

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AS A CONFESSIONAL AFFIRMATION OF DIGNITY AND JUSTICE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MARGINAL COMMUNITY

This chapter will explore the connection between popular religion and justification by faith. I will argue that the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community confesses the central doctrine of the church through the familiar sights, sounds, and symbols of popular religion. This popular expression of faith serves as the epistemological locus for the community's self-understanding as the justified people of God. It is through popular religious practices that the community confesses its understanding of justification. This form of faith expression and confession by the marginal community invites the wider church to examine her own understanding of the doctrine and its implications for faithful living. The following section provides a brief overview of the role and historical significance of the doctrine for the Protestant Reformation movement.

The Role of the Doctrine of Justification By Faith in the Protestant Reformation Movement

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith* that was endorsed by the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, stated in its preamble the historical and contemporary significance of this doctrine for the Reformation and Lutheran-Roman Catholic ecumenical movements:

The doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was held to be

the "first and chief article" and at the same time the "ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines." The doctrine of justification was particularly asserted and defended in its Reformation shape and special valuation over against the Roman Catholic Church and theology of that time, which in turn asserted and defended a doctrine of justification of a different character. From the Reformation perspective, justification was the crux of all the disputes. Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions and by the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent. These condemnations are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect. For the Lutheran tradition, the doctrine of justification has retained its special status. Consequently, it has also from the beginning occupied an important place in the official Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue.¹

The *Joint Declaration* repealed the condemnations of the sixteenth century as a result of new insights developed from ecumenical dialogue. The *Joint Declaration* also affirmed the importance of this doctrine in each respective tradition. This development is significant in view of the many and diverse interpretations of the doctrine by contemporary theologians and ethicists.² These views will be examined in this chapter in order to obtain a more global and contextual perspective that addresses the relevance of the doctrine for diverse communities of the twenty-first century such as the Hispanic/Latina community.

¹ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Geneva: LWF and PCPCU, 1995), 1; *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Commentary by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg* (Strasbourg: LWF, n.d.); *Justification by Faith: Do the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations Still Apply?*, ed. Karl Lehmann, trans. Michael Root & William G. Rusch (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997).

² See, for example, George Wolfgang Forell, *Faith Active in Love, An Investigation of the Principles Underlying Luther's Social Ethics* (New York: The American Press, 1954); William H. Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology, Its Historical and Systematic Development*, ed. and trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Bloomquist and Stumme, eds., *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 12-3, 20, 27, 33-4; *Justification in the World's Context, Document No. 45*, ed. Wolfgang Greive (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2000); *Justice and Justification*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1992); and also the various essays in "Statement of a Consultation, Justification and Justice: A Meeting of Lutheran Theologians in the Americas," *Word & World* 7 (1987).

Martin Luther

In order to gain perspective on the issues that gave rise to the primacy of this doctrine one first has to consider the *Angst* that thrust Martin Luther to the forefront of the Reformation movement. Martin Luther's affirmation of the doctrine of justification by faith in the sixteenth century allowed him to answer the compelling question of his time: "How can I find a gracious God?"³ Many scholars contend that this was the paramount issue for the Reformers of the late medieval and early modern period.⁴ Luther was afflicted by a troubled conscience because of his inability to meet the demands of the law.⁵ When in reading the Epistle to the Romans he discovered that God in God's grace had declared him righteous by faith alone and not by works, Luther found freedom to serve God and neighbor.⁶ This revelation compelled Luther to formulate an understanding of justification by faith alone that made the doctrine *the* dogma of the Protestant Reformation and the principle dogma about the Christian life.⁷

³ Simo Peura, "What God Gives Man Receives: Luther on Salvation," *Union with Christ*, 76.

⁴ Ibid. See also Gerhard O. Forde, "Eleventh Locus, Christian Life," *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 397; Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 30-1.

⁵ Forde, "Eleventh Locus," *Christian Dogmatics*, 412f.

⁶ Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 595-6; WA 34:337. In his lectures on Romans, Luther elaborated and declared that the justified "is at the same time righteous and a sinner": righteous insofar as God imputes the alien righteousness of Christ, but in oneself as such a sinner. Both apply in the total sense: "For this is true, that according to the divine reckoning we are in fact and totally righteous, even though sin is still present ... So we are in fact [at the same time] and altogether sinners" (Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 263; WA 391, 563, 13-564,4).

