# CHAPTER 2

## POPULAR RELIGION AS A LOCUS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

The role of popular religion as a locus of epistemology within the Lutheran tradition is one that has required critical research and examination in light of the history and increasing presence of the Hispanic/Latina community in the church.[1] My purpose in examining this history and the role of popular religion in the faith transmission and expression of the people is threefold. The first is to examine how this process of the transmission and appropriation of religious ideas is characteristic of the process of transmission of religious ideas that occurred during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The second is to attempt to discern the value and significance of the role of popular religion in faith formation and transmission within the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community. The third is to attempt to see how this faith appropriation and expression as

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[1] In this section I am going to be following the lead of Hispanic/Latino theologians who have explored this area. At the Hispanic Theological Initiative's Fourth Annual Summer Workshop at Princeton Theological Seminary, Orlando Espín provided a very valuable explanation of popular religion as epistemology. He defined it as "the processes by and through which Latinos/as image the 'real' and construct knowledge (and, specifically, *theological* knowledge), why they do it those ways, and for whose benefit." He noted that the questions on epistemology have to be addressed precisely because culture assumes that there are indeed specific ways of imaging the "real" and of constructing knowledge that, in turn, shape and identify culture. He also claims that any study of epistemology will lead to some substantive questions on salvation, revelation, and so on, because these theological topics stand on how humans culturally understand and image what to them is real. Espín further understands epistemology to be broader and more inclusive, involving understanding, experiencing, and meaning-granting. It is dynamic and historical, with a past. It has to do with the root meaning of Tradition as the handing-on of experience. See Espín, "The State of U.S. Latino/a Theology: An Understanding," *Perspectivas, Hispanic Theological Initiative Occasional Paper Series* (Fall, 2000), 36-37; also idem, "A 'Multicultural' Church?" Theological Reflections from 'Below'," The Multicultural Church: A New Landscape in U.S. Theologies, ed. W. Cenkner (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 54-71, and "Popular Religion as an Epistemology (of Suffering)," *Journal of Hispanic Latino Theology* 2, no. 2 (1994): 55. This chapter is written with this inclusive notion of epistemology; that is, popular religion will be examined from the perspective of the historical experience and religious practices of the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community that express the appropriation of the reformation faith

mediated by its various popular forms and rituals has served to affirm the faith and cultural identity and expression of the Hispanic/Latina community. The way the community appropriates the faith tradition through the use of language, liturgical symbols, and religious practices, and the manner in which the people of God appropriate their identity as *imago Dei* in this dialectic of sacred encounter through the expression of their popular faith and devotion, is the subject of this chapter.

Because research and literature from the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran perspective is limited, I will provide a brief overview of the manner in which other faith traditions have interpreted this form of faith expression so as to have a comparative basis for an evaluation and definition of popular religion within the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina experience. For this purpose I will use the contributions of Orlando Espín, Sixto García and Juan José Huitrado-Hizo and the elements of epistemology that they define as critical for understanding the popular religiosity of the community. The language and symbols of the people are two primary elements. These are epistemological vessels that grant and convey meaning in the construction of knowledge. These two elements will be emphasized in the development of this chapter.

This review will lay the foundation for an analysis by empirical research of the practice of popular religion among four Lutheran Hispanic/Latina congregations in Texas. The focal point of this research is to attempt to discern how the practice of popular religion has operated as a subversive form of

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tradition in a way that is made uniquely their own, and that grant meaning, identity, and self-understanding as a people of God.

affirmation of the *imago Dei*; that is, the affirmation of the human dignity and cultural identity of the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community in light of the historical marginalization that was the result of the conquest of the Southwest with its correlative ideological effect of negation of cultural and human worth.[2] While the findings of this research will show some ambiguity in terms of the expression of self-understanding through the means of popular epistemology and the findings of Hispanic/Latina theologians, the medium of popular religion as epistemology serves as a resource for self-understanding. This medium reflects the historical legacy of a group of people on the margins of the Lutheran tradition.

## Popular Religion as a Subject for Theological Reflection

Popular religion is widespread in both Roman Catholic and Protestant contexts. By "popular," I mean that which is common to the experience of a people and independent of "official" sanction by ecclesiastical authorities. When used in Latin American contexts, "popular" generally refers to the poor, the majority class. When used in North American contexts, it generally refers to the majority middle class. In the context of this dissertation popular religion and popular religiosity will refer to the religious practices and self–understanding of the marginalized Hispanic/Latina community that may or may not have the official sanction of the religious specialists.

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[2] For an excellent review of this history, see Daisy L Machado, "A Borderlands Perspective" *Hidden Stories: Unveiling the History of the Latino Church,* ed. Daniel R. Rodríguez-Díaz and David Cortés-Fuentes (Decatur, GA.: Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana, 1994), 49-65. Idem, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands: The Church and Manifest Destiny"

According to Robert Schreiter, official religion can be defined as those prescribed beliefs and norms of an institution promulgated and monitored by a group of religious specialists.[3] He defines popular religion as those patterns of behavior and belief that somehow escape the control of the institutional specialists, existing alongside (and sometimes despite) the efforts at control of these specialists.[4] In his view popular religion is a deviation from a norm. The norm is understood to be a set of beliefs that then define a kind of practice. Popular religion in this sense has either alternative beliefs, or no clearly defined beliefs at all. He distinguishes popular from elite religion by identifying the latter as a cultural category that contrasts the more literate, verbal, and conceptually sophisticated approach of one group with the more illiterate, nonverbal, and often enthusiastic form of another ("lower") group.[5] It is also a social and economic category. The elite group will be identified with power and the control of resources, and the popular group will often be known simply as "the masses" of unlettered and disenfranchised people. Examples of popular religion include the religious activity of the illiterate majority in medieval and early modern Europe and the imported Iberian pre-Tridentine popular Catholicism that took root in Latin America and the American Southwest.[6]

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*Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 63-72.

[3] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 125.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 122-143. For the role and history of popular religion in the Hispanic Roman Catholic experience see Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997). For a view of popular religion as the form of faith of the

Popular religion has been a subject of serious theological reflection among the Hispanic/Latina community in its effort to formulate an Hispanic-American theology that reflects the lived experience of the people.[7] Writing from the Roman Catholic perspective, Orlando Espín and Sixto García argue that an Hispanic-American theology should reflect the multiethnic reality of the Hispanic-American world, the diversity of its social situations, and the cultural and religious pluralism present among Hispanic/Latinas.[8] They insist that this theology should equally take into consideration those elements that unite the vast majority of the Hispanic communities in the country: language, religion, values, and traditions, a minority[9] status in church and nation, and (especially!) the key role of popular

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dispossessed, see González, *Mañana*, 55-74; as a way in which the faith of its members becomes authenticated, see Alex García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres: The "Little Stories"and the Semiotics of Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 12-21. As a symbolic form of protest against the elite that excludes the practitioners, see Gustavo Benavides, "Resistance and Accommodation in Latin American Popular Religion," *An Enduring Flame: Studies on Latino Popular Religion*, ed. Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo and Ana María Díaz-Stevens (New York: Bildner Center Publications, 1994), 39.

[7] See Espín, *The Faith of the People.* In the foreword to the book, Roberto Goizueta indicates that the "pluriconfessionalism" so common in the Latino Roman Catholic and Protestant community is only possible where faith is understood as *fundamentally* a way of living or being, "*una manera de ser*," rather than fundamentally a way of thinking, "*una manera de pensar.*" He argues that if the Latino community resists the dominant culture's pressure to reduce faith to conceptual, rigidly dogmatic formulas, and if the community continues to value and affirm the centrality of Christian praxis in popular religion, a more effective model of Christian unity may be possible, one that is consonant with the people's way of living the faith.

[8] Orlando O. Espín and Sixto J. García, "Hispanic-American Theology" *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 42 (1987): 114.

[9] I understand the term "minority" to be a demographic misnomer in some parts of the country such as the Southwest because the Hispanic/Latina community is the majority in such cities as San Antonio, El Paso, East Los Angeles and the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas. However, as a hegemonic term it has been used to designate the marginal and peripheral status of the Hispanic/Latina community. It is a label that has been imposed upon the community by the dominant political ideology. This phenomenon is a direct corollary of the conquest of the Southwest that was the result of the ideology of Manifest Destiny. From among the very vast (and growing) bibliography on this point see, for example, González, *The Story of Christianity,* 2: 246-50; R. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); R. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); D. Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the*

religion or religiosity.[10] They argue that popular religiosity is one common element that emerges from the rich variety of the Hispanic-American world, as probably the least "Angloed"[11] area of any of the Hispanic-American cultures, and therefore the least "invaded" and thus more deeply "ours." Popular religiosity can be seen as a font of Hispanic-American world views and self-concepts. For

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*Making of, Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); M. Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979); and L. Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

[10] Espín and García, *Hispanic-American Theology*, 114 (emphasis theirs). Some scholars distinguish popular religiosity from popular religion. Espín understands popular religion to be a manifestation of popular Catholicism that is often interpreted by religious specialists as a deviation from the official norm of the church and that awaits catechesis to purify it. Others argue that popular religiosity is a more ample term that can be understood as the collective expression and consciousness of a people that (1) defines its relationship to the divine, (2) touches on all the essential elements of its experience, and (3) guides its choice of cultural direction. In this sense it is a proclamation by Hispanics/Latinas themselves that they have a right to exist as a people. See Juan José Huitrado-Rizo, M.C.C.J., "Hispanic Popular Religiosity: The Expression of a People Coming to Life, " *New Theology Review* 3, no. 4 (1990): 43-4. In the context of this dissertation the terms popular religion and popular religiosity, while distinguishable, are not mutually exclusive. They will be used interchangeably to denote this sense of insistence on cultural affirmation and direction and religious self-understanding that may be in tension with the official teachings, tradition and cultural expression of the Euro-American dominant church. This tension is part of the living experience of the people and is often the impetus for continual reformation within the Lutheran church. It is my contention that popular religiosity expresses the way in which the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community has appropriated the transmission of the faith tradition of the missionaries in light of their cultural self-understanding and expression of faith. It is the indigenization of the faith tradition. Popular religiosity as such is the ethos or religious sense of the people that guides their self-understanding and creates meaning for daily living. Espín and García make the point that it is essential that popular religion/religiosity be understood as a place of encounter with the sacred and a locus for Hispanic-American theology, because otherwise we would be condemning Hispanics to silence and continued second-class status within the Christian community. See Espín and García, *Hispanic-American Theology*, 114-5.

