

Theological Perspectives for Life, Liberty, and
the Pursuit of Happiness

NEW APPROACHES TO RELIGION AND POWER

Series editor: Joerg Rieger

While the relationship of religion and power is a perennial topic, it only continues to grow in importance and scope in our increasingly globalized and diverse world. Religion, on a global scale, has openly joined power struggles, often in support of the powers that be. But at the same time, religion has made major contributions to resistance movements. In this context, current methods in the study of religion and theology have created a deeper awareness of the issue of power: Critical theory, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, feminist theory, critical race theory, and working class studies are contributing to a new quality of study in the field. This series is a place for both studies of particular problems in the relation of religion and power as well as for more general interpretations of this relation. It undergirds the growing recognition that religion can no longer be studied without the study of power.

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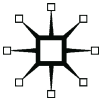
Religion, Theology, and Class
Jeorg Rieger

*Theological Perspectives for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness:
Public Intellectuals for the Twenty-First Century*
Edited by Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and
Rosemary P. Carbine

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THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS
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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-37170-6

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First published in 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

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ISBN 978-1-137-37222-2 ISBN 978-1-137-37221-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137372215

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Theological perspectives for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness :
public intellectuals for the twenty-first century / edited by Ada María
Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and Rosemary P. Carbine.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-137-37170-6

1. United States—Religion. 2. Religion and politics—United States.
3. Religion and state—United States. 4. Life—Religious aspects.
5. Liberty—Religious aspects. 6. Happiness—Religious aspects.
- I. Isasi-Díaz, Ada María, editor of compilation.

BL2525.T485 2013

320.97301—dc23

2013019294

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: November 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Ada María
I Will Not Die an Unlived Life

Dawna Markova¹

I will not die an unlived life.

*I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.*

*I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible,
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.*

*I choose to risk my significance;
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.*

¹ In Dawna Markova, *I Will Not Die An Unlived Life: Reclaiming Purpose and Passion* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 2000). Used with permission.

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Contents

Foreword ix
Joerg Rieger

*Introduction: Reimagining the Responsibilities of
Public Intellectuals* xiii
Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and
Rosemary P. Carbine

Part I Learning about “Our Nation” from *La Lucha* (The Struggle)

- 1 The Indigenous Dream—A World without an “America” 3
Andrea Smith
- 2 Race, Religion, and the Pursuit of Happiness 13
James H. Evans Jr.
- 3 *pax americana*, *pax humana* 23
Sharon Welch

Part II Creative Practices that Emerge from *Lo Cotidiano* (The Everyday)

- 4 The United States as a Responsible Member of the Global
Community: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness When
Globalized Militarization Matters 37
Keun-Joo Christine Pae
- 5 Living Sustainably toward Social Justice: Asceticism Revisited 51
Paula M. Coeey
- 6 “Dead in the Water. . . Again”: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of
Happiness in the Twenty-First Century 61
Teresa Delgado

7	Welcome to the Great American Middle Class: From the American Dream to Deep Solidarity <i>Joerg Rieger</i>	71
8	Political Theology: Reflecting on the Arts of a Liberating Politics <i>Mark Lewis Taylor</i>	83
Part III The Significance of <i>Fuerzas Para La Lucha</i> (God-Given Strength for the Struggle)		
9	Naming What We Want: Thoughts on Religious Vocabulary and the Desire for Quality of Life <i>Anthony B. Pinn</i>	101
10	Redeeming Equality: Life, Liberty, and Alternatives to Obliviousness <i>Mary McClintock Fulkerson</i>	109
11	The Political Divide <i>Stephanie Y. Mitchem</i>	121
12	Revitalizing US Civil Society by Reconceptualizing Civil Religion and Its Virtues <i>Rosemary P. Carbine</i>	129
13	Latinas' and Latinos' Understanding of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness <i>Ada María Isasi-Díaz</i>	145
<i>Afterword</i>		
	Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Rosemary P. Carbine	157
	<i>Selected Bibliography of Suggested Readings</i>	159
	<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	165
	<i>Index</i>	173

Foreword

Joerg Rieger

Power is all-pervasive in our lives; it is at work not only in politics and economics but also the in worlds of culture and ideas, and in matters of religion. At the same time, power is never unilinear. It takes many different shapes and forms. Dominant forms of power often move from the top down and seek to control everything. The good news, however, presented in this book, is that there are other forms of power that move from the bottom up and provide alternatives that are often overlooked as the dominant powers seek to deny their existence and to cover them up. One of the most important developments in religion and theology is a sense that these fields can no longer be studied without paying attention to these flows of power.