⁷ Forde, "Eleventh Locus," *Christian Dogmatics*, 397; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 258-9.; see Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Basic Theological Writings*, 595-6; WA 34:337. Lohse distinguishes the doctrine by pointing out that Luther's statements on justification are to be

Luther said of this article that it is "the central article of our teaching," "the sun, the day, the light of the church."⁸ Luther, the Confessional Writings, and the Lutheran dogmatic tradition refer to the doctrine in such glowing terms as:

- "the proposition of primary importance"
- "the true and chief article of Christian doctrine"
- "the head and cornerstone which alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and protects the church"
- "*the articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*"⁹

In the treatise, "The Freedom of the Christian," Luther makes famous the importance of this doctrine for the Christian life. He writes: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."¹⁰ This theological axiom liberates the imprisoned because it declares the Christian free [from works] in the conscience by faith in Jesus Christ. By faith alone the believer obtains a spiritual freedom that makes her lord

seen against the horizon of the last judgment and that only as unfolding the comprehensive significance of Christ's saving work can it be appropriately treated. "The article of justification is nothing else than faith in Christ, when this is properly understood." See Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 225. The intent of this chapter is to focus on the ethical implications of Christ's justification of the believer in light of Luther's understanding of the freedom of the Christian.

⁸ WA 40 III, 335, 5-10; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 258-9.

⁹ Carl E. Braaten, "Response to Simo Peura, 'Christ as Favor and Gift,'" *Union With Christ*, 71; In his lecture on the *Stufenpsalmen* of 1532/1533, WA 40 III, 352, 1-3, Luther already stated: "Sic audivistis ... quod iste versus [scil. Ps. 130:4] sit Summa doctrinae Christianae et ille sol, qui illuminat Sanctam ecclesiam dei, quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia." ("So you have heard ... that this verse [Ps. 130:4] is the sum of Christian doctrine and that sun which shines on the Holy Church of God; for when this article stands, also the church stands; when this article falls, the church falls also."); see Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 258; Friedrich Loofs, "Der articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae," *ThStKr* 90 (1917), 323-420; Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith – A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Basic Theological Writings*, 596; LW 31:333-77.

even over prison chains. Luther takes this idea from St. Paul's own statements, who says in 1 Cor. 9:19, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all," and in Rom. 13:8, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." For Luther as for St. Paul, love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved. So Christ, although he was Lord of all, was "born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4), and therefore was at the same time a free man and a servant, "in the form of God" and "of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-7).¹¹

For Luther "stone walls do not a prison make" and even the pope is subject to the Christian as her servant.¹² The Christian is justified before God, that is, "we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith."¹³ She is free from the works of the law as these cannot obtain salvation.¹⁴ Spiritual freedom obtains for the Christian a right relationship with God. Luther interprets this right relationship as a vertical understanding of faith. A system of meritocracy imposed by works no longer burdens the conscience for faith cannot exist in connection with works.¹⁵ A "holy and happy exchange" occurs. The Christian receives the righteousness of God through faith in Christ and Christ receives the sin of the sinner in exchange.¹⁶ Christ's righteousness is imputed to the Christian by faith. Modern scholars refer

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 608.

¹³ "The Augsburg Confession," IV, BC, 30.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian", 598-9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

to this exchange as forensic justification.¹⁷ The effect of this exchange is to remove the anxiety produced by the inability to obtain salvation by works of the law.

For Luther, Christian freedom is not a license to sin (immoral freedom), but a freedom to act in love in service to the neighbor.¹⁸ He understands faith active in love as the horizontal dimension of faith: "I will therefore give my self as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."¹⁹ One is not free of "good works" except to the extent that these are aimed at producing a salvation by works-righteousness as this would nullify grace and the merits of the cross.²⁰ The Christian is justified and saved by faith because of the pure and free mercy of God.²¹ Thus justified, one becomes the servant of the neighbor through the body and its works. One becomes "a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians."²²

¹⁶ Ibid., 603-4.

¹⁷ See, for example, Simo Peura and Carl Braaten, *Union with Christ*, 42-3.; 71-2.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian", 619-20; *LW* 31:333-77; Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 70-111.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian," 619-20; *LW* 31:333-77.

²⁰ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian," 613.

²¹ Ibid., 612.

²² Ibid., 619-20.

