

# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

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Center for Hispanic Studies  
*25 Years*



Hispanic Experience and Lutheran  
Theology: Four Views

Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case

From the Margins to the Table

Dealing with Culture in Theological  
Formation

# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

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*On the cover: Detail from a Mexican fasting cloth tapestry ("hungertuch"). The full tapestry blends Native American scenes, historical colonial references, and more recent Latino folk culture, with Christ standing front and center in the midst of "the least of these" (Concordia Seminary art collection).*

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# EDITORIALS

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## Editor's Note

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If the cover didn't give it away, this issue of *Concordia Journal* is a special theme issue celebrating the 25 years of Concordia Seminary's Center for Hispanic Studies, formerly the Hispanic Institute of Theology. Perhaps nothing more needs to be said than that.

Why? Because the articles speak for themselves, representing, at least metaphorically, the past, present, and future of the Latino experience of Lutheranism and, more broadly, Christianity in the Americas. And the editorial roundtable speaks with urgency about what the Latino contribution to American Lutheranism will mean within a society that will soon have no majorities, but a plurality of ethnic minorities.

More to the point, their words speak to the growing sense that much of what will drive global Christianity in the next 25 years is and will be coming from the global South, cultures that don't fall neatly into some of our "post" categories: post-Christian, post-church, postmodern. Though they certainly fall into one: postcolonial. All of which can be a breath of fresh air. Why read this when you could be reading that?

So, perhaps nothing more needs to be said than that. Except to say that it is a necessary blessing to have a Center for Hispanic Studies at a place like Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. It is a necessary blessing to the church to have a center that is preparing pastors, deaconesses and leaders for the present and future of what is the most rapidly growing ethnic population in North America. And it is a necessary blessing to have a center where critical issues related to Hispanic/Latino theology and missions are addressed and applied to the challenges of Christian mission and ministry today. This is, literally, life and work along the borders, but it affects us all, from the margin to the center and back again.

In conjunction with this issue, you will find podcasts on *ConcordiaTheology.org* that also mark the occasion with thoughtful reflection and relevant conversation. And it also coincides with a new release of the Center's own web site (<http://chs.csl.edu>), which showcases a wide range of new resources and features related to the global South and to Hispanic/Latino issues and ministry.

Much has happened in 25 years. Much more is still to come. But this is at least one milestone worth marking along the way.

Travis J. Scholl  
Managing Editor of Theological Publications

### ***Concordia Journal* simplifies subscription rates**

*Concordia Journal* has changed its subscription policy to more accurately reflect costs, uses, and resourcing of the journal. Effective with the Summer 2012 issue, we have simplified the subscription rate as follows: \$25/year for individuals (USA or international), \$50/year for institutions.

At the same time, we have resolutely reaffirmed the stance that the full clergy rosters of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and The Lutheran Church—Canada will continue to receive *Concordia Journal* gratis, as a resource for their vocation and ministry.

## An Urban Seminary, Part II

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After Jesus had entered Jerusalem and chased the money changers out of the temple courts, Matthew 21 reports, “he went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night” (v. 17). Then this passing information, not a doctrinal passage but a passage I find symbolic for what I want to share: “Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city...” (v. 18). Jesus returned to the city. There is no need to rehearse here the diminished presence of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the great urban areas of America. As the population of the United States has increasingly concentrated itself in metropolitan areas, the LCMS presence in the great cities has declined. What is worth pointing out is the historic importance of great urban centers to the spread of Christianity. In *The First Urban Christians*, Wayne Meeks took a scholarly look at the role of major cities in the early spread of Christianity, focusing especially on St. Paul. “The mission of the Pauline circle was conceived from start to finish as an urban movement... Within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement.”<sup>1</sup> If Concordia Seminary is to further our Lord’s mission (and may we go out of business if we don’t!), then we must produce pastors, deaconesses and resources that follow his example. Jesus returned to the city... and so do we.

I am pleased to announce the “Mission*Shift* Institute,” an initiative to increase awareness and effective ministry in urban areas. The mission remains the same, to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The *Shift* is to make urban ministry a “top of mind” awareness in the formation of pastors and deaconesses. Here’s the purpose of the Mission*Shift* Institute, quoting from its business plan.

The urban community is far from what it used to be, even 10 years ago. Cities are quickly changing, diversifying, and growing rapidly. The cities’ inhabitants are from a variety of backgrounds, beliefs and cultures. Not only is there the challenge of understanding a neighbor from a different country, but also the problem of understanding a neighbor from a different generation, socio-economic status, or social orientation. The problems and core issues in the city are just as diverse as the population within. Urban areas nation-wide deal with issues such as homelessness, poverty, racism, gangs, HIV/AIDS, prostitution, chemical dependency, mental illness, justice and prison systems, refugees and immigrants, and single generation families. Congregations also have their own struggles as many are barely holding on, or in decline. Such diversity and complexity have never been faced, and past prescriptions are not improving the situation. In neighborhoods Somalis, Hmong, Bhutanese, African Americans and Hispanics live side-by side with young urban professionals, spiritual skeptics, casual Christians, Jews, Mormons and the gay community. For the Anglo congregation many questions arise such as: Who is our neighbor? What are their needs? How do we relate to them? And most importantly, how can we bring the Gospel to them?



Seminarians in *MissionShift* will meet at an urban mission site in the city of St. Louis one evening every week for an academic quarter. Each week experts will teach the students about realities of urban life. How do you get to know a culture that is far different than the culture in which you were raised? How do you communicate the gospel to people who don't know Jesus, don't know the Bible, and probably couldn't care less? What social needs are the people facing? How do you get grants to help? And on and on, three hours every week for an academic quarter. And it won't only be seminarians. *MissionShift* will include laypeople from urban congregations, the laypeople who are living where the action is and who want to make a difference in their community for Jesus Christ. Each cohort of students, seminarians and laity, will create and implement projects for urban outreach, hands-on learning. Thus *MissionShift* brings to churches the experience and expertise of people who know how to do mission in the city and enhances outreach in local parish communities. This design of *MissionShift*—lay people along with seminarians—is a tangible demonstration of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis's commitment to living out together the "priesthood of all believers."

Does this mean that we're abandoning other destinations of mission, like rural, suburban, and institutional settings? Absolutely not! Every place our graduates are sent, every place our theological resources go, every place is a place where law and gospel must cross cultural understandings. My first call was to a rural dual parish and what a great place it was, seven wonderful years! Although the people looked and spoke like the culture in which I grew up, it was a different culture. For example, when the women's group was talking about how the beans were doing, I asked, "Beans?" Gladys said, "Soy beans," and could have added, "you naïve seminary graduate." Actually, her look said it! Every ministry situation means crossing cultures, bringing the unearthly revelation of God's presence into our world of closed systems that grow out of our self-centered, self-serving original sin. To share, we must first shut up in order to listen. So *MissionShift* abandons no place where our graduates or resources will be sent but instead will sensitize all our graduates and resources to listen to people who need Jesus. Our goal is to have every seminarian go through the *MissionShift* experience so that this new pastor or deaconess knows that every call is a cross-cultural call. Quoting again from the business plan:

Missional outreach in a pluralistic, post-modern, urban context is best accomplished by understanding and communicating through the hearer's worldview. This requires:

- Measuring communications by what people hear, not by what we say;
- Meeting people where they are, not where we are;
- Recognizing worldview differences are not limited to race and ethnicity but include generational differences and social orientations;
- Recognizing there is no 'right' worldview, just different ways of seeing the world;
- Supporting, leveraging and connecting with hearers' relational networks, thereby enabling ministry to have the widest possible impact;
- An emphasis upon incarnational and relational approaches to ministry.

In the Fall 2009 issue of the *Concordia Journal*, I wrote an essay titled, “An Urban Seminary” (in conjunction with this essay, you can also now find it on *ConcordiaTheology.org*). There I rehearsed briefly how Concordia Seminary had moved out of the city to the Clayton campus and then I touted our metropolitan location, in the sixteenth largest metropolitan area, next to Forest Park (larger than Manhattan’s Central Park), close to all the benefits of living in a large metropolitan area but also all the problems of urban living. Yet, to paraphrase Jesus, Concordia Seminary is in the city but not of the city. Our 72 acres are secluded, a quiet place to study and converse with our professors about theology and mission, to grow in spiritual maturity, but still get first-hand experience with contemporary problems following the teaching model of action followed by reflection. I led off that 2009 editorial by saying, “we’re moving forward to seize the opportunities of our urban setting.” It’s not enough to tout that we are in a metropolitan area. I was recently asked if I take the Seminary’s role in growing our church personally, and my answer was immediate, “Yes.” That is true of so many on our faculty. We must, must teach our seminarians and provide resources that fulfill the command, “Seek the welfare of the city” (Jer 29:7). The *MissionShift* Institute aims to do that. Rev. Jeffrey Thormodson, former missionary to Russia, is the director. Feel free to contact him for more information ([MissionShift@csl.edu](mailto:MissionShift@csl.edu)).

“Jesus returned to the city.” Go to First Immanuel Lutheran Church on Ashland near Roosevelt in the heart of Chicago and you can see those words painted high above the altar. I have a heart connection with First Immanuel. My great-uncle Hermann Bauer was pastor there from 1934 until 1941. My mother was confirmed there. My great-grandfather, a retired pastor, died in a house right across the street. The congregation was in its heyday back then, but times changed, the times of changing neighborhoods, white flight to the suburbs, and declining interest in our Lutheran church. Today First Immanuel is back, an inspiring ministry of the baptized with the servant leadership of Pastor Harry Therwanger. Jesus returned to the city, and so is your Seminary.

Dale A. Meyer  
President

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. 10, 11.

## Hispanic Experience and Lutheran Theology: Four Views

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*The editorial staff and leaders of the Center for Hispanic Studies submitted the following questions to a “roundtable” of four leaders in Hispanic ministry.*

*Primary question: It is well known that people of various ethnic groups, including Hispanics, who join Lutheran churches value its confessional theology and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But what does the Hispanic community bring to the table of our Lutheran confession and witness that otherwise would not be there?*

*Secondary question: How does the Hispanic experience deepen or expand our understanding of Lutheran theology?*

These two questions have always been at the center of my theological vocation and pilgrimage in North America. I would direct the reader to two bibliographical resources that will help you understand how I have pursued a living dialog with the above questions under my catholic evangelical faith in light of my Hispanic/Latino experience. The first resource is my essay “The Witness of the Cross in Light of the Hispanic Experience.”<sup>1</sup> The other is a more recent essay, “The Local Church: A Critical Point of Departure for a World Ecclesiology.”<sup>2</sup>

Who is a Hispanic/Latino? This is an important question for our reflection. Hispanic/Latinos in the U.S. are made up of different races (Amerindian, Aztec, Mayan, Black, Caucasian, Asian, and a mixture [*mestizaje*] of many of the just mentioned races). We also come to the U.S. for different reasons. The largest Hispanic group in the U.S. is Mexican. They have been members of the U.S. cultural matrix for many generations, or have just arrived by crossing the border at this very moment. I came to the U.S. as a Cuban-exile in my early teen years. Our contexts are different and our histories are different. Nevertheless, in my service as pastor to U.S. Hispanic/Latino communities in Chicago, Illinois, and Hollywood, Florida, and also as a Lutheran educator, I have found some common keynotes that may contribute to strengthen our witness to the gospel.

These keynotes are: our common experiences of migration, shared suffering, and festive hope. In light of these experiences, our witness of the gospel will not neglect the living incarnational hope and the holistic and sacramental presence of the word of God. This point of departure will help to enlighten our confessional witness in the twenty-first century. Our confessional witness of the gospel has been overshadowed in recent times by a very individualistic faith experience which has been fed by the consumerism of our age. The individual and her/his personal spirituality occupy center court under these influences. Let us see how it has affected our theological perspective.

In light of a conservative evangelical theology, truth is sought and expressed mainly within a frame work of a subject/object correlation. A person is perceived to live in faith if she/he gives the right answers to theological truths found in Scripture. The believer in this kind of posture assumes also that the Christian life is something that the Christian lives only in her/his relationship to God and no one else. We have received salvation and peace from God. We believe in this framework that we know the

truth and that the truth has made us free. However, in this one dimensional living of our faith, we weaken and distort the reality of the incarnation. There is another important dimension of truth that must be incorporated to our faith life in light of the incarnation. Please listen to the words of the Gospel of John in relationship to our Lord's incarnation: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). If you read this text in Spanish, it reads "el verbo," "the verb" dwelt among us. Jesus is the living, present word of God, active in the midst of his people. This is also the intended sense for John in this verse in the original Greek text. The Word did not come just to be perceived and enjoyed by us as individuals but rather to dwell in the midst of our communities, life, and pilgrimage on earth. He came to dwell among us as the living, creating word through his accompaniment with us. Moses and the patriarchs of the Old Testament knew that faith in God meant a communal faith, a faith where God was celebrated as he accompanied them in their struggles and pilgrimage. This is how they beheld God's presence and glory. Our hope is even more significant because we know, as this text points out and as Matthew reaffirms through the testimony of the angels, that Jesus is our Immanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). This is because he came in the flesh, died, rose again, and did not leave us orphans (Mt 28:20). His presence is a living, incarnational presence and hope because he lives very present within the horizon of his people's history. It is not just a truth to give meaning and peace to one believer in Christ.

This living, incarnational hope is at the center of the U.S. Hispanic confessional witness. We know that our faith is not something that only belongs to us as individuals. Our migration has forced us to go into a new land, among new people, and to experience separation from the family left behind. In this reality our Lord Jesus Christ becomes very real in our hope of his incarnation. We see him not only in providing a personal faith for us, but also in how he walks in our midst, holding us together and keeping us together in a living hope within our community. This living incarnational hope redirects our faith to consider the full impact of what salvation is all about. It is holistic and goes beyond the personal. The word for salvation in the Greek is *sōzō* (σώζω). It is a holistic salvation. It is God's total embracing of the person in all dimensions of life. Central to this holistic embrace is Christ making it possible for us not to walk alone but rather to walk as respected and valuable members of our community. This is the kind of gospel lived and experienced as the blind received sight (Mk 10:52), as lepers were healed (Mk 2:40–45), as one once demon-possessed is now welcomed within his community (Mk 5:18–20). U.S. Latinos/as who have been displaced and maligned because of their migration status are more than glad to give testimony to this incarnational hope.

Confessional Hispanics in North America value our festive hope. Those who do not understand this festive hope, stereotype the life of Hispanics as being free-spirited and always in search of a good time. Festive hope means that we gather in our communities to celebrate God's gift of life among us. Our celebration of our children's baptisms binds us together within our communities of faith. Our brothers and sisters in Christ become our *comadres* (co-mothers/sponsors) and *compadres* (co-fathers/sponsors).

These celebrations are signs and symbols of the gift of the Holy Spirit among us. Our celebrations create a sacred space to welcome into our community of faith new friends and new family members. Our festive hope points to what the sacraments are all about. They signal the gifts of forgiveness, healing, and fellowship that make one family from a group of sinful people. Baptism is not just the welcoming of one individual into God's family. It is rather the gift of God's incarnational presence and Holy Spirit which creates a new community of faith, a holy temple built in the Lord (Eph 2:13–22; 4:1–6). Our festive hope sings praises to this *koinonia*, this fellowship, created by God's presence among us. This is how we articulate and explain a true biblical, sacramental theology. In light of this perspective, we know that the sacraments are not just about me but that they are rather about *nosotros*, we, the people of God. It is in this light that we are committed to one another and the world in ministries of mercy and service.

Alberto L. García

*Alberto L. García is a professor of theology at Concordia University, in Mequon, Wisconsin.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Alberto L. García, "The Witness of the Cross in Light of the Hispanic Experience" in *The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century: Signposts for a Multicultural Witness*. Eds. Alberto L. García and A. R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 189–215.

<sup>2</sup> Alberto L. García, "The Local Church: A Critical Point of Departure for a World Ecclesiology" in *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology*. Eds. Alberto L. García and Susan K. Wood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 120–47.



The great influx of Hispanic immigrants in the last decades has been transforming the religious landscape of the United States. Since two-thirds of the U.S. Hispanics are Catholics, this transformation has especially affected the Catholic Church. But the same holds true, although in a much smaller scale, for all the denominations—including the LCMS.

Even though our church has been working among Hispanics since the 1920s, Hispanic Lutherans are not easy to find. Still today the number of established Hispanic congregations and pastors represents but a very small percentage of the whole Synod.

In 2006, when the U.S. Hispanic population was at almost 45 million, the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Hispanic Ministry of the LCMS estimated that the Synod had some 10,000 Hispanic members and 139 workers (pastors, deaconesses, professors, and lay workers) of Hispanic origin. Since then, God has been very active in Hispanic outreach and, thanks to the obedience, vision, dedication, and support of many, including the work of Concordia Seminary and its Center for Hispanic Studies, the "Hispanic wing" of the LCMS is consolidating itself and growing stronger and wiser.

We can't talk about Hispanics as if they were an homogeneous group, which is what we usually do in this country. Even as it's true that they share a common language, it's also true that they come from many countries with different cultures and customs that determine the way they are, the way they face life, the way they express themselves, and even the way they worship.

In many instances, Hispanics are selfless and submissive, especially those who have suffered years of oppression and alienation. But even those still often have that contagious smile and that distinctive fiesta spirit full of color and music. When two or three Hispanics get together there is noise, laughter, jokes, joy...a way of life that often stands in contrast to the generally more subdued and formal tone displayed in North American Anglo cultures.

Hispanics have a strong commitment to family and community. In the Hispanic world, the reality of “family” goes beyond the nuclear household, extending to other relatives, neighbors, friends, and even church. Hispanics are typically social, relationship-oriented people, often in contrast to the more individualistic character of North American society. For Latinos life is to be lived in community, not in isolation. The big events of life—births and baptisms, *quinceañeras* (girl’s coming of age), weddings, deaths—are to be lived in community and the church is expected to be at the center of all of them.

It is in that sense, where no absolute distinction between secular and sacred exists, that the church becomes part of everyday Latino life. It is in or at least around some church that many Latinos learned since childhood to find the answer to the questions and conflicts of life. Whether well understood or not, biblical or not, Hispanics live a sort of spiritual life that extends to all of life. That spirituality, generally expressed through religious rituals, is what brings order to the chaos of life, what makes sense out of the nonsense of daily living, and what creates the sense of community needed in life.

Maybe one of the biggest contrasts in the practice—and expectations—of the faith of the Hispanic Lutherans, as compared to the Anglo-Saxon Lutherans, is the communal character of their devotion and dedication to the church. The solid doctrinal base of the Lutheran faith in a North American context is often presented in a strongly intellectual and academic way, with an individualistic approach to the pursuit of truth and knowledge. This greatly contrasts with the faith of the church of Hispanic America that is expressed in rituals, processions, peregrinations, and various celebrations, all these communal activities that take the people to the streets to celebrate and to do theology as a group. And it is right there, in those encounters with other human beings that express and celebrate their same faith, that Hispanics learn and live the daily Gospel.

Hispanic Lutherans appreciate the clarity with which the Lutheran teaching opens up Holy Scriptures, something many never experienced in the Roman Church. To find out that heaven is a free gift given by God’s grace through faith, when all their lives they have lived in the uncertainty of not knowing if they had done enough good works for their salvation, is like already being in heaven.

But Latinos also need to know, and can even teach us, that the Gospel is real in every aspect of our earthly lives. Sacred and secular go together under God. They need to know, and yet they teach us, that the gospel is not only what is preached from the pulpit on Sunday morning, but also what is lived and shared every day of the week at church and outside the church.

For the gospel to make sense, the gospel has to be incarnate. Hispanics understand and live the gospel from their life experiences, both personal and collective, which include some degree of oppression, poverty, alienation, abuse, and suffering.

Thus, who better to identify with than Jesus Christ, who suffered all of those things? Christ is the suffering one who identifies with our suffering people.

So, when we put together that holistic spirituality inherited from generations, that natural identification with the suffering but finally victorious Christ, the gift of salvation by grace through faith alone, and we let all these jewels shine together collectively with the music and colors of the Hispanic cultures praising the one Triune God, we can find ourselves immersed in a beautiful fiesta where even the angels are dancing and singing. Hispanic Lutherans can help our Synod rediscover, in a North American context that is often antithetical and antagonistic to our life together, the important dimensions of what it means to be church.

Beatriz Hoppe

*Beatriz Hoppe is manager of multicultural ministries at Lutheran Hour Ministries in St. Louis, Missouri.*



Our newest staff member, our music director, joined us November of last year. Hispanic ministry was a completely new experience for her. She offered “fresh eyes” to the question, “How does the Hispanic experience deepen or expand our understanding of Lutheran theology?” With almost no hesitation, she responded, “It heightens the sense that the mission field is all around us.”

Indeed, that seems to be the universal response. But probing further, I asked, “What does that mean?” She responded, “Well, it makes us aware of how ‘white-bread’ (spelling intentional) we are.” The answer surprised me. “What do you mean by that?” I asked. She said, “We take so much for granted in church. We do things without thinking about it much. It flows naturally from our identity. Doctrine and culture are synthesized. The resulting mix becomes the norm. It becomes the *de facto* way to do and be church. We sometimes confuse doctrine with our own Germanic or Anglo cultures and with our own way of doing things. Having a different culture alongside forces us to unravel culture from doctrine. We are compelled to be culturally flexible for the sake of the Gospel. I think this helps us to understand what is truly doctrine and what is not.”

Is that it? “Well, no. Struggling alongside another culture allows us to see how entrenched both cultures are. And this is just as true for the Hispanic culture, like the almost unconscious refusal to be driven by time in many Hispanic cultures. Or the degree of freedom, sometimes to the point of becoming a distraction, that Hispanic children have in church. Recognizing these areas of entrenchment is important. We are more clearly able to distinguish what is cultural from what is important to our confession. At the end of the day, as we struggle to be church, our confession rises up to unite us.”

These insightful answers helped me. The knee-jerk response: “Hispanic ministry helps us think about the mission,” is the easy answer. While accurate, that response can be shallow. It omits an important element: Engaging the mission with Hispanics means not only dealing with Latino culture, but also with our own church’s cultural

assumptions. As we do this, we begin to understand our Lutheran theological identity more clearly. In the world of books and Lutheran academia, this task is difficult but relatively straightforward. In a congregational setting it is not as easy, but making these distinctions is vital. Disentangling the cultural aspects of how we “do church” from our Lutheran theology distills the purity of our doctrine into a Lutheran theological elixir able to be partaken more readily by other ethnic groups.

Let me give you a practical example. As we met and engaged Hispanic people, we were often asked, “Does your church offer First Communion instruction?” The response was culturally-conditioned, “No, but we offer confirmation instruction. After completing this, the child may commune.” Many Hispanic people simply walked away. They wanted to have their child instructed and prepared to participate in the Lord’s Table. This is part of the deeply rooted religious heritage of people coming from many Latin American countries.

Finally the repetitive need to deal with the question of First Communion compelled us to study the issue. The high value that we, as Lutherans, have for the sacrament came into laser sharp focus. It is not that we failed to value the Lord’s Table. It is that entrance to it required two years of study for our children. The question forced us to look at the history of the “confirmation — communion” linkage. We were forced to take to another level the study of scripture and history. We were compelled to ask, “What does it mean that Christ’s promise is that we receive his true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins?” We were forced to deal with what we already knew: the sacrament mystically strengthens faith. It builds us up as the gospel comes to us personally, forgiving and strengthening faith unto life everlasting.

And we began to wonder: Why not offer that blessing to our children as soon as they are able to discern the body and blood; as soon as they can rightly prepare; as soon as they demonstrate faith in the words, “given and shed for you for the remission of sins”? The sacrament and what it offers transcended our usual cultural way of “doing church.” It is a part of our Lutheran identity that transcends culture. And this participation can bless all our children, Hispanic and Anglo. And lo and behold, we discovered that there was a *First Communion* order in our *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*! We learned that hundreds of our Lutheran congregations already prepared their children for First Communion. But it took engaging Hispanic cultures in our midst, and considering the needs of our Hispanic neighbors first, to get us to address this issue directly.

There are many areas that we need to address and unpack to carry out effective ministries with the Hispanic community. For example: To help build community, once a quarter we join all three of our worship services. The liturgical order necessarily becomes bilingual. So we are compelled to deal with issues of language. It is not unusual to hear some say, “Well, I don’t understand why we can’t do these worship services in English. It’s not fair that the majority of us have to put up with Spanish.” Or think about the need to deal with the issue of immigration and the implications of having documented and undocumented people in the congregation. Or the uncomfortable tension evident in the economic hegemony created when traditional Lutherans occupy the same space as new Lutherans of much lower economic strata. Each of these



issues—linguistic, political, socioeconomic, and many others—forces us to think theologically and scripturally as Lutherans. It compels us to seek clarity, and quite often to distinguish our Lutheran theology from our cultural and national concerns and biases.

The renowned historian, Justo González, writes:

It may well be that our common views, precisely because they are common, involve a prejudice that is difficult for us to see, and that a seemingly more biased view will help us discover that prejudice. This is probably one of the most significant contributions that a minority perspective can make to the church at large.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, I have found that working cross-culturally among Hispanics has compelled our congregation to engage in a concerted effort to clarify doctrine and distinguish it from culture. We are surfacing our cultural biases so that the purity of the gospel and our Lutheran doctrine can guide us to disciple people, as our Lord Jesus instructed his church to do.

Eloy González

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Justo L. González, *Manana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 21.



The body of Christ is a diverse mosaic of peoples, cultures, languages, traditions, and histories. A common thread in this diversity is our common baptismal identity, made possible through the forgiveness of sins given to us by the Lord who gave his life for us. Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither Anglo nor Hispanic. We are one in Christ.

What then do U.S. Hispanic/Latino families bring to our common life in Christ? Before we answer that question, we must avoid falling into a romantic view of the Hispanic family.

The mosaic of life in the Latin American world is a story etched with past conquests, revolutions, and freedom victories, but also one saturated with poverty, devastation, misery, and death. We see Latino societies plagued with corruption, violence, and *la viveza* (i.e., taking advantage of other's weaknesses for personal gain). In the middle of it all, we see real people belonging to working families, struggling to survive, yearning for change and opportunity. The gap between those who "have" and those who "have not" still widens. Signs of disparity and injustice are demeaning. Many suffer subsistence-level living conditions. Various forms of discrimination bewilder and sadden us.

From this world, Latin American families have migrated to the United States (in some cases, they have been in this land for centuries), seeking opportunities to work,

live, and build a future for their children and their children's children. They bring with them positive values too, both to our churches and to our way of life. By the gospel many are called out of the dark side of life and renewed for service to Christ, bringing their gifts to us.

We can and must learn what is positive from the U.S. Hispanic/Latino family. What are they teaching us through their lives and faith walk? How might they even give us some insight into what it means to be church?

We intend neither to compare Hispanics to others nor to offer an exhaustive list of their values, but just some food for thought:

1. Hispanic/Latino cultures continue to hold an elevated concept of *la familia* (i.e., the family) and tend to preserve social structures and traditions through family relationships. *La familia* includes ties and connections that reach to the extended family, even incorporating godparents (*padrinos*).

Opportunity: Re-examine your congregational life, exploring times and setting aside places to prioritize and highlight marriage and the family, both in our teachings and church activities.

2. The tradition of rites of passage: A birth, a baptism, first communion, *quinceañera* (a young woman's fifteenth birthday), and a graduation are reason enough to have a celebration.

Opportunity: Such a tradition could open the door for seeking occasions—in devotions, liturgies, processions, and other events—to recognize and celebrate important changes in our family life. These occasions can become teaching moments about the various stages in our life cycles, exploring their dangers as well as challenges, seeking the Lord's wisdom for life in His Word.

3. Coming together and being together with others. Fellowship around relationships is more important than simply "getting down to business." There can be great spontaneity among Hispanics without the need to belabor a formal planning process. The exuberance of color, celebration, "fiesta," music, and rich sounds of eating, laughing, and playing—an expression of *lo nuestro* (what is ours)—is part of spending not just time but quality time together. Sometimes fellowship is simply the ability to share each other's sorrows as well as rejoice together in the small things of life.

Opportunity: The art and task of building community and relationships provides a welcoming safe haven for families who are struggling to find a place to grow and receive support. We are invited to see time not only in terms of number and quantity, but above all relationally in terms of quality time spent with another. To grasp and celebrate the festive and communal nature of the "communion of saints" and enjoy food gatherings as a sort of "foretaste of the feast to come" remind us that the church cannot be reduced to individuals, preparing us for fellowship around the Lord's Table.

4. Hispanic/Latino families live a continuous process of adjustment and the need for adaptations, yet steadiness prevails under great pressure. The difficulties in life have shaped and tempered the need to move on, the ability to live in "hard times" and move through them, seeking the family for help when sought, refuge when needed, and solidarity when required.

Opportunity: Latinos teach us that the church is always on pilgrimage, never comfortable with this world, always on the move and thus doing the mission of Christ, seeking after and living according to the values of the city that lasts forever. In such pilgrimage, one learns to make the best of change and in so doing to trust in God's provision and in his gospel promises.

5. Hispanics exhibit a work ethic that motivates the capacity to risk much in order to attain the well-being of the family. This spirit of facing the challenges (like long hours and low wages) even against the odds of losing everything and then having to start all over offers us an example of resilience for the sake of the family.

Opportunity: Learning about our vocation as Christians and putting into practice in the family a spirit of sacrifice, generosity, and love for the neighbor strengthens the notion of the family as *una escuela para la vida* (i.e., a school for life).

6. "*Si Dios quiere*" (if God wills it!). Though often an overused cliché, these words offer us a worldview that looks to God and does not hesitate to call out his name. God's name is not cursed. There is a respect for God's name, a respect for the sacred.

Opportunity: Luther in his Small Catechism spoke of the role that parents have in the spiritual growth and maturity of their children. Who will teach them to call upon the name of the Lord? It is important to reestablish the role of parents as spiritual mentors for their children, so that many generations will respect the sacred, the Holy One. There is so much disrespect for the family and the sacred. Latinos tend to hold these priorities in high regard. We can use this in our churches and communities.