In this book, the authors analyze the stark shapes that dominant power takes in our age, but they do so with the goal to identify alternative forms of power that direct us toward new visions and new ways of life. These alternative forms of power emerge in various places and among various groups of people and they are not easily harmonized, but they share in common the fact that they emerge from the grassroots, from locations that are frequently neglected by those who present themselves as the gatekeepers of common sense, intellectuals and academics included.

It is no accident that this book owes its existence to the initiative of Ada María Isasi-Díaz. She was the one who convinced a group of intellectuals involved in public issues to produce short chapters that address not only the most burning issues of our time but also the hope that emerges here and the alternatives that are being birthed. This initiative was deeply rooted in the heart of her work and in how she thought of herself and of her friends as public intellectuals.

As a result, the chapters of this book are down-to-earth and written to make a difference in the midst of the struggles of contemporary life. At the same time, these efforts represent a cataclysmic change in our fields of study, of which Ada María was one of the pioneers. While many of us were still trained to study religion and theology in terms of the seemingly universal ideas of the elites, we are now increasingly paying attention to everyday expressions of life. In her native Spanish idiom, Ada María kept talking about “lo cotidiano,” the everyday, as that which is at the heart of the study of religion and theology.

It is the life experience of the common people, and the marginalized in particular, that forces us to pay attention to the structures of power; the elites, on the other hand, can afford to take power for granted. And it is in these life experiences of the common people that we find the alternatives. The common people, as Ada María knew so well, are not simply the victims of dominant power but are those who put up resistance and who present us with alternatives that provide real hope. These everyday struggles, as the dangerous memories of some of the Christian and other religious traditions attest, are also the location of the divine.

Another key insight that marks the sea change in which we find ourselves is the awareness of struggle. This is another one of Ada María’s contributions: we do not find ourselves in a situation of heavenly bliss where people for the most part get along—we find ourselves in the midst of struggles that are matters of life and death. Ada María learned this from her sisters at the grassroots—Latina women who are forced to struggle for survival and against the forces of death every day. How far US society and the academy are removed from understanding this can be seen in the fact that those who take stands against exploitation and oppression are often accused of instigating class struggle. Ada María was one of the intellectuals who helped us understand that the struggle doesn’t come from only one place or form of power; rather, the struggle that is waged here is initiated from the bottom up and from the top down. In this context, the goal of our everyday struggles against exploitation and oppression is not the struggle itself but a new life, which overcomes struggle and the daily grind.

The sea change of which Ada María’s work and the present book are a part challenges not just traditional academic methods but also the American way of life. Rather than starting with lofty ideals and grand dreams—the so-called power of positive thinking—we are now starting from the everyday struggles of life and the hopes that are

located here. From there we are building the vision that does not rest until it ushers into the “kin-dom” of God—a term that summarizes of Ada María’s theological efforts to reenvision the difference that the divine makes in the world in non-imperial terms. What more could we ask for?

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Introduction: Reimagining the Responsibilities of Public Intellectuals

*Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock
Fulkerson, and Rosemary P. Carbine*

What binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional—what makes us American—is our allegiance to an idea, articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Today we continue a never-ending journey, to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they have never been self-executing. . . . That is our generation’s task—to make these words, these rights, these values—of Life, and Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—real for every American. . . . You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time—not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals.

With these words, President Barack Hussein Obama in his second inaugural address on January 21, 2013 enjoined all US citizens to do the collective work of public intellectuals as their political birthright. Yet, “public intellectual” is a term and a role often rife with misconceptions, and some of the contributors to this book rightly express reservations about using it. *Public* can be misconstrued to mean those who have garnered both academic affluence and broad societal influence. *Intellectual* can also falsely imply a privileged academic scholar at an institution of higher education, suspected

of participating in status quo power relations and thus perceived to be distanced from the vicissitudes of daily life. Rather than academic rock stars or celebrities who have cornered (and benefitted from!) the market on doing serious thinking about important public issues with a social impact, “public intellectual” in this book refers to scholar-activists or activist-thinkers who work with various communities of accountability in and beyond the academy (e.g. feminist movements, racial and/or economic justice activism, pacifist groups), who question the prevalent ideological contours and values that shape and structure our public or common life, and who engage in critical thought as well as sociopolitical action for justice—all of which flow from a shared sense of being human with others and seeking flourishing for all.