For Luther the Christian is a servant of the neighbor. The Christian is servant of all, subject to all, just as Christ was a servant and emptied himself in that form.²³ The Christian is set free from the works of the law but performs them out of love for the neighbor. The Holy Spirit infuses this love in the heart of the Christian. One serves God as a "little Christ" in the world by serving the neighbor in love. Luther formulates the law and gospel dialectic and the political and theological use of the law from this understanding of service to the neighbor.²⁴ In this way he addresses the social and individual sin and evil.

As if to underscore his point, Luther indicates that the will is not free to do the good, but is in fact in bondage to sin and evil. In his treatise, "The Bondage of the Will," Luther refutes Erasmus' contention that the will is free at all.²⁵ One cannot do anything good because of his or her sinful nature and condition; in effect, one is curved in on himself (*incurvatus in se*). The law accuses and brings awareness to the self-centered condition.²⁶ For Luther there is only self-will. There is no free will or free choice. To opt to believe in free will or free choice is to opt out of grace because that would mean that one is capable of choosing the good for one's salvation. Free choice is not possible because of the sinful nature.²⁷ The initiative of God in Christ makes possible the salvation without the

²³ Ibid., 618.

²⁴ Benne, "Lutheran Ethics," *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 14; Luther, "Temporal Authority: To what Extent It Should Be Obeyed," WA 45: 81-129.

²⁵ Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," *Basic Theological Writings*, 173-4; LW 33:15-16.

²⁶ Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," *Basic Theological Writings*, 180-1.

²⁷ Ibid., 201; WA 18: 771-776.

works of the law and produces the good works of the Christian as the fruit of faith.²⁸ Ultimately, justification is by the grace of God who gives the righteousness of faith to the believer. For Luther, "no works and no aspirations or endeavors of free choice count for anything in the sight of God, but are all adjudged to be ungodly, unrighteous, and evil."²⁹ Righteousness is by grace alone and by faith alone. Good works emanate from this position of grace.

Simo Peura

Finnish theologian Simo Peura points out that the question challenging Luther went beyond his existential anguish and encompassed a much broader ethical scope. For Peura, Luther's question was the classic problem that has exercised all Christians throughout the history of the church. He was trying to work out a solid answer to the great commandment of Scripture: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).³⁰ Thus for Peura the doctrine of justification understood as declared or forensic righteousness does not grasp the whole intent of his doctrine.³¹

For Luther this commandment of love is a twofold commandment: we must love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves; these belong

²⁸ See Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Basic Theological Writings*, 155-6; LW 31:293-306.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Peura, *Union with Christ*, 76.

³¹ Ibid.

to each other and cannot be separated from each other.³² This great commandment is "written in the human heart," but Luther insists that God did not write it into the human heart only for the pedagogical purpose of revealing to us our inability to fulfill the commandment of love. Nor did God wish only to bring us into the depths of despair. The preaching of the law might affect us in this way, but Luther says that the intention of the law is that it be fulfilled through the pure, unselfish love of God and neighbor.³³

Our existential desperation is the result of our conviction that we are not able to live according to this commandment.³⁴ When we realize on the one hand that we cannot live according to God's will, that we cannot love purely, and on the other hand that God punishes all sinners, we naturally become desperate. In the final analysis the problem boils down to one of self-serving love because the love of God is actually directed toward the *good* that God is able to give us and not toward the *triune* God.³⁵ This impure love in ordinary life tends to use others for one's own benefit.³⁶

³² Ibid., 77.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 77-8. Peura indicates that "perhaps the most obvious example in our time concerns the economic power of international corporations and the great free market speculators of the world. These are able to ruin the entire economic system of weak, small nations in just a few days whenever they grab a transient chance to make great profits at the expense of others. All too often the result is that thousands of people lose not only their savings but their jobs and their very economic base for daily life. We can clearly see in such unhappy events that the core of sin is to use others for one's own benefit."

