

FOREWORD

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It is indeed an honor for me to write this foreword. About thirty-five years ago, when I gave one of my first Latina feminist talks at a small college in Iowa, I declared, "We are going to look into the future of Latinas and imagine many voices contributing to our understanding of God, justice, and feminism. We Latinas cannot be divided and scattered into many pieces and still be Latinas, Christian, and committed to justice." Little did I understand that one day I was going to be asked to write a foreword for what will become a powerful set of conversations in the theological world, particularly for Latinas.

Latinas in the United States performing ministry carry out their baptismal call with profound, quiet spirituality and endurance in environments often plagued with challenges, obstacles, and contradictions. Today, fresh new voices of Latinas doing critical analysis and scholarship in theological and intellectual arenas are emerging. These Latina scholars bring to the table of scholarship an understanding of liberation that is integral and holistic. To some it may appear as a sense of *bendito coraje*, or "blessed anger." At the same time there is a sense of deep, reflective feminist spirituality which is a mixture of new and old perspectives. This includes a fresh and vibrant analysis which both challenges and inspires us to see things in new

ways. This reader gives us a foundational affirmation of and deep affinity to these fresh voices.

This collection of essays combines the voices of established and emerging Latina scholars. It is worth noting that this is the first collaborative work focusing on the feminist theological exploration of the lived experience of Latinas and using it as the starting point and key source for theological insight. As a whole, this volume continues the tradition of bringing together our resources, strengths, and visions, as they are culturally mediated, and which characterize Latina scholarship in general and Latino/a theology in particular as joint theories and theologies, *teorías y teologías de conjunto*. As a shared effort, this volume enriches, deepens, and develops further the *teología de conjunto* tradition by framing it within distinct feminist struggle and thought. This manner of scholarship highlights not only the connection of our common endeavors to the reality of our communities, but also our shared commitment to the goals of human dignity for all and greater justice for women. As such, our endeavors demonstrate a relational character and a communitarian orientation.

As the subtitle reads, the significance of this book is the systematic approach that the various contributors take to examine the relationship between religion and justice from the social and cultural context of Latino/a life. More significantly, this reader makes the point that religion and theology can and must be related to the history of struggle and hope, of suffering and survival, of poverty and social change, of injustice and liberation in our plural communities. A theology that refuses to be touched by these past and present histories becomes an empty and alienating religious ideology. Certainly, from the point of view of liberating Christianity, religion and the struggle for justice cannot be separated. The various essays included in this book adopt multiple feminist methods and address a diversity of topics. However, in my opinion, what provides unity to the book is the coherent way in which the contributors approach the relationship of religion and justice from a feminist perspective. The plurality of methods and topics does not hinder but rather enriches the ecumenical conversation about intercultural and interdisciplinary theologies.

The theological world has been waiting for this conversation. Crucial to this dialogue is the intersection of traditions, values, theology, and social justice. Oftentimes, we Latinas who have walked with the poor have lacked confidence in our ability to articulate our vision of

humanity, or our theological method and our claim to justice both at the national and international levels. This reader moves beyond these fears and initiates a diverse and ecumenical conversation with a wider community. It will give scholars, especially feminist scholars of religion, as well as theology and ministry students, church congregations, pastors and priests, students in various related fields, and, most importantly, the international community, an opportunity to read and understand Latinas in the United States.

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