The assertion that as academics we have the moral responsibility to be public intellectuals is thus not a self-aggrandizing claim, but rather an embrace of the responsibility we have to enhance the society we have inherited, in which we live, and to which we contribute. Our understanding of this responsibility and our desire to write about it arises in response to the absolute need we have to live life intentionally, to seriously analyze the influence we have with those who study with us, and, given the great investment society has made in us, the absolute right society has to demand that we contribute to its upbuilding. Embracing our moral responsibility to contribute to society is an important way of repaying a social investment, such as the money society has spent on us in the form of scholarships and grants, and the time that society has given us to pursue our own interests, which we always hope reverberates for the good of all. While many of the contributors express gratitude for inspiring teachers, financial and collegial support, and the communities of inquiry offered by the academy, many of us also recognize the importance of transformative pedagogy, to help not only ourselves but also our students unlearn harmful patterns of race, class, gender, sexual, and other forms of privilege that are life-denying, distort liberty, and obstruct happiness. The responsibility we have to be public intellectuals needs to be much more broadly embraced in the contemporary United States, but at the same time this role needs to be further clarified.

We must have an impact on our sociohistorical reality because, as academics, we have the opportunity to influence the worldview that guides us as a nation, as a society, and as a people. At present, there is much talk about the need for creating a “new” America. Given the failures of economic and political systems during the past few years, this most important and absolute need must not be the work of a few but rather must emerge from the people. Our government must follow

the people's understandings of the values that must guide us. All those who hold governmental positions at all levels must remember everyday that in the United States, very explicitly, government is "of the people, by the people, for the people," as Abraham Lincoln so magnificently instructed us in his Gettysburg Address.

Activists have led the way in this struggle to reconceptualize what the United States should represent and advocate as a people and as a nation. Reviewing some significant events of recent years, we have to be grateful to those who struggled mightily against the governor of Wisconsin to protect union rights. These activists brought home the Arab Spring—the spontaneous protests of common people that started across the Arab world in early 2011 and is still going on in Syria—making us realize that we too could bring about radical change in our government and in our society. Wisconsin activists also parented the Occupy Wall Street Movement that has propagated like wildfire from New York to other US cities as well as to more than 80 cities throughout the world.

Those who oppose the Occupy Movement criticize it for not making concrete demands, for not having clear plans for the future. Those of us who support the Occupy Movement know that before concrete demands are made, values need to be identified, and a vision rooted in the needs and hopes of the people must be articulated. The questions that are raised by the activists—and by many of us whom the dominant status quo political and economic systems have failed miserably—provide the needed guidelines for elaborating a new United States, one that holds those with economic resources, prestige, and power, accountable, one that rescues politics and government from the hands of corporate America and returns it to the people, and one that creates a moral economy in which basic human needs trump profit.

Academics have a vital role to play in creating and explaining a new national identity that entails and inspires these humanitarian values. Our many years of study must free us to serve the new vision emerging from the people, rather than support present-day structures that have failed miserably. Our mission as public intellectuals does not demand taking the side of any given political or social system. Rather, our mission is to impact the shape of society—of social, economic, and political institutions—by clarifying the goals behind the political and economic priorities of those who govern. Our role as academics embracing our responsibility to be public intellectuals begins by acknowledging our worldview. Lincoln's phrase becomes so very valuable here, because what must guide us, the vision that beckons us, is indeed the people, the people as a whole and never the few who are always privileged at

the expense of the many, and particularly those whom present-day systems have failed. Modeling the meaning of representing issues of justice to the wider public, Ada María, who first imagined this project, exemplified and continues to inspire this vocation for academics. Ada understood herself to be a public intellectual, or, as she put it, an activist-theologian, whose experience was deeply rooted in enduring and effective struggles for justice for the marginalized. She came to the United States with her family in 1960 as a political refugee from Cuba. As an Ursuline sister, she spent years in Lima, Peru working with the poor. After leaving the order in 1969, Ada's conversion to feminism in the 1970's and experiences with the Women's Ordination Conference were also crucial to her formation. As she continued to be connected to grassroots Latinas whom she regarded as organic intellectuals, all of these experiences helped her see the intersection of a number of marginalizing factors besides gender and the potentially liberative role of Christianity, and religion more generally, in ongoing struggles for life. These experiences were and remained rich sources for Ada María's life as an ethicist at Drew University, an academic who never confined herself to the so-called ivory tower. Instead, she worked to create "a praxis of solidarity with other communities of struggle. . . . convinced that unless we build common understandings and practices among those of us who are marginalized, our communities will continue to be denied access to what they need for fullness of life" (Isasi-Díaz 2004, 5–6).

Based on the paradigmatic character of Ada María's life as a public intellectual, our field of action is the culture of the United States—the American way of life that has been absconded by the few and set against the many both in this country and the world over. By rethinking the values that must undergird us as a people, as a society, as a nation, and that must be the immediate basis for all government, we can stake the claim that the American way of life must be based on "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," as the Declaration of Independence sets forth, not on greed, crass individualism, and egotism. As public intellectuals, we must explore and reclarify the meaning of life, liberty, and happiness in order to effectively combat economic profit, controlling and dominating power, and dishonorable prestige, in order to uproot them from our hearts, lives, and social structures. To do so, we must unmask historical and present-day structures that have not and do not yet fully realize these values, as well as strive to elucidate and establish the true meaning of life for all, of liberty grounded in solidarity, and of happiness as the fulfillment of human capabilities, rather than a consumerist fed and bred acquisition of anything and everything we can own.