Marcos Kempff

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# ARTICLES

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## Theology in Context

### Music as a Test Case

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Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

The church's attitude towards music has not been without some ambivalence. In his *Homily on Psalm 1*, St. Basil (ca. 330–379) credits the Holy Spirit with the wisdom to use our human inclination for pleasure to teach us virtue through the singing of psalms. Since a catchy tune is likely to help the spiritually young retain what the words of the apostles alone might not, the Holy Spirit “mixed sweetness of melody with doctrine so that inadvertently we would absorb the benefit of the words through gentleness and ease of hearing, just as clever physicians frequently smear the cup with honey when giving the fastidious some rather bitter medicine to drink.”<sup>1</sup>

Is music a necessary means for spiritually immature Christians to get hooked onto something more virtuous? Or is music a gift from above to be embraced as part of our creatureliness, along with the engagement of the senses and the enjoyment of sound, rhythm, and color? Basil moves along a spectrum that allows for both views. Doctrine is beneficial, but music can be sweet like honey too. Text and music together can serve in the “training of souls” of both “children in actual age as well as those who are young in behavior” by helping them commit to memory the psalms as they go about their business at home and the marketplace.<sup>2</sup>

On a good day, St. Augustine (354–430) praises the devotional use of music, realizing that when hymns “are sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervor and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than they would if they were not sung.”<sup>3</sup> Other days, the church father is not so optimistic, aware of the seductive power of music to move, please, and stimulate our mood: “But I ought not to allow my mind to be paralyzed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place.”<sup>4</sup> Like Basil, Augustine shows ambivalence in his attitude towards music in church, allowing for the tradition of church singing “in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion,” while forcefully warning all who “find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys” against committing “grievous sin.”<sup>5</sup> Augustine wavers between the dangers and benefits of the marriage between text and music.

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Is music a means to a greater end such as the worship of God or the reception of his gifts through life-giving words? Or, more than being a vehicle of the word, could music also express such greater ends in musical form, becoming a sort of life-giving musical word itself? The answer is yes. While music can be a means to communicate the text and bring it to light (and life!), the text may also allow for a range of musical settings that can elicit a corresponding spectrum of responses to the text.<sup>6</sup> While the relationship between text and music can be explored in various ways, Basil's and Augustine's dilemma encourages us think about the nature and function of music from a theological angle.

In this essay, I argue that this type of reflection concerning the use and reception of music in the church represents a concrete form or test case for getting at the broader question of the relationship between theology and culture. This question calls for some confessional Lutheran response and contribution, as we become a more ethnoculturally diverse church where the gifts of various cultural groups are being brought to the church. What do these gifts bring to our church, fellowship, theologizing, and proclamation? How does the word interact with gifts of culture? When do these gifts get in the way of the gospel? When do they serve to illuminate and even embody the gospel?

Our argument proceeds in four stages. First, we will show that the history of Western music from the medieval to the Baroque period shows a spectrum of ecclesiastical attitudes towards music that go from seeing music suspiciously as an obstacle to the word to seeing it more warmly as a gift from God to communicate the word. Such attitudes towards music offer us a window into the church's various forms of engagement with the culture around her, giving us insight into the theological and cultural assumptions that shaped such engagement or lack thereof. In the overall narrative, the Lutheran tradition represents an approach that is not shy but rather bold in interacting creatively with the culture while remaining faithful to its theological commitments. Second, we will show how the Lutheran tradition offers, in the *Apology's* distinction between "sure signs of grace" and "signs instituted without the command of God," a promising framework for developing a theology of the sign (*signum*) that promotes the church's creative use of signs in culture while discerning their potential to communicate and embody the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Third, we will bring a representative, trans-ecclesial body of music from the Latino Christian world (a *corpus Hispanicum*, as it were), as well as some lesser-known works (inclusive of both Latin American and U.S. Hispanic contexts), into conversation with Bevan's *Models of Contextual Theology*, where he shows various ways of conceiving the interaction between theology and context.<sup>8</sup> The results of this interaction will yield a synthetic framework to assess from a Lutheran angle potential uses of music selections from a particular culture (in our case, music coming from the Latino Christian world) in the life of the church—either devotionally or, in some cases, liturgically—by ranking the range of theological orientations of the musical text (and its cultural associations) vis-à-vis the priority and centrality of God's word.

Finally, we will show how the Lutheran tradition exhibits a remarkable degree of balance when it comes to the evaluation of the use and reception of music as a form



of culture in the church. Four factors for evaluation are the primacy of the word of God in the church's life, the congregation's capacity to receive and express the word in a particular time and place, the degree to which the church's music embodies its past theological tradition or heritage, and finally the degree to which the church's music engages creatively and effectively the present contexts of the cultures in her midst.

### **I. Lutherans Meet Western Culture: A Brief Lutheran Reading of Music History**

Music constitutes a form of culture in two ways. As artifact, music has the capacity to represent a set of values or ideals. As art, music has the capacity to produce and communicate meaning creatively and persuasively, and to foster a certain way of doing things.<sup>9</sup> During the Renaissance era (c. 1420–1600), a church accustomed to singing monophony (the singing of a single line) for centuries—what is known as Gregorian chant—debated at length whether polyphony, the singing of independent lines of equal importance, served a good liturgical purpose. After all, the Holy Spirit had served the church well with monophony for centuries. Why change now? To be honest, there was also a cultural liking for monophony that filtered into the Eastern and Western church because this was the musical form inherited from the singing of psalms in Jewish worship and used in the Greco-Roman world where the church moved about for a long time.<sup>10</sup> Like monophony, polyphony is out there among the folk before it begins to make it slowly into the church.

Theology had a role in assessing new polyphonic music. Would polyphony get in the way of the text, or enhance its communication and reception? Once polyphony slowly set in, there was yet another debate on what kinds of consonances or intervals constituted good and pious polyphonic music. But these arguments were not purely theological in their scope. Calls for perfect consonances and against certain kinds of dissonances in the church were often colored by philosophical assumptions held in Western culture about the nature of the universe as a mathematically proportionate and harmonious cosmos—an idea proposed by Pythagoras long before we hear it from others in the medieval age.<sup>11</sup> At first, it was better to stick to fifths, fourths, and eighths, the so-called “perfect” intervals (due to their simple mathematical ratios) that best bore witness to a perfectly ordered universe. Later on, the common folk, and then the church a bit more hesitantly, moved into thirds and sixths. These new consonances were used in folk music and started to sound good to late medieval and Renaissance ears.

Sixteenth-century theologians from Protestant Reformers to Catholic bishops at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) weighed in on polyphony. To various degrees, consciously or unconsciously, vocal and instrumental music was assumed to embody and transmit some worldview that could be seen as compatible or incompatible with the church's faith and life. Along the more Platonic line of the Augustinian warning against the power of the senses, Zwingli (1484–1531) does away with instrumental music in worship, highly suspicious of the sensual power and idolatrous use of music to derail sinners away from Christian piety but also committed to a philosophical preference for pure spirit over cumbersome matter.<sup>12</sup> While Zwingli, an accomplished musician, does have a place for music in personal devotion and education outside the church,

he does not use it in public worship.<sup>13</sup> In part due to the dangers of idolatry, but also as a reaction to the excesses of polyphony, Calvin advocates the singing of psalms without accompaniment, steering away from instrumental and choral music in worship.<sup>14</sup> Cultural judgments are made on the basis of theological premises and vice versa. Liturgical iconoclasm may be caused as much by Old Testament injunctions against the worship of images as by privileged philosophical commitments to a dualistic cosmology that is suspicious of the senses.

The Lutheran chorale is unthinkable without the development of polyphonic medieval *organum* and forms such as the motet and conductus—all forms of polyphony where a tenor voice, often borrowed from an earlier plainchant, carries the melody and is embellished by one or more upper voices. In Luther's day, the melody would not have been sung by a soprano voice accompanied by other voices in some synchronized harmonic and rhythmic fashion as we are used to today. The melody was sung by a rhythmically free and often syncopated tenor voice with other voices providing "lively runs."<sup>15</sup> Luther thinks highly of Josquin des Prez (c. 1450–1521), an accomplished Renaissance composer, whose motet *Ave Maria virgo serena* bears all the marks of a flowing, canonic, chordal, and cadential form of multi-voiced polyphony. Luther praises Josquin for his ability to communicate the gospel through music, but also for his musical art.<sup>16</sup> Josquin is a long way from monophony. So we know where Luther stood on the question of polyphony, even the kind where not all intervals were "perfect." He liked it, just like many of the folk in his day did, and found it useful to foster the speaking and hearing of the word in the congregation.

The Lutheran chorale, as we hear it today, also benefits from the move made in the Renaissance towards the *cantus firmus* (or "fixed melody"), which goes beyond early polyphonic *organum* by placing the main melody in the upper voice, making the other voices play a supporting role. The focus on the fixed melody gives the music of the time a homophonic chordal texture, like the one we are used to in traditional four-part Lutheran hymnody, which is later developed in the Baroque era (1600–1750) with the introduction of an improvised *basso continuo* (played by say, a lute, organ, and/or a viol or bassoon) as the main device for accompanying melody in the context of a now fully developed move to functional tonality and harmonic progression. Four-part harmony supporting the melody on top is also made possible by the rhythmic equalization of parts fully achieved by the Baroque period, allowing for more control and synchronization of voices in congregational singing. As Lutheran theology meets Western culture, we see a certain appropriation of the move from monophony to early polyphony, from homophony to full harmony.<sup>17</sup> Lutheran hymnody never ran away from these cultural phenomena, but drank from the wells of the musical Western developments in service to the word.

Today we are somewhat removed from either Luther's day or the Baroque when it comes to our approach to hymns. In Luther's day, the folk would have likely been more used to rhythmic flexibility and complex syncopation in their hearing and singing of hymns.<sup>18</sup> At that time, notation did not have the benefit of bars and accents did not always fall on the first and third beats of each measure. This free rhythmic quality is for

the most part lost in our hymnody today, but not in some styles of folk music around the world. Global South Christians from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are notorious for falling outside the established Western harmonies and meters—not because they are less musical, out of tune, or can't keep a beat, but because they are more melodically and rhythmically free in their approach to music.<sup>19</sup>

Our hymnody did not fall from heaven one day. It is a product of developments in Western music, which, though contested at times by some church official, were able with various degrees of success to serve the gospel and make it intelligible to some groups of people at a particular time. Today we are more harmonic than polyphonic. In some ways, we are closer to the Romantic spirit than the Baroque one in our singing of hymns, happy to follow nineteenth century conventions that aim at the use of “beautifully polished phrases and dance or march rhythms to create a certain mood and to give an ornate expression to personal religious feelings,” whereas Luther’s hymns fundamentally “were a confession of faith, not of personal religious feelings.”<sup>20</sup>

Above all, Luther is interested in conveying the word, but he is not antithetical to cultural expression and communication in doing so. The rise of the Lutheran chorale suggests that Luther had benign assumptions about the possibilities of music as creative art and treasured artifact, considering music a divine gift second only to theology that can deliver and embody the Word to the German folk in his day and age.<sup>21</sup> Luther liked what the senses heard in the polyphony of his day, welcoming the cultural developments. This is not to say all forms of polyphony were conducive to worship. Later Roman Catholic counter-Reformers also had their doubts at Trent (1545–1563) about certain forms of polyphony that encumbered the text with secular musical sources.<sup>22</sup> Not every new cultural development makes it into the church.

In the Tridentine reform, the Catholic Church kept the use of Latin. Luther used Latin, but not in country or village churches where the vernacular ruled.<sup>23</sup> While Luther was not the first to bring music in the vernacular to the church—it had been at best tolerated since the Middle Ages for special feasts and occasions—he did give it a regular use and legitimacy in the church service.<sup>24</sup> There is no cultural iconoclasm. The embracing of the vernacular in language and music as vehicles of the word in service to congregations can be justified theologically in Lutheranism, perhaps with an appeal to the incarnational nature of revelation, which Luther also tied into the Holy Spirit’s work through visible means like water, bread, and wine. But its adoption can also be seen as a form of strong cultural engagement, bringing into the church and the liturgy both past musical church tradition and more contemporary forms intelligible and meaningful to God’s people. Luther can work with monophony and polyphony of various sorts. As a musician and composer, Luther would have been sensitive to their possibilities in the divine service.

Lutherans have drunk from other developments in Western music. In the Renaissance, a renewed interest in the recovery of ancient Greek oration explains why the *seconda prattica* (second practice) movement justified the composer’s use of unconventional musical devices, against rules of counterpoint at the time, to get the text’s idea across. When music theorist Giovanni Artusi (c. 1540–1613) complained of Claudio

Monteverdi's treatment of dissonance in his fifth book of madrigals, Monteverdi's brother retorted that the critic had only looked at the structure of the madrigal without paying attention to the words.<sup>25</sup> The text rules and breaks the rules if needed. There are theological reasons for Luther's preference for the use of music to highlight the text of Scripture, but this move is also congruent with the philosophical and aesthetic spirit of the Renaissance.

Without the second practice and its preference for the freedom and flow accorded to the solo voice, we would have no operas like those of Monteverdi (1567–1643) or G. F. Handel (1685–1759). We would have no oratorios like those of J. S. Bach (1685–1750), which include solo passages that do not only aim at projecting the text even in the midst of an elaborate Baroque counterpoint but require great virtuosity to perform. Again, there are not only theological but also cultural preferences towards these musical forms which are grounded in the revival of what ancient Greek drama was thought to privilege in the move, that is, oration over structure.

In the Baroque, the doctrine of affections built on the Renaissance's interest in word-painting (where the music tries to "paint" an affect or emotion expressed in the text) and used such painting explicitly to move the hearer's mood, to bring about a desired effect in the hearer. While there may not be a strict one-to-one correspondence between specific notes or keys and corresponding kinds of emotions or affect (what makes one cry, makes another laugh!), research shows that there is an emotive reaction to music if one hears what one is not accustomed to hearing and is thus surprised by the unexpected. This alone suggests that response to meaning in music depends not only on the musical form per se and the meaning attached to the musical form by the composer-interpreter, but also on the music the hearer understands and thus can anticipate in his cultural milieu.<sup>26</sup>

Like in all hermeneutics of aesthetics, there is both a composer/interpreter-oriented intent and a hearer-oriented response to any musical form.<sup>27</sup> We bring theological and cultural assumptions to our composition, interpretation, and hearing of music. What is heard and criticized as obnoxiously repetitive call-and-response in some North American cultures is heard and celebrated as wondrous simplicity in many global South contexts. Hearer-response sensitivity does not prevent the composer from wanting to tell us what he wants the notes to evoke or express either explicitly or implicitly in his music. If I listen to J. S. Bach long enough, and know what to listen for when he paints theological ideas in his music, I can anticipate to some degree what is coming. Programmatic music is an example of explicit music painting where you are told what to look for; J. S. Bach could be more implicit, allowing hearers to interpret what he is trying to communicate.<sup>28</sup> Renaissance and Baroque interest in the rhetorical use of music assumes a philosophical worldview about the power of music to affect people in certain ways.

How might certain cultures react to the same kind of music? There will be difference in the reception of musical forms not merely because of the message they embody but because the music itself—even "church" or sacred music—is a historical phenomenon that is appropriated differently by hearers from various cultures. Even our most

cherished Western musical forms in Lutheran “culture” may get in the way of the message in some non-Western cultures, just as non-Western musical forms may embody or promote the Lutheran confession in some contexts over time.<sup>29</sup> Culture plays a role not only in the creation but also in the adaptation and reception of sacred music.

The Baroque focus on the power of music as such to move minds is tempered by the Lutheran focus on the word of God over the musical figures per se. Musical figures must, therefore, serve to describe musically what the word is saying to move the soul. Such focus on the word is helpful against the later Romantic temptation towards a purely subjective use of music to express personal feelings (music for individual pleasure, as it were). For J. S. Bach, like Luther, the aim of music is the glory of God and, yes, the enjoyment of man’s soul too. After the Enlightenment, however, such enjoyment is understood no longer as a sacred delight in God’s gifts, but is secularized as a form of entertainment where either the interpreter or the hearer becomes the focus of the musical act.<sup>30</sup> Yet such dangers of culture should not deter Lutherans from evaluating music as a cultural sign in every age for the sake of the gospel. No romantic return to the golden age of Lutheranism will realize this task for us. Herein lies the missiological challenge for the church as she engages various cultures with the Lutheran confession.

Our brief reading of music making and reception in various periods of Western history shows music’s capacity for embodying and communicating a certain worldview, and thus its cultural character as art and artifact. We saw that debates in the church on the potential reception in Christian devotion of various forms of music included not only deeply held theological commitments but also philosophical assumptions about what kind of cultural expressions should embody and promote such commitments. The same is true today.

Debates on traditional vis-à-vis contemporary worship are not only theological, but cultural. People not only decide what is good and bad theology, but also what is good and bad culture. In a church with people of many cultures, the decision on what is good and bad culture is trickier than the question of what is correct theology. What is at stake here is not whether theological content should be distinguished from a certain cultural form, but rather whether Lutherans can engage in the critical and constructive use of cultural forms in terms of their capacity to embody and promote solid theological content today. Our brief Lutheran reading of Western music shows that Lutherans have been bold in cultural engagement while remaining faithful to the content of their confession.

## **II. Two Kinds of Signs: A Lutheran Framework for Engaging Theology and Culture**

The Lutheran Confessions offer a promising framework for approaching cultural signs, and thus for thinking through the relationship between theology and culture. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession distinguishes between two kinds of signs, namely, the sacraments as “sure signs of grace” and other “signs instituted without the command of God.” Therefore, signs instituted without the command of God are not sure signs of grace, even though they perhaps serve to teach or admonish the common folk.<sup>31</sup>

The Apology opens up the possibility of a theology of “signs” (*signa*). The confessors are mostly interested in drawing a contrast between “the sacraments as rites, which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added [and] humanly instituted rites.”<sup>32</sup> As a rite instituted by God, the sacrament is a sure sign (*signum*) of “God’s will towards us, through which God moves hearts to believe,”<sup>33</sup> making us “certain” of his promises.<sup>34</sup> The sacramental *signum* is, and thus effects the same thing as, the word to which it is united. The sacrament is a “visible Word.”<sup>35</sup>

Further attention must be given towards developing the second half of the Apology’s distinction. What are we to make of those “signs instituted without the command of God” (*signa sine mandato Dei instituta*), which could be useful to teach and admonish? What would be an example of such religious-cultural signs? In the Spanish edition of the Book of Concord, Andrés Meléndez includes an example of such a *signum* offered by Justus Jonas in his German edition of the Apology—namely, the image of a cross.<sup>36</sup>

The image of a cross, in and of itself, is ambiguous. It can communicate any number of meanings and evoke any number of responses, some less helpful than others when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>37</sup> In a recent article, Douglas Rutt has noted that the historic post-Conquest reception in Latin America of portrayals of a *dying* Christ, such as Diego Velázquez’s crucified Christ (1632), has privileged the image of the Christ “with us,” the one who is in solidarity with those who suffer.<sup>38</sup> He argues that, while this image of Christ “with us” does not yet point people to the Christ who has already *died* “for us,” it can still teach North American Christians, who live in a context of abundance where suffering is often downplayed and empty crosses avoid dealing with God in the flesh and the cross, to see the Christian life precisely through suffering and the cross.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, Rutt speaks of such cruciform life in terms of the experience of *tentatio*, which God uses in life to bring us down to Sheol through repentance in order to help us depend solely in his grace.<sup>40</sup> But Rutt also suggests that the Christ “with us” image is potentially useful for developing a pastoral theology of solidarity with those who suffer; at the same time, he acknowledges that the image of the *dying* Christ “with us” is not yet the Christ who has *died* “for us,” reminding us that Christ is not only an example of cross-bearing for the needy but God’s gift of salvation for sinners.<sup>41</sup> We note how Rutt’s analysis helps us see the potential ambiguity of a familiar cultural-religious sign to offer a clear witness to or embodiment of the Gospel. The useful or evangelical use of the sign depends not only on the intended message the sign might deliver, but on the recipient of the sign and the cultural baggage he brings to the table when reading such a sign.

Rutt represents an attempt to understand how a sign of significance to a people group functions before assessing its potential use to admonish or teach the folk. The sign may serve as a bridge to admonish with the law or preach the gospel. The sign may serve as preparation for the gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*). More broadly, at its best, the sign may illustrate or even embody some aspect of the Christian story. At its worst, the sign remains ambiguous enough to become an obstacle to all these aims. It may

even serve a countercultural purpose by pointing people away from particular cultural assumptions hostile to the gospel. All cultural signs are, in a sense, religious signs for good or bad. Not all signs are created equal.

The Apology's brief discussion of the "sign," though not developed as such, serves as the sort of conceptual framework and guiding post that helps us engage culture theologically, promoting the church's creative missionary and pastoral engagement with cultural signs while also acknowledging that these are not God's "sure signs of grace" (*certa signa gratiae*). Admittedly, even the best or most convincing attempts at teaching and admonishing the folk through visible and audible "signs" and "rites" other than the ones instituted and commanded by God, such as those offered through dance, painting, sculpture, poem, cinema, and of course music (or any combination of these), may or not serve the Word or be intelligible to the people of a particular culture.<sup>42</sup> However, the Apology is at least, it seems to me, opening a door for pastors and missionaries to engage culture theologically by asking about the potential pedagogical use and evangelical reception of signs of significance in various cultures.

### III. Dealing with Culture Theologically: Hispanic/Latino Church Music as a Test Case for Assessing Bevans's Models of Contextual Theology

While the Apology offers us a framework for distinguishing between two kinds of signs (*signa*), its intention is not to offer a more in-depth schema for discerning the potential value of cultural-religious signs for use in the church. That task requires bringing theology and culture into conversation with one another. To illustrate the productivity of such an analysis, we will bring samples of music from the Latino world—including a trans-ecclesial *corpus Hispanicum* of devotional music—into conversation with Bevans's classic work *Models of Contextual Theology*. We will suggest how music can serve as a test case for dealing with culture theologically.

Bevans introduces a variety of models—some creation-oriented, some redemption-oriented—that are potentially helpful for thinking through the relationship between theology and context.<sup>43</sup> In a creation-oriented theological approach, the world is basically seen as good because God created it and can reveal his power and care through ordinary words, events, and people. In a redemptive-oriented approach, on the other hand, the world is basically seen as bad because, though created by God, it is corrupted by sin and thus in dire need of God's redemption.

These distinctions or "basic theological orientation" of Bevans's models are heuristic and may have several variations, depending on how one appropriates them. A Roman Catholic theologian and former missionary to the Philippines, Bevans understandably defines the creation-oriented approach along Roman Catholic lines, emphasizing the capacity of human nature to respond freely to God's supernatural grace. Therefore, he also associates the approach with Rahner's more problematic notion of "anonymous Christianity," which locates God's grace generally in the world and thus apart from a clear proclamation of the gospel. On the other hand, Bevans speaks of the redemption-oriented approach in terms of the human inability to choose God's grace, which Lutherans adopt. Yet Bevans associates the redemption-oriented approach with

the notion that God's grace should replace human nature—a conclusion that would raise at least some Lutherans' eyebrows. Do Lutherans actually believe that? Moreover, do Lutherans have anything to say on God's work through ordinary people and events in creation?

While Bevans offers his own “basic theological orientation” on what creation-oriented and redemption-oriented means, disagreement on the particulars should not detract us from the usefulness of this distinction and the possibility of appropriating it according to the Lutheran confession. Lutheran catechesis affirms creation and human nature as God's gifts. While the confessors affirm our corruption by sin and need for redemption, they do not speak of replacing nature with grace.<sup>44</sup> Nature and grace are taught in different ways. While God reveals his power in nature, God's redeeming grace is not sought in nature but in the gospel. Lutherans also assert that God works through creation to sustain it with everything needful for life in this world. Through vocation, God uses humans as “masks” to cooperate in his work of preservation. Yet, only through the church, where sinners gather around word and sacraments, does God provide for the redemption of humanity. Lutherans can say creation is God's gift and needs God's redemption. Similarly, Luther speaks of music as God's gift along with theology though he is aware of the potential idolatrous abuse of both gifts.

Bevans draws artificial distinctions among his models for the sake of conversation, to show the obvious extremes, and for the sake of analysis. Models do not correspond exactly to the reality they represent.<sup>45</sup> Along the spectrum that goes from creation- to redemption-oriented options, Bevans presents six models of contextual theology, namely, anthropological, transcendental, praxis, synthetic, translation, and countercultural. Because the synthetic model is a certain compilation of the others, and the countercultural model may be seen broadly as an attitude that can be applied to other models insofar as they are deemed to have compromised the gospel in favor of culture, we will focus on the first four models, seeing how they might function in the *corpus Hispanicum* of church music.<sup>46</sup> We will assess how musical forms from a cultural context can be evaluated, in terms of the themes they communicate and the cultural associations they evoke, and ranked vis-à-vis the centrality of the word in the Lutheran church.

Bevans uses agricultural images to describe his models. The translation model evokes the image of the seeds of the gospel being planted in foreign soil.<sup>47</sup> The old time message is adapted into various cultural idioms. Translating “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” into the Spanish language, while maintaining a traditional four-part chorale form in place, is an example (*Culto Cristiano*, #129).<sup>48</sup> The translation model also comes to us in more present cultural musical forms, such as in the *Introit* and *Gloria Patri* from the Lutheran Cuban Mass (*Misa Cubana* 2), where the seed of the word is transmitted through genres of Cuban music—namely, the Habanera for the *Introit* and the Cha for the *Gloria Patri*.

Most music in the Lutheran church falls into the translation model. Some favor idioms from the past, others from the present. Both sides of the old traditional vs. contemporary music debate agree on the translation model, where the Christian message is seen as transcultural, even if they disagree on the best cultural medium to communicate



it without doing harm to the message. The appropriate musical medium rests on factors such as the role of past tradition as a source of theological identity, the place of present contexts in the intelligible expression and reception of the message, and the positive or negative associations that both past and present musical forms might bring to our minds.<sup>49</sup>

In the anthropological model, the seeds of the word are already in the garden (world) so that all there is to do is wait for them to bloom.<sup>50</sup> The goal is not so much to play the “Christian” message through some musical medium, but to see what God can teach us through musical offerings already in the world. An example lies in the use of native Amerindian instrumental songs offered during processions or offertories in church. A more specific example is the use in Hispanic churches of the highly popular song *De Colores*, which typically speaks of the beauty of creation without necessarily making any explicit reference to the gospel. Is there a place for this kind of music in the church?

*De Colores* has likely been heard by almost any Latin American child at some point in his life. The song has positive connotations, evoking images of childhood, nature, and church. Under the anthropological model, the assumption in the use of such a song in a church setting is that God has revealed something of himself in creation that we can appropriate more fully. The song may potentially serve as a starting point for meeting a certain people group where they are in terms of their cultural familiarity with a piece. However, since the song only points to the natural knowledge of God in a popular form, the anthropological model may fall into a romantic view of culture and lose the centrality of Christ and the gospel in the church’s worship. A way this danger is dealt with is by using the piece to set up a gospel stanza, a move made in ELCA’s *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* (1998), which adds a third stanza to the folk piece (LLC #494) that speaks of the joy of living under the grace of the King who does not die and calls the church to quench the thirst of souls for Christ by spreading his light of grace to many a soul.<sup>51</sup>

The praxis model sees the world as a garden that must be weeded out daily.<sup>52</sup> One becomes a better gardener through practice as one takes care of a world plagued with evil. The model exhibits a critical stance towards an unjust society and calls Christians to work for the building of God’s kingdom on earth. Canticles such as *Un pueblo que camina* (LLC #511) or *Enviado soy de Dios* (LLC #415) fall into this category. There is an interest in calling God’s people to make the world a more humane place in the sphere of temporal righteousness before the neighbor—especially, the poor and vulnerable. The danger lies in confusing faith and works, failing to distinguish between active justice or righteousness before our neighbor through good works and passive righteousness before God through faith in Christ alone.

In global South communities where poverty, exploitation, and marginality are an everyday reality, there is room for music that speaks of God’s care for those who suffer and the church’s works on behalf of the suffering neighbor. The challenge is to see how music can paint for us what the Christian life looks like in a context of injustice without making our praxis a condition for justification before God or without making

the Christian hope in the life of the world to come conditional on the building of a just society in the here and now.<sup>53</sup> The same principle applies to a canticle such as *Tú has venido a la orilla* (*¡Cantad al Señor!* #62), which calls modern day Galilean disciples and fishers of men to participate in, and indeed cooperate with, the Lord in his mission. The challenge is to portray textually and musically the Christian life, in its indicative (divine initiative) and imperative (our responsibility) sense, without compromising the centrality of the gospel.

Bevans's fourth model is the transcendental one, which parting from a particular life experience seeks to draw broader lessons for others.<sup>54</sup> The model assumes that if the gardener cultivates his garden, he will be able to inspire others to do the same in their own contexts. We are now in the realm of the testimonial. A good example is Justo González's *De los cuatro rincones del mundo* (LLC #450), where he uses the Hispanic historic experience of multi-ethnic origins or geographical-historical *mestizaje* to teach the whole church about her *mestizaje* (catholicity) and God's love in Christ for the nations. The model shows that theology is done from some individual or communal context, which can serve to teach some aspect of the Christian story to the whole church.

A danger of the transcendental model is to make individual or communal experience the standard or ideal image for all Christians. One must be careful that an individual's life experience does not become necessarily normative or universal for all. In some cases, the musical expression may be too personal or communal to be grasped by a larger group, as is the case of the *Introit* of *Misa Cubana 4*, where a brief phrase from *Son de la loma y cantan en llanos*, a popular Cuban folk song, is used brilliantly to call people to gather in worship by evoking the descent of farmers from the hill (*loma*) to the plains (*llanos*) for dance and celebration. Such liturgical adaptation of folk song may be meaningful to the Cuban people and perhaps to Cuban Americans, but not easily understood outside of the island or Cuban-America cultural settings.

In the latest edition of his work, Bevans added a countercultural model.<sup>55</sup> Similar to the praxis model in its suspicion of the world, the gardener is to pull out the weeds from the garden (world) before he can plant the seeds (of the gospel) there. While one could associate certain forms of music with the model's critical assessment of culture as hostile to Christianity, it might be more helpful to see this model as an attitude towards certain moves in music. For example, the normative use of Latin in the liturgy in the Western Catholic church up to the time of Vatican II could be seen as countercultural. Despite the use of music in the vernacular in church all the way back to the Reformation of the sixteenth century and before, the use of Latin in the Catholic Church attempted in part to keep the church pure from the influences of the secular world where the vernacular ruled.