[11] The term "Anglo" refers specifically to persons of English ancestry. However, in this study, the terms "Anglo" and "Anglo-American" designates that group of North Americans with an Anglo-Saxon or northern European heritage. This terminology is inclusive of the German and Scandinavian communities whose Protestant heritage and Reformation tradition have contributed to the historical landscape of the United States. See Charles P. Lutz, ed., *Church Roots: Stories of Nine Immigrant Groups That Became The American Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985). It is interesting to note that the history of the Hispanic/Latina immigrant experience and contribution to the formation of the American Lutheran Church is not mentioned in this study. See, for example, T. Michael Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas* (Austin: LSPS, 1989). See also, William A. Flachmeier, *Lutherans of Texas in Confluence: With Emphasis on the Decade 1951-1961* (Austin: Southern District of the ALC, 1972), 87-8, 111-2.

these reasons (among others), it becomes the main source for a true Hispanic-American theology.[12]

For Espín and García, popular religiosity can be defined as the set of experiences, beliefs, and rituals that more-or-less peripheral human groups create, assume, and develop within concrete socio-cultural and historical contexts, and as a response to these contexts. Though these popular expressions of faith these groups distance themselves from the normative expressions of the church and society. Through these rituals, experiences, and beliefs they strive to find an access to God and salvation that they cannot find in the traditional rituals and belief systems considered normative by the church and society. This definition includes the main elements that are shared by both "popular Catholicism" and "marginal religions."[13] These include an authentic search for God and for efficacious salvation, the social vulnerability of the people and their peripheral status in church and society, and the transmission of "wisdom" and "theology" developed and accumulated in the course of many generations.[14]

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[12] Ibid., 114-5.

[13] Ibid., 115. The authors point out that the religious universe of Hispanic-Americans is *not* homogeneous, easily identifiable with the Roman Catholic tradition. It is complex and varied, even if we could classify the diversity in the two basic categories of "popular Catholicism" and "marginal religions." The first includes those elements more or less acceptable -- even if peripherally -- to the Catholic Church; and the second including those faith expressions which would be unacceptable at any level to the Catholic Church and which probably can be traced back to non-Christian origins. This second category would also cover the explicit non-Christian, Hispanic-Amerindian or Afro-Hispanic religions. See Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 122-43.

[14] Ibid. For Espín and García, no other element in the religious universe of Hispanic-American cultures offers such a wealth of perspectives and realities open to theological thematization: access and encounter with God through myth and symbol, "wisdom" religious stories, a sense of tradition, redemption, salvation and liturgical symbolism. It also represents a distance from and

Espín and García maintain that there are foundational issues for the theologian who attempts to understand the dynamics of popular religion as a locus of epistemology.[15] These include the faith experience of the people, wisdom, doctrine and revelation, ecclesiologies, and christologies, as well as the concepts of grace, salvation, and worship. As faith experiences both popular Catholicism and marginal religions communicate, albeit in different ways, a sense of authentic encounter with God, with the holy and the sacred. They use sacred symbols and sacred space to signify this encounter. Quite often the "sacredness" and commitment of their faith experience is uniquely vivid, enthusiastic, and immediate to them.[16] Popular religiosity often uses Christian

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challenge to the normative doctrinal and liturgical dimension of the official church and thereby offers the theologian a unique opportunity to revise and re-think traditional attitudes from the official church toward popular religiosity, mainly, contempt, neglect, and attempts to "purify it" from "unorthodox" elements rather than taking account of the prophetic challenge these popular religiosities often present to the normative liturgies and doctrines of the official church. By "official" church I understand Espín and García to mean the official teachings of the magisterium of the Roman Church.

[15] Roberto Goizueta indicates that the postmodern suspicion of all claims to epistemological objectivity and universality is giving us a renewed appreciation of the influence that the socio-historical context of the scholar has on his/her theoretical conclusions. He asserts that this renewed attention to the socio-historical context of the intellectual enterprise can engender a new openness to the voices of "the Other," that particular human voice which modernity has ignored. Blind to its own particularity and socio-historical context, modern Western thought became assumptively identified with universal truth. See Espín, *The Faith of the People*, xii. Espín concurs when he asserts that the theologian is always rooted in culture, class, etc., often with the biases, interests, world views, assumptions, etc., of his/her socio-cultural context, and that theological method, as a reasonable quest for truth, reflects this reality. The point these authors make is that awareness of this reality is required in order to avoid a repetition of pre-existing North-Atlantic ("Anglo") or Latin American models or, worse, a slide into religious demagoguery. See Espín and García, *Hispanic-American Theology*, 114. It is with this awareness in mind that I as a Latino Lutheran attempt to conduct this research even as I recognize that the tension of writing from the perspective of my social location is never fully resolved. My attempt is to obtain objective distance from my social location by examining the research and methodologies of other theologians and social scientists.

[16] Here the theologian faces the task of relating in a meaningful way the symbols of faith experiences and liturgical gatherings to the sacred symbols of the "popular Catholic" community. See Espín and García, *Hispanic-American Theology*, 116. By the "experience of the divine" Espín understands this to mean an encounter between a human being (or group) and some One that is strongly felt, undoubtedly experienced as near and as good, and which (however briefly)

symbols to express revealed doctrine or wisdom. Their groups have a "priest" or leader who functions as the depositary of this wisdom. Their praxis and tradition is transmitted orally or through popular-religious liturgical celebrations. Popular Catholicism has learned to "celebrate what it believes."[17] The authors point out that the wisdom transmitted by popular religious revelation theology seeks to provide meaning for life and suffering (unemployment, discrimination, family ruptures). It is salvation conceived in a "here and now" perspective, although the concept of "eternal salvation" is not necessarily absent from popular Catholicism.

In terms of ecclesiology, the task before the theologian is not confined to discern "models" of the church in popular religiosity, nor to theologize upon the particular "ecclesiology" of a popular-Catholic group. The crucial issue is to acknowledge the challenge that popular Catholicism presents to the church regarding its prophetic mission, and the need to re-think its language in terms of salvation, redemption, and renewal.[18] The theologian may well discover that the

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grants complete meaning and fulfillment to that human being's (or group's) life. See Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 92-3.

[17] Ibid., 117. Here the theologian has several opinions to consider. One is to develop a revelation theology that will allow members of popular-Catholic communities to see the church as a suitable place for the celebration and transmission of these truths. The theologian can accomplish this by bringing in the insights of popular religiosity to renew normative liturgy and normative/traditional revelation theology. Another is to accept such a popular-religious tradition of "salvific and revealed" truths as a valid alternative to the normative or traditional concepts. This will depend on the specific contents and form of transmission of such popular-religious tradition. The theologian ought to keep in mind that revelation overflows the phenomenology of the church and of the Christ-event, and that salvific, graced events take place in "non-orthodox" forms of Christianity as well as in non-Christian religions.

[18] Ibid. This is a point made by José David Rodríguez, Jr. when he argues for a more comprehensive and faithful understanding of our theological tradition by a re-reading of our theological principles from a Hispanic perspective. It is his contention that the witness of faith from this perspective helps the church to recover, not only those important elements that define our socio-historical reality, but also some central teachings of the Christian faith that make possible its continuous renewal and obedience to the gospel. See José David Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 107-22.

peripheral, popular-religious group may be closer to the gospel demands than the segment or community of the church in which he/she is situated. On the other hand, it may well happen that the theologian will decide that a properly formulated ecclesiology may better reflect the expression of "church" of a particular popular-religious group, or offer this group acceptable alternatives as far as expressing their own striving for meaning.[19]

For Christology the basic issue is the traditional Christian claim of the centrality, uniqueness, and universal decisiveness of the Christ-event and how the concept of redeeming mediator is understood by both constellations of popular religiosity. This is a significant question when one considers that within Hispanic-American popular religiosity the Christ-event stands simply alongside the cult of Mary or of the saints as just another religious expression. According to Espín and García the theologian may keep in mind two options: One is to remember that the mystery-reality of the Christ of God always overflows our conceptual and verbal expressions. The other option is to look at texts in the New Testament such as Lk. 4:18, where Jesus stands as the one anointed by the Spirit to proclaim "the good news to the poor, the liberation to the captives ... the year of grace of the Lord;" simply put, to prophetically focus on the marginalized and socially vulnerable groups to which many Hispanic-Americans belong.[20]

Concerning grace, salvation, and worship, Espín and García encourage the theologian to borrow Leonardo Boff's concepts of grace and dis-grace, to

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[19] Ibid.

connote the justice or lack of it in a community or social situation, as a point of departure. They point out that many Hispanics conceive grace (often without using the specific term) as the salvific, social justice-building intervention of God in their lives. The theologians face the question whether the popular-religious symbolism of grace does not challenge the more "academic" and socially-detached theologies of grace to re-think their symbols in terms of justice and love.[21]

Worship presents many possibilities for the expression of popular religiosity. Espín and García encourage the theologian to ask whether normative liturgies ought to be imposed on popular-religious groups, given the fact that the latter often celebrate human life and its expression of faith more profoundly than the former. The other question asks whether wisdom and salvation texts proper to popular religiosities should not be incorporated into normative liturgies.[22] We will examine some of the implications of these notions when we examine the worship practices of the four Lutheran congregations that are the subject matter of this research.

Espín makes the point that popular religion has many facets, but chief among them is the notion that it has served as a very important preserver of the dignity and identity of the people, and as a guarantor of their hope that the

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[20] Ibid., 118

[21] This is a perspective that has been appropriated by the Lutheran community in its attempt to understand fully and inclusively the implications of its central doctrine of justification by faith from the perspective of the Latin American experience of oppression and poverty. We will examine this perspective in chapter four from the papers presented by Lutheran theologians at the Consultation on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith held in Mexico City in 1985.

[22] Espín, *The Faith of the People*., 119.

transformation of their subaltern reality is still possible.[23] In this sense popular religion plays a role in keeping a rebellious hope alive. By this he means that Latinos have not usually produced, disseminated, or controlled what is said about them in American society. This is part and consequence of their subaltern condition. Therefore, the contents of self-definition and self-identity (and thus of the resulting sense of dignity and self-worth) are received by Latinos in the "public" realm as filtered through and shaped by the holders of American cultural hegemony. The family and immediate neighborhood's interpersonal network (i.e., the "private" realm) are often no match for the hegemonic avalanche of symbols and justifications, in spite of their opposite message. Popular religion in this sense stands out as one of the very few social (public and private) spaces that have been able to preserve some high degree of protagonism for Latinos, albeit oftentimes symbolic.

Other writers have written on the role of popular religion as an important subject for understanding the expression of a people. Juan José Huitrado-Hizo

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[23] Ibid., 102. The notions of the subaltern universe and dominant cultural hegemony are dependent on the thought of Italian social philosopher Antonio Gramsci and Brazilian sociologist of religion Pedro Ribeiro de Oliveira. For their extensive bibliographies see Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 105. Gramsci varied the classical Marxist approach to religion and proposed that the religion of the proletarian (or subaltern class, as he termed it) could not be understood entirely as having been imposed by the ruling class. While this is sometimes the case, and while sometimes subaltern religion will mirror the religion of the ruling class, at other times the subaltern class will develop its own form of religion in opposition to the wishes of the ruling class as a way of maintaining cultural identity. According to Schreiter, the subaltern approach highlights an important aspect of popular religion often overlooked, namely, that the symbolic world of a popular religion can provide one of the few resources of identity over which an oppressed people can exercise some control of their own. A second strength of this approach is that it sees popular religion as having integrity of its own, which in turn implies an analysis somewhat independent of that of the religion of the dominant class. Its strength, its patterns of change, and its ability to endure have to be understood within the context of the subaltern class in its totality. A third strength is the extent to which the subaltern approach values the symbolic potential of popular religion, especially in its ability to forge identity for a people otherwise denied it by a ruling class. See Schrieter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 136-7.

points out that popular religion represents a form of resistance to cultural and ideological imposition and definition by one group over another.[24] In the United States this cultural and ideological dominance has occurred through the Euro-American Roman Catholic Church and its Tridentine theology, and its acceptance of the premise of Protestant Reformation understanding and interpretation of pre-Tridentine theology and medieval practice as backward, deficient, and superstitious.[25] In league with this theological interpretation by the elite or official religious tradition of the Roman Church there existed the ideological and cultural sense of superiority and dominance of the Euro-American Roman Catholic and Protestant establishments in the United States.[26] Popular religion represents that form of resistance to the destruction of the Hispanic/Latina cultural and religious identity that has survived on the margins over centuries. It refuses to die in the face of cultural and ideological oppression. It represents that form of practice and understanding by which the marginalized Hispanic/Latina community find access to God and salvation.[27] This factor alone makes it an important subject for theological reflection by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities.

