

Preface

We are a small and lonely human race
Showing no sign of mastering solitude
Out on this stony planet that we farm.
The most that we can do for one another
Is let our blunders and our blind mischances
Argue a certain brusque abrupt compassion.
We might as well be truthful.

—ADRIENNE RICH¹

The poetic requirements enunciated by Adrienne Rich in this verse, published when she was still a young writer trying to find and forge her own literary voice—to merge “brusque abrupt compassion” with the will to “be truthful”—have their peculiar existential and theological dimensions. Rich was clearly aware what they meant for her as a poet, woman, feminist, anti-war activist, and a believer in the equality of all human beings despite their differences in gender, race, national origin, cultural identity, or sexual orientation. And she was indeed willing to pay the price and to endure the sacrifices entailed. Whether she was also conscious of any religious or theological implications, I leave it to the literary critics interested in analyzing her poetic heritage.

This challenge—to forge a close link between a “brusque abrupt compassion” and the will to “be truthful”—happens to be the hidden inspiration of the lectures and essays reproduced in this book. These essays emerge from different crucial and complex conflicts. From the memory of

1. “Stepping Backward,” in *Poems*, 8.

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a bishop, Bartolomé de las Casas, urging the Pope of his time to cleanse the church from complicity with violence, oppression, and slavery; from the lament and defiance of so many Middle East women, victims of male domination and so many wars; from the voices bursting out from the colonial margins that dare to question and transgress the norms and laws imposed by colonizers and conquerors; from the emerging and diverse theological disruptions of traditional orthodoxies and rigid dogmatisms; from the denial of human rights to immigrant communities, living in the shadows of opulent societies, by those always so proud of their exclusive civil rights; from the use of the Hebrew sacred scriptures to displace and dispossess the indigenous peoples of Palestine.

They belong to different intellectual genres and conceptual crossroads and are thus illustrative of the dialogic imagination that the Russian intellectual Mikhail Bakhtin considered basic to any serious intellectual enterprise.² Yet, they have a hidden connection - the linkage of the “brusque abrupt compassion” and the will to “be truthful,” above mentioned. These essays are also the literary sediment of years of sharing lectures, dialogues, and debates in several academic institutions in the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Switzerland, Germany, and Palestine. They are here published with the sole objective of inspiring new dialogues and debates, nurtured by the dialectics of compassion and truthfulness.

This book is dedicated to a person close to my heart and mind: George V. Pixley, who in the 1960s was my professor of biblical studies, in the 1970s my faculty colleague, and, for the last fifty years, my dear friend. During his many years of teaching and lecturing all over Latin America, George Pixley inspired myriad students to do their best, as members of the academy, society and church. He has written many books and numberless essays in Spanish and English, several of them translated into Portuguese, forging a particular and unique convergence between the most rigorously critical biblical hermeneutics, the emerging liberation theologies, and process philosophy.

2. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*.