Countercultural proponents may argue for the preservation of the church's identity in the midst of an unholy world through appeals for uniformity in worship. A call for the preservation of "church culture" typically accompanies such arguments. While there is a salutary place in Lutheranism for liturgical unity and identity for the sake of the gospel and love, a narrow countercultural position might dismiss engaging present

contexts for the sake of a broader catholicity in service to the word and people from various cultures in our midst. The statement is often made that hymnals today include musical offerings from non-European Christian cultures of the past, so new Lutherans should be grateful. This claim for catholicity in the liturgy is true to some extent, but the statement does not consider that such offerings have been filtered through Western European musical forms that, with the exception of Gregorian chant, are likely foreign to what the original music of these people groups would have actually sounded like in their own contexts.

The danger of countercultural attitudes does not lie in their concern for good theology, church unity, or even wholesome past tradition in the face of a culture that is hostile to the gospel. Rather the danger lies in seeing all culture as bad or hostile to God. In such cases, countercultural becomes anti-cultural and mono-cultural, making the church sectarian rather than catholic, and leading her to summarily exclude the contributions of other cultures to the proclamation of the gospel in the church through various forms of music.<sup>56</sup> “Church culture” talk has arguably been used, consciously or unconsciously, to suppress important gifts from non-Anglo communities to the Lutheran church.

Bevans’s synthetic model is an attempt to bring the concerns of all other models into dialogue with one another.<sup>57</sup> Without seeking an unrealistic cohesion, let us propose a Lutheran synthetic approach to dealing with culture theologically. Keeping the gospel at the center of the church’s proclamation through music (a non-negotiable for Lutherans), we ask: when is it prudent to use music in church to paint the Creator’s revelation in the beauty and wonder of nature and human culture (anthropological)? When is it prudent to use music in church that focuses on personal and communal experiences in order to illuminate some aspect of the Christian story we all can learn from (transcendental)? When is it prudent to use music in church that yearns for the care of the vulnerable and calls the church to do works of justice (praxis)? When should some forms of music be used to set the church apart from other musical forms in the secular realm that might be associated with messages hostile to the word (countercultural model)?

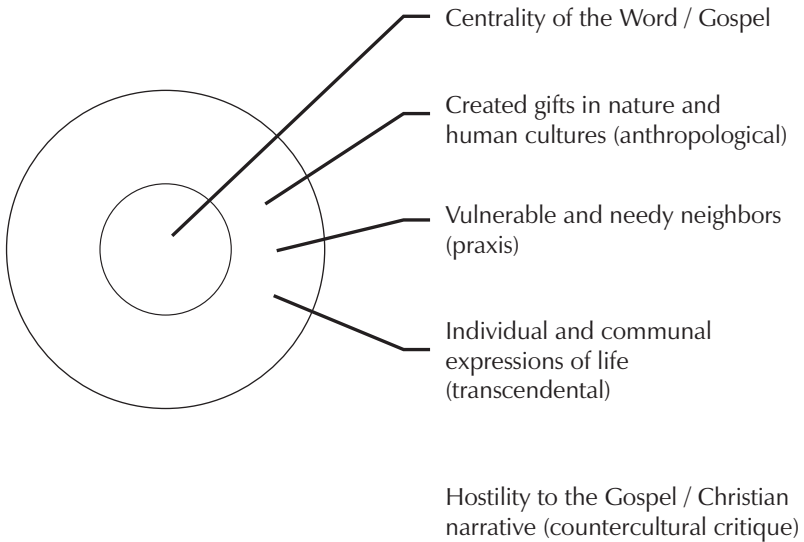
In our synthetic proposal, let us think of a target we shoot for in assessing the use of music in the church (see Figure 1). The bull’s-eye is God’s word, the Christian narrative, but also more specifically, the gospel that points us to God’s mercy in Christ. That is the center and foundation—the *signum* in the Apology—which directs us most clearly to God’s will and promise. While Bevans’s models tend to ascribe to them equal status, Lutherans give transcendental priority to the word as the *norma normans* which serves as the grammar for assessing various models. Completely outside the range of the target lies all that is hostile to the gospel in any particular culture and should be kept out of consideration in the expression of the church’s faith and worship. Much discussion and disagreement might already take place at the level of what is outside the range. What musical developments in our cultural milieu might be hypothetically useful but practically detrimental to the church’s devotional life due to the anti-Christian images, experiences, or philosophies they embody or evoke? Making judgments at this

level will require not only a theological understanding but also an understanding of the nature and function of music as a cultural art and artifact in a particular context.

Outside of the countercultural critique, there are still other areas within the range that, while not allowed to take the place of the center, might score some points in the direction of engaging cultures theologically for the sake of the gospel. For instance, music that bears witness to the beauty of nature and human life can help tell of the Father's created gifts and their place as vehicles to praise his name. Music that calls for the need to assist the widow, the poor, the orphan, and the most vulnerable in society can serve to teach of God's work in the world through his "masks," and can help new Christians rejoice in the fruits of faith and their vocations among neighbors in need of the gospel and works of mercy. Last but not least, music that is representative of an individual or communal experience of the love of God may also be used occasionally in contexts where the same can be anchored in legitimate biblical narratives or themes.

### A Lutheran Synthetic Proposal

Figure 1



While one does not buy into any model completely in a synthetic approach (including the translation model), there is a sense in which, on account of the centrality of the word in our Lutheran confession, we still give priority in our proposal to the translation of the message into some cultural idiom. What is most important is not to buy wholly into a model's potential assumptions and logical conclusions, but to take into account its main concerns and starting points as one assesses music as a form of culture theologically. One might think, for instance, about how the starting points and themes of each model may serve to set up or may follow from—either partly or

wholly, and both theologically and musically in terms of meaning effectively given and received—some aspect or theme of the Christian story at the center of our lives as God’s people. In a Lutheran framework, for example, a song of praise to God for the gift of life may set up a hymn that proclaims new life in Christ, which in turn may be followed by another hymn about living out the new life through vocation in the world. In the liturgical context of the church’s worship, these choices would be made considering not only the flow among the individual musical forms in themselves, but also their strategic place in the overall flow and rhythm of the *ordo* in the liturgy where the service of the word leads to the service of the sacrament.

#### **IV. Drawing Threads Together: Factors for Assessing the Use of Music in Church**

In distinction from other Reformers, Luther shows a remarkable degree of balance in his assessment of music. He sees music a gift and grace of God, not a human gift. At the same time, in affirming that “God has preached the gospel through music,”<sup>58</sup> Luther clearly does not see music as an end in itself unless it embodies and communicates the word, the text, and the sermon that preaches Christ. Because fine arts, including music, can be used to “serve the gospel’s cause,” Luther fights “against all who would divorce the gospel from human culture.”<sup>59</sup> To praise Christ intelligibly to hearers, therefore, Luther also shows sensitivity to the language and music of the people, moving from monophony in Latin to polyphony in German. His chorales or hymns, which are adopted for the sake of congregational singing, can be based on pre-Reformation Latin hymn melodies, German *Leisen*, and secular and folk songs.<sup>60</sup> Though somewhat unique, “From heaven above to earth I come,” Luther’s adaptation of a pre-Reformation popular tune on the arrival of a messenger from far lands to bring news, serves the purpose of communicating the gospel to the people in culturally familiar ways. The original folk tune was part of a singing game well known to the young. In Luther’s adaptation of the popular song, the Christmas carol speaks of the message of the angel, who brings good news of the child to be born.<sup>61</sup>

We have noted that in the reception of the musical culture of his day for devotional and liturgical purposes, Luther does not entirely leave behind the past tradition of chant and Latin. The broader lesson for us is that Luther can still make use of the best of the past liturgical tradition while not ignoring but rather engaging present cultural gifts. Everything is done in service to the gospel: “All our liturgical arts and forms, all our attempts to draw men into the orbit of Christ must therefore not be allowed to obscure the one who himself is both the subject and object of worship: Jesus Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

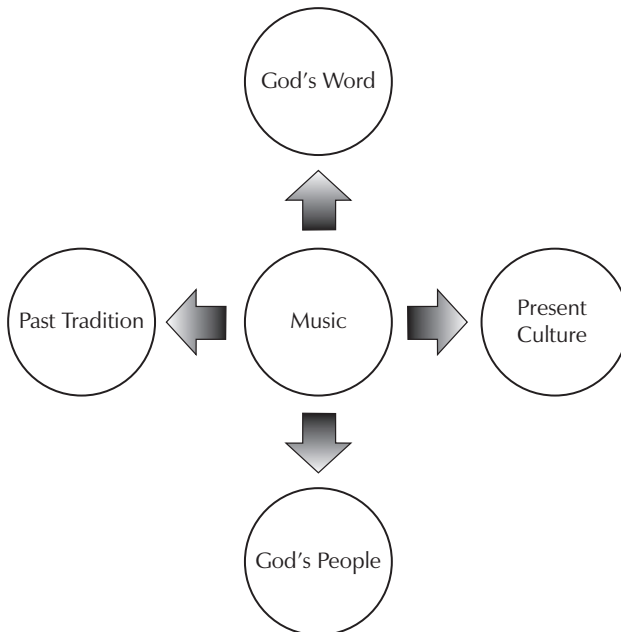
But everything is also done in service to God’s people. If some may need more time to appreciate the Lutheran chorale, others will need more time to appreciate the introduction over time of new musical forms from around the world into the life of the church. Only the idolatrous abuse of the fine arts is condemned in Luther’s view of worship. But such abuse occurs both when liturgical arts obscure the gospel and when they no longer serve the neighbor in love. In assessments of music in devotion and worship, and especially in so-called worship wars, a measure of evangelical and cultural patience is needed for the sake of the gospel and love.

Believers are free to make use of them [i.e., arts] in service of others. The only rule to be observed...is a certain moderation lest the devout be absorbed by external rights, or place their trust in works of art...Churches ought to be built, pictures painted, and hymns composed in order to call men to the gospel, but not for men to do God a favor. And if ever the time should come when churchly ceremonial and pomp threaten the works of service and love, all the expenses of buildings, pictures music, and the like would have to be deferred in favor of practical works of mercy.”<sup>63</sup>

It is evident in our discussion that Luther holds a number of factors together, and even in some tension, as he approaches the use of music in the church, namely, the church’s past heritage, the present cultural contexts, the praise due God and the proclamation of his word, and the need of the neighbor. These four factors help us draw some threads together, which can be illustrated by placing music in the intersection of two different lines, one moving between God and man (vertical) and another between past and present cultures (horizontal) (see Figure 2 below). The Apology’s distinction between two signs operates primarily along the vertical line, contrasting signs backed by the word of God from other cultural-religious signs that are not commanded by God but may serve to instruct and admonish the folk. Bevans’s models of contextual theology operate mostly along the horizontal line that moves from transmitting the past to engaging the present, giving various weights to the influence of the past vis-à-vis the present in the church.

### A Lutheran Fourfold Approach

Figure 2



A Lutheran fourfold approach to dealing theologically with music as a form of culture would ask four questions:

Along the horizontal line:

1. Past Tradition: How does the musical form embody the church's past heritage (e.g., Scripture, Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran chorale, or Gregorian chant)?<sup>64</sup>
2. Present Culture: How does the musical form engage the present culture(s) in our midst in order to bring people closer to the gospel or to highlight and teach some aspect of the Christian narrative (e.g., natural knowledge of God, yearning for peace and justice, the problem of theodicy, life experience of God's love and goodness)?<sup>65</sup>

Along the vertical line:

1. How does the musical form serve the word of God, the signs (signa) he has commanded and promised, and more broadly the teaching of the Christian story?
2. How does the musical form serve the people? How does a cultural sign help to communicate the word intelligibly to the people? How does it serve to admonish and teach the common folk? How does the sign help them worship God without making it too difficult or too thoughtless? What associations does the form bring to the people? How churchly are these associations?

Luther can hold these considerations in a healthy tension. Some musical forms engage present culture well but do not take into account the past tradition. So everything must be contemporary because historic is old-fashioned. Could a Lutheran identity be sustained in the long run by this one-sided approach? Others only repeat the past tradition but do not engage present cultures at all. Everything is historic hymnody and nothing addresses contemporary cultures. Could a Lutheran church avoid sectarianism and actually bring people of other nations into its fold by proceeding this way over the long run?

Some musical forms present the word without regard for its cultural communication or reception. Is this good proclamation? How can they *understand* if they have not *heard*? What cultural forms can best embody the gospel without watering it down? Other musical forms serve the people with what they understand and are familiar with, but do not go more deeply into the word. There is also the problem of giving people only what they are familiar with or want all the time to the detriment of not acquainting them with the past (or relatively established) tradition or the present (developing) devotional expressions of the Christian faith.

Our fourfold approach helps Christians recognize that they gravitate toward various sides of the diagram in their use of music in the church. A theologian can never achieve perfect balance, no grand synthesis. In some cases, he might want to move along a certain side of the spectrum depending on the context. In doing so, however,

he does not want to lose sight of other factors and will want to grow in areas that receive less attention. This is a more humbling attitude than arguing for the one way to resolve the tension inherent in the dynamic of theology and culture. There is no magic model for engaging culture theologically, but many possibilities, which are in part determined by the contexts God's faithful workers serve. Beyond cultural curiosity, we need pastoral, missional, or catholic flexibility, and not a one-size-fits-all approach, even if this means making mistakes along the way as we deal with cultural signs theologically in a world that is increasingly diverse in its ethnocultural makeup and increasingly in need of the word of God.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> St. Basil, *Homily 1*, in *Music in Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. James McKinnon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions X*, 33, trans. and ed. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 238.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>6</sup> "Yes. The music does illumine the text, but its role goes beyond that of being a vehicle for the words. The reverse may be true as well: the text may enable the tune to 'speak' as the dominant element. For example, varied musical settings of the Kyrie Eleison will elicit quite differing responses to that text. The intensity of the lamenting or pleading quality could cover a wide range of emotions and place emphasis on the music." Mary K. Oyer, "Using Music from Other Cultures in Worship: A Conversation with Mary K. Oyer," in *Music in Christian Worship*, ed. Charlotte Kroker (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>7</sup> Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XIII, 3, in *The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [hereafter Apology], ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Bevans speaks of "culture," which he describes as religious or secular, as a dimension of the broader category of "context," which in turn includes personal and communal experiences as well as social location and change. In this essay, I use "culture" in a more inclusive sense than Bevans's use and thus as a category that could potentially account for all dimensions of what he calls "context." Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), xvi-xvii, 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> Brown questions the assumption "that music can be treated simply as a 'package' that contains the Gospel message instead of being treated as an art that embodies and interprets the Gospel message by its structure and the way it sounds." Frank Burch Brown, "Religious Meanings and Musical Styles: A Matter of Taste?," in *Music in Christian Worship*, 142; Saliers argues that "music is never an 'ornament' to worship . . . Rather, music which serves the worship of God is itself an embodied form of praying, proclaiming, and listening." Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical Musical Formation," in *Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning*, eds. Robin A. Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 387.

<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that St. Basil's and St. Augustine's cautious endorsement of music is connected with the practice of singing psalms; Salazar traces both the scalar and melodic qualities of Western plainchant to influences from Hebrew, Greek, and other cultures. See Adolfo Salazar, *Conceptos fundamentales en la historia de la música* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), 39-82.

<sup>11</sup> For a narrative of how this assumption played out in medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment debates concerning what constitutes proper tuning, see Stuart Isacoff, *Temperament: How Music Became a Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical Musical Formation," in *Liturgy and Music*, 385-386.

<sup>13</sup> Robin A. Leaver, "Liturgical Music as Corporate Song 1: Hymnody in Reformation Churches," in *Liturgy and Music*, 286-287.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin's conservative approach to the liturgy has not remained among his theological heirs today. See Robin A. Leaver, "Liturgical Music as Homily and Hermeneutic," in *Liturgy and Music*, 340-341, and Bert F. Polman, "Forward Steps and Side Steps in a Walk-Through of Christian Hymnody," in *Music in Christian Worship*, 66-67.

<sup>15</sup> LW 53:204.

<sup>16</sup> "God has preached the gospel through music, too, as may be seen in Josquin, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, are not forced or cramped by rules, and are like the song of the finch." LW 54:129-30.



<sup>17</sup> For an account of the evolution of Western music, see Adolfo Salazar, *Conceptos fundamentales en la historia de la música*.

<sup>18</sup> LW 53:204–205.

<sup>19</sup> In some non-Western cultures, for instance, the basic shape of a melody or its percussive sounds is more important than having a consistent pitch, the rhythmic complexity and vitality of music more important than its meditative or inward character, or the free and repetitive flow of the music more important than some evolutionary sense of development towards a goal. See Mary K. Oyer, “Using Music from Other Cultures in Worship,” in *Music in Christian Worship*, esp. 156–158, 177–182.

<sup>20</sup> LW 53:197.

<sup>21</sup> “I am not satisfied with him who despises music, as all fanatics do; for music is an endowment and a gift of God, not a gift of men . . . I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise.” Ewald M. Plass ed., *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 980.

<sup>22</sup> The venerable tradition of sacred polyphony or *organum* had already developed in Notre Dame Cathedral from about 1160 to 1250 with Léonin and Perotin, whose work is compiled in the *Magnus liber organi*. See Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 3rd edition, vol. 1, *Antiquity through the Baroque Era* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010), 59–67.

<sup>23</sup> LW 53:XVI–XVII.

<sup>24</sup> LW 53:XVI, cf. 195. Here the story of the German carol, which Luther used, is similar to the story of the toleration, demise, and ultimately popular reception of the fifteenth-century Spanish *villancico* still in use in Latin America today. The practice of the *posadas*, for instance, is inspired by the Christmas *villancico*. See Paul R. Laird, *Towards a History of the Spanish Villancico* (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), and Tess Knighton and Álvaro Torrente, eds. *Devotional Music in the Iberian World, 1450–1800: The Villancico and Related Genres* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Thus Giulio Monteverdi states that “the oration is the mistress of the harmony.” For the Artusi-Monteverdi, see Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 212–214.

<sup>26</sup> A classic work is Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956).

<sup>27</sup> For a recent work on music from the perspective of cognitive neuroscience, see Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Plume, 2006). For more composer/ interpreter-oriented treatments of musical aesthetics, see Enrico Fubini, *Música y lenguaje en la estética contemporánea* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994), and Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music* (New York: Signet Classics, 2002). A chapter of Copland’s work above is included in Lee A. Jacobus, *Aesthetics and the Arts* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 164–169, along with other chapters by Eduard Hanslick, “The Effects of Music” (170–182) and Susanne K. Langer, “On Significance in Music” (182–212).

<sup>28</sup> For a vivid description of Bach’s rhetorical use of music, see James R. Gaines, *Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Harper, 2005), 80–95; for a more scholarly description, see Friedemann Otterbach, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Vida y obra* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990), 73–89.

<sup>29</sup> Marquart suggests that “‘local culture’ is to be absorbed by the liturgy in small doses rather than big chunks, and gradually, preferably in the course of centuries. ‘Small dosage’ coloration is virtually unavoidable, if for no other reason than that every translation is to some extent a cultural adaptation.” He also argues that “various components of culture must submit to the discipline of a sound ‘liturgical grammar’ to be of service in the worship of the church” (p. 68). Kurt Marquart, “Liturgy and Evangelism,” in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 58–76.

<sup>30</sup> For the contrast between J. S. Bach’s era and that of Frederick’s, see Gaines, *Evening in the Palace of Reason*; see also Otterbach, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 93–97, cf. 69–72.

<sup>31</sup> Apology XIII, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Apology XIII, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Apology XIII, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Apology XIII, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Apology XIII, 5; for a more in-depth look at Luther’s theology of the *signum*, see Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther’s Concept of the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953), 101–172.

<sup>36</sup> *Libro de Concordia: Las Confesiones de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana*, ed. Andrés A. Meléndez (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), *Apologia*, XIII, 3, n. 274. The *Concordia Triglotta* edition of 1917 includes the reference in the German main text (“als ein gemalt Kreuz”). So does the Henkel English edition of 1854, which translates the whole passage as follows: “Signs, therefore, which are instituted without the command of God, are not signs of grace: although they may be memorials to children and to the ignorant, like a painted cross” (italics mine).

<sup>37</sup> Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “God Against Us and for Us: Preaching Jesus in the Spirit,” *Word & World* 23/2 (2003): 134–145.

<sup>38</sup> Douglas L. Rutt, “Luther, Tentatio, and Latin America,” *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 19/1 (Epiphany 2010): 7–11. In his reflections, Rutt draws in part from the work of Alberto L. García, “The Witness of the Cross in Light of the Hispanic Experience,” in *The Theology of the Cross for the Twenty-First Century: Signs for a Multicultural Witness*, ed. Alberto L. García and A.R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 189–215.

<sup>39</sup> Rutt, “Luther, Tentatio, and Latin America,” 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–10.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11; similarly, Martin Luther can speak of Christ as both gift and example in *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*, in *LW* 35:117–124.

<sup>42</sup> For examples of theological engagement with North American cultural signs, see David Lewis, “Cinema and the American Mind,” and Anthony A. Cook, “Media as a Source of Information and Identity,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 112–161.

<sup>43</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21–22.

<sup>44</sup> FC, Epitome and Solid Declaration, Art. I.

<sup>45</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 28–33, 139–140.

<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that Bevens sees the countercultural model as a “model” in its own right and not merely as an attitude towards other models.

<sup>47</sup> For the translation model, see Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 37–53.

<sup>48</sup> *Culto Cristiano* (1964) maintains the past tradition in two distinct musical settings, namely, Luther’s original, more rhythmically syncopated version (not uncommon in sixteenth century polyphonic style), and the later isometric version more familiar in the West with more equalization of parts and rhythmic homogeneity.

<sup>49</sup> “The stronger and the more specific these associations are in nonchurchly directions, the less suitable the corresponding music is for congregational worship.” Marquart, “Liturgy and Evangelism,” 67.

<sup>50</sup> For the anthropological model, see Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 54–69.

<sup>51</sup> *Jubilosos, jubilosos vivamos en gracia puesto que se puede.*

*Saciaremos, saciaremos la sed ardorosa del rey que no muere.*

*Jubilosos, jubilosos llevemos a Cristo un alma y mil más,*

*difundiendo la luz que ilumina la gracia divina del gran ideal;*

*difundiendo la luz que ilumina la gracia divina del gran ideal.*

<sup>52</sup> For the praxis model, see Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 70–87.

<sup>53</sup> For a confessional Lutheran engagement with the language of humanization, liberation, and kingdom-building in Latin American and U.S. Hispanic/Latino theologies, see Leopoldo A. Sánchez, “The Struggle to Express Our Hope,” *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 19/1 (Epiphany 2010): 25–31.

<sup>54</sup> For the transcendental model, see Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 103–116.

<sup>55</sup> For the countercultural model, see *ibid.*, 117–137.

<sup>56</sup> I am in basic agreement with Bevens’s critique of the potential dangers of the countercultural model. *Ibid.*, 124–127.

<sup>57</sup> For the synthetic model, see *ibid.*, 88–102.

<sup>58</sup> *LW* 54:129.

<sup>59</sup> Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 186.

<sup>60</sup> For a list, see *LW* 53:208.

<sup>61</sup> For an analysis of the hymn, see Jerónimo Granados, “Martín Lutero y la música,” *Cuadernos de Teología* XXVI (2007): 129–144.

<sup>62</sup> Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 187.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Bevens speaks of the “experience of the past,” which is associated with the preservation and defense of God’s revelation in Scripture and the church’s theological tradition. *Models of Contextual Theology*, 5–7.

<sup>65</sup> Bevens’s description of what he calls “present context” is helpful at this point. It includes factors such as personal or communal experience (e.g., immigration), whether the culture is secularized or religious (e.g., North Atlantic vis-à-vis global South Christian), social location (e.g., poor, minority status), and social change (e.g., the move from modernity to postmodernity to postcolonial thought in the West). Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 5–7.

## From the Margins to the Table

### An Anglo Lutheran's Journey into North American Hispanic-Latino Theologies

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Douglas R. Groll

A quarter of a century ago those of us who were involved in organizing and implementing the Hispanic Institute of Theology (now Center For Hispanic Studies), a program to equip Hispanic men and women for service in the LCMS, never dreamed that one day there would be a complete edition of the *Concordia Journal* dedicated to the study of facets of ministry in the Latino world, including U.S. Hispanic American theologies. Having said that, it would be a mistake for me to call this milestone an accomplishment as though someone had deliberately set out to bring it about. Instead, it seems better to celebrate this publication event on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS) as a culmination of the unwitting efforts of many men and women under God that has now converged at this point in history to make this edition possible.

Arriving at this day has been a process of moving the contributions of the Hispanic American churches from the margins to the center of activity at the table; from the margins of educational methodology of theological education by extension to acceptance of the work of the Center as everyday operations by the greater seminary community; from the position of marginality of Hispanic American theologies to greater engagement in the current theological scene with their focal points. In this essay, I would like to share my perspectives on this move from the margins to the table as I have witnessed it over many years from my position as an Anglo Lutheran educator, administrator, and pastor-theologian.

#### **Perspective 1: Theological Marginality for the Sake of Operational Effectiveness**

Participating in a theological dialogue with Hispanic church leaders or treating the theological concerns of many Hispanics as a serious area of theological reflection or a source for general faculty and student growth was not really envisioned by most in the church as a priority when we launched the Hispanic Institute of Theology (HIT). Our mandate in the spring of 1987 was very clear: "Get Hispanic men trained for ministry as soon as possible!" The educational and administrative sponsors of the Institute knew that there was no time to waste in theological debate. We had to show The

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Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) immediately that confessional Lutheran theology was being taught in a nationwide formation program to justify the substantial dollar investment (well over \$225,000 per year) made in an unknown educational experiment.

Although our Institute faculty was well-aware of theological currents of liberation theology coming out of Central and South America, and the possibility of its influence upon North American Hispanic Christian churches, the expediency of starting a functioning training program far outweighed and precluded delving into emerging trends in North American Hispanic theologies. We were not alone in that practical approach to our task. Hispanic theologians were pretty much at the margins of mainstream theological thought in most seminaries at that time. The dominant Anglo American mindset at our seminaries and others across the country presupposed that serious theology could be done in Princeton, Rome, Berlin, St. Louis, or Minneapolis, but not in Mexico City, Bogotá, Caracas, San Juan, or Buenos Aires. In the case of the LCMS, the time and energy drains of the traumatic upheavals of our Synod and seminary administrations and faculties over the previous twenty years precluded serious contact with the newly emerging Roman Catholic and Protestant Hispanic voices of the 70s and 80s. Many felt the LCMS had to get its house in order before engaging other churches again.

At first glance, creating a teaching unit to serve a specific (though quite diverse!) ethnic group like the Hispanic-Latino seemed a realistic and perhaps theologically simple goal. Our Synod had a long history of forming pastors within a working model of a “practical seminary.” For years the LCMS remembered the “practical seminary” in Springfield, Illinois, with great pride. The formation of a highly practical unit such as the Hispanic Institute was a logical first step for getting functioning workers into the field who could bring the gospel to Spanish-speaking peoples in the United States.

What we overlooked, however, was that the unique sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities experienced by Hispanics in the United States, not to mention their own unique expressions of Latin American Christianity, would demand unique theological questioning and relevant responses. Our Hispanic pastors, for instance, would have to address questions of racial, economic, and political discrimination at a level not encountered by our European pioneers. Nor had we considered that as faculty and students delved deeper into questions of Hispanic presence in the United States, there would inevitably be a need for a serious theological voice to inform, educate, and even speak prophetically to our own Synod and its institutions on theological, ethical, and pastoral issues important to Latino churches and communities.

In short, the HIT-CHS willingly began its mission conscious of its nature and identity as a sort of institutional outsider at the margins for the sake of accomplishing a pressing ecclesial task, while at the same time remaining rather innocently naïve concerning the serious need to bring Hispanic American theological questions closer to the center of mainstream theological study and formation. At least at the beginning, we were not ready to explore, for instance, questions such as: “What does confessional Lutheran theology contribute to ethical questions dealing with poverty and marginality, discrimination, or immigration issues?” or “How does Lutheran theology handle ques-

tions related to popular religiosity, or the place of cultures in devotional and liturgical expression?" By the mid-nineties as our students worked through and completed our programs for service as lay workers, deaconesses, and ordained men in various services and ministries around the country, they also began to echo the aforementioned types of concerns as they encountered them in their everyday work in the church.

## **Perspective 2: Shock Waves from the Margins Force a Theological Refocus**

Hispanic American theologies did not suddenly drop out of the sky. Their development was and still is a process. There is no one critical event that gives a beginning to Hispanic American theologies and assigns a starting point for our interfacing with them. Although essayists wrote theological thoughts from the margins prior to 1980, one starting point for a clear concrete articulation of Hispanic American theology might be the 1978 French publication of the Mexican American priest Virgilio Elizondo's *Mestissage, violence culturelle, annonce de l'évangile*, published in English in the United States in 1983 as *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*.<sup>1</sup>

Even prior to this publication both English- and Spanish-speaking Protestants had become familiar with the works of the Cuban-American Methodist historian, Justo González, known especially during the decade of the seventies for his extensive histories of the Christian Church. The publication of his *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, in 1989 established in a sense the Protestant anchor to complement Elizondo's Roman Catholic perspective.<sup>2</sup> Elizondo and González became quite close to each other as they sought to understand how the Hispanic experience might enrich our theological reflection and the practice of ministry.

In his laudatory preface to Gonzalez's *Mañana*, Elizondo identifies and almost hints at a type of "Hispanic Christianity" that might be the groundwork of a catholicity transcending traditional Roman Catholic or Protestant identities. Such catholic expression of Christian reflection would approach theological questions from a holistic understanding of the church's mission inclusive of the whole person, and thus with attention given to both spiritual and bodily needs, to the need for forgiveness from sin but also for basic temporal needs. The term *mestizaje* became a way to speak about a coming together of theologians from different traditions who, without sacrificing their own theological identity, would do *teología en conjunto* (doing theology together) in service to the task of encouraging a greater understanding of the Hispanic face of Christianity, its challenges and above all its contributions to the whole church.