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[24] See Huitrado-Rizo, "Hispanic Popular Religiosity, " *New Theology Review* 3, no. 4 (1990): 43-6.

[25] Ibid., 48-51. See also Espín, "Pentecostalism and Popular Catholicism: The Poor and *Traditio*," *Journal of Hispanic Latino Theology* 3, no. 2 (1995): 14-43.

[26] Ibid., 27-8. For a more detailed analysis of the distinction between "popular" and "official" or "elite" religion, see Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 124-5. See also, Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970).

[27] Ibid., 36-42.

There are other factors that also make popular religion a significant locus for understanding the epistemology of a subaltern community. As Virgilio Elizondo, Alex García-Rivera and others have pointed out in their various works, these factors have to do with cultural identity and affirmation of human dignity.[28] Their works reveal that the symbols of a community are powerful media through which the community is affirmed and valued. Such symbols as the Virgin of Guadalupe and San Martín de Porres and their life-affirming narratives as interpreted by the language of semiotics have been powerful sources of inspiration and affirmation for a community that has been the victim of conquest and of ideological imposition. These theologians help us to see that hidden in the simplicity of the narrative of Guadalupe and the "little stories" of St. Martín de Porres there is a "Big Story" about the human being. They reveal that the indigenous, black, *mestizo*, and mulatto poor have a place in the reign of God. They disclose that God accepts what the world rejects. They also teach that God converts the rejects of society into agents of mission and transformation. These narratives reveal that no matter what the difference in human being or station in life all of creation is a *creatura de Dios*, a creature of God.

Perhaps more poignantly these narratives reveal that as a creature of God one belongs to God in whom one finds the source of life and hope in the midst of adverse conditions. These "little stories" are deceptively simple yet communicate essential information about the nature of the world and one's place in it. In this

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[28] See for example Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997) and *The Future is Mestizo* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988). See also, García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres.* For the role of semiotics in the study of culture, see Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 49-50.

way popular religion has helped the people to survive and to make sense of their world in spite of the world's rejection of them as a people. It has provided the people a significant source of contact with the supernatural and divine world when mediation was not possible through official channels. It has also provided a sense of community and solidarity through the "less official" channels of those who imparted the popular faith traditions.[29]

Espín points out that popular religion as expressed in the diverse traditions of the Hispanic/Latina experience reflects the group's rejection of modernity and its ideological project because it relegated the Hispanic/Latino poor and marginalized to be objects and non-persons.[30] In this sense, popular religion represents an indictment on the "official church" and its failure to criticize itself and the ideological machinery by which it gained its prominent status in this country. Popular religion in this sense is counter-cultural because it rejects pressures to assimilate and to conform to a dominant view of reality. It is a form of protest against society and the mainline churches and a form of prophetic denunciation of the sin and injustice present in the world.[31]

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[29] Elizondo indicates that it was the grandmothers of the *Guadalupana* religious family who were responsible for imparting the faith traditions when the priests were not available or accessible. See Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo.* Espín points out that the symbols, stories, and celebrations of popular Catholicism act jointly as bearers of its doctrinal and ethical contents, and as the preeminent evangelizing vehicle vis-á-vis the poor. See Espín, "Pentecostalism and Popular Catholicism," 33.

[30] Ibid., 35-36.

[31] Ibid., 32-3. Espín points out that this is particularly true of the Pentecostal movement that has a tradition of rebellion and prophetic denunciation of the sin present in the world, especially as it wounds and oppresses the poor. In this sense Pentecostalism as a force and sign of the Spirit and reign of God offers the Latino peoples the symbolic power that is often denied them through institutional Euro-American Roman Catholicism or "mainline" Protestantism. For an excellent study on Latino Pentecostalism as a sign of the Spirit and reign of God, and as a prophetic denunciation of systemic sin and evil in the structures of the world, see Eldin Villafañe, *The*

According to Juan José Huitrado-Hizo, the Hispanic/Latina community also experiences popular religion as a meaningful source to resist assimilation pressures. The group finds within this religious experience the affirmation of their cultural identity and human dignity as well as the point of reference for their rich and unique history. They can trace their roots as a people in the history of popular religion. They also find in it meaning for the present and hope for the future. Huitrado-Hizo makes the poignant observation that popular religiosity, as part of the history of Hispanics in this country, is not only a manifestation of a popular Catholicism, but it is also a proclamation by Hispanics themselves that they have a right to exist as a people.[32] This is a significant observation given the marginal status that has characterized the history of the Hispanic people in the United States. Popular religion as a salvific form of faith praxis has been a venue for the affirmation of identity and cultural worth.

For purposes of clarification, Huitrado-Hizo offers a definition of popular religion. For him, as has been noted above, "religiosity" can be understood as the collective expression and consciousness of a people that (1) defines its relationship to the divine, (2) touches on all the essential elements of its experience, and (3) guides its choice of cultural direction. The term "popular" (as

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*Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

[32] Huitrado-Hizo, "Hispanic Popular Religiosity," 44. This "right to exist as a people" is an observation that is shared by the Protestant and non-Roman Catholic community in the United States. See, for example, González, *Mañana*, 31-2., Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 107-22, and Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit*. These authors point out that the Protestant and Pentecostal communities experience their faith traditions from their own distinctive cultural, sociological and theological lens. This is a "minority" perspective of a people living in exile. González adds that all Hispanics can trace their theological roots to the Hispanic-American Roman Catholic tradition even as they depart from it. See *Mañana*, 21-2, 66-7.

in "people") refers to the reality of a particular human group's consciousness of its own identity as it is shaped and formed by the group's reflection on its roots, its present situation, and the creative movement of culture. As defined, Hispanic popular religion arises as an expression of these three realities – religiosity, faith, and the consciousness of the people – as intrinsic axes of the self-identity of the Hispanic people, a people seeking to establish its horizontal and vertical religious relationships in Christian faith, and at the same time seeking in this context to identify itself as a people with a God-given right to exist even if this right has been denied at various times during its history.[33]

## The Protestant Expression of Popular Religion

The Hispanic Protestant expression of popular religion finds parallels with the Roman Catholic experience in the mutual quest for self-expression and affirmation of identity as a people of faith with a right to exist.[34] The Protestant

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[33] Huitrado-Hizo, "Hispanic Popular Religiosity," 44-5.

[34] For Protestant historian, Paul Barton, the term "identity" refers to the process of locating oneself within one's physical, cultural, social, and religious world. He claims that there are several factors that influence one's self-perception. First, one's identity is shaped through ritual activity, symbols, and myths that objectify a sacred order. Individuals and groups structure their behavior and activities so as to live in concert with their sacred universe. In doing so they internalize the objectified sacred order.

Second, one's culture and ethnicity shape one's self-perception. As a member of a particular culture or sub-culture, the individual adopts the underlying ideologies, beliefs, values and customs of that particular group.

Third, one's identity is essentially social: it is developed through interaction with other individuals and groups. For Mexican-American Protestants, their identity was shaped primarily in relationship to the Anglo-American co-faithful of their denominations and by Mexican-American Roman Catholics within their ethnic community.

Identity also entails the process of differentiation. Racist and discriminatory social practices by Anglo-Americans made it clear to Mexican-Americans that most members of the dominant society considered Mexican-Americans unworthy of enjoying the better fruits of society. Religious instruction taught Mexican-American Protestants that they had "true" religion and that the religion of their Mexican-American Roman Catholic neighbors was idolatrous and superstitious. See Barton, "In Both Worlds: A History of Hispanic Protestantism in the U.S. Southwest," (Ph.D. diss., Southern Methodist University, 1999), 2.

experience diverges in part from the Roman Catholic experience by its emphasis on the Bible as a primary locus and symbol of identity.[35] The right to exist as a people of faith can be traced directly to the Protestant emphasis on the Bible as the source and symbol for all life-giving existence in community and for the affirmation of identity as a people created in the image of God.[36] The Bible is a symbol of the popular religious expression of the Hispanic Protestant community. It is a symbol that is at variance with commonly held interpretations by the dominant culture.[37] However, ambiguity exists in the interpretation of the Bible as a symbol of both conquest and liberation. The Bible was a liberating force to the degree that it gave the people scriptural authority for identity as a people of God. But it became a tool of conquest and oppression when it was used to impose a hegemonic value system that contradicted the values of the

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[35] Barton indicates that in the U.S. Southwest in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Bible and other Biblically-based religious literature were used by missionaries as authoritative sources to distinguish their positions from the theological claims of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant missionaries considered Roman Catholicism blasphemous precisely because they believed many of its doctrines and practices to be incompatible with the Bible. Protestant missionaries and their Spanish-speaking converts wielded the Bible as a "weapon" to denounce Roman Catholic teaching and practices. Their preaching and teaching, which regularly included distinctions between Roman Catholic and Protestant theology and ecclesiology, relied heavily upon Scripture. Many of the books published and circulating in México and the U.S. Southwest were Spanish-language translations of British and North American Protestant authors. These authors relied heavily upon biblical citations as authoritative sources for their refutations of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. See Barton, "In Both Worlds," 45-6. For a Lutheran apologetics of the Scriptures in refutation of Roman Catholic dogma, see David Orea Luna, *Cristo o Roma* (México: Publicaciones Amanecer, 1952).

[36] Barton, "In Both Worlds," 43. Barton states that the Bible symbolized the Word of God for Anglo-American missionaries and their Spanish-speaking converts. As the Word of God, the Bible was not only the preeminent source of authority of Protestant preaching and teaching, it permeated and served as the foundation for Anglo-American culture. See Barton, "In Both Worlds", 2-3. For a similar perspective, see Rubén P. Armendáriz, "The Protestant Hispanic Congregation: Identity," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 239-40.

[37] For a perspective of the Bible from the margins see González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1996).