As public intellectuals, one of our most valuable tools for this task is words. Our words have to be measured and must be addressed first of all to ourselves. We must pledge never to use words “cleverly” for they can indeed become a tool for propaganda that might move people but leave them empty and diminished as human beings. We must never appeal to prejudices, emotions, vanities, and expectations of the people to incense them and turn them into a mob that stops thinking about the consequences of their actions and stops being rational. Our words must always illumine, never hide the truth. Our words must appeal to reason and help people to respond from their best self, which is always a social self that recognizes and practices compassion, not a self-centered individual who has made herself or himself exclusively into a *homo economicus*. We must never simply throw words at people but must seek to engage them in reasonable arguments out of which can grow shared understandings about the good of all. In order to do so, our words must never be violent but they must be aggressive, confronting irrationality in such a way that words become community-building tools, not divisive and hate-fomenting.

In our role as public intellectuals, always from the perspective of the people, for the people, and by the people, our task revolves around and is always focused on systemic change, on structural change. Of course, persons are indeed most important, but our task is to move our society and to move us as a people, so that we can create radical change in our form of government—from a representative democracy that stops representing only the corporate world and the wealthy and again represents all the people; in our economy—from profit-centered to human needs-centered; and, in our society—from privileging the few to providing for the development of the capabilities of the many.

As public intellectuals, our goal parallels the goal of all education: developing a critical consciousness. Developing critical consciousness entails a social and psychological process. As a process, it is a dynamic movement similar to the Occupy Wall Street Movement that started in the summer of 2011 in New York City. Those who oppose the Occupy Movement criticize its lack of definition. But processes have less to do with being and more to do with becoming. Critical consciousness is precisely a process of becoming that hopefully will last our entire lives. As a psychological process, developing critical consciousness is a coming to know ourselves, made possible by acting and reflecting on our actions. Furthermore, this critical self-knowledge is not, and cannot be, an individual act. Because human beings are social beings, our interconnectedness shapes how we come to know ourselves and

how we come to be ourselves. Very seldom can we uphold who we are, act out of who we are, and act in order to become ourselves if we do not have societal structures that facilitate such movements. The Occupy Movement and other ways of organizing open up spaces for us to continually develop a critical consciousness. Developing critical consciousness “implies socialization and the transmission of culture, not in an adaptive sense, but rather in a creative and revolutionary way” (Martín-Baró 1991, 226).

Ada María’s experience as an immigrant to the United States and her continued identification with marginalized groups gave her a crucial consciousness that has been vital to challenging the status quo in North American culture. Her invention and elaboration of *mujerista* theology has served as a profoundly important way to give voice to often overlooked Hispana/Latina women (Isasi-Díaz 2004 [1993]). By focusing on and writing out of the quotidian or everyday experiences and wisdom of Latinas, Ada María has challenged not only the false universalizing of academic feminist thinking about women’s experience; she has also creatively complexified issues of racism and ethnic marginalization beyond the Black-white binary by redefining diversity and pluralism in light of Latina and Latino experiences. She combined *mestizaje* (the mixture of white and Native peoples living in what is now Latin America and the Caribbean) with *mulatez* (the mixture of Black and white peoples) to recover and make visible the racial and cultural mixtures of Spanish, Amerindian, and African peoples embodied by US Latinas and Latinos. Ada María acknowledged both the violent colonialist legacies of this intermixture and the new forms of *mestizaje* and *mulatez* happening in the United States, both to describe our reality of intermingled peoples and cultures and to make it a moral choice (Isasi-Díaz 1996, 64–66, 79–80). Her life and writings thus stand as a creative and revolutionary model for continued academic connection and identification with marginalized groups and unheard voices.

As academic theologians and religion scholars inspired by Ada María’s work, our task resonates with other academics who understand themselves as public intellectuals. While we ground our words in human values, we come to those human values from a religious perspective. Religion does not add content to human values but rather “thematizes” those human values (Curran 1985, 11), making them concrete and explicit in the language and texts, symbols, and practices associated with religious traditions that revere Jesus Christ, the Buddha, the prophet Muhammad, the Jewish Torah, and the Hindu Vedas. Although most of the contributors to this book identify as Christian theologians or

ethicists, we do not wield religion as a weapon or use it as a ruse in irrational appeals. Instead, we are compelled by the belief in the sanctity of life and in the human values that arise out of a social ontology, or our interconnectedness with each other as well as with other species and the biosphere.