Justo is very secure in his Methodist denomination and thus very at ease with other Protestants and with Catholics, while I am very secure in my own Roman Catholic Church and thus very at ease with Protestants...I suspect both of us enjoy our Catholic-Protestant *mestizaje*, which might appear strange to others but is so enriching for us that we hope to bring others into this new expression of Hispanic Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Following the publication of these two works we begin to see a flowering of writings by Hispanic pastors, priests, and young scholars, amplifying many facets

and distinctive features of Hispanic American theologies. As seminal as the works of Elizondo, González, and their students are in articulating issues in Hispanic North American theologies, we still have to spend some time in understanding their relative dependence on the Latin American theologies of the last half of the twentieth century.

### **Perspective 3: Post War Secular and Theological Awakenings in the Americas**

Our purpose is not to give an exhaustive history of Hispanic Christian churches in the Americas. Having said that, we do have to say something about the overall tone of Christian ecclesial and secular history in both the United States and Latin America in the decades prior to the emergence of U.S. Hispanic American theologies to help explain the rationale and content of their contributions and the challenges they pose to us.

#### **Two Worlds of Ecclesial Self-Understanding**

To appreciate the contrasts between North American Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies on the one hand, and Latin American and U.S. Hispanic-Latino Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies on the other, we have to recall two radically different approaches to church presence in the Americas between 1492 and the present. Luis Rivera Pagán speaks of the conversion of the Caribbean and South America throughout the Spanish conquest as a “violent evangelism.”<sup>4</sup> While we must always point out the heroic, self-sacrificing evangelistic fervor and gentle love of the missionary orders of Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits—one thinks especially of an individual such as Fray Bartolomé De Las Casas—we have to recognize the searing nature of the conquest.

Conquest Catholicism did not change a mindset or a propositional set of doctrines held by an already Christian people. Instead, the Spanish conquest actually brought about a new people. In a matter of decades, indigenous religious, social, economic, and governmental structures were overpowered by the sword and replaced. Moreover, through the racial (and cultural) mixing of the Spaniard and the indigenous Americans in what is often termed broadly the phenomenon of *mestizaje*, a new people emerged that reflected these culture-clashing changes. Justo Gonzalez’s phrase “*Our Spanish fathers raped our Indian mothers!*” graphically underscores the dark side of this Spanish “evangelism” and the bittersweet ambiguity of the Hispanic historic experience where cross and sword got mixed up in an uneasy and tragic relationship. While violent, the evangelism brought about through and with the conquest and colonization also brought about—on a more positive light—a new cultural, linguistic, and biological person. Consequently, as both Elizondo and González affirm, the U.S. Latino or Hispanic is still in a sense tied, whether he acknowledges it or not, to his Latin American Catholic evangelistic history by blood. Latino conversion, for better or worse, was of the total being.

One result of this creation of a new Catholic being was a consciousness of the ambiguity of being Latino Catholic by blood and yet exercising a critical stance over against the official Church. At least for three centuries this new being could not walk away from

being Roman Catholic. To be Latino was to be Catholic, for better or worse. The Latino could not simply change denominations on the basis of a shift in theological or confessional persuasion based on competing theological systems as one could in a more pluralistic North America. It is through this sense of total Catholic identity, by culture and blood, that the Latino identifies as someone with roots in Latin America. It is this “new person” who, placed in a U.S. religious and cultural context, interfaces with North American Roman Catholic or Protestant religious expressions of the Christian faith.

This new person born through the political, biological, and religious conquest in the Americas is not the same as the person whose identity is rooted in the explorers and colonists that came out of Northern European Reformation theologies or Roman Catholic traditions. North America became a mix of many different European theologies and cultures brought to a new land. This was not a new people but old peoples finding new space to be *New England*, *New Scotland*, *New York* (Nova Scotia), *New Jersey*, *New Bavaria* or *New Ulm*.

At least officially the American Revolution and the new constitution guaranteed some protection for the North American to be a European Christian or an enlightened secularist of one’s choosing within the confines of law safeguarded by a new government and new economies. In this pluralistic society, spiritual identity could not be totalitarian as it had been experienced by the new person of Latin American heritage. Spirituality had to take its place alongside political and economic systems designed to hold the society together. In some cases, the only measurable differences between groups within a geographical area in North America was a nuanced doctrinal articulation of competing Western Christianity such as the Lutheran Confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, or the Book of Common Prayer. Northern European Christians insisted on their confessional and ecclesial identities in those negotiated space-time dimensions of Sundays or midweek evening prayer. During the week, however, they returned to the pluralistic acceptance of work, study, political, or commercial homogeneity.

During my years as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Cleveland, Ohio, founded in 1853, older members from the early twentieth century told wonderful stories of their youth as German Lutheran children of Trinity School on the south side of Lorain Avenue engaging in horrendous winter snow-ice ball battles with their German-Roman Catholic counterparts from St. Mary’s on the north side of Lorain Avenue. The parish life of both groups was identical. Their church buildings and schools looked alike. They enjoyed the same games, ate the same food, and their fathers drank beer in the same pubs. Even these ecclesial battles stopped when local merchants summoned Pastor Pieper and his Roman priest counterpart and told them that these battles were bad for business. New spiritual identities were not being forged here. These were not a new people. There was not an integrated spirituality forming a blood-deep sense of new identity in these young Lutheran or Roman Catholic Americans.

These distinctions between senses of identity are important because they help us understand why Latin American and U.S. Hispanic American theologies are really so much more inclusive of the totality of life and why they speak to the political and

economic systems of power that regulate, restrain, and restrict what is needed to be human. By contrast, North American theologies, perhaps with the exception of those reflections linked to the historic struggles of slavery and more recently the African American Civil Rights movement, have been relatively content with applying biblical truths to the individual in his/her personal life but in large part have hesitated to address the total person in the midst of systemic political or economic aspects of life. The contrast between two different worlds and identities helps explain in part why theological dialogue between people holding these two distinct self-identities is difficult. In a practical sense, the contrast also helps to partly explain why and how our North American Protestant or Roman Catholic mindset of what is successful evangelism and individualistic popular spirituality it is so radically different from a Hispanic Christian cultural self-understanding.

### **Late Twentieth Century Latin American Theological Awakenings**

Keeping in mind that these two Christian cultural self-identities will be interfacing throughout the rest of this study, we turn to late twentieth-century Latin American histories and theological interpretations of that history as they affect North American Hispanic theologies. My own narrative of awakening to changes in Latin America might be a shorthand account for introducing someone else to those tumultuous years.

As a newspaper boy in Ohio in the 1950s, I read most of the *Toledo Blade* every evening from cover to cover during my route before I returned home. Each evening I studied the maps of troop movements north and south of the 38th Parallel in Korea. Along with most children at that age, I was conditioned to view all post WWII history as a part of the North American-Communist confrontation. Events that would happen even in Latin America would be processed through the lens of this East-West rivalry. Throughout Latin America the transition from rural self-sustaining economies to First World-Third World dependency models left millions poorer than before. World War II had shown Latin America that the prosperous industrialized nations needed raw materials from the third world. Latin Americans saw themselves as a part of this dynamic in the negative sense of exporting much with little positive return. There was unrest and anger.

The United States had engineered the overthrow of the leftist Arbenz government of Guatemala in 1954. The Nixon motorcade was stoned as it entered Caracas in 1958. I remember buying a newspaper in Union Station in Chicago in early January, 1959, as I returned to Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota, following the Christmas break. The front page showed pictures of Fidel Castro and his followers entering Havana. In March, 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion planned under the Eisenhower administration and approved by John F. Kennedy ended in disaster. In October 1962, I was in the cafeteria line in Koburg Hall on the campus of Concordia Seminary when word came that the Russian freighter carrying ICBM's capable of hitting North American cities had turned back. The Cuban Missile Crisis was over.

The effects of these localized outbreaks of criticism and confrontation with what Latin Americans perceived as North American hegemony took different turns. In an attempted national answer to long-term neglect and fear of a second Cuban Revolution,



the Kennedy administration launched the Alliance for Progress programs to develop the underdeveloped of Latin America. Hundreds of millions of dollars in aid moved into the Americas to attempt to economically and militarily pacify the neighbors to the south and stop potential revolutions. The area was flooded with hundreds of workers, advisors, the Peace Corps, and U.S. military advisory contingents.

At the same time, secular programs of development were rushing into the Americas, Christian churches from the United States and Europe bought into theologies of development. Valparaiso University helped coordinate a Lutheran Prince of Peace Corps, which sent idealistic young North American Lutherans to help in this noble effort. As a young missionary in Eastern Venezuela in 1966, I was a part of that mindset. We were active in extensive Word and Sacrament ministry in traditional evangelism and educational ministries. At the same time, we opened a bakery, a barbershop, an agriculture coop with extensive irrigation technologies, and a taxi line. A heady optimism empowered our activism. If there was a slogan that embraced mission development at that time, it was the following: "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will live for a lifetime." Pessimism entered when sooner or later entire segments of the poor and politically powerless realized that knowing how to fish didn't help if you were denied rights to get near the water, denied the opportunity for any means of earning a decent living.

There were reactions to theologies and philosophies of development from within and without ecclesial communities throughout Latin America. Indigenous voices, often priests who worked with the poor in barrios far removed from the official hierarchies of the Roman Catholic Church, began talking about theologies of revolution. Within a few years of the declaration of the Alliance for Progress, it became obvious that this initiative was not working. After a decade the region was still rife with right wing dictators. One would hear voices saying, "Development is not enough! The whole system has to go!" Latin American theologies of development gave way to Christian leaders who saw the need for a violent or almost revolutionary Christian activism. This revolutionary Christian activism became embodied in the life and death of the Colombian priest, Camilo Torres. Born of a wealthy Colombian family this priest-sociologist spear-headed development movements to educate Colombian peasants through innovative radio instruction throughout the early sixties. As hard as he worked, Camilo ultimately concluded that "development" was not working. He joined the guerilla forces and was killed by government soldiers in 1965.

Camilo's death had far-reaching implications for Christian Latin identity. As I traveled to my congregations and mission stations in Eastern Venezuela from 1967 to 1970, I would see painted images of Camilo Torres on the walls of remote rural villages alongside those of Che Guevara. Revolution and theologies of revolution merged with the memories of Camilo. Evangelical churches were not immune from thinking about the need for something beyond development. Young evangelical pastors were speaking about "*concientización*," a phrase made popular by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, which in part encouraged the oppressed to learn about the conditions for their own oppression so that they could work for change. Such consciousness-raising or critical con-

sciousness led to movements for meaningful educational and agrarian reforms. Images of Che and Camilo could even be seen at youth “evangelism” rallies.

Not only did I see pictures of Father Torres as I traveled around Eastern Venezuela, but also evidence that armed revolution or any form of a repetition of the Cuban experience would not be allowed throughout the Americas. I routinely passed through Venezuelan army movable checkpoints set up to impede the movement of Venezuelan leftist guerillas that controlled parts of the mountains of Monagas State. I would often see U.S. Army insignias on ammunition belts and water canisters. On one occasion one of the members of one of our congregations needed emergency medical treatment. I went to a Venezuelan Army Special Forces encampment near our small church to ask for a medic. I held the flashlight as he nimbly found a good entrance point for an IV. I asked him where he had learned such fine techniques in emergency medicine. He answered, “Walter Reed Medical Center.”

By the late sixties Christian thinkers within the churches throughout Latin America had concluded that neither “development” nor “revolution” were theological answers to empower a change in the totality of the problems—both social and moral—in their nations. Ten years of development had not changed power structures or the plight of the poor. Armed revolutionaries had ultimately been outgunned. Theologies of development and revolution had not been articulated in a way with which the faithful or their leaders could identify.

In 1971 Peruvian priest-scholar Gustavo Gutiérrez published his *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics, Salvation*.<sup>5</sup> Though written in Spanish, his work was soon translated into English and distributed through the Maryknoll’s Orbis Press. Critiques of Gutiérrez abound, many written by Lutherans. This is not the place for another. What seemed important to me then and even today was my conclusion that Gutiérrez had correctly analyzed the weaknesses of Western capitalism and that he had been able to theologically define the nature of poverty and underdevelopment in terms of a systemic permeation of sin. He had moved the problematic realities of the poverty that we saw every day in the *barrios* of Caracas in the midst of unparalleled opulence into theological questions that begged to be answered by something beyond a political campaign and a simple rearrangement of left, right, or center parties every four or five years. He was equally critical of both Washington and Moscow.

Gutiérrez dared to say that institutional systems could be sinful as the perpetuating means of corrupt, unjust, and oppressive policies and practices. Moreover, he claimed that Christ actually identified with the poor in a preferential way, not as the instigator of class warfare but in the sense that those who suffered in the midst of poverty, oppression, and sickness could know that the same suffering Christ is with them. He challenged the church not just to minister to the poor but to become poor by identifying with them. He even went so far as to say in a caring way that there was a sense in which those in power who seemed to manage oppressive systems were themselves enslaved by the systems they managed. Faithful Christians caught up in the midst of an unjust and immoral state of affairs must move away from oppressive systems that propagate such a state of affairs in order to see their own slavery to sin. They are called to spend time with and among the poor at the margins, for only in identifying with the

suffering Christ found among the poor could they be convicted of sin and find freedom from the enslavement of sins committed against the neighbor. It seemed to me that Gutiérrez had defined the condemning nature of the Law in terms unheard of in current Lutheran writings, which often were intent on speaking of the individual sinner's relationship to God at the expense of any serious consideration of the effects of individual sin in community or society as a whole.

While at that time I never felt that I had heard a satisfying soteriology in liberation theology that went beyond a journey with a suffering, dying Christ, a re-reading of Gutiérrez in preparation for these reflections drew me to conclude that providing a soteriology was not his purpose. His aim was at drawing the church into a new commitment with the present realities of suffering in the Latin American world. He was going for a sort of theological ethics. What is important for our purposes is simply that Gutiérrez, and other Latin American writers such as the Argentine historian Enrique Dussel, who also wrote from a liberation perspective, were being read in both Roman Catholic and Protestant seminaries throughout the Americas in both Spanish and English during the seventies, and that North American Hispanic theologians were grappling with these issues and trying to theologize in their own U.S. Hispanic American contexts.

### **North American Hispanic Theologies Responding in Their Contexts**

As we consider Hispanic American theologies in the United States we remind ourselves that, prior to the American Revolution, the "new person" created in the Spanish conquest occupied greater territory of what is today the United States than the original 13 colonies. One could do American religious history from the Northeast or from the Southwest, as it were. Even the land upon which Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, stands today was once the property of the King of Spain and was ceded to the French DeMun family around the time of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The two worlds of ecclesial self-understanding previously described were set to interact now in both peaceful and violent ways as Anglo dominant North American-European Christians and Christian children of the Spanish conquest interfaced. For purposes of brevity, I will only mention that the tone of interaction between these two worlds was often defined by violent conflict for an entire century prior to World War II. These would include the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846 and 1847 with the invasion of Mexico City by Winfield Scott, the Spanish American War of 1898 in which American troops occupied Havana and basically colonized Puerto Rico, the invasion of Veracruz, Mexico by American troops in 1914, and the incursion of 10,000 troops into Mexico by General Blackjack Pershing in 1916 in a failed attempt to capture Pancho Villa.

Post World War II years continued to present occasion after occasion for Hispanic communities to struggle to hold their historic Christian sense of self-understanding within the geographical, political, and economic environment of a Christian North America. Though there were many more, four examples will suffice to illustrate the constant challenge to the Hispanic-American theologian to give voice to Christian confession from perspectives of the sojourner and exile, the economically and politically oppressed.

**1. The Bracero Program and Operation Wetback as a manifestation of the need for theologies of the borderlands to affirm God's love and presence for those without homeland, the exiles of our day.**

From the beginning of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1883 when the United States officially moved to limit Chinese immigration, North American agriculture increasingly had to look to Mexico to provide the needed manpower to maintain the agricultural industry. That reality continues to this day. The Bracero Program, initiated in 1942, promoted the reception of hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers to fill labor needs in many states left without workers due to wartime.

The transitory and often dehumanizing nature of this relationship was heightened by an official program initiated in 1954 called Operation Wetback, in which more than 3,000,000 Mexicans were deported. In some cases, illegal immigrants were deported along with their American-born children, who were by law U.S. citizens. The practice of stopping "Mexican-looking" citizens on the street and asking for identification, today known as racial profiling, incited and angered many U.S. citizens who were of Mexican-American descent. Opponents in both the United States and Mexico complained of "police-state" methods, and Operation Wetback was abandoned.<sup>6</sup>

**2. The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) as an example of popular religion at the service of the totality of the new person and as an answer to economic injustice.**

In 1962 Cesar Chavez organized this movement of farm workers to protest the wages and working conditions of Mexican grape pickers and to organize as a union. The importance of this event for our purposes is that it gave a concrete flesh and blood incarnation to a political problem leading to social political action in the name of the totality of the Hispanic person as both a worker and a spiritual being. An image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was carried at the front of each procession. In his own words given in a speech in Sacramento in March, 1968, Chávez defines the integration of the reality of the suffering Christ with the struggles of a suffering people:

We should be prepared to come to the defense of that priest, rabbi, minister, or layman of the Church, who out of commitment to truth and justice gets into a tight place with his pastor or bishop. It behooves us to stand with that man and help him see his trial through. It is our duty to see to it that his rights of conscience are respected and that no bishop, pastor or other higher body takes that God-given, human right away.

What do we want the Church to do? We don't ask for more cathedrals. We don't ask for bigger churches of fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. The Division Street Riots of 1966 in Chicago as a manifestation of the new urban presence of the Hispanic.**

The previous two illustrations of Hispanic presence could lead to a presumption of a certain rural-agricultural character of Hispanic presence devoid of the complexities of the modern city. For many Anglo North Americans the 1957 Broadway musical *West Side Story* so brilliantly written and produced through the collaboration of Laurents, Bernstein, Sondheim, and Robbins was a first introduction to any possibility of Hispanic presence in the modern city—not to mention, the reality of tension among ethnic groups. Urban conflict—going back at least as far as the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 in Los Angeles—attests to a history of complex relationships.

The Division Street Riots of 1966 in Chicago began on June 12 and lasted for three days. Originally, this celebration commemorated *El Día de San Juan* (St. John's Day), an event organized by *Los Caballeros de San Juan* (the Knights of St. John), one of the first Puerto Rican religious and social organizations in Chicago. *Los Caballeros de San Juan* was a key religious institution, which like the office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, promoted integration of Puerto Rican migrants into mainstream Chicago life while maintaining cultural pride and integrity. It was during this first Puerto Rican parade on June 12, 1966, that one of the first Puerto Rican riots in the U.S. began on Division Street. The riot, one of many urban disturbances across the nation in the 1960s, was a response to the shooting of a young Puerto Rican man by Chicago police. What is important for us is that even in a modern North American city, so accustomed to the Anglo North American “private within the walls of the church” manifestation of religious identity, a most public demonstration of cultural unity would come out of a Christian religious observance of a saint's day and then take on a political power character as it confronted—as seen by some—a hostile Chicago police establishment.

Religion is not merely a private individual affair for the Latino, but rather a public communal one. Hispanic Christians in Chicago continue to witness to the collective popular Christian identity in the public arena. The Puerto Rican community marches on Kings' Day Epiphany. The Way of the Cross in the Pilsen neighborhood on Good Friday sees thousands of primarily Mexicans accompanying the Christ to Calvary, stopping at Stations of the Cross to pray about gun violence in the city, gangs, drugs, and young men and women in harm's way in Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

### **4. The presence of identifiably large groups of immigrants from Latin American countries in the United States as a direct result of political upheavals in their nations of origin.**

The last half of the twentieth century was a time of upheaval in many parts of the Americas. Both Canada and the United States received hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Central and South America as a result of campaigns of terror from both the extreme right and left. In the course of the early nineties, the HIT program serving the Lutheran Church Canada included large numbers of Central American immigrants from Guatemala and El Salvador who had fled from right-wing death

squads in their own countries. Lutherans from El Salvador would remember the constant death threats against Lutheran bishop Menardo Gómez and the tragic murder of Pastor David Hernández at the hand of these death squads.

At the same time, early HIT extension centers in Miami provided ongoing theological education to established Lutheran congregations of Cubans who related to their homeland and to the United States from the perspective of those who had fled the left in two different immigrant waves. The first was the Cuban immigration of the 1960's following the Castro takeover; the second wave was that of the *marielitos*, Castro's political prisoners who were able to come to the U.S. during a brief window of opportunity in the early eighties. Throughout the years, a good number of CHS students at both the congregational (pre-seminary) and seminary levels of formation have lived in their own flesh many of these painful experiences prior to coming to the United States.

#### **Perspective 4: Concerns from the Margins for Consideration at the Center**

The previous perspectives aimed at giving the reader a sense of some of the historical, religious, political, and socioeconomic reasons that have contributed to the diversity and complexity of Hispanic identity in the United States. We draw attention especially to the Hispanic sense of ecclesial Christian identity as contrasted with North American-European historical and theological starting points of self-understanding, and the challenges for ministry and theological reflection for both the growing U.S. Hispanic and the majority (but numerically declining) Anglo-American society that arise from such contrasting worldviews. Even if we understand the history and the complexities, the question still remains: "So what? Show me!" We now have to answer if North American U.S. Hispanic-Latino theologians have anything to offer North American theologians in general, and if a community of students, faculty, and scholars gathered around our own Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS) in particular has anything to contribute to North American Lutheranism. Are Hispanic American theologies "for real" or a blip on our screen of theological fads that come and go?

Hispanic American theologies in general and the CHS in particular represent needed voices in our theological conversations because they call us to return to the biblical message and our Lutheran Confessions for answers to new issues and challenges arising from Hispanic American communities in our midst. These issues and challenges offer a certain Hispanic lens that theologians and church workers must take seriously in order to relate the Gospel to Latinos in the United States. But such a lens can also contribute to a broader understanding of the mission of the church for both Latino and Anglo Lutherans. There are at least four important themes that confessional Lutheranism needs to seriously consider as it seeks to reach out to and work with Hispanics in the U.S.: Marginalization and Poverty, *Meztlizaje* and *Mulatez*, Exile and Alien, and Solidarity.

A serious conversation with Hispanic American theologians will invite each faith tradition and our own Lutheran confession of the faith to challenge us Anglos to an internal questioning of the prejudices and myths we bring to the hermeneutical process. Justo González has invited us to "read the Bible in Spanish." By this phrase, he certain-

ly does not mean that everyone has to learn to read Spanish in order to understand the Bible. Instead, he invites us to try to understand the history of salvation from the perspective of the underclasses of our society: the poor, the oppressed, and the powerless. In this respect, he is presupposing some postmodern premises in the sense that each cultural group will inevitably come to the interpretation of the Word from a particular culture and thus will hear God speak through their linguistic and cultural lenses.

In his *Mañana* as well as numerous writings and oral presentations, González has continued to call for dominant sides of society to “demythologize” their own histories and thus try to understand the Word as it might be mediated by that other culture. In our North American context, he decries the myth of historical innocence of North American historiography and its popular romanticizing of American history that has reflected a political-theological marriage and Christian denominational blessing of power to justify our colonial expansion over the continent through philosophies of Manifest Destiny, the institution of slavery, and the realities of blatant international aggression (especially against our nearest neighbors to the south). Such criticism takes on special significance during this election year in which we hear both political parties trying to define once again their relationship to “American exceptionalism.” This is the eschatological idea that in some way God favors the United States in an exceptional way, as the city of Zion set on a hill, thus ascribing a certain moral superiority to the nation which in turn justifies both domestic and international uses of power.<sup>9</sup>

Listening to the Scriptures certainly involves the best possible scholarship we can muster to do exegesis of the text’s meaning for that time and that place. At the same time, however, Hispanic American theologies invite us to move beyond the safe havens of individual scholarship and parsing of grammatical constructs, and invite us to recognize our own extra-biblical political prejudices when interpreting the Scriptures in order to hear the text call us to repentance over and over as a sinful people and to leave behind the destructive sinful myths that enslave us to our political and economic dominance and idolatry. We now turn to an application of a Latino lens for thinking theologically which is informed by the four aforementioned areas of special concern to Latinos in the United States. The point is not to be exhaustive. There are other issues and experiences that are not discussed in this essay and deserve a Lutheran response. But the following areas do give us insight into areas where the experience of Hispanic brothers and sisters offer us a challenge, an opportunity for repentance and forgiveness, and a path for reflection and action as individual Christians or as churches.

### **Marginalization and Poverty**

In a sense Hispanic American theologies have to take poverty seriously because the Scriptures do. As partial heirs of aspects of liberation theologies, there must be attempts to define and confront aspects of poverty as Christians out of Hispanic contexts. In this respect there is quite a broad consensus in Hispanic American theologies while in so much of North American Anglo-Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies, there is a general tendency to overly spiritualize poverty. The affluent North American churches paint the poor of the gospels in Luke 6:20, for example, with a wide brush

stroke to justify a sort of Platonic separation of an overly spiritual view of poverty apart from the human tragedy of physically ill or empty bellies.

Even when there is an acknowledgement of the spiritually poor, there is often an inference of moral weakness of the individual to survive and thrive, rather than a critique of the systems of economics and powers, and the possibility of their permeation by sin. The physical side of this dualism then reduces human poverty to such a limited economic definition that there is ready justification to condemn a serious critique of the system as an instigation of “class war.” In response to charges of class war in speaking of the poor, Gutiérrez delineates a broad definition of the realities of poverty for people who will be trying to relate “Good News” to the Hispanic situation:

The world of the poor is a universe in which the socio-economic aspect is basic but not all-inclusive. In the final analysis, poverty means death: lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one’s human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in the areas of self-expression, politics and religion. Poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families, and individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Hispanic theologies can contribute to the theological work of clarifying the broad implications for Spirit-filled living as the sanctified life leaps beyond our North American individualistic, moralistic definitions of charity for the poor. Hispanic theologians can help clarify the need for a prophetic call to repentance for our participation in systemic and corporate sin—a participation that sucks the life out of others, that does not promote the well-being of the neighbor, a more dignified human life for all of God’s children. For instance, what does Luther’s criticism of the idolatry of riches and possessions, his denunciation of medieval romantic and utilitarian view of the poor, or the confessional Lutheran distinction between law and gospel and the two kinds of righteousness, contribute to these conversations?

### **Meztizaje and Mulatez**

Central to understanding Hispanic American theologies is the need to grasp the racial, ethnic, social, economic and political implications of what it means to be *mestizo* or *mulatto* in our rapidly changing North American culture. By definition a *mestizo* is a person of mixed race parentage especially in western United States and Latin America, the offspring of a Spaniard and an Amerindian. Related to this definition is the parallel dynamic of *mulatto* as any person with a mixed Black and Caucasian ancestry. I have already delineated some of the facets of *mestizaje* as they relate to the formation of the “new person,” the Latin American. Though the idiosyncrasies of black and Caucasian racial mixing might be different, the impact of these racial mixes in the colonization process and the movements of immigration have played out in often parallel and intersecting ways.

Elizondo delineates two major waves of *mestizaje* that have defined Hispanic presence in the United States. The first *mestizaje* was the “new person” who came about



through the racial mixing (miscegenation) of the Spaniard and the indigenous peoples of the Americas during the Spanish Conquest. The second *mestizaje* is the dynamic in which North American culture finds itself today as the Latin American crosses borders and enters the United States and to a greater or lesser degree interfaces with North American Anglo Protestant and Roman Catholic society through general social interaction but also increasingly through intermarriage. Both movements have engendered questions about identity, the self-perceived identity of the Hispanic and the assigned identity by the dominant society.

Simply put, what seems to happen is a series of identity crises at almost every age level as the North American Hispanic is neither understood nor accepted by the new environment in which he/she finds himself/herself or by the culture, which they or their parents have left. They are neither here nor there, and yet in both places at the same time. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant Hispanic American theologians have appealed to their own respective faith and cultural traditions to call today's Hispanic to a positive self-esteem and affirmation of cultural worth as people of God even in the midst of rejection and discrimination. People who are not fully in either place also bring something unique with them, an understanding of what is good and bad on each side of the cultural border. They can help bring people together, build bridges.

Consistent with the Roman Catholic dependence on history and tradition, Elizondo and Roman Catholic Hispanic American theologians insist on the importance of the history of the 1531 apparition legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe (*La Morenita*, or *little Brown Virgin*) as both a positive affirmation of God's love for the conquered Mexican peasant but also God's affirmation of Mary's being a brown-skinned person. When the dehumanizing slogans of "wetback," "pocho," or "spic" are hurled at the Hispanic immigrant, the tradition of the church shouts back out of its history, "Not so! You are someone! The Virgin is one like you, loves you, and is with you and prays to her Son for you!" The significance of the symbol of Guadalupe is, of course, broader than its particular Roman Catholic devotional interpretation. It can point to God's love in Christ too, which includes even the despised *mestizos*, brown peoples of our day.

On the side of the biblical witness to the incarnation through Hispanic eyes, González and other Protestant Hispanics see in the Scriptures another type of *mestizo* affirmation. In answer to the latent racism that has empowered so much of Anglo separation from African American, Hispanic, or Asian cultures, González invites the Hispanic to affirm worship for the Galilean Jesus of Nazareth. In essays and spoken presentations over the years, he has invited Hispanic Christians to a consideration of the messiness of our Lord's genealogies, which included Rahab the harlot and Ruth the Moabitess. I have heard him contrast this less than racially pure Jew as Savior (since "nothing good comes from Galilee" anyway) to the perceived purity and innocence of the North American Anglo Christian and the self-understanding of a certain self-righteousness that masks personal and corporate sin. The Hispanic American *mestizo* or *mulatto* need not apologize, for his or her "reality of being mixed" is affirmed in the very incarnation of our Lord, the man from Galilee. These reflections echo very much the research done by Elizondo on the Galilean identity of Jesus—an identity shared by his disciples too.