Hispanic/Latina culture. It became an oppressive tool when those who taught from it failed to criticize the values of the dominant culture.[38]

According to Protestant historian Justo González, the Bible plays a significant role as a symbol of liberation and identity in the experience of the people. González is a major proponent of this idea when he argues for a central feature of the Protestant tradition since the time of the Reformation: making the Bible available to the people in their vernacular.[39] By this he does not mean simply reading the Bible in a Spanish translation. His proposal is more concrete. He means reading the Bible as a political book, that is, as a book that is concerned with issues of power and powerlessness, for these are central issues in Scripture. For Hispanics to read the Bible "in Spanish," that is, as exiles, means to read it as members of a powerless group, as those who are excluded from the "innocent" history of the dominant group.[40] When the Bible becomes a resource accessible to the people, and the people discover in the Bible their own particular perspective then the Bible becomes the people's book, that is, a subversive book no longer under the control of the dominant groups in society.[41] In contrast to the one characteristic of the dominant culture, the point of departure for reading the Bible in Spanish is to read the Scriptures as presenting a history of the people of God "beyond innocence," that is, to view biblical history

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[38] Barton, "In Both Worlds," 45-6.

[39] González, *Mañana*, 75-6.

[40] Ibid. By "innocent history" González means the selective forgetfulness of Biblical and extra-Biblical historical deeds that served to justify the present order that is interpreted as the result of the great deeds of past heroes while forgetting their flaws and ambiguities of character.

[41] Ibid., 84.

as "responsible remembrance" leading to "responsible action." In this way the Hispanic/Latina Protestant community interprets the Bible as a source of life, hope, and empowerment in the midst of oppressive circumstances.[42]

Protestant theologian Luis Pedraja helps us to understand that the question of identity plays an important role in both Protestant and Catholic Hispanic theological understandings. He points out that Hispanic Protestants often define their identity through opposition to Roman Catholicism.[43] At times the self-definition of Hispanic Protestants takes the form of a strong anti-Catholic rhetoric. However, for most Hispanic Protestants, self-definition takes the form of a slow withdrawal from the aspects of cultural and family life that are rooted in Catholicism. He notes that this withdrawal from their heritage adds to the problems of understanding and building a Hispanic identity. Both historians and theologians observe that for the Protestant Hispanic, there is a double marginalization. Often they are both rejected by Catholics and alienated from the Catholicism that lies at the core of their cultural and family identity.[44] On the

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[42] See González, *Santa Biblia*. Also see Justo González and Catherine G. González, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). For similar arguments from the Lutheran perspective see Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," and "Confessing the Faith in Spanish: Challenge or Promise," in *Hispanic Theology: Challenge or Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 351-66.

[43] See Luis G. Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey: Mapping North American Hispanic Theology," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 131-2.

[44] Ibid. See also González, *Mañana*, 14-5. González points out that conversion to Protestantism from Roman Catholicism seemed to demand an uprooting of the religious-cultural ethos that formed the deepest roots of our Hispanic culture and collective identity. For this reason he protests the type of Protestantism that is interpreted and transmitted by Nordic European culture in a such a way that it destroys the collective soul of the Hispanic people in the name of Gospel.

other hand, they are also marginalized by their Anglo denominations and forced to conform to structures, rituals, and practices that are alien to their culture.[45]

For Pedraja the question of identity is not limited to the racial and cultural milieu. It is also ontological and ethical in nature, affecting all Hispanics.[46] As observed by Virgilio Elizondo, the core of Mexican-American existence is "to be 'other' or to 'not-be' in relation to those who are."[47] Pedraja indicates that all Hispanics are caught in different levels of oppression that attack their dignity as human beings. Ontologically, they are denied their being and forced either to conform to identities that have been imposed or to define themselves in terms of negations. The experience of the Hispanic/Latina community has been that Anglo-Americans do not always fully accept Hispanics as "Americans." At the same time, Hispanics no longer fit into or belong to their country of origin. According to Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Hispanics live in the "hyphen" between two cultures.[48] Their identity lies at the crossroads of cultures, races, and nationalities.[49]

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[45] Pedraja, "Guideposts along the Journey," 131-2. See González, *Mañana*, 14-15, and Barton, "In Both Worlds, " 2-3.

[46] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 131.

[47] Virgil Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo,* 20.

[48] Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

[49] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 131. See also Francisco García-Treto, "Reading the Hyphens: An Emerging Biblical Hermeneutics for Latino/Hispanic U.S. Protestants," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 160-61.

Pedraja also observes that the "non-being" of Hispanics is not just about self-definition, it is about marginalization.[50] Because Hispanics are immersed in the predominant cultures of the United States through education, socialization, and necessity, they are denied their culture, identity, and history. It is not uncommon for the contributions and heritages of Hispanics to be ignored and absent from both education and the media. The "English-only" movements further threaten to marginalize Hispanics by denying them a basic aspect of their culture – their language. As pointed out by Pedraja and by this writer in Chapter One, language bears identity and values, serving as the principal link to culture and heritage.[51] It can also become an instrument for persecution, derision, and economic oppression at the hands of those in power.

Pedraja finds that the resistance of Hispanics to the leveling force of the dominant culture manifests itself in issues of identity as a liberative praxis.[52] He believes that the Hispanic quest for identity is a quest for liberation through the

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[50] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 132.

[51] Ibid. See also Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha*, 52-4. As pointed out by the writer of this dissertation, language bears the soul of the people. It is the medium of faith. I contend that language bears the imprint of one's ethos and world view and is the inherited gift of past generations as part of the evolving creation of God, or a *creatio continua*. As *creatio continua* language asserts God's ongoing creative and sustaining activity in the world. It is the way people *know* and experience God. It bears the wisdom and faith of the people through oral traditions and family history. It cannot be easily dislodged without tearing at the fabric of one's being. Clifford Geertz provides useful definitions of ethos and world view: "A people's ethos is the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their world view is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concepts of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order." Clifford Geertz. "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," (*The Interpretation of Cultures* [New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973], 127). I believe that the notion of language as the bearer of one's ethos and world view is implicit in this definition.

[52] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 132.

right of self-definition.[53] This does not mean that Hispanics lack an identity or a voice. Rather, it means that their differences, uniqueness, and voices are covered, hidden, and silenced by political and social agendas. In asserting their voices and their identity, they are ensuring their place in society and asserting their right to self-determination. Pedraja makes the theological observation that the quest for identity is connected to our understanding of the doctrines of creation and humanity. We as a people of God assert the positive value of our creation and humanity. By affirming our value and dignity, Hispanics oppose the sinful structures that try to marginalize, obscure, and eradicate God's good creatures who are made in the image of God. Thus, Hispanics bear the *imago Dei*, revealing the diversity and inclusiveness of God, which can never be reduced to a singular image.[54] Also, along with the pain that results from existing as nonbeings, there is also a liberating dimension in the in-betweenness of Hispanic identity.[55] As Elizondo notes, Hispanics are free to move in the in-between and emerge as a new people whose identity is not yet defined. They are neither this nor that, rather, they are fully both.[56]

According to Roberto Goizueta, a liberative praxis also emerges through the communal and aesthetic practices of Hispanics that are the basic expressions of human praxis as a communal solidarity, a solidarity that is

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[53] Ibid. This is an argument that is affirmed throughout the theological spectrum of the Hispanic/Latina community. See for example, Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha*; Maldonado, Jr., ed., *Protestantes/Protestants*; Arturo J. Bañuelas, ed., *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective* (New York: Orbis, 1995).

[54] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 132.

[55] Ibid.

negated by oppression and alienation.[57] Pedraja notes that these communal practices result in different forms of popular religion that help Hispanics locate themselves as active agents in the world.[58] As a result, the symbols and rituals of popular religion are *the principal way* for being in the world available to these Hispanic communities.[59]

## Popular Religious Practices

As already observed there are different ways to define and interpret the nature of popular religion. As a general understanding popular religion is a term derived from the Spanish *religiosidad popular*, which describes innovations, celebrations, and the development of religious expression without the control of clerics or institutions.[60] Espín refers to popular religion as the *sensus fidelium* that is part of all living traditions taking concrete form in the richness of various cultural contexts.[61] It uses the cultural vehicles available to express faith

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[56] Ibid. See González, *Mañana*, 26.

[57] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 132. See Roberto Goizueta, "Rediscovering Praxis," *We Are a People: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 63-4.

[58] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 132.

[59] Ibid. As indicated by Orlando Espín and Sixto García, popular religion is a principal locus of theological reflection in Roman Catholic Hispanic theologies. See for example, Orlando Espín, "Tradition and Popular Religion: An Understanding of the Sensus Fidelium" *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992), 62-87. See also, Sixto García, "Sources and Loci of Hispanic Theology" *Mestizo Christianity*, 104-5.

[60] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 133. See also the definition offered by Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo in the introduction to *Discovering Latino Religion: A Comprehensive Social Science Bibliography* (New York: Bildner Center Publications, 1995), 28-9.

[61] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 133. See Stevens-Arroyo, *Discovering Latino Religion*, 64-5.

experiences in concrete symbols and forms.[62] It also expresses the necessity for concrete expression of religious faith. These concrete expressions of faith provide a liberative voice to the community expressing their protest and opposition to their exclusion, marginalization, and oppression at the hands of those in power. Thus, their rituals serve as symbolic acts of resistance against power structures that dominate and hide the voices of the people.[63]

Popular religion is the concrete expression of the religious experiences of a community.[64] It is present in Hispanic Protestantism as the concrete expression of empowerment and resistance. Mainline Protestant expressions of popular religion are different from Catholic expressions. Instead of using expressions derived from native religions, they tend to use Pentecostal expressions that are often absent from mainline denominations as vehicles of empowerment. They also incorporate music and practices that are closer to Hispanic culture. For instance, Edwin Aponte presents a compelling argument for recognizing *coritos* (little choruses) as a form of Protestant popular religion. According to Aponte, *coritos* are concrete vehicles that express a hope, faith, and

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[62] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 133.

[63] Ibid., Gustavo Benavides writes that popular religion is a symbolic act of protest against the elite that excludes the practitioners. See G. Benavides, "Resistance and Accommodation in Latin American Popular Religion," *An Enduring Flame*, ed. Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo and Ana María Diaz-Stevens, 39.

[64] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 133. Pedraja points out that in most cases, popular religion takes the shape of cultural expressions that are not limited simply to accepted Christian practices. He notes that while expressions of popular religion find easier venues for expression within Roman Catholic communities, there tends to be a greater resistance to them within Protestant circles. Protestants reject many of the vestiges of Catholicism and native religions that appear within popular religion as examples of the syncretistic, idolatrous, and superstitious practices of Catholics. At first glance popular religion may appear to be one of the principal distinguishing marks that separate Protestant and Catholic Hispanic theologies. However, its rejection does not indicate its absence from Protestantism.

empowerment rooted in both the Bible and the lived experiences of the community.[65] They give a voice to the people's hopes and faith in God. Their presence beyond the institutionally bound hymnals attests to their power as expressions of popular religion outside the rigid power structures of institutions. *Coritos* are usually printed on loose pieces of paper that attest to their transgressions of any given boundary and formalization. The *coritos*, which are an integral part of Protestant Hispanic services, represent the fluid and living dimensions of the faith found in the Hispanic communities that sing them. In addition, as Aponte notes, *coritos* also defy the rigid, structured liturgies by maintaining an open adaptability to the community's circumstances.[66] In this sense, *coritos* transmit orally the traditions and faith of the people in a concrete form adapted to their context.