Overview of the Essays in the Book is a section header. Reformat accordingly. This call to be public intellectuals invites us to make new myths for America, which tie its guiding principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness not to what Cornel West calls the “three dominating, antidemocratic dogmas” of free-market fundamentalism, militarism, and authoritarianism (West 2004, 3–8), but to new and more prophetic meanings. As William Dean notes, “If the religious critic’s responsibility [as a public intellectual] is to be exercised, new thought must be given to the myth of America” (Dean 1994, 174). To be viable, a new myth will emerge from “the deliberate development of conventions about American meanings, including religious meanings. . . . It will frame a sense of the whole from a particular public standpoint. It will offer large visions that provide images in terms of which all else in the society can be understood.” (Dean 1994, 176) Resonating with and building on this rich tradition of scholars who understand themselves as public intellectuals, that is, intellectuals who serve the public good and, like West, who seek to give prophetic witness that “speaks to the democratic issues of equality of opportunity, service to the poor, and a focus on the public interest” (West 2004, 17–19, 74), these essays are most deeply inspired by Ada María’s passion for the constant need to challenge long-standing traditions, whether Christian or secular, through the lens of *la lucha* or the struggle for justice. Thus, these essays result from a creative bricolage of religious, cultural, and so-called national values, which aims to reimagine and revivify US common life, to construct new practices and strategies for altering our current sociopolitical imagination and way of life. These essays certainly do not claim to address or resolve all contemporary social and political dilemmas in the United States, or conclude with one shared set of strategies to reimagine a shared American mythos and ethos. Nonetheless, the call for academics to be public intellectuals and Ada María’s model as an activist-theologian remind us that our social location needs to give us a real connection to marginalized groups. Similar to *The Poverty Tour: A Call to Conscience*, an event during which Cornel West and Tavis Smiley visited 18 cities in 11 states during August 2011 to listen to the stories of everyday poor peoples’ plights, or the organic connection of Ada María who lived with the poor and never separated herself from *lo cotidiano* or the everyday lives of marginalized

groups, the contributors to this collection have a shared stake in what happens in America, not simply the freedom to do a kind of academic tourism of so-called outsiders.

The logic of these essays is inspired by some of Ada María's characteristic convictions: the crucial role of learning from the experiences of others, especially disempowered groups, involved in *la lucha* or the struggle for justice; the centrality of *lo cotidiano* or the everyday for innovative epistemologies and ethics, or ways of knowing and living; and, the testimony of her life to the significance of *fuerzas para la lucha* or God-given strength for the struggle. Beginning in Part I with the view from the struggles of marginalized groups about our understanding of the public that is America, Part II moves to examples of everyday practices that emerge from complex social contexts and realities and that urge us to reconfigure our general categories of ethics, theology, and politics. Part 3 engages with the function of religion and of a God-referent in the work for justice, concluding with the challenge to both religion and humanism in contemporary US politics.

To actually help in shaping a society that works for the good of all is no easy task, as these essays illustrate. As Part I illustrates, our official national founding story misrepresents realities of power; in particular, our story attests to the denial by the Euro-invaders who supposedly discovered America of their own status as invasive immigrants. Historically in the United States, religion, and particularly Christian faith, has authorized the colonizing of Native land, generated a religious reasoning that justified slavery or the continued avoidance of racialized realities, or produced authoritarian and theocratic nationalist views that trade on, and indeed valorize, individualism that currently buttresses status quo inequalities, political or economic. These grim reminders that religious, and often Christian, visions and values do not necessarily support our commitment to a shared common good, especially one that privileges the most marginalized, do not rule out its constructive and liberative work, especially when rethought and reconfigured through the strikingly creative visions of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" provided in this book. In response to religion's ability to both oppress and liberate, to both dehumanize and enhance human well-being, these essays all practice what Linell Cady has called extensional theology in order to claim a public voice and role, "to extend fairly the existing political order and to improve that order." This method involves retrieving, rethinking, and extending aspects of religious, cultural, and political symbols, texts, and practices in new ways to better address contemporary sociopolitical situations (Cady 1993, 56, 57, 62–64).