Our Synod does not have a stellar history of ministry in American culture apart from our European ethnic enclaves. There is a cultural unity of sorts there that is important and must be acknowledged. But such cultural unity has had its dark side too. We have tended to move away from urban areas as Hispanic and African American groups have moved into our neighborhoods. Dozens of our congregations in almost all major cities have sold or shuttered their doors at the prospect of interaction or *mezizaje* on any level with new peoples for the sake of doing ministry to new waves of immigrant neighbors. White flight comes in many forms, at times when the budget line item for Hispanic stuff is cut out even though we know it is a critical ministry where Lutherans should have a voice in an increasingly Latino neighborhood. The voices from the margins mediated through the CHS, their students, faculty, and the communities they serve through various educational programs must continue to be heard in such a way that our Anglo theological endeavors and their leaders are at least exposed to the new *mezizaje* so that the desire to flee is replaced with a vision of opportunity by Anglo and Hispanic minister alike.

### **Exile and Alien**

Come, you faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness! God has brought his Israel into joy from sadness, loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke, Jacob's sons and daughters, led them with unmoistened foot through the Red Sea waters. (*Lutheran Service Book*, #487)

This Easter hymn reminds us that in our Lutheran faith expression there is the affirmation of movement. God's people are pilgrim people. God's people have always been called to follow somewhere and to be saved through movement. Abraham migrated from Ur to a promised land. Jacob's family followed one of his sons into Egypt to get food. Moses led them out of the slavery back to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *led them with unmoistened foot through the Red Sea waters*. They migrated into the Promised Land. When Israel became too comfortable with its land and wealth and refused to follow Yahweh, it had to be saved through a moving experience into exile and then return, now restored to rebuild.

Our Lord's life and ministry as well as the history of the ancient Church give ample testimony of the "mobile" people of God. Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem at the worst possible time when modern medical specialists would advise against travel in the last months of pregnancy. The child Jesus is whisked off to Egypt out of Herod's grasp. We hear of him again after the holy family had migrated to Nazareth and was now in movement as a child going up to the holy city to learn from the teachers in the temple. His ministry is not one of waiting but rather one of movement, always movement to serve at the expense of comfort and permanence. "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" (Mt 8:20) St. Paul and his companions' movements around the Mediterranean during those first five decades following our Lord's Ascension suggest a recognition of civil authority, but at the same time a sense that the gospel's message was for all people. Movement was a part of the dynamic of spreading the gospel.

All of this is only to introduce the biblical theme of God's people as a pilgrim people, in the world but not of the world. Sometimes God's people are strangers and sojourners, who have no place to lay their heads, and sometimes they are the hosts exhorted by Scripture to welcome the stranger and to protect and provide for the foreigner in their midst. What happens when we get so comfortable in the earthly city that we become apathetic to the needs of sojourners in our midst, many of whom are our brothers and sisters in Christ? What does the pilgrim identity of God's people, especially seen today in the migration of Christians from the global South to the North for any number of reasons, contribute to a Lutheran ecclesiology and missiology?

An educational and research unit like the CHS can foster a needed dialog about the theological implications of globalization and the immigration of God's pilgrim people from one place to another. Central to any conversation of this theme has to be the premise that migration is not a problem that challenges exclusively Hispanics, the Hispanic church, or evangelization of the Hispanic. The North American Anglo-European soul is also being challenged. We have to address these questions, not just from a social and political point of view (though that is important), but also from the point of view of how political decisions affect people—especially, God's children. People of the dominant culture, who hold economic and political power, will, of course, have to answer to God for their decisions for or against their neighbor. How a host nation treats the foreigner in its midst is also under God's purview. How does one honor the authorities while also loving the sojourner? How does one honor the law and vocation while also speaking against those parts of the law that do not allow us to fulfill our Christian vocation on behalf of suffering neighbors? These are difficult questions, but Hispanics look to the churches—yes, to the Lutherans too—for answers. What do we have to contribute?

Together we must wrestle with these types of questions: 1. What is the nature of citizenship? 2. Can any of God's children ever really be "illegal"? 3. Who has the right to limit movement? 4. Does the immigrant's need to feed his/her children take precedent over the host country's immigration guidelines? 5. How does the church minister to undocumented people? 6. Can the church commission women for deaconess ministry and ordain men for public ministry who have become prepared for ministry and are apt for ministry, but for many reasons may never be able to regularize their immigration status? 7. How does political anger against the alien affect the spiritual life of the person that expresses such fear and anger? 8. Under what conditions must we obey God rather than man? 9. How do we serve the American children of undocumented immigrants? 10. What would a Lutheran reading of Scripture, its teaching of God's law and gospel and its theology of the two kingdoms and vocation, bring to the table as we seek to engage these issues coming from the margins?

### **Solidarity**

This final point is perhaps the most difficult for us to describe and begin to live out. The Anglo North American Protestant-Roman Catholic charitable ethic is seemingly unparalleled. We respond to everything. I am writing these lines in the midst of

modern history's strangest spring climate change upheavals in nearly a century. On this weekend of April 16, 2012, more than 144 tornados were reported in Oklahoma alone. Lutherans will respond with dollars and willing hands. Hispanic American theologians, however, are not just challenging us to act in emergencies, but in a sense to "be" with our brothers and sisters, not from the point of view of our strengths and power and what we have to give as churches and organization with material resources, but from the perspective of our Hispanic neighbor's weakness, insecurities, and powerlessness. We are being challenged to become vulnerable, to allow ourselves to be and feel helpless with those we would normally want to help. In many cases Hispanic neighbors in our midst are not asking us to do something, but rather to be in solidarity with them. Here once again the words of Cesar Chávez ring out a different call than the desire for a handout:

We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.<sup>11</sup>

This cannot be easy because we have so much to lose. Our individual congregational properties and institutional properties housing universities and seminaries, not to mention congregational and denominational endowment values, now claim billions of dollar worth. Should we consider "downsizing" property to minister with people in less affluent residential areas, perhaps sacrifice the prestige of higher educational recognition of our fine universities and seminaries so as to actually walk with people who come to us with poorer elementary and secondary education backgrounds? Or how do we move significant administrative units of these institutions to the margins, or bring the margins to learn at and contribute to our old institutions? How do we break patterns of creating dependence which comes from doing for others and instead risk failure in projects we know might have less favorable outcomes if we are less controlling? How do we just hold the hands of the suffering?

We are confident that the CHS will continue to wrestle with these types of questions as movement from the margins continues to challenge our thinking and practice at the center. In these twenty-five years we have seen unexpected demographic shifts as our country has become more and more Hispanic. We pray that as Concordia Seminary continues to welcome new voices from the margins to participate in and contribute to its mission on behalf of the LCMS, our common witness to the gospel will continue to be enriched and enriching to many in our congregations. The body of Christ, his church in the world and our Lutheran confession of the faith, is getting yet another voice, another perspective and experience, another gift sitting at the table, always eager to join hands and lives together in mission and ministry to the world.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Virgil Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Justo González, *Mañana: Christian theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Luis N. Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y violencia: la conquista de America* (San Juan, PR: Editorial CEMI, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, ed. and trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> University of California, Calisphere Program, Documentation of The Bracero Movement, 1932–1945.

<sup>7</sup> Taken from *El Grito* (Summer 1968). Cesar Chavez Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Taken from documentation of the Puerto Rican Arts and Culture Center of Chicago, 3015 Division Street, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>9</sup> “GOP Making ‘Exceptional’ Argument,” *Chicago Tribune* (Sunday, April 15, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Chavez, *El Grito* (Summer 1968).

## Dealing with Culture in Theological Formation

### A Former Missionary in Latin America Reflects on Training Pastors and Communicating the Gospel

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Gregory Klotz

Talking about the theme of a broad theoretical or missiological framework for the preparation of leaders in a cross-cultural setting cannot be done within a 45-minute time frame much less a 45-year span of ministry. Nevertheless, the theme, topic, and necessity for this discussion are paramount to continue the movement of the Church in today's world. Perhaps the most perplexing part is where to begin the discussion. There is so much to say, and we cannot go into depth on every issue. I would, therefore, like to highlight certain basic concepts that feed into thinking cross-culturally about theological formation. We will play a little with definitions and theories but focus on practice. I will give you some problems to work on as well.

I would like to begin with a look at the term *culture* and then move toward a framework that may help in theological formation. Along the way, I will cite examples from my own ministry as a missionary in Latin America, and present problems I encountered for you to consider; I do this because I believe education involves problematizing real-life situations. In addition, we will dialogue about what we know to be true and what we have not considered feasible. In many ways, this paper is an intersubjective inner dialogue I've had with myself, contrasting my opinions before going into the Latin American mission field with my conclusions after returning. My hope is that this paper will stimulate you to further investigate, reflect on, and creatively problem-solve how theological formation can better take place with cultural knowledge as an advantage and not an obstacle.

There is no one definition of culture. Some definitions describe culture as that which holds communities or groups together in which communicative media is used to describe these experiences, at whose root is a particular central religious allegiance or core value. Looking at culture this way converts it into an object for study and fragments it into blocks or compartments. In these definitions it is assumed that there are categories of meaning that are universal, that is, the same from culture to culture, and that there are various cultural media or forms that build off a core value within the community. Historically, and as a result of colonialism, these definitions offered early researchers a way of categorizing cultural meaning into preconceived categories, allowing

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meaning to be aligned within their own understanding. Other definitions of culture focus on building blocks or elementary units of meaning that can be found at the base of any complex structure within a community and then manifested in different ways through diversity of cultural media. This is not to say that any of these are right or wrong; it is simply how researchers have attempted to get a handle on the problem of *culture*.

But in some way, scholars have contributed to their own problem of studying *culture* by converting culture into an object to be studied instead of a process to be observed in and through human interaction. If I could, I would avoid it altogether, but since dealing with *culture* in theological formation is the overall theme this evening, I cannot skirt the issue. So, I would like to take some time and present the following questions: *How* should we approach talking about *culture* and *what* should we do about it in the area of theological formation, not by labeling it but by observing it in action? This means we observe the praxis of people in action communicating about their real world.

The first thing is that we have to change our viewpoint on this topic. The term *culture* originated in the Western world, and, like so many things in the West, it was made an *object* of study. As an *object*, it became dehumanized and instead was analyzed as an independent truth or significance; that is, it lost its human element as succinct definitions were sought. In the area of theological formation, we cannot deal with culture as an object simply because we are dealing with human beings. We humans each experience the world differently and communicate our experiences differently to others (this is knowledge). Additionally, we each live in a social context where our words and objects (cultural media) carry varying degrees of meaningful experience or exist in numerous domains of meaning far from mere lexical equivalents, all of which revolve around a core metaphor (or religious value), which gives ultimate meaning for all things in that community. It should be noted that although there are lexemes that contain meaning, the social context is the actual genesis of the meaning of words as signs in communication, and it is this social context that gives us the phenomenon we have termed *culture*.

Having made that distinction between object and process, I would like to take the perspective of a *descriptive* exercise of the phenomenon of culture in a behavioral way, or how it is performed. This is more beneficial simply because anthropology is a behavioral science—it studies how people behave. Culture is a phenomenon and product of the interrelationship of people. So, we will begin with this phenomenological view of culture, determining how people seek and give meaning to the world around them, as well as how they talk about this meaning with others which, in the end, is their known reality.

We humans interact with the natural world around us.<sup>1</sup> As we experience this world, we organize our perceptions and experiences into meaningful experiences individually, but also with a social community by communicating with others our experiences of nature. The result is knowledge; it has meaning for the community and the

individual. The words I choose are selected from what I have heard others use in similar instances, words which already have a lexical value are now nuanced within the description of something real in the social context.

When we experience a *breakdown* in *how* to communicate meaningfully what we experience in the real world, we may call this another culture.<sup>2</sup> I can think, “What word should I choose?” However, some of the questions actually at work here are: “In what context is that word used?” “What social reality is associated with this word choice?” In other words, how can I describe my experience if I don’t know the words to do so?

Let’s look at the human experience and show how this works. We will use the example of language as this is the most basic form of communication. And, it should be noted, that we go about all of this naturally, totally unconscious that we are doing this.

I experience something in my life. Let’s make it simplistic. I want to tell you about it, but how? I have words that I choose from based on how you, or others, have described similar experiences in the past, and I assess that you probably know those experiences and words in that context. So I begin, “I saw a car hit another car.” Now as you sort through the meaning of car as a train car, toy car, and other domains of what car can be, you finally arrive at the motorcar because of the context. Also, when I say it *hit* another car, you could interpret it as “slapping” another car—since *hit* can carry this meaning—but the context sums it up for you. We share a similar context, a similar experience, which means we share *knowledge* of the situation through experience and sharing. It is our reality. You may have additional questions, which come from your experiences or previously related experiences, and so you may ask, “Was anyone hurt?” “How many cars were involved?” All of these seek to further define the experience, as well as share in the knowledge of what happened.

As you can see, communication and, more importantly, how *communication* takes place are foundational elements in sharing knowledge within a reality of the world. Now, I could have said, “I saw a car accident yesterday.” This takes us to a second stage of how culture operates. This step is *codification*. By saying “I saw a car accident yesterday” I have used a highly codified, or condensed, example of a whole series of actions in my social context. This codification is used because we all know what the individual parts mean and what they communicate. There is no need to say more. I have not described step by step what happened, but merely have termed that description as an *accident*. And since we most likely are from the same culture, we not only have experienced something similar but we share the same lexical and social context which allows us to sift through the domains of meaning of the lexemes, allotting them their contextual appropriateness.

When we communicate, we go through this process unconsciously as we size up words within contexts and consider the possibility of their meanings as they relate to context. As an example, if I had said to you, “I had an accident,” you would most likely understand that I was involved in a physical accident, a car accident possibly. But if your two-year-old son said, “I had an accident,” you would probably most likely assume it is *not* a car accident, but a potty accident. Context is totally different; words are the same. I am a grown adult; the boy is two-years old. I know how to drive; the boy can only walk.



Communication between the individual and the group is always highly codified; thus, when communicating within a specific social context, much more of what is “known” is codified, separating the “common place” reality it signifies to move to something that is specific or new, adding to knowledge and expanding my communication base.

Another example of this codification is when I say, “Well, I’m going to get ready for bed.” Everyone knows I am not going to iron a shirt and put on a suit and tie, or shine my shoes, or put on make-up, or tie my gym shoes; that is, everyone in my same social context, operating with the same standard communication skills knows what I mean.

Equally, since it is so commonplace that we agree on what takes place, I don’t need to say, “Well, I am going to walk upstairs, turn down my bed, slip into my pajamas, go to the bathroom, brush my teeth, go back to the bed, get in, say prayers, close my eyes, open my eyes, set my alarm because I forgot to, sigh at how little sleep I am going to get, and then close my eyes again, and go to sleep.” Codification in communication allows us to say, in a very short way, all the details of similarly shared experiences or acts. This is socially constructed *knowledge*,<sup>3</sup> as we know that all the words and the contexts to which they allude. But in another social community it might mean to lock doors, move the couch to the corner of the room, lay out the mat to sleep on, and it might mean—“OK, everyone, time to leave!”

What I have described within verbal communication also is true of any type of *cultural media* used for communication. It may mean a particular media of communication within the community to arrive at a particular meaning, or a particular aesthetic within a particular media, a voice genre, a color, or even a vocal inflection. I use voice inflection in communication in my Spanish classroom at Taylor University to show how language communicates beyond the lexeme. The lexemes in this example are the same, but the meaning is different based on intonation, an aesthetic in speech, which clues the meaning for interpretation. It is the difference between saying, “What did you get your mother for Christmas” and “What did you get, your mother for Christmas?” To this we can add smells, sounds, etc.

Thus, through language and other media of communication, we know and can organize the world around us into meaning. Everything in our world has meaning for us. We have set up labels, words, sounds, colors, art, architecture, etc. This, of course, includes church and other organizations. In our own social community everything that surrounds us has meaning. We are not aware of things that do not have meaning for us. Additionally, in another culture, we are not aware of the meaning of all of our surroundings, but it is there. We do not perceive it, because it is meaningless to us. And, if the object in another community is similar to one in our own, we will interpret it from within our lexical reference of that sign and not necessarily grasp the intended meaning for *that* community.

Let me illustrate that briefly for you. This is the world of church, which has meaning for me. I will now be explicit and put **in bold** those terms which we can easily recognize as codified terminology, meaning that they are words which access groups of meanings or are signs for a group of collective signs, activities, structures, or a whole process and mean more than just the mere lexical definition through their association

with the social context. As a Lutheran Christian, I was born and raised in a **church**<sup>4</sup> that had a **liturgical** structure, all **congregations** had their own **buildings** which were A-frame, there was a **president** of a congregation, there were **elders**, there was a **ladies guild**, there was a **Sunday school** for children, there was adult **Bible study**, etc., etc. These are the structures that make up “American” Lutheran Christianity, as well as other denominations. It is easy to understand how the image of the church, as it exists in this form, could be seen as a whole: codification LCMS. Although there are various components that make up the congregation and denomination in the United States, we lose sight of the fragments that make up the whole and accept the whole structure as “American Lutheran Christianity” or “the Church.” To understand all the elements that make up the meaning of something codified we could do an exercise in deconstruction and unpack the historical, real-life social context in which these took on codified meaning, but...let’s not.

As a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod worker, this is my interaction with the *religious* world around me. It provided the context for my theological training. It was and is an integral part of my world. Now, as a missionary, I go overseas with this view of the church in my head. Although I go as a product of seminary education and understand the doctrines of the historical church as well as denominational differences, I have not been taught the semiotics of culture—the skill of communication or the artful use of symbol and meaning in communicating the gospel. Yes, I have been taught to “preach,” but this too is a communicative form which is codified in structure and social context—an acceptable way of speaking in my social context, which historically developed into the present form.

So, I enter Latin America with this idea of church and theology. I set up an organizational structure that depicts denomination, I begin having Bible studies in homes, I begin to form a group with a church president, an offering deposited in a bank, preaching, etc. My downfall is not that the church takes this shape; my downfall is my ignorance in assuming that these “shapes” or “social forms” have the same meaning in that social context of which I am not a part. And it was along these lines that I had my first awakening along the road to an understanding of theological education that could be defined by a free exchange of dialogue between two social realities—one, in which I lived out my faith and gave substance to my faith and, the other, the reality in which this gospel message, which has expression and organization in my context, would seek expression in a totally different culture. “Hi, I’m a Lutheran missionary and I have come to bring you Christ!” Well, people saw *me*, what *I* did, what I had, how I lived, my salary, my family, I drove a nice car, I had food on my table; to them, *I* was the Lutheran church. So when I asked, “Do you want to be Lutheran?” the answer was, “Hell yes!”

I am not alone in my idea of church. When I arrived in David, the Lutheran Mission in the USA had already purchased a house where I was to live. It was in the middle of town and it was large. Definitely upper-class colonial. It was purchased with the plan that this was where the congregation of David, Chiriquí, would meet. The house was to be in mission hands until I left, at which time it was going to be turned over to the church.

After a few years, when I understood what the purpose behind the purchase of the property was, I wanted to move out. The reason was because there were several Bible study groups meeting, and the possibility that there were several small churches around the city seemed to be more homogeneous than one meeting place. As well, the costs to maintain a large structure in a middle class area would have been prohibitive for the lower-class people meeting in my groups. Now, let's raise some questions that cause you to think about the structure of your own congregation or church. What is the history of its formation...its history in the social context? What is wrong with meeting in houses? Is the purchase of a property necessary? Is legal status as a church in the country a necessity? How would *they* envision the church organization in their social setting? What about the ministerial offices, the way education takes place, and the substance of that education? All structures have meaning and purpose in the social context and were once established through real-life issues. Here, on the mission field, there is no history and no instance of correctness or incorrectness; there is no meaning other than, "I am the Lutheran Church" and to be Lutheran is to be like the missionary.

We really don't know that we communicate this way until we reflect on it in another social context and have to wrestle with why we are not understood the way we want to be understood or have to question the organization of their structured reality. Even if we know the language a bit, we do not know the social context.

What is expected of you as a *pastor*, for example, has much more to do with the expectation of leadership according to leadership models within the social structure than theological reasons for that office. Although Scripture may point to the spiritual qualities in leadership, the social expectations of leaders and leadership formation in Guatemala, for example, will have a distinct expectation as far as what a *pastor* does than in Chicago, or even rural Alabama.

Hopefully, this concrete example causes you to think about the implicit meaning, codified meaning, at least in the case of a leadership position in the church as it relates to culture. Now, I am going to tell a few stories of other experiences I had in communication in a diversity of social contexts. I tell these to you in raw form; that is, as close to the original scenario as possible without giving you context or background information on the issues at stake. Each of these examples presents an issue of dealing with cultural communication as I have just presented, somewhat simplistically. For each of these, I want you to think about what we have said, maybe take some notes, and then reflect on how *you* would solve the problem I was experiencing, or at least try to determine what the crux of the problem was.

### **Example One: Burning off the fields.**

In a rural Bible study in Panamá, we were studying 1 Peter and the refining of gold to make it pure. I had never seen gold refined before, but I understood that firing something in an oven could possibly make it sturdier, such as pottery, or I could easily see that it was something similar to silver smelting as I had seen before. The people I was working with were mostly tobacco and sugar cane farmers. Most had a sixth-grade primary level education. Most of them were probably looking at the Bible for the first

time. Here was my problem: I recognized that they did not know what the purification process for gold was, so I chose something from their everyday lives. Before the *safrá* (sugar cane) harvest, the fields were burned to get all the rats and other critters out, as well as burn up the weeds. The sugar cane was then good to harvest. The fire purified the fields in one sense of the word. So I used this as an analogy not only for purification but also of the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

### **Example Two: The Second Commandment**

Here was my first exposure in theological education. I established Bible studies in houses in David, Chiriquí, Panamá. I also had groups in rural farm villages. In my Bible studies I used a mix of Bible studies on justification by faith and Luther's Small Catechism. My first group was a group in a rural mountain area. We met in their living room Wednesday afternoons and studied the Catechism. Every one of them had a Catechism, and we used that together with the Bible. Everyone knew the answers to the questions. There came the time that our family left for a two-month furlough in the United States. When I returned, I learned that the estranged husband of one of the female members had been assassinated by machete. I also learned that the burial was that same day. Then I learned that the wife, Rosa, was in the hospital in Concepción so I went there. She was delirious and the family was around her bed. She did not go to the funeral because of her condition. As I stood there, somewhat in the rear, behind her one of her brothers, I heard her say, "Did you put a spoon on his chest?" And then, "Did you tie his thumbs together?"

"Why?" I asked myself, "Why would she ask that?" I asked her brother who said, "The spoon is placed there so that whoever it was that killed him would die of hunger, and the thumbs are tied so that whoever did it would be bound and could not flee or leave the country." I was perplexed. Here was a family that looked forward to Bible studies, had been through the Catechism and knew the answers—yet there was witchcraft. What went wrong? I couldn't figure it out. I put this on the back burner for thinking. I didn't address the issue immediately. What was the problem?

### **Example Three: The Baptism Bracelet**

One time I was getting ready for a baptism. The woman had come to me asking me to baptize the child and she was willing to go through classes in preparation for that baptism. We looked at the Scripture passages related to baptism, and we talked about the necessity of continuing to come to church so that the child could be brought up in Christian teaching. We also discussed the fact that this child now bore the name of his Savior, and that he now belonged to him. God would continue to protect and defend him always as salvation was brought to the child. In getting ready for the Baptism, the mother came up with the child. Among the items of regalia that the child wore was a piece of red woolen thread tied around his wrist. I did not baptize the child that day. What happened? What went wrong with the teaching that I gave? What was not understood?

#### **Example Four: You're too cute!**

When I arrived in Panamá, the now-sainted Rev. Merrell Wetzstein took me around to houses where he had formerly conducted Bible studies, or to families that he knew were interested in possibly hosting a study in their homes. Some of these families, including the one from this story, I never saw again. We entered into this house, and sat down on the couch. I remember everyone being quite talkative. Pastor Merrell was joking with the people as only he could do in his Portuguese-laden Spanish. Suddenly, the grandma of the family appeared coming out of her bedroom. She immediately came over to where I was on the couch and sat beside me. She kept touching my arm and saying that I was so handsome and that she had a very strong eye. And, in the course of her *manoseo*, her “touching,” she said, “You are so handsome, and you don’t have something red on. Why don’t you wear something red?” At that point, I answered her. What was the problem and what did I say?

#### **Example Five: I do believe in elves, I do, I do, I do...**

At the Lutheran Center in Antigua, Guatemala, where I trained pastors of the Guatemalan National Church there were two groups of students. One was Mayan Indian and the other was Ladino, a mix of Spanish and Indian blood. The groups studied separately because of cultural and educational differences. The Mayan Indian group studied at an academic level of around sixth grade elementary. On this particular occasion, the Mayan group was studying the work of the Holy Spirit, spirits and angels and the like. After class we broke for lunch and then kept talking as we normally did. In the course of conversation we began talking about the *Tz’ij’itz’ij’ mite* or *dwende* which, in Guatemalan folklore, is a little sprite or leprechaun or elf that comes at night and ties girls’ hair into knots while they sleep. And, while talking about it, one of the pastors who is highly respected and a very wise man said that one day he was sitting talking with a group of elders in the community when all of a sudden this *dwende* came over to him and jumped on his shoulder and just sat there. None of the other pastors looked at him, or reacted in astonishment or disbelief. Wow! What was I to think? Need this be addressed? What did I not know or experience in this community? What happened to communication here? Suddenly I was on the outside.

#### **Example Six: Goodness snakes alive!**

In my classes, again at the Lutheran Center in Guatemala, I had approximately eight students representing four different Mayan Indian language communities, all of whom spoke Spanish as their second language. In our classes, discussion was very practical and praxis-centered, as opposed to the Ladino students whose classes were very theoretical. In Mayan Indian classes much of our conversation revolved around correctness in ritual or observance, which was not surprising since the whole community is bent on conformity and balance so there is also much more dialogue around the activities of pastoral leadership.

One time we got sidetracked on the very first day of class which set the tone for the remainder of the week and we ended up studying something that I had not even an inkling to study. Here is how it began: “Pastor Gregorio, there is a man in my congregation who has recently become a member. He was a shaman, involved in Mayan magic, and he renounced that practice and was baptized and studied with me and became a member, he and his whole family. But now he comes to church with marks on his legs because the snakes that are on his incense burner come to life during the night and bite him. He has the marks and everything. What should we do?” Everyone listened with rapt attention. Nobody doubted the validity of the event even though they did not have congregations anywhere near this pastor’s town, nor did they know the gentleman.

Suddenly someone else chimes in, “Yes, that happened to me too. There was a devout Roman Catholic family who became Lutheran not too long ago. They took their images (saints, Mary, and maybe even Jesus) out of their homes and threw them in the river. A few days later when they were farming in their field down-river, they found that the images had all swum ashore and were now in their fields. They weren’t near the river; they were in their fields, meters from the river. What should we do?” What is going on here and what would you do? What is the problem? What is needed?

### **Example Seven: Without Words**

I reflect now on an incident that raises the question, “How would you train a pastor to handle the following situation regardless of his context?”

During the guerrilla conflict in Guatemala, the elders of a well-established congregation met one night to discuss an incident. One of the members of the congregation had apparently been kidnapped either by right-wing death squads or by leftist guerrillas. His wife came to the council asking them to put an announcement in the newspaper saying that he was in no way involved in the civil war conflict and asked the captors to please let him go. What would you do? What could be done?

As we attempt to deal with the issues in these examples, I want to return, for a moment, to where we began our discussion in dealing with culture by framing it from a phenomenological perspective as a constructed interpretation of the objective, real world around them through media that facilitates communication of experiences in that world between individuals in that community. Knowledge and reality can be described as a social construct continually defined and redefined through communication and understanding of shared experiences that takes place through words, lexemes not divorced from their social context, but through which meaningful experience is communicated within social contexts. Words, images, symbols, art, dance, music, etc., because of specific meaning within social contexts, develop cumulative, polysemous meanings over time according to the various domains of experience which they access. People sort out similar and dissimilar experiences through defining and redefining signs and their relationship to phenomena in talking about the world around them, and the end result is *knowledge*.

You may have guessed from the stories and the questions that I was missing the communicative skills to meet the social context in which these incidents happened. In some way the words, the teaching, the doctrine were not given a place in the social context of the people. In effect, I had answers for questions that they were not asking, and they weren't asking any precisely because I had not pinpointed any specific activity or experiences from their social context, and because whatever it was that they did, or believed, was commonplace knowledge—codified words or even behavior—in that particular setting. What was missing in the communication as I entered into another community? If you have answered the problematic issue as *context* you were right.

### **The Issue of Contextualization**

I would now like to shift our discussion to look more deeply at *context*. The issue of *contextualization* is the answer to the problematic issue of cross-cultural communication. Again, definitions attempt to grasp at the meaning of contextualization in order to distinguish it from syncretism. Let's look at a couple of these theories and then offer up our own working model in order to answer the questions raised in the examples above and move toward a framework for theological formation across cultures.

Missiologists, such as David Hesselgrave, understand contextualization as something which we do to the message and teaching of the gospel to make it fit into another context after analyzing semiotic equivalents from cultural media.<sup>5</sup> This type of reforming a message seems to grow out of what anthropologist Charles Kraft refers to as a *dynamic equivalent*: a lexical, material or aesthetic difference in communication between cultures that carries the same equivalent or fundamental "objective" meaning or emotion.<sup>6</sup> This, of course, is based on the assumption of universals: that people in all cultures around the world have set categories within cultures wherein the basic difference for communicating the meaning of a message depends on cultural media attached to specific social contexts to acquire the same dynamic meaning.

Others, such as Maryknoll missionary Robert Schreiter, in his book *Constructing Local Theologies*, treats contextualization as something in which the message, the gospel, is preexistent in the culture.<sup>7</sup> Following the "anonymous Christian theory" formulated first by Karl Rahner,<sup>8</sup> this concept of contextualization warrants no need for a distinction between the message and media, as the gospel message is not "in-breaking" to people within that society because Christ is preexistent in the social structure although under different media forms or signs. The job of missionaries is to identify the "gospel" elements as they exist culturally, such as a Jesus motif, forgiveness motif, sacrificial motif, etc., and qualify them as Christian according to their dynamic social equivalents to Biblical teaching. Instead of an objective Jesus, it offers us a Christ-figure with no incarnational substance other than an equivalent dynamic concept from within the community.