Another way in which popular religion expresses itself in Protestant Hispanic communities is through the *testimonio*.[67] In the *testimonio*, congregants are invited to speak during the service to give their testimony of how God is active in their lives. *Testimonios* provide a concrete dimension to the faith by articulating how God is active in the present.[68] In this sense, *testimonios* provide a dual vehicle of empowerment. First, they empower ordinary members of the

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[65] Ibid. See Edwin Aponte, "*Coritos*," 62-5. See also Samuel Soliván, "Hispanic Pentecostal Worship," *Alabadle!: Hispanic Christian Worship*, ed. Justo González (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 52-3.

[66] See Aponte, "*Coritos*."

[67] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 134. See also, Edwin I. Hernández, "Moving from the Cathedral to Storefront Churches: Understanding Religious Growth and Decline Among Latino Protestants" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 228.

[68] See Samuel Soliván, "Hispanic Pentecostal Worship," 53.

congregation to speak about their faith and life. In the *testimonios* it is not the clergy or the institution that speaks and teaches about God. Instead, they invite the people to interpret everyday circumstances and attest to God's power and presence in them. In this act, the hermeneutical prerogative is taken away from the institution and placed with the people. Second, by recognizing that God is active in the lives of the people, *testimonios* recognize several elements of the Hispanic faith. First, they affirm God's presence and work in the midst of the people, and move the locus of God's activity and presence away from the powerful and the institutions. In addition, they express an essential element of hope in God's living presence and activity in the world. *Testimonios* replace the distant and abstract God of philosophy with God's immanence and activity in the world, bridging the gap between God's transcendence and God's immanence. As a result, *testimonios* empower the Hispanic people by asserting the reality of God in their lives and God's solidarity with them.[69]

Pedraja notes that the role of *testimonios* and *coritos* in Hispanic Protestantism points to a further aspect of the popular religion of Hispanic Protestants. He observes that where Catholics express their popular religion in concrete symbols, Protestants express it primarily through words. The primacy of the "word" in Hispanic Protestantism takes the place of the icon in Catholic popular religion. As a result, we find that *testimonios, coritos*, prayers, and Scriptures take the place of images, devotion to saints, and certain types of religious acts. Many of the homes and churches of Hispanic Protestants do not have images of saints on the walls, but they do have Scripture verses. Instead of

[69] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 134.

a statue of *La Virgen*, there is an adorned, Bible-shaped frame with the Ten Commandments or John 3:16 written colorfully in its center. The primacy of the Scriptures in Hispanic Protestant piety does not negate the concreteness of their popular religion. The words of the *coritos, testimonios*, and community prayers are firmly rooted and enfleshed in the lives of the people who speak those words of faith, and point to concrete issues and concrete ways in which God's presence and power works in the life of the community.[70]

The role of the Bible takes on an added sacramental significance for those who place scriptures on their walls. The Bible is indeed the Holy Bible, serving as a source of insight and strength. As González notes, the Bible "interprets us in a radically new and ultimate affirming way."[71] For Hispanic Protestants the Bible served in times past as a source of empowerment in several ways. It empowered them by giving access to the Scriptures and their interpretation in ways that were not possible for many Catholics before Vatican II. In this sense, it provided an identity that distinguished Protestants from Catholics and empowered their biblical hermeneutics. For Hispanic Protestants, the Bible was a prized possession that affirmed that God's Word was not a prize reserved for the intellectuals and the elite, but a source for the people's empowerment. [72]

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[70] Ibid, 134-5.

[71] Ibid. See also González, *Santa Biblia*, 117-8.

[72] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 135. For an example of this kind of empowerment within the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina migrant community of Weslaco, Texas, see Paul Collingson-Streng and Ismael de la Tejera, "Bible and Mission in a Hispanic Congregation," *Bible and Mission: Biblical Foundations and Working Models for Congregational Ministry*, ed. Wayne Stumme (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

Pedraja notes that the importance of the Bible and the "word" in Hispanic Protestant circles does not deny the validity and presence of certain symbols in their midst. The two images that still survive the iconoclastic tendencies of Protestantism are the images of Jesus and of the empty cross.[73] These images present a unique insight to certain dimensions of the Catholic and Protestant Hispanic communities. In many instances, the images of Jesus and the crucifixes in Catholic churches present a graphic image of suffering. Even images of Christ teaching depict the crown of thorns over his heart. These images offer a sense of comfort and hope in the recognition of God's solidarity with their suffering. The suffering of the Hispanic people is graphically present also in the suffering of God, which validates their experience and unmasks the invisibility of their suffering. On the other hand, the empty cross of the Protestants and the resurrected Jesus speaks of the hope and end of suffering. In their symbol, they capture the eschatological hope against hope that the living God will triumph over death and suffering. The importance of these symbols to express meaning and evoke action cannot be overstated. In a sense these symbols in Catholicism and Protestantism express a polarity that requires the presence of both images: suffering and resurrection. The emphasis of one over the other can lead to a denial of suffering or to a denial of hope. Although changing symbols in both groups now portray the cross as a source of suffering

[73] For an eloquent example of the use of the empty cross in Protestant popular religion see Tomás Atencio, "The Empty Cross: The First Hispano Presbyterians in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 38-59. Atencio points out that the empty cross is not only a poignant symbol of conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism, but also represents a dramatic and fundamental spiritual and cultural shift. The severing of Jesus from the cross is a protest against the Roman Catholic Church and clergy and an appropriation of the dominant American Protestant values.

and confrontation, both of their theologies requires a continuing dialogue that ensures the preservation of these elements in their popular religion.[74]

## Popular Religion as a Process in the Transmission of Reformation Ideas in Europe During the Sixteenth Century

Popular religion as the faith expression of the people was not a phenomenon particular to the Americas. As Robert Schreiter has pointed out, examples of popular religion include the religious activity of the illiterate majority in medieval and early modern Europe.[75] The experience of the faithful in the appropriation of Reformation ideas during the sixteenth century is such an example.

Much has been written on the effect of the printing press on the rapid transmission of Reformation ideas, but some scholars such as R. W. Scribner contend that it cannot be argued that it was the primary instrument for the diffusion of these ideas, because as much as ninety percent of the German population in the sixteenth century was illiterate or semi-literate.[76] It is

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[74] Pedraja, "Guideposts Along the Journey," 136. Justo González makes the point that the problem with the empty cross of Hispanic Protestantism is that it is often the Hispanic/Latina people who hang from it, crucified in our culture, tradition, and identity. While the empty cross reflects our piety it does not negate the reality that we are still a people of the crucifix. Thus we need both for theological and cultural integrity. See González, "Hanging on an Empty Cross: The Hispanic Mainline Experience," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 293-4.

[75] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 127.

[76] R.W. Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, ed. Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (Worchester, England:

undeniable that the printed word provided the vehicle for an unstoppable momentum towards religious reform, and that the reading public formed a new and powerful force for public opinion, but to concentrate on the printed word alone directs attention too narrowly at the small, if growing, elite of the literate.[77]

To be sure, to be illiterate in that age did not mean to be beyond the reach of the printed word. There is good evidence that most villages would have contained at the very least one or two persons, perhaps the village priest or village officials who would be able to read and write and who could relay the Reformation message to non-readers.[78] Printing as such was not the only medium available to people of that age for the transmission of ideas. They had at their command a whole range of information media. Besides the printed word there were visual forms such as popular woodcuts, participatory social forms such as popular festivals and celebrations, and above all, forms of oral

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Irish Academic Press, 1989), 83. Also see, for example, Mark U. Edwards, Jr., "Evangelical and Catholic propaganda in the early decades of the Reformation," *Printing, Propaganda and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Lay Culture and Learned Culture: Books and Social Change in Strasbourg, 1480-1599* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1982); idem, "Introduction: The laity and their pamphlets – different modes of discourse," *Conflicting Visions of Reform: German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519-30* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996).

[77] R.W. Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 83.

[78] Ibid., 84. On literacy in Germany see R. Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lekture. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973), 6-38. Scribner points out that this method of relaying information to the popular masses involves a more complex process of transmission that can be recaptured through the study of the printed word alone. Even if once concentrates on readers, one faces the problem of *how* people read – not just how effectively, but also in what circumstances, and in what manner. On the complexity of mass communication and the varied theories involved in its study, see D.McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory* (London, 1983), 126-7 on the inherent contradictions of studying media content as a social and cultural indicator. See also M.B. Cassata and M.K. Asante, *Mass Communication Principles and Practices* (New York, 1979), parts 1-2.

communication, such as the sermon, hymn-singing, and mere word-of-mouth transmission of ideas.[79]

In sixteenth-century Germany, oral transmission was still the primary mode of communication among the vast majority of the people, who received their information by face-to-face contact in small communities. As R. W. Scribner points out even the printed word was most often mediated by the spoken word, by reading aloud to oneself, by reading aloud to others, or by discussion of things in print.[80] Scribner argues that public and private discussions were probably the most frequently used means of transmitting ideas, and pride of place as the major formal means of communication must go not to printing, but to the pulpit, from which post public announcements were proclaimed.[81] In reality the

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[79] Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 84. Idem, "Flugblatt und Alphabetentum. Wie kam der gemeine Mann zu reformatorischen Ideen?" *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit*, ed. H. J. Kohler (Stuttgart, 1981), 65-76; idem, *For the sake of simple folk: Popular propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); idem, "Reformation, carnival and the world turned upside-down," *Social History* 3 (1978), 303-29. See also, Richard G. Cole, "The dynamics of printing in the Sixteenth Century," *The Social History of the Reformation*, ed. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1972); idem, "Pamphlet woodcuts in the communication process of Reformation Germany," *Pietas et societas: New Trends in Reformation Social History, Essays in Memory of Harold J. Grimm*, ed. Kyle C. Sessions and Phillip N. Bebb (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1985); Timothy R. Jackson, "Drama and dialogue in the service of the Reformation," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, ed. Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (Worchester, England: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 105-6.

[80] Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 83-4. Scribner gives the example of a peasant by the name of Hans Haberlin who was from the village of Wiggensback, near Kempten. It appears that Hans went to hear sermons from the evangelical preachers in Memmingen and Kempten, and in consequence purchased a copy of the New Testament, which he tried to read himself at home. As he put it, he 'thoroughly exercised himself' in it. Anything he did not understand, he took to the preacher in Kempten, who then instructed him, and showed him how to read and experience the New Testament. See also, W. Vogt, "Zwei oberschwabische Laienprediger," *Zeitschrift fur kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchliches Leben* 6 (1885), 416. Scribner makes the point that the Reformation produced a religion of literate bible-reading laymen who read the scriptures in the vernacular and who by oral communication contributed to the dissemination of Reformation ideas. See Scribner, *For the sake of simple folk*, 2-3.

