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FROM THE HEART OF OUR PEOPLE

Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology

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Introduction

The present volume is not *about* or just *for* U.S. Latinos/as. It is a collection of original essays that *explore* issues in Catholic systematic theology from the perspective of Latino/a¹ faith and culture. Furthermore, this book is an example of doing theology from that perspective.

Latino/a theology is not a monolithic discipline. Consequently, these essays do not represent the only way of doing Catholic systematics from the Latino/a experience. They are the result of a year-long process of discussion, mutual critique, and reflection by twelve theologians engaged in what has come to be known as *teología de conjunto*.² Therefore, the essays in this volume cannot be separated from the dialogical context within which they emerged. This way of doing theology is a departure from the usual style of European and European-American theological scholarship. The chapters in this book certainly represent the insights, research, and work of their individual authors; but as it will become clear to the reader, all the texts are engaged in mutual conversation. This volume, therefore, should be read as a whole.

At the 1995 annual meeting of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS) in New York, Professor Miguel H. Díaz raised the question: "What would Catholic systematics look like if it were done *latinamente*?" The challenge was picked up by a number of theologians attending the ACHTUS meeting and by the editor-in-chief of Orbis Books.

In 1996 Professor Orlando O. Espín, on behalf of the Center for the Study of Latino/a Catholicism (of the University of San Diego), requested the necessary funding from the Lilly Endowment, which generously agreed to support a year-long symposium. Nine Latino/a Catholic systematians were invited to participate in the process. A Latino biblical scholar, a Protestant Latino theologian and church historian, and a Latin American systematian joined the group in order to provide their expertise and distinct perspectives. Díaz's original question was posed to the group as the sole agenda. Two week-long meetings in San Diego, in January and July of 1997, separated and followed by frequent consultations among the participants, provided the context for the free-flowing and enriching conversations which gave birth to the essays in the present volume.