Both the concept of *culture* and *contextualization* are dehumanized or objectified from the process of these theories, since they are studied systematically as independent existing entities. The interactive, praxis-oriented human element is removed and makes the study static vis-à-vis a relational observation and co-elaboration for meaning in any

social setting, e.g. an ongoing process between two people. Contextualization simply happens; it happens all the time and in all circumstances and is ongoing. Experiences or events from one community will acquire meaning in another culture. It should be understood though, that it is called “contextual” if in communication there is agreement between the message deliverer and the individuals or communities receiving the message. On the other hand, it is “syncretistic” if the message is changed; no agreement between the message deliverer and the individuals or communities receiving the message has taken place in relation to the sign or media of communication and its place in the social context and the meaning it possesses.<sup>9</sup>

I want to focus on contextualization, however, and not syncretism. I want to look at contextualization as a dynamic human process: one that continually takes place between members of the same community as well as members of different communities. By communicating using the cultural media available to us, we constantly are expanding our knowledge of the known world through dialogue.<sup>10</sup> When communicating their experiences, others use words and concepts that are new to us. We see music, art, dance, and other signs constantly change as they need to accommodate new experiences into the context of the community—all for the sake of creating meaning. Again, as Dr. Jack Schultz has stated, there is no intrinsic value of knowledge given to music, dance, art, or words apart from their social context. This means that contextualization is a natural and constant process whereby the creature seeks communion and understanding, striving for meaning and union with each other and, ultimately, with God. It cannot be viewed objectively or stagnantly or systematically lest it lose this human element. It can only be observed, tested, adopted, and adapted in ongoing socialization.

I would like to take a look at this and unpack what I see as the development of theology, and the impact that it has on theological formation. Overall, the process of contextualization can be seen in some ways as incarnational; the Word becomes incarnate in our lives; we become incarnate in the world of other people, etc. I see contextualization, however, as a two-step process, particularly as it relates with Scripture. This first step relates to the power of the Holy Spirit and the “in-breaking” of the message in the lives of people, regardless of culture. It is a *spiritual* (*Spiritual*) activity.<sup>11</sup> By calling it spiritual, attention is diverted from the speaker and is placed on the one from whom it came, namely, the Holy Spirit. This is seen in Romans 10:17 where it says that faith is a gift that comes through the preaching of the gospel. This is what we confess as the work of the Holy Spirit in the explanation to the article of the Apostles Creed. “I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel...” Holding this to be true, then, the first step of contextualization is faith, as God’s Word becomes incarnate in me. How? Well, much like a sacrament, faith comes “in, with, and under” the form of the word preached to me. It is not intellect; it is not education; it is a Spiritual communication that is exclusively the power of God through his word as he has ordained it to be.

From a missionary’s standpoint, as one proclaiming that word to another, I can try to choose the correct words, media, and method of communicating the gospel in another culture by attempting to become one with that culture from the onset in an



effort to be understood (an attempt at personal incarnation into that culture). I can attempt to use my words and the context as carefully as possible so as not to confuse the two. Ultimately, however, it is *in spite of me* that the message is heard and believed by someone in that community, and the same would be true if such preaching were happening within my own community. But in order for this to take place, there has to be an ongoing, two-sided communication, not a one-sided lecture. Testing, retrying, analyzing, and revisiting are required, and it takes a lot of time—it is an ongoing process.

In the Greco-Roman world at the time of Christ, using all the cultural media at his disposal, Jesus preached in an understandable way; he was in, with, and under the context of the people to whom he himself belonged. He chose words that carried weight not merely lexically, but within their social context so that knowledge was shared about their known world. He spoke to and under the forms of the social context of the people, and the Holy Spirit did his work and caused faith to be born in people. This message is received and finds its home in the hearts of unregenerate mankind simply because it is an intrusive, spiritual, in-breaking work of the Holy Spirit. It is a message that stands outside of and against the perceived everyday natural experience of people to create a sacred understanding, a “Holy Spirit understanding” of that word, as Romans 10 says.

Faith receives and applies the message of liberation and freedom to my context first. Jesus comes to me first, as a sinner, through forgiveness, and offers restored communion with God. Now the second step of contextualization begins, which is where the fun began in the New Testament. People wanted to share this phenomenal thing that happened to them: “How can I express to others what I have just received?” “Who else might share my experience and be able to find adequate words to describe this Jesus?” “What is it like in my known world that I could even use as an example?” Theological discussion is born and, over time, concrete formation of systematized theology takes place. It becomes a corpus of truths—dictums—divorced from the real-life context, language, and codifications in which it was first formulated, but which should be tested and refined in the light of constant change in social communication.<sup>12</sup>

I agree with what Dr. Rutt has stated as well, that theology was actually born out of missiology, not simply because the church had to go to other cultures and deal with problems in communication. It grew out of the endless discussion on how to talk about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, etc., in a diversity of social contexts. Contextualization in its second stage, therefore, is theologizing; it is making sense of what your faith holds true in a way that can be held to be true by the whole community as it comes up against obstacles, teachings, or systems of belief, such as an unbelieving social community and its practices.

The first 400 year period of Christendom was precisely an ongoing discussion defining and redefining how to talk about, and how to confess true faith about, Christ in the Hellenistic world as the Church changed social contexts. Systematic theology is therefore a theology that has universal significance as historical teaching and dialogues of the worldwide community of the faithful as it travels through time in a variety of social contexts. It is enshrouded within a veil of historical social context (words, media,

aesthetic forms, etc.) of those from within a shared social or cultural context, among whom a struggle exists for answering one's faith. What has happened is that it has been somewhat distanced from its historical social context over time.

Contextualization is, in a nutshell, the theological development of the Church within a culture as the local community responds to their world from the standpoint of faith. I know to some this may seem fragile—trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide the Church in the world, the all-inclusive world—but we do have a Scriptural example overseeing this theological venture in Isaiah 55:10-11: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” This is much like a line made by biologists from the movie *Jurassic Park*, who stated that the theme park would not be able to contain and place limitations on Jurassic life because “life always finds a way to continue on.”

Indeed, defining and redefining is what happened during the Reformation. Luther, and the reformers, saw that the word of God was not addressing the social context of the world in which they lived. The practical words of Luther in his commentaries and *his* redactions of the Small and Large Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles reflect a praxis-oriented approach to understanding and implementing the teaching of Scripture within a specific social context. Making the church the “peoples’ church” brought theology into the world of the community of faith once again.

Let’s revisit those examples that I gave before from a contextualizing viewpoint before making some concluding remarks about theological formation in light of this discussion.

### **Example One: Burning off the fields.**

I recognized the social context as distinct from my own. I had seen gold and silver processed, but I knew that most of them had not. Using the meaningful experience of purifying as getting rid of unwanted or unproductive elements that contaminate what is desired, I saw a similar experience in the social context with the burning of the sugar cane field. We were able to communicate the meaning of the experience by changing the sign from gold to sugar cane and effectively communicate what Saint Peter was talking about.

### **Example Two: The Second Commandment**

The second commandment talks about using God’s name in vain; that is, for calling on him where he is not found, such as witchcraft, swearing, etc. Well, obviously what the second commandment explains as “witchcraft” was not seen as “witchcraft” for them. Merely saying “witchcraft” in teaching spoke to my culture’s consideration of what constituted witchcraft, but the implications were obviously not the same for their culture. How could I have spelled it out differently? My problem was that I didn’t know what witchcraft was in their social context. What was demonic for them? Demonic and

witchcraft are highly codified terms; they have social contexts behind them. I did not specify or ask them what these practices were, nor did I venture to unpack the elements of meaning of this codification for me. What were the activities in their lives that might be called demonic and from which they needed to flee? I was dealing with words and concepts of their meaning from within my social context. I did not know the social context of what, for them, might constitute witchcraft, or even have a way of ascertaining the unknown. The examples that the explanation of the second commandment gave were contextual to the United States.

In fact, the whole educational format of the LCMS explanation to the Small Catechism, with questions and answers and occasional vignettes, came *out* of a need in the social context of the U.S. at around the turn of the century when neo-liberalism doubted the historicity and inerrancy of Scripture. The extended explanations in the Small Catechism were most likely written for theological reasons, as they include a mini-systematic look, vis-à-vis a guide for Christian living, with real-life situations. Plus, the explanations to the Small Catechism were written in the social context of the LCMS for families who were already Christian, perhaps second or third generation. It was not evangelistic in nature and was not written as a handbook.

This led me to think about how the catechism could be written within an evangelistic context for first generation Lutheran Christians. We have to make the focus of the catechetical instruction evangelistic in nature; one in which it is actually an Enchiridion—a handbook for Christian living, in the context of the people where that living needs to take place. They have to write it.

How could they possibly write their own material? To answer this question, let's adjust our focus slightly. If the Small Catechism explanations were written in the context of questions asked by the church in the U.S., what questions from real-life situations might Panamanians, Guatemalans, or Venezuelans need to have addressed in their Christian walk. For example: "Can I still be Panamanian and be Lutheran?" This was related to participation in communion—not the nature of the substance of bread and wine or a theological debate, but rather that all schools had priests who celebrated Holy Communion as part of the graduation ceremony. To refuse communion would be social suicide with these students' classmates, students with whom they had shared their childhood. Or, "Could people in rural areas go to visitations at the houses of the departed?" At the houses of the departed, rosaries were spoken continuously. But not going would break social solidarity with the mourners.

### **Example Three: The Red Bracelet in Baptism**

Why did I not baptize the child on that day? The red woolen thread signified a warding off of the evil eye. Children wear these so that they are not given the evil eye. It is believed that the evil eye will make them sick and could even cause death or permanent bodily harm. There is a diversity of cures for the evil eye, but red woolen thread wards it off. This is a very old Middle Eastern belief dating back to the third millennium BC, in which white and black woolen threads were used as a preventive. It was brought across northern Africa and into Spain and over with the conquistadors.

The woman was taking all of the protective measures available to her: baptism and the woolen thread. I interpreted the presence of the thread as a codification of her reliance and faith in it to prevent the evil eye. She may have received the teaching of what baptism was, but, to be on the safe side, she decided to also have the amulet with her. I had not thought to include God's powers in baptism as exclusive and unique; that He was a God jealous of all others claiming to be powerful and almighty; that only He could protect and save. I also missed the possibility of baptism as being interpreted as an amulet, functioning apart from the promises of the Word and faith.

#### **Example Four: You're too cute!**

The color *red* was key here as it produced a way of talking about Christ. It is what my homiletics professor, Rev. Rossow, called a *gospel handle*, in what is now his book, *Gospel Handles: Finding New Connections in Biblical Texts*.<sup>13</sup> It used the lexical reference of *red* and took it out of the social context of witchcraft and put new meaning on it that related to an opening to present the gospel message of Christ. I was not identifying the red wool with Christ, but with Christ's blood, redefining the signified object.

#### **Example Five: I do believe in elves, I do, I do, I do...**

Social contexts have a diversity of levels of the spiritual world. In the United States we do not consider Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny to be spirits. They do not fall within a domain of meaning that relates them to the spirit world. We do not have a category for elf, leprechaun, or sprite other than *mythological*. We do not attribute malevolent spiritual power with them, but they are not the same as Santa Claus. This Mayan Indian, however, considered the sprite to be a real-life spirit type creature. I would need to watch this designation and how it played out in further discussions (which it didn't) in order to ascertain if there was some significant spiritual dimension that conflicted with the gospel. I mean, we have no apparent problem with Santa Claus as a mythological creature (or is he?).

#### **Example Six: Goodness snakes a life!**

The whole process of understanding this practical example typifies the process of theological thought that I am espousing. Namely, these Christian gentlemen now have to give answer of their faith in front of a situation. What if I stepped in and said, "No such thing. Snakes don't come alive off of clay incense burners." This would have missed the point entirely. Whether the event actually happened or was a cultural metaphor for something else, they were perplexed and that is all that counted. If their faith were in a critical situation, it would have been failure for me to spoon-feed them some theological answer.

This real-life situation saw the need to console the consciences of those who were bothered by demonic powers, if not physically then psychologically. Together we worked on a ritual that was basically a service in which they publically confessed their faith facing the East and reaffirming their power through Christ and his protection, and then facing West, denouncing Satanic powers and then breaking up and burying the objects of the past saying something like, "I now put to rest the gods of old, those that held

power over me, those that no longer control my life as a redeemed child of God.” It is the experience and praxis that makes this powerful, not the mere knowledge of the doctrine of Baptism. This was NOT made mandatory for any who left the Roman Catholic Church or were shamans. It was done only as a response to tormented consciences.

### **Example Seven: Without Words**

The dilemma: by saying nothing the congregation member most likely would be tortured and killed by his captors. Announcing his innocence in the newspaper would have endangered everyone in the congregation who may also be suspect, or thereafter be suspect for making such a statement. The man was found a few days later in a gully, tortured and wearing sandals, or *chancletas*, a sign that he had been politically assassinated. Under normal circumstances, the shoes would have been sent home to the family as a sign that he would not be returning. For some things you are never prepared, or simply lack preparation.

### **Theological Formation**

Reflecting on what I have said, I would like to offer some guiding principles in theological formation which, I believe, would hold true for any culture, but particularly for the men and women in the Latin American context. In keeping with the overall theoretical tone we have been discussing, I believe that effective education is a dialogical process, in which what is known and experienced by one person is known and confirmed by another, or it is different. When it is different, the other person needs to organize or reorganize his or her perspective and thought in accordance with what someone else has experienced, thereby expanding not only possible evaluation of what was shared, but also acting on what is shared. The best form of education is one based on *praxis*—an interaction with the real world—that sets the stage for reflection.<sup>14</sup> Particularly in theological formation, we are not concerned merely with memorizing doctrine and teaching as static academic monoliths. Formation is a “forming,” a “molding” of engaging faith in the lives of real people with real questions, seeking to understand their actions and those of the world around them from a faith that has been given through the working of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

This happened in each of the cases previously illustrated. I had to engage my faith and share my experiences and, in return, listen to and engage the faith of others, erroneous or distorted as it may have seemed to me, in order to achieve a communication that would be understood and practiced. This is an ongoing, life-long process.

First of all, therefore, theological formation should be ongoing. You cannot “know” enough theology; you need to see faith in action, reflect on life, and talk about it. In the living out of Christian life, theology will be carried out in the real life situations.

Second, theological formation cannot be spoon-fed. I have shown that education takes place in healthy, constant, time-consuming dialogue. Spoon-fed education assumes that what is being taught is objective without the social context in which it has developed. This is not to say that it is or is not true; my point is that it loses the real-life social context in which the *problem* or *issue* is worked out.

Third, a good part of the theological formation should be the unpacking or deconstruction of the surrounding social context in which decisions, doctrines, and theology are formed, so that both student and teacher grow in understanding how a particular doctrine or teaching was formed, and so that an adequate answer can be given in today's society, or in another social context.

Fourth, we have to lose the dichotomy of teacher vs. student. This dichotomy feeds the spoon-fed model of education in which *what* is learned is disassociated as neutral to all social contexts, and places the teacher as the fountain of all knowledge. The teacher may know the truths and theology that has come down to the present social setting throughout history. He should unfold the context and real-life situation so that, through active discussion, the student can experience these situations in his whole life. This places student and teacher on the same level; both are learners. The teacher learns about the social context, ministry, problems, and issues of the student, and the student is introduced to how the church has handled these situations throughout history.

Fifth, theology is not redone in every social setting, nor does it mean a *reinventing* of the wheel. If we are celebrating diversity in ethnicity and community, we must be true to life and celebrate the diversity of social issues and contexts in which each person and culture bring a contribution to the ongoing history of the Church. This can easily be done by embracing and appreciating the answers that the historic church has had to give for its faith in real-life situations and knowing that the leader in formation is a continuance of this theological thought in their social context.

Sixth, formation needs to be done pro-actively; issues must come from the witness and practice of the church and are addressed with real-life functional answers. It should be praxis-oriented, beginning with the question of *how* to give effective witness of the gospel to people within my social context confronted by an issue—that is to say, problematizing the issue from the standpoint of giving witness to the issue. This is the beginning of theological formation. Identifying the ills and issues in one's social context and wrestling with how to address them brings the student into a relationship with Scripture as well the historic answers of the church.

Seventh, both student and teacher (if we can call them that) must have confidence in each other so that they can enrich each other's world by deconstructing codified communication, taking nothing for granted, never assuming the meaning of anything going on in the social context. Deep questions and honesty must be shown as among brothers in Christ.

Eighth, decisions about ministry, the structure of the church, and other things relating to the witness of the gospel in that social context should be made by the people of that social context. The teacher should be the consultant and guide by going back to Scripture and the answers of the church. This means that the teacher must trust the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person under formation, that the decisions made will ultimately be done under his guidance.

Ninth, in all of this, you are forming a community of the faithful, not an institution. Ministry and witness should be the reason for the organization of the congregation, the formation of the leader, all of the activities in the congregation. You are not making a club of the faithful.

I will stop at nine. For those who think stopping at nine is like dropping only one shoe and listening for the other, you will probably feel uncomfortable without a tenth point. Nine is fine. I will stop here as I think I have exhausted, if not the topic, then my listeners. Thank you for this invitation to share with you. I hope that you found it enlightening, or at least entertaining.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> I am, of course, over-simplifying by saying this only because some will say “My husband doesn’t understand when I talk to him,” but a miscommunication does not only occur between cultures, but within cultures if the signs used in communication related to different experiences.

<sup>3</sup> Berger and Luckmann. Berger and Luckmann pioneered the concept in phenomenology that the knowledge is an ongoing construct of engagement with phenomena (actions, people, etc.) in the world and how to communicate to others those experiences. The result, language, or symbols within culture, carry meaning as signs that organize reality into domains of meaning according to specific social relationships.

<sup>4</sup> I am using bold print here to show that these are highly codified signs that carry significant meaning in our society without unpacking their significance.

<sup>5</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library Publications, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol 14, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 283. Rahner says, “We prefer the terminology according to which that man is called an ‘anonymous Christian’ who on the one hand has *de facto* accepted of his freedom this gracious self-offering on God’s part through faith, hope, and love, while on the other he is absolutely *not yet a Christian* at the social level (through baptism and membership of the Church) or in the sense of having consciously objectified his Christianity to himself in his own mind (by explicit Christian faith resulting from having hearkened to the explicit Christian message) We might therefore put it as follows: the ‘anonymous Christian’ in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian mission, who *lives in the state of Christ’s grace* through faith, hope and love, *yet who has no explicit knowledge* of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.”

<sup>9</sup> Hesselgrave makes the distinction between contextualization and syncretism as two sides of the same coin. A problem lies not in the terminology or the fact that there is an agreement between the relationship of sign and meaning in communicating effectively between one culture and another, or that there is a syncretic problem when the sign may be similar from one culture to another, but the underlying message is very distinct. The problem is precisely *who* decides that either has taken place since effectively they have different worldviews. Many things have been termed syncretism when, in fact, the person who has labeled them as such has not perceived the depth of meaning in the social context of the people. On the other hand, in American Christianity, a certain amount of syncretism has taken place without it being acknowledged as such. This paper does not delve into this complex problematic issue.

<sup>10</sup> Berger and Luckmann. The development of what follows is directly related to Berger and Luckmann’s concept of the social construction of reality which centers around the semiotic significance of words, objects, etc., as the individual seeks to give meaning to phenomena in the world around him or her. The medium, language in this case, carries meaning because of its use as a signifier of shared experiences in the community. The codification of the signifier lends to future use as a way of expressing and, and therefore giving meaning to, such phenomenon. Meanings of words, objects, and sound, are used to communicate similar and dissimilar experiences in binary fashion, which is how reality is constructed through ongoing interpretation of individual and community interaction with the world around them. Aesthetics, knowledge of good, bad, beautiful, ugly, etc., are also constructed socially through communication. My point is to illustrate that theology, historically as well as in the global context, is constructed or grounded in the relationships between the text of Scripture and the faith experience of the individual in his social setting.

<sup>11</sup> I make the distinction between spiritual written with small-case ‘s’ and Spiritual large-case ‘S’ as a way of identifying the activity of the Holy Spirit (Spiritual) vis-à-vis the spirit of the world, or spirits, or spirituality innate to *homo sapiens*. Dr. Norman Nagel used this illustration in classes at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>12</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: Harper& Row, 1967). And, also by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). The idea is similar to Hegelian philosophy in which the idea or concept or reality as it is in itself (*Ansich*), meets contrary opinions or challenges, binary opposites (*Anderssich*) in which it is known by what it is *not*, before synthesizing into what it is (both is and is not) as a concrete thought. This, however, is in constant progression since the final synthesis becomes the thesis (for which there is an antithesis) in further developed thought. In teaching Christian doctrine as stagnant reified truths, the important crucible of the historical social context is hidden. This social context provided an antithetical notion or idea contrary to the pure idea or belief about the reality of what was being confessed, providing the need to address the antithetical, negative, or challenging issue, subsequently synthesizing it into doctrine (a concrete dictum). As such, it is a full, developed, and higher confession of truth. But if taken out of the social context and simply applied to another, loses the meaning of applicability unless it becomes the “pure idea” which is challenged by “antithetical ideas” in the world of today, causing a refining of the confession.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Rossow, *Gospel Handles: Finding New Connections in Biblical Texts*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 2005). Much of my thinking as a model of education comes from Freire, particularly the disintegration of the dichotomous structure of teacher/student and the experiential orientation of mutual knowledge and growth. Predating postmodernism, Freire is not talking about relativity and absence of objective reality; this was far from his concern. He rather emphasizes the acknowledgement of cultural models of knowledge and interaction with the world as mutual constructions of reality within social systems. Popular during this period as well, in the field of anthropology, was Claude Lévi-Strauss who, undoubtedly, Freire had to have read since Levi-Strauss worked in Brazil among the Amazonians and wrote a seminal book in the field of anthropology, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).



# HOMILETICAL HELPS

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### Proper 14 • 1 Kings 19:1–8 • August 12, 2012

#### Introduction

The Old Testament lesson for Proper 14 contains the introduction to the narrative of Elijah's flight to Mt. Horeb and his confrontation with Yahweh there (1 Kgs 1:1–18). As only the first eight verses of this narrative are included in the lesson, it appears that this reading was designed not for the sake of presenting the narrative of Elijah's journey—otherwise the whole story would be read—but rather to provide an OT parallel for the Gospel reading. This Sunday's Gospel reading (Jn 6:35–51) is the second of three lessons from John 6 that present the "Bread of Life discourse." The connection appears to be that in 1 Kings 19 God through an angel fed Elijah bread in the wilderness just as Jesus fed the 5000.

There is, however, no direct reference in John 6 to the events of 1 Kings 19. The preacher thus may choose either to focus on the narrative of 1 Kings 19:1–8 without making a necessary connection to John 6 or he could follow the "logic" of the lectionary and use 1 Kings 19 as a means to bring his hearers to the message of John 6. If he chooses the former, then he would want to take into account also what is related in 1 Kings 19:9–18. If he chooses the latter, then he should probably just preach directly on the John 6 rather than risk allegorizing 1 Kings 19.

#### The Text

The events of this lesson follow immediately upon the narrative of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel: Elijah proved victorious over the false prophets, Yahweh revealed to Israel that he is the true God, and then there came an end to the drought that was initiated in 17:1ff. Key for today's lesson is that following his victory, Elijah executed the false prophets and this act will prompt Jezebel to attempt revenge.

Verses 1–2: What were Ahab's intentions in reporting what happened to Jezebel? It is not clear from the text. Jezebel, however, quickly shows herself to be a "woman of action" in sending the threat to Elijah. Ahab apparently did nothing before as his queen killed the true prophets of God (18:4). Now, in spite of what he witnessed at Carmel, he would likely do nothing to prevent her from killing Elijah either. Ahab's passivity in relationship to his wife will play out again in the story of Naboth's vineyard in chapter 21.

As אֱלֹהִים in verse 2 lacks the article, Jezebel could be referring to "God," that is, the God of Israel, rather than "the gods" (as it is often translated). It could well be that according to the logic of her own syncretic religious system (combining Baalism and Yahwism?) the queen was convinced that somehow she was faithful and Elijah was the heretic who opposed the "state religion" and now became a murderer by killing its prophets. In this then is a case of false faith attacking the true faith.

Verses 3–4: Elijah’s immediate motive for fleeing is fear for his life. He runs and does not stop until he reaches Beersheba, the southern boundary marker. Elijah then proceeds one day out into the wilderness and prays for death before falling asleep. Elijah’s prayer is a complaint, and thus it seems that underlying Elijah’s fear there is despair. A mere coward would run and pray for life, not death. Elijah flees death at the hands of Jezebel and prays for death at the hands of Yahweh. It could be that in spite of the triumph over the false prophets, Elijah at this point sees no hope for a reformation and restoration in Israel—so he laments.

Verses 5–8: Rather than kill Elijah Yahweh sends an angel to feed and sustain the prophet. Elijah then goes forty days and nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. That these two meals are miraculous is evident in that (1) they are provided by God through this angel—Elijah does not provide it for himself—and (2) the food and water are able to sustain Elijah for forty days and nights as he journeys to Horeb. That Elijah goes to Horeb and the journey takes 40 days and nights suggests a parallel between Elijah and Moses. And so a more obvious NT parallel would be Jesus’s 40 days in the wilderness: as this angel serves Elijah food in the wilderness, angels would also serve Jesus during (Mk 1:13) and after (Mt 4:11) his temptation. So if there is anything typological in this passage, it is more likely the experiences of the prophet which will be reflected in Jesus’s ministry than the bread he ate.

### Observations and Considerations for Preaching

1. A stereotypical move often made with this text is to contrast Elijah’s fear and flight in chapter 19 with the prophet’s boldness in chapter 18 so that the preacher can then point out that Elijah was “just a normal sinner like us.” This move tends to make little of the fact that Jezebel had already killed many of the “orthodox prophets” of Yahweh, *and so the threat to Elijah was very real*. Yahweh could and did preserve Elijah’s life thus far—but *he didn’t do it for all of his prophets as many had been killed*. Thus, the preacher should not be too glib about making this comparison, in particular if he and his hearers have not faced such persecution themselves. It would be more constructive to consider instead how you or your hearers should respond if such persecution arose among us.

2. Elijah’s more serious error is found later in the narrative, but is evident in this lesson. The prophet despaired that Yahweh would do anything. In response to the prophet’s despair Yahweh shows his faithfulness: first, rather than taking Elijah’s life he sends an angel to feed Elijah with food that will sustain him for 40 days—*the opposite of killing him*. What is more, Yahweh will later appear to his prophet—though in a way not expected—and then answer Elijah’s complaints—though, again, not in a way expected. Elijah will later return to Israel and speak the final words of judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel.

3. In applying this to his hearers the preacher might focus on such themes as fear of persecution, compromise with faithless religious beliefs and institutions in our contemporary setting (something Elijah never did), and the potential for despair when it appears as if God has failed to act. The preacher may also then compare Yahweh’s faithfulness to Elijah with his ongoing faithfulness to his people, culminating in the ministry of Jesus. In his Son Jesus, the God of Israel did decisively initiate his reign among men, though, again, not in a way people expected. In the same way the Father

of Jesus will be faithful to his people today as they face hostility in a world that rejects the gospel: as the God of Israel sent an angel to feed and sustain Elijah, so he will sustain his people today and unto the resurrection of all flesh on the last day. Then, by analogy, the preacher might point to the Lord's Supper as one place where God today does literally feed and sustain his people in the midst of a hostile world.

David I. Lewis

## Proper 15 • Joshua 24:1–2, 14–18 • August 19, 2012

### The Choice is His

There is nothing more non-descript than a plain white Styrofoam takeout container. As it sat on our counter, it went unnoticed. My wife had to bring it to the attention of our sons. They opened the lid and found something unexpected: desserts! Cookies and brownies, big and small. The ordinary container had revealed its content of choices, too many choices. Which should they choose? The little brownie or the fruit filled cookie? One or two? Who knew such a simple package could offer such difficult choices.

Choices. Your life is filled with them. The little brownie or the fruit filled cookie? Pepsi or Coke? Chevy or Ford? One piece of pie or six? Go out to dinner or stay home? Paint the front door blue or white? Start a new job, or stay with the one you currently have? Some choices are great; some are small. Some make a big difference and some are not significant. Some are heart wrenching and some barely make a dent in your daily awareness.

Since your life is filled with pathways of choices, it is very easy to extend your familiarity with choices to areas where a choice is not yours to make. For instance, what about God? Is he your choice? Did you sit down in your easy chair one afternoon and come to the conclusion that you would choose God to be a part of your life? Did you make a conscious choice that your commitment would be to him? Isn't that what is going on in Joshua 24, after all?

Joshua assembled the twelve tribes of Israel to give them the word of the LORD. "Thus says the LORD," said Joshua, and the word of the Lord comes to the people. What does the LORD say? He reminds the people of their fathers who lived beyond the Euphrates, the fathers who served other gods. He reminds them that he took one of those fathers, Abraham, out of that foreign land of foreign gods and gave him the land of Canaan. The LORD reminds them of Isaac and Esau and Jacob and the descendants of Jacob, and what he did for them. He reminds them of Moses and Aaron, his instruments that he used to bring his people out of slavery in Egypt. He reminds them that he drove the peoples out before them and he told them "I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant" (Jo 24:13).

Joshua delivers to the people of Israel this imperative: serve the LORD; put away the gods! Serve the LORD, the LORD who speaks these words, who rescued them, and who delivered them into a land he has promised. If this for some reason, some

odd reason, seems evil, displeasing in their sight, Joshua demands that they choose which god they will serve. How about the ones beyond the Euphrates? How about the ones down in Egypt? Joshua, however, declares, “As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Jo 24:15). See, one may say, this looks like another illustration of a world full of choices! See, one may say, these words of Joshua prove the world of choices extends to God. Choose the gods your fathers served, or serve the gods of the Amorites, or serve the god that brings you pleasure, or serve the god that tells you that you are always right, or choose a combination, or choose the one true God. Is Joshua really suggesting to the tribes and to you that they and we have the right to choose God? Absolutely not! One who thinks that Joshua 24 is about making a choice for the LORD has sadly misunderstood this word. Choose for yourselves amongst the gods that your fathers worshiped, sure. Choose one of the gods of the Amorites, yeah you could do that. That is no different than choosing between a blue door and a white one or between ham and turkey. Making the LORD just another choice, no way!