[81] Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 84.

religious reform was first and foremost a powerful preaching revival, and the first act of any community that developed an interest in these ideas was to request a preacher to proclaim the 'pure Word of God' in the language of the people. It was not believed to be sufficient just to read printed tracts, or even the Bible that had been translated into the vernacular by Luther. The great desire of the people was to hear the Word in the vernacular. Indeed, for Protestants 'hearing the Word' became virtually a third sacrament alongside Baptism and the Lord's Supper.[82]

Scribner argues that the sermon was not a distinguishing feature of the Reformation movements. Preaching, and especially popular preaching in the vernacular, had been going through a revival for at least a generation before. What was different according to Scribner was the scope and intensity of the Reformation preaching revival, as well as its emphasis on the Bible as the sole source of religious truth. Much depended on the style, zeal, and personality of the preacher, but more importantly, the Reformation sermon attracted attention because it was so unconventional in both form and content.[83]

First, it was often released from the confines of the church building. During the early days, many Reformation preachers found themselves without a church in which to preach. Either they were unbeneficed or they had been refused permission to use a local church. Instead they turned to preaching

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[82] Ibid. Discussed at greater length, idem, "Practice and principle in the German towns: preachers and people", *Reformation Principle and Practice, Essays in honour of A.G.Dickens*, ed. P.N. Brooks (London: Scolar Press, 1980), 95-117. On the sacramental status of 'hearing the word', see E. L. Eisenstein, *The printing press as an agent of change*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 374, and B. Moeller, *Deutschland im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 125.

outdoors, in churchyards or fields, and indoors in private homes. Such informal circumstances freed both preacher and hearers from the constraints of the formal sermon, and heightened receptiveness by creating a freer atmosphere for the exchange of ideas. Printed propaganda for the Reformation presented this aspect of the evangelical sermon as a radical departure from older patterns. In broadsheets and book illustrations, the Reformation sermon is shown as something demanding active participation by the congregation that is depicted following the preacher's text in a book, or gesturing as if in discussion with him. Congregants at Catholic sermons, by contrast, are shown as passive, detached, and uninterested.[84]

It was the irregular nature of such preaching that attracted attention. It was not uncommon for preaching to be done in the nature of a disputation with the intent to provoke some response from the audience. The willing audience or congregation became used to interrupting or, on another view of it, participating in evangelical sermons.[85] In this way, the Reformation sermon provided stimulus to discussion and elaboration of the Reformation message, as hearers challenged the preacher to expand further on the text. This kind of passionate

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[83] Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 85.
[84] Ibid. Also see Scribner, *Simple Folk*, 196-200.

[85]This practice was not without critique as unacceptable preachers (that is, those who did not preach the 'pure word of God') were contradicted, either by heckling or by disrupting the sermon. In places where the Reformation was officially adopted, the authorities then had to re-impose the discipline of the passive congregation. In Saxony in 1532, Luther attacked interruptions of sermons as the work of "sneaks and hedge-preachers," and the Saxon church ordinance of 1533 expressly prohibited anyone speaking to the preacher while he was in the pulpit. Anyone who did not understand the preacher was to consult the preacher in private afterwards, when he would 'instruct' the questioner on the point at issue. See Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 86-7. See also, Martin Luther, *Von den Schleichern und Winckelpredigern*, WA 30/3, 518-27. E. Sehling, ed., *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* 1/1 (Leipzig, 1902), 187.

exchange of ideas continued in private conversations, fostered especially by another very important form of communication, discussion, and explanation of the text. This invited a far more active participation from hearers than the sermon, and seems to have arisen naturally from the custom of reading aloud.[86] It was also not uncommon for the laity, including women, to turn to preaching. Wandering preachers were also a common sight during the early years of the Reformation and contributed to the dissemination of Reformation ideas.[87]

It is indisputable that Luther's use of the German language as a medium of preaching contributed to the Reformation.[88] The German language was a fundamental instrument for Luther because the preaching in a simple form, in the vernacular, made the reception of the ideas clearer. The use of popular language had the impact of transforming the Word of God into life for the people because the simple word was close to simple faith. The words and visual images that were used made people think of something closer to their reality and not something apart from their lives. Concerning the most important task of a language, its spiritual task, Luther postulated the same rank for all languages: all of them, each in its own kind and its own time is capable of conveying the Gospel: "They are the sheath wherein the word of the Spirit sticks; they are the

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[86] The practice of participation with the audience is not uncommon in the Hispanic/Latina community. This community practices the evangelical style of preaching that invites the audience to participate in the creation of a sermon dialogue by responding to questions of the preacher after the lessons have been read to the congregation. This is a practice that has been witnessed at St. John/San Juan Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas. See, for example, González, *The Liberating Pulpit*, 113.

[87] Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas," 85.

[88] Walter Sparn, "Preaching and the Course of the Reformation," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, 175-6.

shrine wherein we convey this treasure."[89] Language is the medium that creates the space for understanding oneself, the world and the difference between both.[90] For Luther the German language was the medium for conveying the Word of God in a way that would speak to the heart of the people for the heart was the place of encounter with God and the place where one knew oneself. That is why the sermon was everything to Luther. It was the event at which God "writes living words in our hearts."[91]

According to Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, Luther sought to enlighten the laity as a whole by giving them the Bible in printed form in the vernacular and by advocating the use of all known media to communicate the truth comprehensively to the people.[92] Already in 1522 Luther offered the *Betbuchlein*, which contained *inter alia* the *Passional*, as a "proper lay Bible." This book tells the story of Christ's Passion, using the biblical texts with illustrations. In the preface Luther explained that the linking of word and image was adopted "above all for the sake of children and simple folk, who are more easily moved by pictures and parables to retain in their minds the divine history, than if they were read [to them] or taught [in sermons]".[93] It appears that Luther was not simply applying insights gathered as a teacher. Rather, he felt himself

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[89] Sparn, "Preaching and the Course of the Reformation," 177; WA 15, 38.8-9.

[90] Sparn, "Preaching and the Course of the Reformation," 180.

[91] Ibid., 177; WA 12, 259.

[92] Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "Luther and the Laity," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, 29-30.

encouraged to adopt such a teaching device by Christ's own practice of telling parables. He furthermore suggested that pictures might be drawn of the whole Bible, bit by bit, for those who wished to consign them to memory. The lay Bible as such was not in itself a means of proclaiming the true Word, but a device to fix in the memory what had been preached and read of that Word. The lay Bible was intended as a 'primer' to train the memory to retain initial or basic biblical knowledge that had already been communicated by other means.[94]

Music was also another important medium for the communication of the Reformation message.[95] Luther believed in the power of music and considered it an appropriate means to convey divine truth. He esteemed the Psalter as a 'little Bible' that incorporated the essential message of the Word of God. He also affirmed the ability of the psalms and hymns to express gratitude towards the Creator and to promote the edification of the congregation. This allowed him to approve of quasi-sacramental music in the service of the Word. As Gerhard Hahn has demonstrated in his seminal study, Lutheran psalm-hymns were essentially updated. These were "Christianized" psalms that became the central

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[93] WA 10.III, 331-459. This is R.W. Scribner's cue and point of departure for his book *For the Sake of Simple folk*.

[94] Robinson-Hammerstein, "Luther and the Laity," 30-1. Robinson-Hammerstein notes that the lay Bibles could be illustrated catechisms or compilations of the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, etc., but there existed also quite a number of lay Bibles in the form of illustrated biblical story books, published in order to further the Lutheran Reformation. They recorded the major events in the history of salvation in strictly chronological sequence by means of illustrations and texts, very much the manner of simple compilations of broadsheets.

[95] Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, 141-2.

concern in musical composition as a means of conveying to the people that the ancient Word of God was relevant to the present generation.[96]

Believing that psalm-hymns could be used for the transmission of the Word of God Luther developed a program to furnish these hymns to the people in an effort to teach the Word. Observing that in the manner of the prophets and the most ancient Church Fathers psalms should be set in the vernacular for the people, Luther stressed that the reason for such a strategy was the Word of God, "so that it may remain and spread among the people through song."[97] Song is explicitly identified as a means of transmitting and firmly fixing the Sword of salvation in the minds of the people. As indicated by Robinson-Hammerstein and other scholars, it is generally recognized that the psalm-hymn was Luther's genuine and original invention and contribution to the music of the Reformation.[98] With the psalm-hymn Luther had found the epitome of *Gebundenheit* and freedom.[99] He used the psalm-hymns to convey the message of the Reformation and adapted them for this purpose.

An example of psalm-hymn made famous by Luther is *Aus tiefer Not*, Psalm 130, which had four verses in its first version. It was later expanded and changed into a second version of five verses and carried the more explicit

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[96] Ibid., 144; see WA DB 6, 2.4 (Preface to the September Testament, 1522).
[97] Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," 152.

[98] Ibid. See also Markus Jenny, "Kirchenlied, Gesangbuch und Kirchenmusik" in *Martin Luther und die Reformation in Deutschland* (Exhibition catalogue, ed. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nurnberg: Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1983), 301.

[99] Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," 152.

Reformation message of justification by faith alone.[100] The appropriate tune to convey the text was chosen by Luther himself as an "improved" *contrafactum* of a medieval spiritual song, sung by pilgrims at Eastertide. Luther gave the same tune to two other psalms, Psalm 12, *Ach Gott vom Himmel sieh darein*, and Psalm 14, *Es spricht der Unweisen Mund wohl.* All three were printed in 1524 as a joint broad sheet. The same tune was also adopted for Luther's Reformation ballad *Nun freut euch* that told the story of his own anguished search for a gracious God and his discovery of justification by faith alone.[101]

In the debate over the vernacularisation of the Gregorian chant Luther insisted that the musical "text as well as notes, stress, manner and gesture must be that of the genuine mother tongue and voice (*aus rechter Muttersprache und-stimme*); otherwise it is only imitation as the apes do."[102] Luther advocated for a German mass, "but," he says, "I should like it to be a genuinely German kind (*Art*). I am prepared to accept that the Latin text should be translated and the Latin tone or tune (Notation) should be preserved; but it simply does not sound right nor appropriate (*nicht artig, noch rechtschaffen*)."[103] The appropriate "translation" bothered him greatly since it was the Word of God that might be falsified by a careless or inappropriate translation.[104]

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[100] Ibid., 154.
[101] Ibid., 154-5.

[102] Ibid., 151

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid. See also WA 18, 123.16-17.

The process of introducing music as part of the liturgy was a long and difficult process and involved a great diversity of opinion, but in the end Luther's mature conceptual approach to music as a medium of communication convinced him that any dogmatism in strictly separating sacred and profane music was counterproductive.[105] He felt that music to be "appropriate" must fulfill two conditions. Firstly, the stress and emphasis in the tune must be in agreement with the text. Music had to be syllabic and rhythmic and no musical tradition could be considered sacrosanct in its artistic integrity, not even the time-honored Gregorian chant. Secondly, and for the same reason of effective Word-communication, there had to be an assimilation of sacred music to the tunes people actually knew. This led to *contrafacta* from medieval religious and profane tunes. Only the consistent, text-related adaptation of existing tunes from both spheres could make music a serviceable medium of communication that could result in the responsible, informed participation of the people.[106]

It is indisputable that much of Luther's theology is conveyed in the hymns that he wrote for the church and that were sung to popular tunes. These hymns communicated the message of salvation and incorporated a message of hope. They became the songs of the people and were sung not only in church, but in private houses and public places. The creation of the hymnal – Luther's invention – contributed to the message of the Reformation and in time became a

[105] Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," 151.