Based on Ada María's emphasis on *la vida es la lucha* or struggle as partly constitutive of life, Part I draws on the wisdom from different social and historical struggles to redefine "our nation" and its values. Andrea Smith rereads "our nation" from a viewpoint that has been honed by her many years as an activist in antiviolence and indigenous peoples movements. With a deeply profound personal as well as intellectual awareness of our nation's egregious history, she starts with a forthright condemnation of the double standard of the United States in denouncing genocide as a violation of civil rights and democracy happening elsewhere while ignoring that US law sanctioned the genocide of Native Americans and the violation of their civil rights and right to self-determination. Smith challenges us to rethink our present understanding of nationalism and sovereignty, which, she suggests, "inevitably lead to xenophobia, intolerance, factionalism, and violence. All sovereignty or nationalist struggles, it seems, are headed down that slippery slope towards the ethnic cleansing witnessed in Bosnia." The author boldly invites the reader not to presume that the United States "should or will always continue to exist as a nation-state"; to do so creates the space needed "to reflect on what exactly is a just form of governance, not only for Native peoples, but for the rest of the world." She focuses on the spiritually-based visions of nation and sovereignty, separate from nation-states, which Native women activists are beginning to articulate, which "are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility." Following a critique of heteropatriarchy and the current understanding of human relationship to land, Smith concludes her article by endorsing "mass-based peoples' movements" that use "alternative governmental structures," instead of relying on the state. These movements make military power obsolete and depend on principles of horizontalism that make possible "radical participatory rather than representational democracy." The author grounds her proposal on actual happenings taking place among factory workers in Argentina and self-governing Native communities in places like Chiapas, Mexico.

James Evans, an intellectual who has always seen and experienced the connection of texts and lived realities, provides a compelling reread of "our nation's" history as he illustrates the very different constraints on access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that have always accompanied race. Political power, economics, and morality are all intertwined with race and religion. Even as African American religious visions have offered life-giving interpretations of liberty for racialized populations, our systems have found ways to render inequality as "normal." Whether by racist policies that limited the social contract to

whites, or by contemporary versions of “you deserve what you’ve got,” the function of our national systems has continued to reproduce both political and economic inequality. Showing how intertwined the US moral and religious imagination has long been with race, Evans, a theologian trained in literature, political science, and ministry, reminds us that the function of religion based upon Jeffersonian and Hobbesian reason basically supported the view that the powerful were those who rightly ruled. Even as happiness is part of a moral narrative, he argues, the limitations of white versions of that imagination were disturbingly illustrated by the dominant interpretation of the Black Power Movement as a threat rather than the creative use of American values in a crucial movement for justice.

Sharon Welch asks who we are as Americans and what our role in the world is today, based on a reinterpretation of “our nation’s” thinking about strength and power. Welch discusses two main visions: one, believed by many, that genuine power and decisive action require unilateral military force; another, that coercive military force can be counterproductive. This latter one is not merely about the “folly of military intervention in particular situations . . . but another vision of world community and of the ways peoples and governments can exercise power responsibly in the face of grave threats and great opportunities.” With years of activist experience in peacebuilding and racial justice, Welch endorses a different definition of strength and power from the operative one today. For her, such a definition must include seeing the world through the eyes of others beyond the shores of the United States, including the different religious traditions that have been mainly ignored or maligned in our history. With a vision that is especially enriched through her significant work enabling academic institutional change, Welch ends with a clarion call to endorse peace, “viable alternatives” to reverence, compassion, virtuosity, honesty, curiosity, and respect, which she proposes as “wagers to be lived, risks to be taken, not conundrums to be resolved in theory.”

In keeping with Ada María’s persistent point about *lo cotidiano* or the everyday as the locus of theology, ethics, and politics, Part II focuses on emancipatory and life-giving practices that emerge from particular contexts and struggles. Inspired in part by her work with a nonprofit organization for ex-Korean military wives, K. Christine Pae defines excessive militarization as a global reality. An academic who regularly works with ordinary believers as well as her students around social justice issues, Pae explores in this essay how Americans, as global citizens, can rediscover the sacrality of all human life, responsibly exercise political liberty, and

pursue happiness with others. To do this, Pae explores everyday practices, especially narrative and storytelling, of women and men whose lives are threatened by globalized American militarism, especially South Korean sex workers in US military camptowns, and as a result of those narratives rearticulates global peacebuilding and spiritual activism grounded in ordinary people's everyday lives.

A wonderfully creative interpretation of pleasure and joy in our pursuit of happiness is found in Paula Cooley's exploration of the previously unacknowledged constructive functions of daily religious practices of self-denial in ascetic (i.e. vowed religious) communities. Another scholar with wisdom shaped by years of activism in the public sphere, in churches, and publishing on social justice issues around gender, race, environmentalism and class issues relative to religion, Cooley reinterprets some classic stereotypes. Reminding us that asceticism is really about training, crucial to any successful pursuit of happiness—including the shaping of desire—Cooley connects the practices of sixteenth-century Anabaptists and a Roman Catholic sisters' community with the production of freedom and happiness. Rather than the repression of desire, world rejection, and moralistic self-denigration stereotypically associated with asceticism, the asceticism of these communities profoundly enhances the values of the American Dream. Anabaptists, for example, have lived out and supported religious freedom in their own distinctive way. Ascetic practices of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet have enhanced the options for person-centered medical care by working with other denominations. Ongoing attitudes of joy and hope are based neither on success nor belief in an afterlife, but seem to confirm that self-denial as engagement for the "other" can provide a happiness that is basic and sustaining, rather than diminishing and repressive.