The people respond adamantly that they will not follow any other God than the LORD. They seem appalled by the very suggestion itself. “Far be it from us!” Never! Never! Let it not be! They say they will follow no one other than the LORD who saved them and showed them great signs (Jo 24:17). Is it simply that they didn’t want to bite the hand that fed them? Is it just a matter that these people made a good and educated choice? Joshua bursts that bubble straight away. “But Joshua said to the people, ‘You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God’” (v. 19). Joshua recognizes the sinful condition of this people and their lack of power and authority to do any choosing. Freedom of choice just failed them.

The confession that Joshua and the people make is bold: my household and I will serve the LORD, and far be it from us that we would serve anyone other, for the LORD is the one true God. This response, however, has nothing to do with their choice but everything to do with *God’s choice*. God took Abraham from beyond the river. He chose Abraham. God delivered his people from Egypt. He chose them. Now this word of the LORD has come to the twelve tribes. Their response? To serve and follow him. Their response flows from faith, which is never a choice of man but always a work of God. God has done his work on them through his word!

Always a work of God! So it is in your life. As neither Joshua nor the twelve tribes chose the LORD, so we have no ground for choice. Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (Jn 15:16). Choose for yourself this day whom you will follow (Jo 24:15). Who you will follow is Jesus who has already chosen you and leads you to himself by faith. The one you follow is Jesus who has drawn you to his cross through the waters of your Holy Baptism. The one whom you follow is Jesus who finds you dead in your trespasses and brings you to himself—to life—even when we had no intention to follow. “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God’s choice for you is no accident or afterthought: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiri-

tual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the very foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:3-4).

So what does the LORD’s work mean for Joshua? What does it mean for the twelve tribes? What does it mean for the disciples? What does it mean for you? It means being chosen by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who sent his Son to be your salvation, the promise fulfilled. It means receiving that gift by a faith that is his work alone. It means living a confession that looks like these words: As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD, the LORD, who is the true God. It means confessing with our lips and lives that we follow none other than the LORD. He is our Savior who came after us and rescued us on the cross.

Kyle Castens

## Proper 16 • Isaiah 29:11–19 • August 26, 2012

### Textual Considerations

The text—God’s word to his people through the prophet Isaiah—contains a number of key words that point to significant concepts in Israel’s history.

The Hebrew word **צַר** (v. 16) is used in our text to refer to the activity of a potter. In Genesis 2:7 the verb describes the creation of “man.” “YHWH formed man of the dust of the earth.”

The Hebrew word **רָאָה**, translated by “fear” (v. 13), can have a “relationship” connotation. The people were attempting to gain a “relationship” with YHWH by following human “commandments”/“rules” (NIV).

The Hebrew word **הַפְּלִיאָה** (v. 14), translated by “wonderful things” in the ESV, is related to the term that refers to the plagues in Egypt (Exodus 3:20). The “wonderful things”/“plagues” were signs of both judgment and deliverance.

### Suggested Outline

We confess in the Creeds that we are members of Christ’s holy Christian church. As individual members of Christ’s church the words of our text confront us with a number of questions:

How significant in my life is the understanding that God created me, that he fashioned me in my mother’s womb? Am I living as though I created myself? Do I recognize that I am to be the caretaker of the body and life God has entrusted to me? Who/what determines my relationship to God? The standards of men or the standards of God? What I hear and learn from the internet? Facebook? Twitter? What role do the Ten Commandments/Words have in my life? Do I appreciate the benefits of Holy Baptism and the relationship the Holy Spirit has established between God and me?

The questions remind me that I continue to sin and stand in need of the Lord's forgiveness.

The words of our text comfort us with words of promise. The promise of peace and the opening of eyes in our text have been and will be fulfilled by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. The "sealed book" of the text has been replaced by the "open book" with the message of God's love revealed in Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and anticipated return. As one who was spiritually "blind" at birth I have experienced the Holy Spirit at work in me through the means of grace (word and sacraments). "I was blind and now I see." The Holy Spirit has opened my "deaf" ears to hear—and to believe—that I as a sinner have been tied in to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The promise of "peace" and source of "joy" are renewed by the very presence of our Lord in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. By the work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments I believe that Jesus Christ will return to claim me and all believers. He will invite us to experience his presence, "life without end." I anticipate being there with you.

Arthur F. Graudin

### **Proper 17 • Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9 • September 2, 2012**

#### **What does the Old Testament portrayal of Israel have to do with us followers of Jesus Christ?**

This question may well occur to hearers of this and similar Old Testament lessons. The fact is that when God through Moses addresses Old Testament Israel, he also speaks to us. By way of analogy think of one of C. S. Lewis's fantasy novels in which some children see a picture of a ship. The picture has marvelous powers, which draw the children into the ship and with it into the land of Narnia to which it is sailing. Now let this text of God's word draw us in and make us part of this picture here of God speaking to the people he had delivered from bondage and calling them to lives consecrated to him. That is the objective of this study and this sermon.

#### **Does this text, then, require Christians to keep all the statutes and rules of Moses, including the ceremonial laws?**

The followers of the Messiah in New Testament times are obligated to keep the moral requirements, not the ceremonial and political regulations which were given to the Israelite nation in the period before the Messianic Kingdom—e.g., Rom 13:9–10; Col 2:16–17; Mk 7:18–23 (the Gospel for the day); Mt 19:5–8. Disobedience to the moral commands is an "abomination" for people of all nations, and all need to hear a warning against bending or ignoring them and forgetting God (Dt 4:2, 9) through the perversity of the wayward heart (Mk 7:23). In the Deuteronomy 4 discourse Moses warns of God's wrath and punishment when the heart turns away from him (v. 27), urging the people to remember the sad results of the Baal worship and sexual immorality at Peor (v. 3; cf. Nm 25:1–9).



## **What is God's attitude toward his people?**

While he makes his demands and threats of wrath very clear, his people also know of his readiness to forgive the penitent, as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex 34:6). He wants to be known as Israel's God and to act as such (Dt 4:2ff; Ex 6:7), just as he was Abraham's God (Gn 17:7–8). He wants to be known as the deliverer of Israel—in the exodus and throughout Israel's communion with him, setting them free from their troubles, including sin (Ex 20:2; Dt 4:20; Ps 34:17; 8–9). He wants to continue to love them in the same way he loved Abraham and all the fathers (Dt 4:37–38; 7:7–8; Jer 31:3).

## **Is the Lord near to us as he was near to Israel?**

He was “near” to the faithful (Dt 4:7), accepting them in love and dwelling with them to benefit and help them (Lv 26:11–12). He was “near” to those broken-hearted over troubles and sins to give comfort and aid (Ps 34:18), “near” to those under assault from those who were “far” from him (Ps 119:150–51). Furthermore, he promised them a saving Messiah, who would be Immanuel, “God with us”—the ultimate in nearness (Is 7:14). This was Jesus, God with man in human flesh (Mt 1:23; Jn 1:14). He is indeed near to all who trust in him for salvation and spiritual restoration, who know him as the great deliverer and Savior (2 Tm 1:19; 1 Thes 1:10), who have met divine love in him (1 Jn 4:15–16, 19). He, with the Father and the Spirit, are near to us (Jn 14:16–17, 23), and abiding in him we can joyfully bear the fruit of obedience for which Deuteronomy 4 calls (Jn 15:5–11).

## **So is there a link between the Christian church and Israel?**

All who trust in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior are branches which have been grafted into the “olive tree” of Israel, God's people, while those who do not believe are broken off and must be called to believe and be grafted in (Rom 11:17–24). The believers are spiritually the children of Abraham (Gal 3:7–9) and can confidently rely on the promises given to Israel of deliverance and of God's love and nearness. God's dwelling with his people is a reality for them (2 Cor 6:16–17). This is a message and viewpoint which is a pleasure to pass on to our children. So where is faithful Israel now? In the hearts of believers in Christ (according to St. Paul).

## **Suggested Outline**

### **Christians and Israel**

Introduction: Why should Christian believers spend time on the words of this text about Old Testament Israel?

- I. We need to hear that the God who commanded Israel to obey also requires it of us
  - A. The righteous and just laws call for a right relation with God (v. 8)
  - B. Forgetfulness and disobedience toward God and His will deserve wrath (vv. 9, 23)

- II. We need to know that the God of Old Testament Israel is also our God
  - A. He is also near to us (v. 7)
  - B. We, too, have a wondrous heritage to transmit to coming generations (v. 9)

Thomas Manteufel

### Proper 18 • Isaiah 35:4–7a • September 9, 2012

Is this a great time to be the church? Do you have joy in your pastoral ministry? Do the baptized in your congregation show cheerful confidence in their Christian faith? Isaiah 35:4–7a, the first lesson for September 9, gives us a platform to be “helpers of joy” (2 Cor 1:24).

*You Lost Me* by David Kinnaman, based on Barna research, lists six reasons why 18 to 29 year-olds are disengaging from the institutional church. 1. Overprotective: “The church is seen as a creativity killer.” 2. Shallow: “Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults.” 3. Anti-science: “I knew from church that I couldn’t believe in both science and God, so that was it. I didn’t believe in God anymore.” 4. Repressive: “Religious rules—particularly sexual mores—feel stifling to the individualist mindset of young adults.” 5. Exclusive: “They have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus Christianity’s claims to exclusivity are a hard sell.” 6. Doubtless: “Young Christians (and former Christians too) say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts.”<sup>1</sup> *You Lost Me* and other books raise the question: Is this a bad time to be the church?

The text recalls us to the essence of faith, “a trust in the promise and mercy of God.”<sup>2</sup> The text promises that God will come with salvation for his people and vengeance upon our enemies. “Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you” (4b). The literary style adds to the impact of the promise because Isaiah spent chapter 34 detailing the bloody and total devastation of the nations. The evidence of salvation will be seen in the reversal of nature’s corruption by sin: the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, the mute will speak and the element of life, water, will be abundant in the wilderness (5–7a; cf. Rom 8:21–22; *LSB* 819). The Gospel for the day shows the fulfillment of these promises as Jesus heals a man deaf and mute. Those who saw it “were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak’” (Mk 7:31–37; cf. *LSB* 394). If your sermon spells out these promises of the saving coming of God, especially focusing on the promises in distinction from what we see, the Spirit of God will work and strengthen faith (2 Cor 5:7). Promise-fulfillment is not limited to the history of Isaiah and Jesus’s visible ministry. The Spirit works through the promises here and now: “The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped” (Introit, Psalm 28:7). And we haven’t done our duty unless 2 Corinthians 1:20 takes shape as the heart of our sermon: “All the promises of God find their yes in him (Jesus Christ). That is why it is through him that we

utter our Amen to God for his glory.” It’s a great time to be church and a great time to be in the ministry.

I would write the sermon with five paragraphs. 1. Is it a good time to be the church, citing evidence that seems to say “no.” 2. The sometimes beleaguered life of the church highlights the essence of faith, trust in the promises of God. At times that means trusting the promises against all the evidence. 3. The fantastic promises of the text call for faith, they are certainly not the things of sight. The nature of faith. Where do we center our trust today? In the ministry of Christ and his Spirit among us today. 4. The promises prompt us to radiate confidence and joyful courage. An illustration of faith despite external circumstances. 5. Yes, it’s a great time to be church because we put our confidence in the promises! I’d title the sermon “With Confidence and Cheerful Courage,” taking a quotation from C. F. W. Walther: “I wish to talk the Christian doctrine into your very heart, enabling you to come forward as living witnesses with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. I do not want you to be standing in your pulpits like lifeless statues, but to speak *with confidence and cheerful courage*, offering help where help is needed.”<sup>3</sup>

Dale A. Meyer

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 92, 93, 131.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 168, 337.

<sup>3</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible*, ed. Charles Schaum (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 9; cf. 458.

## Proper 19 • Isaiah 50:4–10 • September 16, 2012

Allow me a roundabout way to this text from Isaiah. Because I find today’s epistle lesson (James 3:1–12) to be a deeply incriminating word, especially to the preacher who, as Frederick Buechner so evocatively describes him,

pulls the little cord that turns on the lectern light and deals out his note cards like a riverboat gambler. The stakes have never been higher. Two minutes from now he may have lost his listeners completely to their own thoughts, but at this minute he has them in the palm of his hand. The silence in the shabby church is deafening because everybody is listening to it. Everybody is listening including himself.<sup>1</sup>

After and into that echoing silence, the preacher speaks. Yet, even before the first word, James warns us that “the tongue is a fire” (Jas 3:6). The word of James, a prophet as much as Isaiah is, incriminates me because if I think about all the fires my tongue may have ignited in between my last sermon and this one, the ruins may be too hard to bear.

Enter the third Servant Song of Isaiah: “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher” (v. 4). And what does the tongue of a teacher do? “...that I may sustain the weary with a word.” Indeed, this is the hope of every preacher: *to sustain the weary with a word*. Or, as the old homiletical cliché would have it: to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.

But what if the preacher is the weary one? Then, one of the other homiletical clichés still applies: the sermon must preach to me before it preaches to anyone else. Indeed, if what I preach doesn’t strike me to the core of my own being, how can I expect it to do the same in anyone who hears it?

Of course, the beauty of it, especially for the weary preacher, is that this work is never ours anyway. The Spirit of God gives the gift, in both the speaking and the hearing. The Spirit is the one that “wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (v. 4). Always.

And despite however highly we might think of our own vocations, we are not Isaiah’s “teacher” either. The third Servant Song famously doesn’t mention the word “servant,” but we should know by now that we don’t need to see the title to know who it is. The rose still smells as sweet.

I can think of innumerable times in the Gospels when Jesus’s teaching word sustained the weary. One of my personal favorites is the sermon that began with the words “Do not worry about your life . . . .” (Mt 6:25–34; Lk 12:22–32). Its word about flowers and birds has sustained me through too much weariness from the time I was young when my mother first showed it to me.

It is the constant reminder to me that, as the late singer-songwriter Rich Mullins sang it, “He will watch over you and he will watch over me / So we can dress like flowers and eat like birds.”

The beauty of preaching this text from Isaiah is that, perhaps, it is an opening for you to share the word from Christ that has meant the most to you, either over the years or even just yesterday. Which words from “the tongue of [the] teacher” still strike you to the core of your being?

Of course, we get a good word from Isaiah’s “teacher” in today’s Gospel (Mk 9:14–29), especially apropos in light of how Christ’s word enters into conflict with the words of other fiery tongues (Mk 9:14–16; cf. Is 50:7–8).

I love the incredulity in Jesus’s voice in verse 23: “If you can?!” But then comes the sustaining word, rippling like cool, clean water: “All things are possible for one who believes.”

Perhaps it goes without saying, but I’ll say it away: this same Jesus Christ who heals and restores the young boy, who preaches about flowers and birds, who does not hide his face from spitting (Is 50:6), and, yes, who is lifted up and able to stand over the grave of his own death by his Lord God, is the same one who gives us the honor and the privilege to pull that little cord on the pulpit light and speak a word—*his* word—into the silence. And we speak it among the people he has called and who have given us the humble honor of a call to speak to the weariness we all feel. And this same Christ gives us both the tongue to speak and the ears to hear. By his Spirit. As a gift. Always.

In response, our first words should be the words we pray to this same Lord God before we can even begin: “I believe. Help my unbelief.”

Travis J. Scholl

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 23.

## Proper 20 • Jeremiah 11:18–20 • September 23, 2012

### You Can Kill the Prophet, but You Can't Kill the Message.

The text gives a gloomy picture of what happens to God's prophets. Through Jeremiah, Yahweh has convicted Judah for breaking the covenant he made with their forefathers by turning to false idols and disobeying his word. The response? Men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, secretly plot against him. His enemies plan to slaughter, destroy, and cut him off from the land of the living so that his name, and the name of him who sent him, will be remembered no more.

The prophet had no idea he was being led like an innocent lamb to his own death. But it is finally the Lord himself who's got the prophet's back, upholds his servant, and ultimately vindicates him. Jeremiah commits his ministry, his cause, to the Lord. Yahweh vindicates his prophet by fulfilling his words of judgment against Judah. Along with his ministry, Jeremiah puts his life in the hands of the Lord, who alone judges righteously, trusting in his deliverance.

Was Jeremiah's name forgotten? Never. As the Panamanian salsa singer Rubén Blades once said concerning the life of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, a Salvadoran priest who was martyred by death squads as he celebrated mass for calling God's people to repentance in unpopular times, enemies who persecute God's spokesmen "*matan a la gente, pero no matan a la idea*" (i.e., "they kill the people, but they do not kill the message"). It matters little whether or not Jeremiah died at the hands of enemies later in life. Some prophets do; some don't. That's God's business. The message is what matters, not the remembrance of the prophets' own names per se but of the name of Yahweh to whom they bear witness.

### Jesus Dies a Prophet's Death to Save us from our Sins.

The lives of the prophets finally point to Christ's own life. As the church says in the liturgy of the word: "In many and various ways God spoke to his people of old by the prophets, but now in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1–2a). The Son is God's persecuted prophet. He dies because of what he says in the stead of the Father who sent him. The response? His enemies secretly plot against him. The Son is the servant who is led like a lamb to the slaughter to be cut off from the land of the living (Is 53:7–8). Sounds just like the cross of Jeremiah whose life points to Christ's own suffering for our sins. On the cross, the Son also puts his life and cause in the Father's hands. God the Father vindicates him from his enemies by raising him from the dead. Jesus dies on the cross because of what he says by divine authority, because he calls sinners to repentance and forgives sins. He does not only say he forgives sins but, unlike the prophets, he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29).

## **The Father Vindicates Jesus and his Message, the Lord Jesus will Do the Same for his Church.**

Now Jesus is our risen Lord. By raising him from the dead, the Father vindicates him and his message. As our Lord, Jesus has given his divine authority to the church and her ministers of the word today (modern day prophets, as it were) to speak on his authority and in his stead, to call people to repentance and make disciples baptizing in his name and teaching what he has commanded (Mt 28:18–20; cf. Lk 24:45–49). Whatever suffering this prophetic ministry brings, we can be sure that our Lord Jesus has our back and will vindicate us, and his message (“I am with you always...”).

## **The Blood of Jesus Sustains his Church.**

Jeremiah has a message of hope, too. Through death and resurrection, our Lord has fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophecy to Judah concerning the new covenant, remembering our sins no more as he gives his church today the blood of the new covenant in his Supper for the forgiveness of our sins (Jer 31:33–34, Heb 10:11–18).

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

## **Proper 21 • Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29 • September 30, 2012**

This narrative selection from Israel’s wilderness wanderings captures a gracious transformation. The story begins in poverty, but ends in abundance. It begins in memory, but ends in hope. It begins in physical need, but ends in spiritual gifts. This gracious transformation occurs when God speaks and Israel hears his words for them in the present moment.

As our text begins, we are immersed in memory: both the memory of the faithful reader and the memory of Israel. The faithful reader remembers Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. On that day, Israel looked in faith upon her present experience. She saw God’s strength and lifted her voice in a song of praise: “The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation” (Ex 15:2). Her song of faith closed with trust in God for the future (Ex 15:17–18).

Israel’s memory, however, differs from that of the faithful reader. Israel remembers her past in a way that is both selective and nostalgic. Her slavery, once recorded in detail, is gone and the food she once ate, remembered in detail, is suddenly free (v. 5). This selective memory transforms Israel. Instead of singing praise, she voices a lament (v. 4–6). Instead of celebrating God’s strength, she cries of her weakness (v. 6). And, when God gives her manna, rather than take and eat, she looks and laments (v. 6).

What we see in Israel is a spiritual disposition, the inability to see God’s present blessing because of a distorted memory of the past. In a sense, this sin is a variation of coveting. Rather than covet what someone else has in the present, Israel covets what she once had in the past. The end result, however, is the same. God’s present gifts are devalued because of the way one remembers the past. God gives Israel manna, yet she looks on it in sinful blindness and laments.

God's people today can still fall into this sin. Memories of the past can cause us to miss God's work in the present. These memories may be personal or communal. For example, memories of how the church used to be, the days when we put chairs in the aisles to accommodate all of the people, can cause God's people to no longer see his present blessing. Glory days of the past hide the glory that is present, hidden in our midst, as God speaks and forgives.

God's response to Israel's sin is one of judgment and grace. The judgment is edited out of our liturgical reading (vv. 18–23). When Israel cries over a lack of meat, God answers her with abundance, abundance so great that Israel is sickened by it. God's judgment invites Israel to see that faith is not a matter of things but a relationship. Faith is trust in the one who gives strength regardless of circumstances (Phil 4:11–13). To a people tempted by a prosperity gospel, measuring God by lack or abundance, this memory can still speak words of warning and guidance today.

While the judgment is hidden, the grace is apparent in our reading. God sees a deeper problem for Israel and Moses. It is not a need for physical food to satisfy their physical craving but a need for his word to shape their spiritual formation, bringing them to deeper trust in him. In response to this deeper need, God answers in abundance, an abundance of the Spirit and an abundance of prophets. Seventy elders gather around the tent of meeting and receive the Spirit, prophesying to the people. Not only that, but even in the camp, Eldad and Medad are prophesying. When confronted with this anomaly, Moses looks with hope to the future, longing for the day when the Spirit of God will be poured out upon all people.

This reading encourages meditation and proclamation upon the gracious, life-giving word of the Lord. Consider the narrative contrast. In the beginning, a word of grumbling came from the outskirts of the camp (v. 4) and perverted God's people, blinding them to God's present grace (v. 5). At the end, the word of God comes from the central place of God's speaking (the tent of meeting) to the farthest reaches of his people (the camp) and reveals his present work. God indeed provides: food for the weary, leadership for the lost, a life of trust in the present, and a vision of hope for the future (v. 29). No wonder that when this event is recalled in Deuteronomy God's people are encouraged to remember that "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8:3).

David Schmitt

### **Proper 22 • Genesis 2:18–25 • October 7, 2012**

There are many things that are basic in life. The basics are needed for a person to build on. Learning the ABCs is basic for education. Learning to boil water is a basic for culinary skills. And the great coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, brought his team back to basics when he said, "Gentlemen, this is a football."

Proper 22 is the first Sunday of the Church Militant period in the season of Pentecost. This is the time when the church remembers that, as we look forward to

Christ's return and the Church Triumphant, we remain in spiritual warfare against Satan, sin, and worldly ways. The battle that began in the Garden of Eden continues. What better way to enter this time of the church year than to remember that we need to get back to the basics, the basic relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another.

To be sure, this text speaks to marriage and God's plan for marriage between one man and one woman. As tempting as it might be to preach solely on marriage, or to use this as an opportunity to preach against gay marriage with the general elections on the horizon, I would suggest a different approach.

Genesis 2 shows us the picture of God's desire for his creation in the Garden of Eden. Everything was perfect as he intended. His desire was to have a perfect and harmonious relationship with creation, including humankind. However, that relationship was broken in Genesis 3 when both Adam and Eve disobeyed God, breaking that relationship. As sin entered the world, everything was turned on its head and was not the way God intended. Death, sickness, poverty, prejudice, and hunger became the new reality.

Sin affected the precious and sacred relationship between husband and wife, but it affected all other relationships as well. For instance sin corrupted relationships in the most basic form of governance—the family. How has sin changed the relationship between parents and children, and between siblings? Extending this out a further, how has sin affected relationships within local congregations, the family of God, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Christian church as a whole? And one more step, how has sin affected the Christian's relationship with non-Christians? Genesis 2:18–25 is an opportunity for the preacher to help the hearer get back to the basics and understand the importance of Christ-centered relationships as the church continues in spiritual warfare.

### Exegetical/Homiletical Thoughts

Verse 18: Could something actually be “not good,” i.e. “bad” in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall? This might be one of the questions in the mind of the contemporary Christian. Nothing “bad” has entered into God's creation at this point in the text. The question is from whose perspective is “not good” viewed? It is not Adam's perspective because nothing “bad” exists yet to which he can compare “bad” and “good,” thus “not good” does not mean “bad.” “Not good” must be seen from God's point of view after declaring days one through five “good.” This portion of Genesis 2 takes place later during the sixth day of creation. It fleshes out Genesis 1:24ff. In this context “not good” means “not yet complete.” “The skies without the luminaries and birds are incomplete. The seas without the fish are incomplete. Without mankind and land animals the earth is incomplete. As a matter of fact, every phenomenon in Genesis 1–2, God excepted, is in need of something else to complete it and to enable it to function.”<sup>1</sup> God alone makes the judgment that it is not suitable for Adam to be alone.

*bādad*, “alone” or “solitude.” This word can have a positive, negative, or neutral connotation. Positively, this word is used for God's uniqueness and incomparability. This word has a negative connotation when a human is abandoned by his or her community or by God. The preacher could use this as a gospel handle proclaiming Christ,



who alone is God and was abandoned and forsaken by the Father while on the cross. The preacher could develop the “relationship” aspect of this text using the Father’s (creator’s) relationship with his Son, and yet the Father values and desires to have a relationship with humankind once again. He treasures this so much that he sent Jesus to die—abandoned and in solitude—so that we might be rescued and restored into a right relationship with the creator and our Father.

“I will make” shows divine intentionality. There are no accidents with God! Every living person is a part of God’s plan. And “God don’t make no junk.”

*kaneyed*, “fit” or “that which is opposite, or corresponds” to Adam. In other words, God intended to make an appropriate helper for Adam. Eve would be like him, and yet different in some way. This is not a word of subordination, nor is this a title of superiority. Simply put, God knew that it was not good that Adam should be alone. He needed someone to stand with him, and Eve needed someone to stand with her. *kaneyed* is found in 2:20 as well.

Verse 22: The bridegroom waits. The first marriage takes place as God brings Eve down the aisle as the greatest pastor ever to perform the ceremony. This could be developed using the illustration of Christ the bridegroom and the Church as his bride.

Verse 23: The image here is not that of Adam standing on a rock, beating his chest like a caveman waiting to drag Eve into the cave by her hair. Unfortunately, there are husbands who think of their wives in this way and worse, treating them as property rather than as a gift from God. The opposite can be true as well, regarding some wives’ attitudes toward their husbands. The image in this verse is one of sheer joy as Adam receives his gift. Not only did Adam and Eve receive each other as a gift to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, but they also received God’s gift of “relationship.” Neither would live alone in solitude because God gave the gift of another human being.

### Suggested Sermon Direction

The preacher can develop a sermon based on the importance of relationship and our basic human need for relationships beginning with our relationship with Jesus Christ. The preacher could also bring in the importance of our relationship with Christ on the vertical level, and with one another on the horizontal level, as we live out our Christian faith during this time of spiritual warfare. We are to help one another and build up the body of Christ rather than tear relationships down. This might mean a call to repentance as the hearer examines his or her relationship with spouse, children, parents, and siblings. It might mean a call to repentance and forgiveness for some who are divorced and need to restore a relationship on a Christian level. The preacher can move the sermon into strained or broken relationships with fellow Christians, or groups within the congregation—obviously keeping it general and not naming names from the pulpit. Finally, the preacher could ask the hearer to examine his or her relationship with those at work or school, as well as with those in their circles who are not of the Christian faith. Getting back to basics with Christ at the center.

Michael J. Redeker

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1–17* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 175.

## Historical Context

Early in his rule Jeroboam ben Joash (793–753 BC) changed the political map of Israel. Through military conquests the territories east of the Jordan were recovered and annexed (Am 6:13), the northern border was extended to Lebo-Hamath, and the southern border was enlarged all the way to the Dead Sea (2 Kgs 14:25). The Northern Kingdom had reached the summit of its material power, the height of its economic prosperity, and the pinnacle of its territorial expansion. Though everything looked great on the outside, Amos saw that the inside was rotten to the core. And the prophet could smell it from as far away as his home town of Tekoa.

## Comments on the Text

The sermon’s focus is upon Amos 5:10–15, thus the comments only involve these verses.

Verse 10: The hymn of Amos 5:8–9 extols Yahweh as the God who changes seasons, days and nights, and sea and water. He also turns strongholds into rubble. This is bracketed by Amos’ description of people who resist change and who refuse to repent. They go to Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal (Am 5:5) only to destroy justice and righteousness (Am 5:7).

Amos 5:10 begins with a third person plural verb, “they hate” (שׂוֹנְאִים). Perhaps, for a brief moment, the prophet’s audience was tempted to think, “Very well, Amos is finally addressing *those* people. It’s about time!” But in Amos 5:11 he changes to the second person plural verbs, “you all.” The “they” become “you,” and as a result Amos becomes one of the reprovers in the gate whom the judges hate.

Verse 11: The “poor” (עֲלֵי) in this verse are likened to “small Jacob” (Am 7:2, 5) who also are called “the needy” (Am 2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4, 6), “the oppressed” (Am 2:7; 8:4), and “the righteous” (Am 2:6; 5:12). People in this group were being abused sexually (Am 2:7), fiscally (Am 2:8; 5:11), judicially (Am 5:10), spiritually (Am 2:12), and vocationally (Am 4:1; 5:11). This is the remnant of Joseph (Am 5:15).

The legal officials oppressing these people lived in houses of hewn/dressed stone which were extravagant, as witnessed by the fact that both David and Solomon used hewn stone for their dwellings (e.g., 1 Kgs 5:31; 6:36; 7:9, 11, 12). By paying taxes on what they harvested, the poor and needy were forced to finance the lifestyles of these judges with their expensive homes and valuable vineyards.

Verse 12: As a noun כֶּבֶד normally carries the meaning of a material gift that establishes an amicable relationship between offended parties (e.g., Ex 21:30). Amos, however, uses the word to show the perversion in this system, where the gift is given, not to the offended party but to the judge. In this context, then, the meaning of כֶּבֶד is something closer to “hush money.”

Verse 15: Instead of overturning and throwing down justice and righteousness (Am 5:7), the judges are called to rectify the dismal situation by “loving what is good” and “setting up justice in the gate,” which was where public business was transacted.

The noun שְׂאֲרִית, “remnant,” denotes what is left over after an enemy invasion. “Joseph’s leftovers” are Yahweh’s chief concern.