[106] Ibid., 151-2.

principal source of spiritual solace for the people. Eventually far more people possessed it and knew its content than possessed the Bible.[107]

Singing "news-songs" also became a sign and method of protest and resistance by certain sectors of society, such as the peasants, who used singing as a way to tell their story and to promote their cause of opposition to the prevailing structures of power. As indicated by Robinson-Hammerstein, this realization may have been raised to an even more intense level of awareness by the religious reformers' encouragement of singing.[108] There is ample evidence that the peasant "rebels" were encouraged in their resistance by singing these songs. This type of resistance may not have been the intent of the reformers but the popular vehicle for the reformation message gave the people a way to extend their resistance to social oppression.[109]

As has been noted, the process of transmission of Reformation ideas had a variety of sources and culminated in the transformation of the liturgical practices of the church. The vernacular became a principal means of conveying the message of the Reformation. Preaching, singing, Bible reading, and Bible discourse in the language of the people allowed the dissemination of ideas to spread in a way that had not occurred prior to that time. The people appropriated the message through their own visual and hearing senses of understanding and communicated the message through their own oral and reading abilities in the

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[107] Ibid., 157.; see also Inge Mager, "Lied und Reformation. Beobachtungen zur reformatorischen Singbewegung in norddeutschen Stadten" *Das protestantische Kirchenlied im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert.*, ed. Alfred Durr and Walther Killy (Wolfenbutteler Forschungen 31: Wiesbaden, 1986), 25-38.

[108] Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," 163.

[109] Ibid.

vernacular. These natural mediums for receiving and communicating the faith message were the forces behind the experience and expression of popular religion and served as a further impetus for the Reformation movement.

## Confessing the Faith From a Hispanic Perspective

The experience of the Hispanic/Latina community in their expression of popular religion is not dissimilar to the experience of the people of the Reformation. This community also expresses the faith in the language of the people. José David Rodríguez Jr. has written that for the Hispanic/Latina community there is a strong need to confess the faith in Spanish.[110] He points out that those with a Protestant perspective may receive this suggestion as an affirmation of their Reformation heritage, but that for Hispanics, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, this confession of faith aims at a more radical and comprehensive goal. It is an effort to recover the perspective that inspired the confessing witness of those early Christian believers who throughout history have continually challenged the church to remain faithful to the gospel.[111] He maintains that the witness of faith from this perspective helps to recover not only those important elements that define our socio-historical reality, but also some central teachings of the Christian faith that make possible its continuous renewal and obedience to the gospel. He calls this the prophetic vocation of the

[110] José David Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 110; idem, "Confessing the Faith in Spanish," 351-66.

[111] Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 110.

Hispanic/Latina community whose catholic roots are embedded in the religious history and confessing witness of faith of the community.[112]

A fundamental feature of this confession of faith is the insistence of reading the Bible in Spanish.[113] This feature is necessary because by it the community is able to reflect on their own unique experience in their own language. This is significant because their reading of the scriptures in Spanish will differ from the expression of faith, theology, ecclesial practice and values that are characteristic of Anglo congregations of the same denomination.[114] As has been pointed out by Justo González, when the Bible becomes a resource accessible to the people and the people discover in the Bible their own particular perspective, then the Bible becomes the people's book, that is, a subversive book no longer under the control of the dominant groups in society.[115] Such a reading allows the people to discover their own sense of power and powerlessness as well as their own sense of liberation by a God who demands justice in human affairs.[116]

For other scholars such as Harold Recinos, this reading of the Bible in Spanish is actually present in the experience of Hispanic communities in the inner-city barrios of the Northeast, who look upon the whole of the Bible as

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[112] Ibid., 108.

[113] This is an argument advanced by Justo González. What he emphasizes is to take seriously a feature central to the Protestant tradition since the time of the Reformation: making the Bible available to the people in their vernacular. See González, *Mañana*, 84.

[114] Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 113.

[115] Ibid., 114. See González, *Mañana*, 84.

liberating and make use, once again, of the principle of correspondence.[117] Such a reading of the Bible helps the people of the barrio make better sense of their reality of oppression, enables them to retain a fundamental sense of their human dignity, empowers them to struggle against the forces that dehumanize them, and calls them to join hands with others, striving for a better world and human fulfillment.[118]

Rodríguez indicates that a specific example of the impact of this reading on the confessing witness of the Hispanic community is shown in the way the subject of migration has been treated by some Protestant Hispanic leaders. This issue is examined from many perspectives – historical,[119] social,[120] biblical[121] and theological[122] -- to formulate a creative and relevant pronouncement that calls for our obedience of faith. In this sense, when the issue of migration is discussed, not only are the sociopolitical problems challenging the present ministry with

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[116] Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 114. See also, Fernando F. Segovia, "Reading the Bible as Hispanic Americans," *The New Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 170-1.

[117] Rodríguez, Jr., "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115.

[118] Ibid. See Harold J. Recinos, *Hear the Cry! A Latino Pastor Challenges the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 65-81.

[119] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. See Marta Sotomayor-Chávez, "Latin American Migration," *Apuntes* 2, no. 1 (1982): 8-14.

[120] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. See Rebeca Radillo, "The Migrant Family," *Apuntes* 5/1 (1985): 16-9.

[121] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. See González, "Sanctuary: Historical, Legal, and Biblical Considerations," *Apuntes* 5, no. 2 (1985): 36-47. See also Francisco O. García-Treto, "El Señor guarda a los emigrantes," *Apuntes* 1, no. 4 (1981): 3-9.

[122] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. See González, "The Apostles' Creed and the Sancturay Movement, " *Apuntes* 6, no. 1 (1986): 12-20; Jorge Lara-Braud, "Reflexiones teológicas sobre la migración," *Apuntes* 2, no. 1 (1982): 3-7; Hugo L. López,

migrants introduced, but also the biblical and ecclesial experience of the past, in a search for the inherent dimensions of this faith that may allow for new opportunities of Christian witness. This is what leads Francisco García-Treto to suggest that in our treatment of the migrants in the United States, we should follow the biblical tradition according to which foreigners were considered to be under divine protection and try everything possible to lend them our aid.[123] According to Rodríguez, this also explains why González can affirm that when dealing with the issue of sanctuary, both the Bible and the witness of the early church call our attention to refrain from giving absolute obedience to the state and its laws, when they are in opposition to the will of God.[124]

A second fundamental feature of this confession of faith is preaching the faith in Spanish. The confession of faith through preaching by Hispanic religious leaders recovers another important emphasis characteristic of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. This emphasis on preaching has also marked the Protestant churches of the past four and a half centuries.[125] However, as indicated by Rodríguez, preaching the Word of God in Spanish today leads to a more radical expression of this reformation heritage, challenging the church to

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"Towards a Theology of Migration," *Apuntes* 2, no. 3 (1982): 68-71; idem, "El divino migrante," *Apuntes* 4, no. 1 (1984): 14-9.

[123] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. See García-Treto, "El Señor guarda," 8.

[124] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. See González, "The Apostles' Creed and the Sanctuary Movement," 19.

[125] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 115. For Rodríguez, the preeminence of preaching in the ministries of Luther, Bucer, Melancthton, Calvin, and Zwingli is too well known to need amplification. See, for example, Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 285-303.

reformulate its understanding of doctrine, mission, and ministry.[126] Various Hispanic scholars have contributed to this understanding of the preaching function of the church by examining the biblical text in light of the socio-historical context of the community.[127] For Hispanic preaching this implies a hermeneutics of suspicion that leads to a hermeneutic circle.[128] When this mode of interpretation is made an intrinsic part of our theological perspective, we are able to discern God's actual involvement and liberating actions in the tradition of the church and our own historical experience. It also empowers the community to challenge the church to make this liberating witness a central feature of its mission and ministry.[129]

A third feature of confessing the faith is celebrating the faith in Spanish.[130] The awareness of God's empowering presence in the lives of the faithful also leads to a renewal of these Christian communities in their worship and ministry, as was the case in the sixteenth-century Reformation.[131] For many of these communities, this renewal is reflected in the rituals and songs that characterize

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[126] Rodríguez, 115-6.

[127] Rodríguez, 116. See, for example, Justo L. González and Catherine G. González, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); also, eds. Daniel Rodríguez and Rodolfo Espinosa, *Púlpito Cristiano y justicia social* (México: Publicaciones El Faro S.A. de C.V., 1994).

[128] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 116. The basis of this hermeneutic circle is drawn from the works of the Latin American theologian Juan Luis Segundo. See Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976), 231-233; also, González, *Liberation Preaching*, 31-33.

[129] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 116.

[130] Ibid., 117.

[131] Ibid.

their religious celebrations. Most elements in these rites and celebrative songs emerge from a popular expression of faith in God's gracious liberating presence, calling for a witness of faith that is deeply social and historical, not just otherworldly. They portray a God who sides with the oppressed and works for their liberation. Rodríguez reveals that they provide a hermeneutic of liberation that involves the use of the Bible and the tradition of faith as effective resources for social change based on love, justice, and equality.[132] They also challenge the whole church to live out the terms of its covenant with God, immersing itself in the struggle against those forces that violate the lives of the oppressed and the well-being of God's created order.[133] It is in this sense that Edwin D. Aponte argues that *coritos* have become active symbols and practices in Latino Protestant popular religion.[134] It is also what drives Roberto Gómez to claim that, after Christmas and Easter, the most holy day in the life of most Mexican-American Christians is the celebration of the Virgin de Guadalupe.[135] This is true for both Protestants and Roman Catholics.[136]

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[132] Ibid., 118.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid. See Aponte, "Coritos".

[135] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 118. See Roberto Gómez, "Mestizo Spirituality: Motifs of Sacrifice, Transformation, Thanksgiving, and Family in Four Mexican-American Rituals," *Apuntes* 11, no. 4 (winter 1991): 86.

[136] Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith from a Hispanic Perspective," 118. In a recent publication, a group of Protestant Hispanic leaders document the richness and significance of these elements in the worship experience of our Protestant communities. See *Alabadle!* A significant feature of this worship renewal is the incorporation of autochthonous elements of our Hispanic cultural traditions in the liturgy. These elements include celebrations of the *quinceañeras, las posadas, via cruces*, or the use of the music and instruments of our people like *maracas*, *guitarras* and Caribbean-style drums. Instrumental groups such as the traditional Mexican *mariachis* are also used for such celebrations as weddings and for the funeral committal rite.

These three features reflect the contextual experience of the Reformation in the Hispanic/Latina community. As we have seen the experience of confessing the faith from a Hispanic/Latina perspective is not unrelated to the experience of the Reformation community of the sixteenth century. Both the Hispanic/Latina and the German communities have appropriated the faith and the theology of the Reformation tradition in a way that is indigenous to them and that reflects the autochthonous elements of their cultural and historical religious experience and world view.

