cleaved by the violence of our socialized limits on the freedom to love, I resist. Looking outward from my own psychic borders, I work at remapping myself; standing at *la encrucijada... despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*, purging and remaking my multiple Self.

In 2014 I closed my address to my ACHTUS colleagues with a postscript of love and hope:

Given my experience —one rather typical for Latino/a Catholics— I wonder again that I should be here as president of this distinguished theological confab. The answer is quite simple. It's not just that you elected me; you all live, think, and work according to Jesus's law of love. This colloquium year, I am the collateral beneficiary and trustee of that love. I open myself to that love and will cherish it —as I cherish you all— with a deep sense of humility and a total desire to serve and build up this little ACHTUS of ours. As I said, I don't feel I belong here in many ways. But I have been called here and have answered — *Presente!*

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