### Homiletical Development of the Sermon

Who likes leftovers? Not me! And so this makes the days right after Thanksgiving some of the most excruciating experiences of the year. First there are turkey sandwiches, then turkey soup, and then turkey casserole. Pretty soon turkey starts showing up in soufflés, burgers, and I’ve even been forced to eat turkey meatballs. Who likes leftovers? Not me!

Neither do the judges during the time of Amos (glean ideas from the textual notes above). “The remnant of Joseph” (Am 5:15) are the leftovers that no one cared about (from the notes above discuss the “poor” in the book of Amos).

Why does Amos call the down-and-outs “Joseph’s leftovers”? Joseph’s brothers cast him aside (cf. Gn 37). Joseph cried out in distress when his brothers threw him in the pit (Gn 42:21). While he wept, his brothers sat down and ate a meal (Gn 37:25). “Joseph,” therefore, symbolizes the oppressed people throughout the book of Amos.

All too often we treat people as worthless leftovers that we quickly discard and throw away. (Here announce the law).

But Yahweh loves leftovers! The Bible is full of people who are rejected, e.g., Hagar, Hannah, Elijah, Zacchaeus, all whom God deeply loved. Jesus was also despised and rejected by men (Is 53:3). He was mocked by the crowd, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, forsaken by the ten, unjustly accused in a kangaroo court, sentenced to death by a weak-willed Roman governor, crowned with thorns by those who spat upon him, and scourged by muscle-men just short of death. But the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Ps 118:22). God loves leftovers. God loves us!

Motivated by Christ’s love, we care for those among us who are the least, the lost, and the last. While so many dismiss these kinds of people, we will feed them, clothe them, and bring them the gospel. We love leftovers!

Reed Lessing

### Proper 24 • Ecclesiastes 5:10–20 (Mt 5:9–19) • October 21, 2012

#### Textual Notes (using English Bible versification)

One of the challenging issues in translation occurs in verse 10, the first verse of the appointed reading. The second line reads, literally, “And whoever loves abundance, not revenue (or income)—also this is vanity.” James Bollhagen suggests that since the particle לֹא normally negates a verb, one should repeat the verb from the prior clause.<sup>1</sup> He translates, “And whoever loves wealth [will] not [be satisfied] with his proceeds.”<sup>2</sup>

In verses 13 and 16, the Preacher employs the Qal active participle of the verb “to be weak, sick” (חָלַהּ) to modify the evil that he is describing. ESV and RSV both

render this participle, “grievous.” Perhaps a gloss such as “debilitating” or “weakening” might also capture the meaning; Bollhagen translates it as “pathetic.”<sup>3</sup>

As the brief comments below will suggest, the noun “lot, portion” in verses 18 and 19, especially in combination with the truth that “God gives” such a portion, is a key to the meaning of this reading. Although in other contexts one could presumably choose one’s own portion, it is not the case here. The reading teaches that God is the one who allots a portion to men and women, and that life should be lived in that profound truth.

## Structure

The text evidently can be divided into two sections. Verses 10–17 describe the vanity and debilitating evil that arises from loving money (v. 10) and from the fact that one has no ultimate control over whether accumulated wealth will last or even benefit one’s own family. Although any attempt to structure this proverb-like teaching might be an over-reading of the text, perhaps verse 10’s truth that wealth ultimately cannot satisfy is explicated by verses 11–12. In turn, the fact that the future use of wealth cannot be controlled or determined (v. 13) may be extended and expounded in the images of verses 14–17.

The second section (vv. 18–20) offers a remarkably different tone and message from the first one. Bollhagen treats verses 18–29 as an important summary of the book’s theme to this point,<sup>4</sup> and Franz Delitzsch describes it as an interruption that offers the ultimate alternative to “the sad evils that cling to wealth.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the key thought in these verses is the double notion that God’s human creatures, and especially those who are his children by faith, must regard their lives and their creaturely possessions as nothing other than the “lot” or “portion” that God himself gives to them. This perspective will enable God’s people to avoid the vanity and debilitating evils that arise from the love of money and the inordinate longing for material success.

## Theology

It would be fairly easy to turn the teaching of this lection into a sort of moralistic admonition to safe, prudent living. And, to be sure, such a turn would not be completely unrelated to the message of the reading. Money doesn’t satisfy. Don’t pour your water into a leaky vessel. Stop and smell the roses; enjoy life each day, as God gives it to you, and leave the rest to him. Such a reading would underscore the fact (which is true enough) that the wisdom literature of ancient Israel shares themes with wisdom sayings both ancient and modern. At the risk of dating myself, “I don’t care too much for money; money can’t buy me love.” It’s a truth that a lot of people know, just by reflecting on life.

To be satisfied with such a reading, however, would neglect the truth that Ecclesiastes belongs to the wisdom literature of *Israel*, and so therefore is also Scripture for *the Christian church*, and that all Christian Scriptures must be read in light of the God of Israel’s revelation of himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In light of the gra-

cious covenant that God made with Israel then, and of the eschatological and gracious new covenant that God has made with new Israel in Jesus now, this lection teaches about the utter folly of making second things first. Here Solomon invites us to live in the knowledge of the God who has our times in his hands and who, for Jesus's sake, will not let us go.

Possessions have no *ultimate* value. Yes, this truth can be ignored for a long time, especially if a person accumulates considerable wealth and is also blessed with good health. Nevertheless, how urgently we all need to call into question many assumptions of our culture that lead us into unthinking pursuits of better clothes, nicer cars, larger homes, better technology, whatever. You start life naked; if you die before the return of the Lord, you will go out of the world naked. Possessions were ever and always intended to be seen and received as gifts of a giver, and to direct our attention to him. When you use a hammer to try to turn a screw, you'll do damage. If you love silver and set your hopes and hitch your value to material success, this is a pathetic, debilitating evil—not least to your neighbor, who needs you to be better than that.

Yet we are physical beings; we need a certain amount of possessions, and food is a good thing. So the text is not a call to asceticism or to denial of the physical. Rather, it is a call to faith and to the acknowledgement that, ultimately, what I have in life is my portion which God has allotted to me. This faith is rooted in the Christ who taught that God provides for non-laboring lilies and sparrows that make no investments for the future (Mt 6).

And there is work to be done, in God and in Christ! Seen in this light, our work can be satisfying because it serves a greater end and is done for a greater purpose than to amass stuff. When daily toil and material accumulation are thus “demoted” to their proper place, there is joy in them each day; our “daily bread” becomes a means through which we give thanks to God the Father and find contentment in Christ.

None of this sounds all that radical. The preacher, however, will search for applications for himself and his congregation that may very well strike at the root of things. Sell that expensive car and get out from under payments that are stressing life and the family. Stop pursuing whatever the next thing is that comes along through my smart phone or my computer that promises to entertain us. Slow down. Ponder what it is to be a creature whose needs are met by a loving Father. Look our culture in the eye, and tell it, “no.” Long for what God is doing in Christ, for you and for the world. Seek first the reign of God, and his putting the world to rights, and all these things will be added unto you.

Jeffrey Gibbs

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> James Bollhagen, *Ecclesiastes* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 199.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Friedrich and Franz Julius Keil Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 6:301–304.

### Christ Alone

Three angels (14:6, 8, 9). Three announcements of judgment. And, at the end of the chapter, the sickle is put to the grapevines, the great winepress of God overflows, and the blood of the condemned flows for 1600 *stadia*. Not a text that one would typically use for a lesson aimed at the 3-year-old Sunday school class, nor likely on the cover of this week's Sunday bulletin, nor, I suspect, the first choice for preachers on the day of the celebration of the gospel. Chapters 12–14 of Revelation intervene between two descriptions of seven “wraths” poured out on the earth. There are two (and only two) groups of people in this chapter: the 144,000 “on Mt. Zion” who have been “redeemed” (14:1–5), further described as the “saints” who “keep faith in Jesus” (14:12–13); the other group are those “on the earth.” These have polluted themselves with wickedness and worshipped what is not God (14:8–12). For them, God's eternal gospel is not “good news,” for it warns of their impending destruction by the God whom they have rejected (14:14–20).

The most problematic phrase in this text, to our Lutheran ears, is *ἔχοντα εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον εὐαγγελίσαι* (14:6). How can this message, one of impending judgment and destruction, be “good news”? This *εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον*, however, encompasses more than the proclamation of Christ's victory; it is the grand narrative of God's dealing with humanity, centered in Christ, which brings “good news” to the elect but always includes consequences for those who reject Christ. To those who hear his call, indeed it is good news. But those who do not hear are under condemnation. To them, the “eternal gospel” is not “good news,” but the announcement that the time for repentance has ended. Indeed, there is no room for repentance in chapter 14; angel follows angel with unyielding fury; the cry “fallen” in 14:8 comes hard upon what seems to be a call to repentance in 14:7, the pronouncement of the verdict in 14:9–11 without a pause of breath.

Your congregation of friendly, pleasant people will not like this message. For it is a message that leaves no middle ground. The apostle leaves no wiggle room, no third category of people who are nice but don't quite believe in Jesus. This sounds harsh, judgmental, unnecessarily divisive, especially as the rhetoric of a hard-fought national election reaches its lowest, angry tones. Is the church just another voice that speaks a word of hatred and division, of us vs. them, of apocalyptic fervor designed solely to rally the faithful? No, the grand narrative of God's working in Christ assumes that something is broken. Something is in need of restoration. We ourselves groan, and the creation groans with us, as we await that day when God redeems his work. That redemption happens only in Christ Jesus, and apart from him is only separation and condemnation. In Revelation 14, it is too late. The sickle is about to be sent into the fields.

For those gathered around the word this day, it is not yet too late; the night has not yet come. And so there is still time. This text might drive us into three Spirit-led responses. First when confronted with the unmistakable signs of the approaching end of the age and we wonder about where we will stand in the judgment—when we ask

“Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24), where is our confidence? Solely in Christ Jesus our Lord. A second response is to turn from sin. When confronted with the unmistakable signs of the approaching end of the age, where is our work focused? On “walking” as children of the light (Rom 13:11–13), putting off the works of darkness (note that the list of the works of darkness in Romans 13 and the evil deeds of the nations in Revelation 14 are virtually identical). Third, when confronted with the unmistakable signs of the approaching end of the age, where is our work focused? On making Christ known to the nations while it is still day (Jn 9:4–5), who is the light of the world, the only one who can deliver from the coming wrath. The angels have not yet come; the gospel is still finding its way in the world through the church.

All this drives us to Christ. “Where is the justice?” some might cry upon hearing this text; “how can a merciful God do these terrible things?” The justice is placed on Christ; the wrath has been poured out on him. The mercy of God is to be found in Christ alone. *Solus Christus!* cried the sixteenth-century reformers. This is always our cry, in and to a world lost in itself.

Jeffrey Kloha

### **All Saints’ Day • Revelation 7:2–17 • November 4, 2012**

Opportunities to preach on the Apocalypse are rare enough, but when presented with a text as powerful and beautiful as this, one should not pass it up. Not only is the imagery rich and vivid, but the gospel impact of the text is overwhelming.

Deftly employing potent rhetorical tools, the narrative of the text intentionally pulls the reader along until at last he arrives at one of the most exquisite gospel declarations in the canon. Two rhetorical moves particularly assert themselves: the laborious accounting of the sealing process in verses 5–8 seems at first blush to be some tedious Johannine “Hebraism”; a careful oral reading, though, reveals the force of absolute completion. “Twelve thousand...twelve thousand...twelve thousand”: twelve thousand times twelve—144,000. None are missed. None are left out. The full number is sealed. And then to sharpen the tension before the breathtaking revelation, the odd seemingly inappropriate question—the heavenly resident queries the overwhelmed seer, only to answer his own question. Who are these in the white robes? The elder knows. The angels know. The Lord knows. And even John must know, but wants to be told to be sure. (Is that not how the gospel’s delivery always must work?) Those in white are the saints...they are you and me.

The description of these blessed saints—the full number of all those once sealed at the font, and now glorified at the eschaton is particularly rich in details, some altogether strange and surprising to the unsuspecting. Robes tattered, torn, and horribly defiled by life in the tribulation are plunged into the bloodbath of the Lamb’s blood and removed dazzling white. And that same lamb now living and exalted serves as shepherd for the gathered saints who drink from the springs of the water of life and find complete nourishment and protection in God’s tabernacle. The Davidic utopia

from the psalm we number “23” finds its perfect consummation. Blood that cleanses, a lamb that shepherds, and finally a God who is as tender as a doting parent: surprising indeed is the reality experienced by these saints.

There are two more points worth noting. First, in spite of all the joy and grandeur of this picture of the eschatological fulfillment, there is a great tribulation. After the baptismal sealing, and before the Judgment Day raising (in both instances, it is wonderful to consider God’s monergism taking hold of his lifeless creature and delivering grace!), is a life in the tribulation—not the least of which is experienced in the internal battle between old and new man. Life in the tribulation is not easy. It hurts. Tears result. The struggle, the agony of life in the tribulation, must not be minimized. Next, notice (and relish!) the move from the endless, uncountable crowd to the tender individual attention of every tear being gently wiped away from every saint’s eye by God himself. The Christian life begins and ends personally and individually with God’s call (into faith and out of the grave). And it is to you, the single Christian, that God comes to wipe from your eye the last tear—the final remnant of life in the tribulation: glorious gospel, indeed. Yet, you never live in isolation. By God’s work, you are part of the grand crowd that cannot be numbered, singing and celebrating in an unimaginably spectacular and delightfully deafening chorus. Universal and sweepingly complete, yet individual and intimately particular: that is the way it is in God’s kingdom.

### Suggested Outline

“Part of the Crowd”

Introduction: Parents warn children not to “go along with the crowd.”

- I. The world’s crowd
  - A. We must resist this crowd—this is “living in the tribulation”
  - B. The challenge is also internal—we fight the old man
  - C. We are fouled and defiled
    1. by the filth of the surrounding environment
    2. by our own falling and failing
- II. God’s crowd
  - A. God calls you in (baptism) and keeps you in
  - B. God brings you to the final fulfillment described by John
  - C. This is *your* future—don’t let the present reality of tribulation diminish the fact

Conclusion: Tribulation is only for a while; life with the Lamb is forever. The last tear will be wiped away.

Joel Biermann



# BOOK REVIEWS

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**PRIMERA CARTA A LOS CORINTIOS: Consejos para una congregación en crisis** [First Epistle to the Corinthians, Counsel for a Congregation in Crisis]. By Rodolfo Blank. St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, 2010. 556 pages. Hardcover. \$29.99.

With *A los corintios* Dr. Rudolph Blank adds another practical yet scholarly commentary to resource libraries of the Spanish-speaking pastor and scholar. Having previously published pastoral commentaries on the Psalms<sup>1</sup> and the Gospel according to John<sup>2</sup> as well as a Spanish language *Teología y misión en América Latina* [Theology and Missions in Latin America]<sup>3</sup> now generally used in seminary mission courses in Latin America and the United States, Blank gives his readers a new and vibrant articulation of the gospel of Jesus Christ through this penetrating letter to a conflicted congregation in the middle of the Greco-Roman world. In speaking of the power of the gospel to that Christian community in the context of a world of economic, political, and religious elitism, this work is remarkably relevant as it roots out those same symptoms of sin still so powerful in our modern societies.

A second contribution of this work is the graphic description of the context of the religious, literary, and philosophic cultures of the first century. It analyzes the transformative nature of the gospel—how it is able to topple the destructive and immoral pagan practices so blatantly obvious then and now. A particularly important contribution of this work

is Dr. Blank's delicate explanations of openly immoral practices in a way that the reader can understand and appreciate the power of the gospel.

The work is replete with its treatment of burning themes that confront the Christian church in Latin America and among Hispanic Americans today. It speaks of theologies of liberation, gifts of the Spirit, homosexuality, the office of the ministry, and the role of women in the church. They are treated with a profound consideration of their impact on the original context of Corinth.

As in his other works, Dr. Blank is always the teacher of the worshipping church, openly identifying specific biblical texts as to their appropriate appointments within the church year as well as the way in which particular texts have been treated by Luther and Reformation writers in the Lutheran Confessional context. It does not take many pages to convince the reader of the author's passion to proclaim the gospel. This commentary will, without a doubt, embolden the serious biblical student to realize she/he is being called to carry on the joyful message of the resurrected Lord.

Douglas R. Groll

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rodolfo H. Blank, *Salmos una ventana al Antiguo Testamento y al Mesías* [Psalms: A Window to the Old Testament and the Messiah] (St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Rodolfo H. Blank, *El evangelio según Juan* [The Gospel According to John] (St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Rodolfo Blank, *Teología y misión en América Latina* [Theology and Mission in Latin America] (St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, 1996).

**HISPANIC MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY** [El Ministerio Hispano En El Siglo XXI] Edited by Hosffman Ospino. Miami: Convivium Press, 2010. 445 pages. Paper. \$22.99.

**LATINO CATHOLICISM: Transformation in America's Largest Church.** By Timothy Matovina. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. 328 pages. Hardcover. \$29.95.

A good deal of this special edition of the *Concordia Journal* commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Center For Hispanic Studies (formerly Hispanic Institute of Theology) has to do with looking around, attempting to place Hispanic ministry in our Lutheran context in the wider context of Christian ministry and, to a more specific degree, Hispanic Christian ministry and theologies in the United States. The bibliographies of articles refer to the panorama of Lutheran, General Protestant, and Roman Catholic authors. Two works in particular lead our readers into an in depth look at current Roman Catholic attitudes, institutions, and organizational strategies for carrying out its Hispanic ministry in the United States. They are valuable for our consideration simply because the Roman Catholic experience in Hispanic ministry bridges centuries, while ours covers decades, their Hispanic membership in the United States embraces millions while ours touches thousands, and their reflection and analysis about their ministries have invited the attention of dozens of their best scholars from many teaching institutions and administrative units while we have not had such fiscal, manpower, or intellectual resources. Thus, we stand to gain in our

Hispanic ministries as we look through their eyes to their successes and failures of the past and their visions of the future.

*Hispanic Ministry In the 21st Century* [El Ministerio Hispano En El Siglo XXI] is important from three points of view. First of all, it is a reflection of the seriousness with which the Roman communion takes Hispanic ministry in the United States. Sixty-two scholar-specialists in Roman Catholic Hispanic ministry were brought to Boston in 2009 precisely to give summary and project vision for future ministry. It is important to note that their efforts were underwritten by a collaboration of Roman Catholic universities, study centers, religious publishers, and diocesan religious leaders. The actual book is a reproduction of the major presentations by eight men and women, who in turn were speaking out of committee reflections of the larger group. Secondly, it is important because the entire literary work is presented in both Spanish and English. In this respect it reflects a recurrent theme by many authors that Hispanic ministry belongs to the whole church in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural context and not to select ethnic specific interest groups. Their reflections are here for all to see. Finally, the work is important because its content is sufficiently rich in historic, analytic, and statistical data, that it moves strategic reflection away from missiological good intentions with an accompanying "wish and a prayer" into actual real time questions that must be debated and answered on the basis of the best studies, manpower, and resources available.

Content themes considered throughout the summary work are; Evangelization and Faith Formation, Hispanic Ministry and Theology,

Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Liturgy and Spirituality, and Social Justice. In all of these major categories the reader can detect recurring subthemes that in turn color each specific ministry. These include: Hispanic Immigration, Ethnic Identity vs. American Assimilation, Historic Liturgy and Popular Religion, Deteriorating Fiscal Resources, and Unresponsive Ecclesiastical Administrative Units. In general the work is sufficiently documented to validate statistical or historic assertions, realizing that the first intent of the authors was to present in a symposium context.

*Latino Catholicism: Transformation In America's Largest Church*, by Notre Dame theologian Timothy Matovina, is a superb, almost encyclopedic study of the Hispanic church in the United States as it is today. Published in 2012, it builds on his previous works, such as *¡Presente! U.S. Latino Catholics from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), and in a sense puts more content to some of the same themes contained in the previously reviewed book. In fact, his introductory chapter is in some sense a summary and amplification of his contribution to the Boston 2009 symposium. In this fine work the reader will see Matovina almost layering in levels of documentation to present histories, statistics, and challenges. He seems to master the administrative nomenclature of North American Catholicism, down to the abbreviations of each administrative unit much the same way that Lutherans glibly speak of the LCMS, ELCA, WELS, LWML, COP, or the LLL. The work's bibliography is a "Who's Who?" of Hispanic American Catholic theologians but not very inclusive of prominent

Protestant Hispanics. However, the nature of the book itself might preclude such an accounting. We might add that though thoroughly Roman in his definition of the church, his treatment of evangelical and Pentecostal mission movements among U.S. Hispanics is quite positive. The author speaks highly of their caring, participative, community building thrusts in ministry.

From this reviewer's point of view, built on many years of Hispanic ministry in pastoral, administrative, and educational roles, Lutheran churchmen and women, theologians, mission executives, and local parish leaders could profit from Matovina's study as he highlights challenges and possible benefits inherent in the following areas:

1. Churches must seriously consider the tension between maintaining ethnic identity for the sake of evangelism and ministry over against the constant American pressure toward assimilation and the development of a sense of the church universal.

2. The sense of the totality of spirituality (see my article "Margins" in this *Concordia Journal*) that Hispanic Christianity brings to North American Christianity might be a needed brake to rampant secularization of American churches in general.

3. Ministry to and with Hispanic Christians in the United States might face decreasing resources and even opposition from anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic economic and political voices within American churches.

4. Denominational judicatories must plan strategically on urban, regional, and national levels. Hispanic ministry cannot be left only to local initiative.

5. As denominational resources and coordination of Hispanic ministries decline, the stability of educational institutions (i.e. universities and seminaries) becomes more important.

6. An ongoing study of Hispanic popular religion is a needed living laboratory that can help churches in general look at the relationship between Christian faith and public and private cultures.

Latino Catholicism is a must for working one's way into an understanding of the faith expression of more than 50 million Hispanic neighbors, as well as a useful tool of evaluating and bettering our own mission dreams.

Douglas R. Groll

**TEOLOGÍA DE LA SANTIFICACIÓN: La espiritualidad del Cristiano** [Theology of Sanctification]. By Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, forthcoming. Paper. \$12.99.

Lutherans have often been misjudged for emphasizing the doctrine of justification at the expense of the doctrine of sanctification. Luther has also been accused of not keeping at the center of his theology the doctrine of sanctification. Also, in lieu of the sign of the times, the doctrine of sanctification is seen by many in the twenty-first century as irrelevant for not showing us a concrete way of living today a sanctified life. Leopoldo Sánchez will engage the reader in clarifying all these misconceptions in his new book *Teología de la santificación: La espiritualidad del cristiano*. He has provided for our contemporary church a concrete and dynamic understanding of how the doctrine of sanctification is central to our

Christian lives. He has accomplished this task through a clear engagement of the Lutheran theological and biblical tradition for our times. At the center of his arguments is the place and function of the Holy Spirit in service to the mission of Christ, which then shapes our view of the place of the Spirit in his body, the church. He accomplishes his task by dividing the book into three parts.

The first part engages the reader in understanding the doctrine of sanctification in light of our Christian vocation and life of prayer (Chapter 1). He also engages the reader in the evangelical dimension of the doctrine of sanctification in this first part by connecting the doctrine to the doctrine of justification. Here he explains sanctification both as a gift from God and as our Christian responsibility before our neighbor (Chapter 2).

In part two, Dr. Sánchez, offers three concrete models of the sanctified life. The first model is inspired by Romans 6 and Luther's baptismal theology where the Christian life is a daily dying and rising in Christ (Chapter 3). The second model is seen in light of a living drama between the believer in constant battle with Satan and evil. Here he draws inspiration from Jesus's temptation in the desert and from Luther's experience of the Christian life as *tentatio*, *Anfechtung* (Chapter 4). In this chapter we are engaged in how the Holy Scriptures and prayer empower us in this living drama against the devil's attacks. The third model is the eucharistic one, the life of "sacrifice and service." Here Sánchez reflects on the importance of Holy Communion for a communal life of service and evangelization in the world (Chapter 5).

The third part of the book gives flesh and bone to the doctrine of sanctification. Professor Sánchez engages contemporary themes for our sanctified life. Among them he engages the challenges of theodicy, poverty, and humanization in light of a doctrine of sanctification, which draws profoundly on Luther's theology of the cross and the two kinds of righteousness (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 engages the reader in the appropriation of a life of prayer toward a sanctified life. In this chapter the author proposes a more person-oriented Trinitarian understanding and use of prayer for the life of the church. He connects Christology to ecclesiology by grounding the church's prayer in the prayer life of Jesus as Son of the Father in the Spirit. Prayer is about sonship. Here Dr. Sánchez moves beyond views of prayer espoused in classical theism (being transcendent) and open theism (being immanent), which render prayer either unnecessary or a burden. The sanctified life of prayer is an authentic Spirit-led participation through Christ and by God's grace in the Trinitarian life.

In Sánchez's work, the sanctified life that is grounded in biblical narrative and the Lutheran tradition points ultimately not to individual holiness, but to the need of others. Prayer is a reflection of how to live as sons of God not just for us but for our neighbor in the church and the world. Last but not least, the last chapter (Chapter 8) appropriately returns to the themes of vocation and prayer as important exercises of our sanctified life against our egotistical individualism and work-alcoholism. Here he reflects on postmodernism in light of Luther, Latino/Hispanic theologians,

and a Christology from below to construct a communitarian understanding of a sanctified life under the Spirit. In this manner he corrects the relativism of our age, which attempts to destroy our life as the church, the community of the faithful, the People of God. Whoever reads this book will learn how much Lutherans really do contribute to the whole Christian church on the theology and practice of sanctification.

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**VASOS DE BARRO: Antropología Cristiana** [Jars of Clay]. By Eric Moeller. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012. 144 pages. Paper. \$12.99.

In the eighth psalm the psalmist asks: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" The answer we give to that question is called anthropology. The question of "What is man?" can be studied both from a biblical and a secular perspective. It is a question that has perplexed philosophers, both ancient and modern. Our old dogmatic textbooks all contain a section on biblical anthropology that treats the doctrine of man. Almost every university includes in courses on cultural anthropology, the study of man from the perspective of the social sciences. Over the past hundred years the clashes and conflicts between biblical theologians and cultural anthropologists have been both frequent and furious. This makes all the more welcome the new book, *Vasos de Barro* [Jars of Clay]. On the basis of a profound and provocative study of the Scriptures, the Lutheran

Confessions, and the findings of cultural anthropology, Dr. Eric Moeller has given Spanish-speaking Lutherans a much needed resource for understanding ourselves and others as human beings, created by God and given a special place and purpose in the ordering of his universe.

It would be difficult to find an author better qualified to produce such a book than Dr. Moeller, who has had experience serving as pastor, professor of theology, cultural anthropologist, and as an LCMS missionary working among the Cuna people of Panama. In this finely crafted book Moeller has produced a resource that helps us understand who we are as creatures fashioned in image of God and sent to live our lives in the midst of a highly complex and confused mix of societies, cultures, and religious traditions. We are grateful that Concordia Publishing House has made this resource available not only to pastors, teachers and professors of theology, but to Spanish-speaking Christians around the world.

The book's title, *Vasos de Barro*, is the key to understanding its content. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 St. Paul likens human beings to fragile jars of clay replete with all manner of weaknesses and faults, unable to realize by themselves the divine mission given to them by the creator in Genesis. Nevertheless, the creator has poured into these jars of clay the water of life so that they might bring the word of life to a world that has largely forgotten the reason for its existence. One of the most exciting features of *Vasos de Barro* is its missiological focus and its highlighting of the mission of the church as both part of and bearer of the good news. Consequently, such important themes as the image of God, the incarna-

tion, free will, the fall, conversion, and the three uses of the law are studied from a biblical, missiological, and confessional perspective. In the interplay of these perspectives, the author shows how each can reinforce, clarify, and broaden the understanding and the practice of church as it carries out its mission as God's people in the midst of the peoples. Rightly understood and applied, the principles of cultural anthropology do not have to be enemies of the faith, but, like the other sciences, they can be God-given insights into how humans interpret reality.

Studies such as *Vasos de Barro* can help Christian missionaries, educators, and pastors in the trans-cultural communication of the good news without falling into pitfalls of Gnosticism, Pelagianism, relativism, Nestorianism, Arianism, humanism, and other heresies both ancient and modern. In his analysis of these and other heresies, the author instructs the church on ways to avoid being misled by modern versions of these faulty ways of understanding human beings and their place in creation. In the past the problematic anthropologies of such "isms" have been studied as something to do with church history, and the history of doctrines, problems of the past that have little to say to us today. In *Vasos de Barro*, Dr. Moeller shows that when these movements and their interpretations are investigated from the perspective of the church's mission today, they become surprisingly relevant. In this light the reader learns that all over the globe supposedly forgotten anthropologies of the past have morphed and metastasized into foci of infection that threaten not only the life and the mission of the church but also the future of our planet.



In developing his major points, Dr. Moeller takes us back to Genesis to study the social, ecological, anthropological, and missiological implications of creation, the fall, the tower of Babel, and the call of Abraham. In rereading these Genesis accounts, the author is led to question the interpretations of thinkers like Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, John Wesley, Pelagius, Flacius, Saint Augustine, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Richard Dawkins, and others. In the process Moeller guides his readers in understanding the importance for missiology of issues such as the relationship between justification and sanctification, the situation of believers as both sinners and saints at the same time, and the proper understanding of law and gospel. Taking us into the New Testament, Dr. Moeller stresses that the question posed by the psalmist and the understanding of our future can never be understood or answered without recourse to the incar-

nation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Thanks to Eric Moeller, Spanish-speaking Lutheran missionaries, pastors, deaconesses, and teachers now have a reliable and practical resource to guide them in the carrying out the Great Commission in a manner that is faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, while at the same time respecting the cultures and traditions of the marvelous mosaic of peoples, tribes, ethnic groups, and races that accompanies the saints and angels gathered around the throne of the Lamb in praise and worship. My only quibble with *Vasos de Barro* is that it is too short. I put down the book wishing that the author had written several hundred pages more. Hopefully in the not too distant future that wish will be realized.

Rudolph Blank  
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