Teresa Delgado recalls the alternative liberative rereadings of Christian Gospels by African Americans while confronting the realities of the transatlantic slave trade that left many deceased Africans under water en route to the Americas. A creative thinker with an ongoing commitment to the intersection of belief in social justice and its practice, including activism in coalition work for peace, Delgado explores and enhances these rereadings that radically rearticulated the slave-holding and patriarchal US founding fathers' version of "life, liberty and happiness." Based on this exploration of everyday resistance to racism, both historical and contemporary, Delgado aptly describes the new slavery and its racially marked economic realities of being under water from un/underemployment as one way to prompt re-reading of those Gospels for more liberative meanings. In contrast to Wall Street creeds and

prosperity gospels that equate life and happiness with individual material wealth and well-being, Delgado leverages baptism in a religious, sociopolitical, and economic sense of new life and gives a profound reinterpretation of Gospel resources on happiness, the Beatitudes, in a way that gives voice to new practices that may yet yield new life.

The “logic of downturn” or the collapse of middle-class visions of the American Dream (job security, economic stability, and a social safety net) brought on by the nightmare of the Great Recession since 2007 inspires Joerg Rieger to seek out other horizons for the flourishing of life that is collective, is focused on the people, and prioritizes the ability of all to live well. From this perspective and experience in community organizing, Rieger redefines solidarity as an on-the-ground living of these values in order to meet everyday needs and to agitate for social change. With knowledge based upon long-term work with labor movements, Rieger calls for more radical solidarity to replace both current congregational and corporate-sponsored charity and volunteer work. For Rieger, deep solidarity is founded on a shared stake in our common life, is oriented toward forging a common bond in times of economic crises, and celebrates shared labor of creating and recreating society, beginning at the grassroots.

Mark Lewis Taylor pushes for further recognition of the intersections between the theological and the political through aesthetic or artful practices of human creativity. With an imagination shaped by years of antiwar activism and very focused work for prison reform, Taylor insists that a rethinking of “theological” and “political” is not a new solely academic enterprise. Rather, he argues, this rethinking offers further support and respect for the non-dualistic ways that the power of exploited and excluded groups is displayed in such art-forms as painting, dancing, singing, marching, walking, and quilting. An activist with a passion for the importance of critical reflection, his reimagining from on-the-ground liberative energies invites a compelling alternative understanding of life and liberty as liberation, based on a retelling of Jesus’s ministerial practices and way of the cross found in contemporary novels.

Part III interrogates both the possibilities and the limits of Ada María’s argument for God-given strength in struggles for a more emancipatory and flourishing life. Offering a vital contribution to the development of critical consciousness, Anthony Pinn observes that for too long the public discourse of Christian faith and its vision of our common life “has not safeguarded the welfare of the collective community in all its diversity,” insisting that we must now learn to do that. Arguing

that theistic religion too often functions as a form of world-denial, directing believers *away* from the physicality of the world, Pinn proposes a materialist biological grounding for shared humanity in order to galvanize our commitment to the common good. For the vision of collective life to include the full spectrum of human pleasure, we must focus on our crucial biological desires and the common ethical commitments our mutual biological needs demand. Pinn's negative take on the function of theistic religion offers a crucial corrective for the theological imagination, and, importantly, it does not end in a mandate for atheism. Rather, his criticism entails a generous call for crucial conversations between moderates of all sides in order to extend the meaning of "life, liberty and happiness" to deeper support for human accountability, pleasure, and well-being. That generosity is wonderfully displayed in his long-term activism with a wide variety of humanitarian institutions, from African American and American Humanist, to Unitarian Universalist, among others.