## Popular Religion in the Context of Reformation History

Justo González makes the observation that the entire history of the Reformation – both Catholic and Protestant – and the ensuing centuries of Protestant-Catholic relations should be examined through the prism of popular religion and official attitudes towards it.[137] He points out that historically there has been a rejection of popular religion or of popular Catholicism by the Protestant community. This was the result of the efforts of the Reformers at "purifying" the religious practices of the people at the time of the Reformation. The Reformers were convinced that the manner in which Christianity had evolved, and the manner in which it was practiced in the religion of the masses, was different from the original faith of early Christianity and therefore a corruption

[137] Justo González, "Reinventing Dogmatics: A Footnote from a Reinvented Protestant," *From The Heart Of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 217-8.

of it. From their perspective, what was needed was a restoration of that original faith, and of the church that practiced it.[138]

González indicates that each of the Reformers defined the limits of such restoration differently, but they all agreed that depuration from popular accretions – or, as they would say, "superstitions," – was necessary.[139] For them these accretions or superstitions were not only the most obvious ones, such as the cult of relics or the excesses in connection with the sale of indulgences, but also included earlier accretions that by then had become a part of accepted Christian tradition, including items such as the interpretation of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[140] The Reformation debates between Luther and Eck at Leipzig, for example, were a reflection of this effort at purifying the faith tradition. While Eck saw tradition as the guarantor of Christian truth, Luther wished to use the Bible to "cleanse" tradition. Whereas Eck upheld decisions by the councils of the church as a part of tradition, Luther rejected them if they contradicted the Bible. For Luther, if these decisions did not agree with the scriptures, then they clearly represented a mistake and a departure from Christian truth.[141]

On the other hand, González points out that it was not only the Protestant Reformation that could be described as an attempt to cleanse the Christian faith from the accretions of popular religion. The same is true of the Catholic

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[138] Ibid., 219.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

Reformation.[142] The decrees of the Council of Trent reflect this, with their emphasis on the education of the clergy, the writing of a common catechism, the insistence on preaching, explaining the sacraments, the move to make monastic life more uniform, and other matters. The Tridentine church was to be as homogeneous as possible, guided by a hierarchical magisterium that knew what people ought to believe and how they ought to express their beliefs. González observes that it is even possible that its attempt to suppress expressions of popular religion led people away from it and toward Protestantism.[143]

Thus, neither the Catholic Reformation nor the Protestant Reformation was an affirmation of popular Christianity. On the contrary, they were both attempts to "re-form" the church according to a vision of an earlier time when it had not been polluted by practices and superstitions of which it needed to be cleansed. One could say that the difference between the two forms of "re-formation" is that the Protestant sought primarily doctrinal reformation on the basis of the Bible, while the Catholic sought institutional reformation on the basis of the hierarchy.[144]

A significant aspect of this Reformation history is the way that popular religion defied official religion, even while outwardly acquiescing to the dictates of hierarchies, magisterium, and theologians.[145] Even though the Roman Church issued an Index of forbidden books, the saints defied this authority by their

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[142] Ibid., 221.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid.

[145] Ibid., 222.

appeal to a higher authority of revelation and conscience.[146] It is thus not surprising that in spite of all the Protestant and Tridentine calls for reformation, Hispanic/Latina popular religion has survived in *lo cotidiano* – the daily life – of the people.[147] It is in *lo cotidiano* that the people preserve their faith and culture.[148]

González indicates that this is particularly true in Latin America where the Tridentine reforms were never fully implemented. The control that the hierarchy claimed and, in many cases, attained in Europe was not generally present in Latin America, where distances were great, communications difficult, and the native (and later African) populations to be Christianized were enormous.[149]

González makes the poignant observation that when Protestantism first encountered the Caribbean and Latin American cultures it came with a reforming zeal reminiscent of the early days of the Reformation – or rather, of the seventeenth century with its religious fanaticism and religious wars.[150] It came wrapped in the mantle of modernity, which meant that it was highly critical both of official and of popular Catholicism. Official Catholicism was criticized because it was authoritarian, because it did not allow for free inquiry in "these enlightened

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] An example of this phenomenon can be seen in the popular use of *dichos*, or proverbs, that contain the folk wisdom and faith expression of the people. One such dicho remarks: "*Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres;*" that is, "tell me who you walk with and I will tell you who you are." The *dichos* contain the oral history and folk wisdom of the people of God and are reminiscent of the wisdom literature of the Scriptures.

[149] González, "Reinventing Dogmatics," 222.

[150] Ibid.

times," because it placed authority in the hierarchy and therefore was anti-democratic.[151] He observes that the Index of forbidden books came to play a more important role in Protestant proclamation in Latin America than it ever played among Roman Catholic Latin Americans. The authority of the Bible was now proclaimed, not only as the authority of the Bible, but also as the authority of the people to read the Bible against all the official readings they had been taught by ecclesiastical interpreters.[152]

Thus, for González and for the Protestant Hispanic/Latina theological community it is important to recognize that Protestantism came to Latin America, not only with an emphasis on the modern ideals of freedom of inquiry and decision, but also with a strong dose of its earlier aversion to popular religion, now reinforced by the bias of the Enlightenment in favor of things Northern European.[153] This means that if official Catholicism was accused of being too much under the control of the hierarchy, popular Catholicism was accused of being under no control – of simply allowing any and all sorts of superstition. If one form of Catholicism was attacked on the grounds that it did not allow for freedom of inquiry, the other was attacked because it did not inquire. Thus, Protestantism developed and prospered in a climate of suspicion both of official and of popular Catholicism.[154]

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[151] Ibid.

[152] Ibid., 222-3.

[153] Ibid., 223.

[154] Ibid.

In the context of this historical development, Latin American Protestantism and its conflict with Catholicism reflected what was taking place in the rest of the world as each of the two main branches of Western Christianity responded to the challenges and the promises of modernity. González indicates that in general, throughout the nineteenth century – and in many ways until Vatican II – official Roman Catholicism saw modernity as a challenge and a threat which was condemned.[155] Meanwhile, Protestantism took the opposite tack, such as praising the virtues and the progress of modernity, even to the point of coming close to confusing it with the reign of God, and claiming that Protestantism itself was the form of Christianity best suited to the modern age. It went so far as to claim that modernity itself was the result or incarnation of Protestantism.[156]

The Latin American Protestantism that emerged from the conditions of this historical development – and which would eventually shape Hispanic/Latina Protestantism in the United States – bears to this day the mark of those origins. As indicated by González, just as Luther's scholarly ninety-five theses and the ensuing attacks on the traditional religion of his time soon became popular and gave rise to a different sort of popular religion, so did the Protestant polemics in Latin America against both official and popular Catholicism become part of popular Protestantism, both in Latin America and eventually among Latinos and Latinas in the United States.[157]

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[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid., 224.

For González it is important to understand this historical development, for only by doing so will those who are not part of this tradition be able to understand the depth of feeling among many Protestant Latinos and Latinas about many of the items in traditional popular Catholicism.[158] For example, González indicates that the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* may be very important for Cuban identity, and certainly for Cuban popular Catholicism; for Cuban popular Protestantism, however, she is at best a matter of historical and ethnographic interest, and at worst an idol the devil has produced in order to lead the Cuban people astray.[159] In the same way in some Protestant Hispanic/Latina churches one may find an image of our Lady of Guadalupe. However, it is also true that still today for most Protestant Hispanic/Latinas – even those of Mexican origin – rejecting Guadalupe is an essential mark of being truly Christian. Some go so far as to make of these "Virgins" counter-myths of evil design and instruments of darkness and superstition.[160]

The tension and ambiguity that these symbols of cultural and national identity produce in the Protestant community reflects the depth of the conflicts bequeathed to the Hispanic/Latina community by the theological and ecclesiastical traditions of the Reformation.[161] The result is that there is in much of Latino Protestantism a sense of cultural alienation that is very similar to that produced by the much earlier Spanish colonization of the Americas. González

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[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

observes that just as Spanish Roman Catholicism told our native ancestors that their religion, and therefore much of their culture, was the work of the devil, so has Anglo-Protestantism told the Hispanic/Latina community that the Catholic religion of our more immediate ancestors, and therefore much of our culture, must be rejected.[162] In many ways, just as for many natives in the sixteenth century it was necessary to abandon much of their cultural traditions in the process of becoming Catholic, so are many Hispanics/Latinas forced away from their cultural roots as they become Protestant. In both cases, this cultural alienation is depicted as good news![163]

Many Hispanic/Latina Protestants refuse to abandon their culture and its traditions. As González points out, this has produced a serious crisis of identity. The questions raised by the Hispanic/Latina community include the following: How are we Latinas/os and Protestants at the same time? What must we reject of our Latino/a inheritance? What must we reject of our Protestant tradition? What must we keep of each?[164]

These are important questions with which the community wrestles. The theological community attempts to address these questions in their reinvention of a Christian theology that reflects and takes seriously the faith experience of the people. The study of popular religion from both the Protestant and Roman Catholic perspectives is a way to answer these questions. It is from the

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[162] Ibid., 225.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

perspective of popular religion that the answers to the questions of identity will be forthcoming and that ecumenical dialogue will bear fruit in the effort to reinvent theology.[165] As González reminds us, these answers will not arise at the level of official religion because our respective traditions are generally fixed on issues that may have been very relevant in the sixteenth or the nineteenth centuries, but are not the burning issues of today.[166] For example, for many Protestant and even Catholic Latinos and Latinas the sacraments are no longer the center of their worship or of their religious sustenance.[167] For most Hispanic/Latina Protestants there are other, more central points to their religious life and devotion – praise and preaching, the witnessing known as *testimonios*, Bible study, etc.[168] Thus, for these reasons popular religion serves as a central *locus theologicus* from which to study the questions of identity as it serves as the place that expresses the authentic voice and experience of the people.[169]

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the role of popular religion as a locus of epistemology within the experience of the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community. We examined the role of popular religion in the Roman Catholic tradition so as to find the nexus, if any, with the experience of the Protestant

[165] Ibid., 226.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

Hispanic community. As pointed out by Justo González, Hispanic Protestants share in common with the Roman Catholic community their theological and historical roots which both can trace to their Ibero-American heritage.[170] He further points out that just as there is a popular Catholicism, there is also a popular Protestantism that in many ways has been created and shaped in opposition to the former.[171]

The research and examination of the diverse theological traditions revealed that both communities use forms of popular religion that reflect their authentic voice, experience of faith, and cultural identity. These forms of popular devotion and faith reflect in part their efforts to resist the imposition of cultural forms that are foreign to their cultural and theological identity and experience. They also express their resolve to affirm their identity as a unique people who have been created in the image and likeness of God.[172] The review of the history of the transmission of ideas during the Protestant Reformation and of the popular religion that it spawned served to disclose the parallels in the way that popular religion was expressed and transmitted in Germany and the way it is transmitted and expressed in the Hispanic/Latina community. The same history disclosed attempts to suppress or eradicate this faith expression of the people as "unorthodox Christianity." Popular religion in its various expressions has defied

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[170] See González, *Mañana*, 14-15.

[171] See González, "Reinventing Dogmatics," 227.

[172] These forms and symbols are expressed in the ritual worship of God in the Spanish language and by the appropriation of indigenous symbols and saints as the bearers of religious and cultural identity. These cultural and religious forms of worship that affirm their identity also allow for the expression and adoration of the Third Person of the Trinity as the liberating agent who empowers the people in their historical journey. See Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit,* 193-4.

extermination by the religious authorities as it serves as the bearer of the *viva vox Evangelii* in the faith experience of the people. The following chapter will disclose to what extent this *locus theologicus* is a living voice and symbol of faith expression of the people of God in their quest to express and affirm themselves as Protestants and Hispanics/Latinos/as through the popular expression of their faith.