A critical take on the function of belief in God is Mary McClintock Fulkerson's attempt at a potentially liberative reading of the national mantra of "one nation under God." Offering a rereading of this theocentric American value, Fulkerson argues that the God-related grounding of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness should not be interpreted as a requirement for either a Christian nation or any religious belief. At least for believers who are not likely to give up their religious faith, this mantra should rather be interpreted as the iconoclasm or self-criticism inherent in theocentric faith, namely, the refusal to absolutize any worldly finite identity or reality, social or otherwise. A posture for the enhancement of world-engagement, rather than denial or avoidance of world, materiality and all its pleasures, iconoclasm entails self-criticism linked to the addressing of injustice and power imbalances. Self-criticism by the powerful in relation to the plight of marginalized populations will begin to generate rewritten accounts of American history that have occluded the marginalized. Shaped by her work with a local public project to recover Durham, North Carolina's social history of racism, sexism, and other injustices, Fulkerson recognizes that deeply internalized aversions to the "other" are at the root of the injustice of American practices. Addressing injustice has not been fixed by rationality or legislation, or by ostensibly "inclusive" churches populated by dominant populations. Minimally, such change requires alternative face-to-face communities of accountability that will alter our dominant stereotypes of one another.

Stephanie Mitchem's essay focuses on how the political divide we experience in the United States today is profoundly religious: on the one hand, religious conservatives work to construct the United States into the Christian nation as they alone define it; on the other hand, "activists work to create greater equity around the world, informed by ethical and religious values that they work to infuse into political values." Having long recognized "the cognitive dissonances between lived life and theoretical pronouncements" of mainline (white) disciplines, Mitchem's intellectual activism is shaped by years of "asking questions" as an African American, middle-class woman about the false universalizing of white American/European experience. Mitchem complicates her work further as she opens to view key social justice issues entailed in contemporary faith divides—issues that rarely get public exposure. Focusing in particular on the functions of religious conservatism in national political debates, Mitchem shows that this vision brings "profound confusion about the ends of society and the meaning of community," denying the obligation to help the poor, to reduce or do away with so-called entitlement projects that provide a social safety net for the most vulnerable, opposing unions and just pay for teachers, and so forth. This vision relies on a "hate speech" that is "so sophisticated that the number of disenfranchised, numb, apathetic people increases." Though not always using religious language, the activists endorse "power *with*" rather than "power *over*," an understanding of freedom that cannot be separated from the struggle for human dignity and non-hierarchical organization as well as leadership. These understandings are indeed religious for many and need to be claimed as such.

Aligning with Cornel West's diagnosis of nihilism in America, an increasing stratification, polarization, and fragmentation in US civil society motivates Rosemary Carbine to critically examine recent events in US conservative and liberal political camps in order to explore their alternative political visions of reviving the common good, often rooted in what Americans revere as civil religion. Based on an analysis of the operative civil religion in Glenn Beck's Restoring Honor rally in 2010 and in the PBS-sponsored By The People citizen deliberations during and beyond 2007, Carbine offers a compelling model of dialogue rooted in humanistic virtues of listening, learning, respect, and compassion for the renewing of civil society. For Carbine, life in a democracy is partly oriented to public discourse and decision making through that discourse; gaining recognition and participating in that discourse via the practice of these virtues is part of enjoying and sustaining a shared life together in a democracy that esteems dialogue—and much more.

Influenced by her activism in US Catholic feminist movements and her scholarly work in comparative feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologies as well as US public/political theologies, Carbine considers the classroom a site of civil society; she utilizes transformative pedagogies to help shape undergraduate students for informed, responsible, and justice-oriented citizenship.

The book concludes with Ada María Isasi-Díaz's essay about the too often ignored constructive contributions of immigrant groups to the United States. in redefining life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, particularly from the perspectives of Latinas and Latinos. After highlighting some of the very little known (or perhaps purposefully ignored) history of one of Latinas/Latinos ancestors—the Spanish—in what was US territory even before the arrival of the Pilgrims, Isasi-Díaz discusses facts about present-day immigration that are hardly ever considered, such as immigration as an intrinsic element of globalization and the responsibility of the United States for creating conditions in other countries that consequently coerce peoples to migrate in order to survive. Isasi-Díaz claims the right of immigrants to contribute to redefining who US citizens are and what the United States is about. She argues for the need for a broader “we” when it comes to understanding who constitutes the people of the United States as a nation. She ends by explicitly mentioning Latinas'/Latinos' contributions to this nation: an understanding of life as a struggle, the importance of relationships captured in their valuing of family that is not merely a heteropatriarchal one but celebrated in Latinas'/Latinos' *fiestas*, and the importance of community over individualism and destructive competitiveness. Isasi-Díaz believes that these Latina/Latino cultural values are indeed most valuable in creating a postnational project of humanization of which the United States must be a part.

We, the scholars whose works appear in this book are grateful to be able to exercise our role as public intellectuals and to contribute at this time of crisis—a time of radical possibilities as well as of enormous difficulties—to the creation of a new United States of America committed to the life of all peoples and species spending ourselves to provide for the full development of all of our capabilities as an exercise of liberty, and rejoicing in the happiness that true solidarity can bring as we are and we in the US slowly become a people for the good of all.

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