For Peura, Luther's entire theological work can be viewed as an attempt to solve the problem of self-serving love.³⁷ Both his view of salvation and his social-ethical writings concern the same problem. For Luther typically refuses to distinguish between the question of salvation and the question of ethics even when he does assert a difference between eternal life and the goodness of earthly life.³⁸ The Reformer takes seriously the words our Lord spoke to the lawyer who asked him what one has to do to inherit eternal life: "Do this," that is, fulfill the twofold commandment of pure love, "and you may live" (Luke 10:28). Luther also takes into account the words Jesus spoke concerning the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-45). He is convinced that what we have done to those who in their distress have needed our love (and, therefore, have done to Christ) affects our own salvation.³⁹

Luther offers several examples of his intention to deal with the problem of pure love. His effort to build a system of social welfare with the city council of Wittenberg, his emphasis on the Golden Rule as the basis for all inter-human relations, his doctrine of two kingdoms, his critique of usury and the legal system, and his instructions for being a righteous and fair sovereign are all attempts to point out the necessity of loving God from one's whole heart and the neighbor as oneself.⁴⁰ He was convinced that the problem of true love can be solved only

³⁷ Ibid., 78.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.; Paul Althaus stresses that Luther identifies natural law with the commandment of love, that is, Christ and natural law teach the same thing. Natural law is summarized in the Golden Rule: I ought to treat my neighbor as I would like to have him treat me. Luther equates acting

through faith in God. Individuals cannot find the love that is commanded of them in themselves; it has to be given to them by God.⁴¹

Luther's answer to the problem of self-serving love is found in his understanding of faith. By faith the believer receives a pure, unselfish love from God, who is this love and who gives this love to the believer who desires to receive God.⁴² This is also the main issue of Luther's *Large Catechism*.⁴³ The first part, which deals with the Ten Commandments, demands nothing other than pure love. The first commandment with its requirement of a comprehensive love of God is the central one, but it includes the love of neighbors as well. When one meditates on these commandments, one discovers one's inability to love. Therefore, one must necessarily proceed to the Creed.⁴⁴ The Creed aims to explain how one is enabled to fulfill the law of love. Meditation on the creed helps one to understand that God is the One who first reveals this pure love as God is the source and donor of this love. The Lord's Prayer instructs one to ask for what is lacking but is nevertheless necessary, that is, pure love.⁴⁵ As we meditate through the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, we

according to the Golden Rule with "Christian love." See Antii Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology," *Union With Christ*, 99; and also, Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). For a contemporary ethical interpretation of the two realms tradition, see James M. Childs, Jr., "Ethics and the Promise of God, Moral Authority and the Church's Witness," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 98-9.

⁴¹ Peura, *Union with Christ*, 78.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

become partakers of God and divine love. This participation, or "divinization" as Luther also calls it, involves a salvation that does not neglect the needs of this life.⁴⁶ He contends that participation in God enables the pure love of God and of the neighbor.⁴⁷

The love of God is a self-giving love.⁴⁸ In his explanation of the Creed, Luther describes the aim of this kind of love: "Through this knowledge of God we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see that God gives himself [*sic*] completely to us, with all his [*sic*] gifts and his [*sic*] power, in order to help us to keep the Ten Commandments: The Father gives us all creation, Christ, all his works, the Holy Spirit, all his gifts."⁴⁹ One of the purposes of this self-giving love of God is to effect in us the capacity to love our neighbors. We see this intent in the commandments. The first three and the following seven do not exclude each other. When Christians love God with the whole heart, they also love what God wills and expects from them. From this perspective it is not difficult to comprehend that the will of God is that we should love our neighbors.⁵⁰

George Forell

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 93-4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Sammeli Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics: What is the Structure of Being according to Luther?" *Union with Christ*, 129-30.; see WA 3, 102:31-32, 349:35-39, WA 4, 269:25-30, 278:7, 15-35.

⁴⁹ Peura, *Union with Christ*, 93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 94.

In his classic work on the subject, George Forell captures Luther's understanding of faith active in love.⁵¹ For Forell, this articulation of love is the ethical principle that underlies Luther's social ethics. It is a "theological" or "evangelical" ethics based upon the witness of the Gospel. For Luther, justification is the basis for all Christian ethics. "There is no Christian ethics apart from Christian people; and only people justified by faith are Christian people."⁵²

Luther understood the principle of love as emanating from justification:

Justification of necessity precedes love. One does not love until he has become godly and righteous. Love does not make us godly, but when one has become godly love is the result. Faith, the Spirit, and justification have love as effect and fruitage, and not as a mere ornament and supplement. We maintain that faith alone justifies and saves.... On the other hand, love and works do not change us, do not justify us. We must be changed in person and justified before we can love and do good works. Our love and our works are evidence of justification and of a change, since they are impossible until the individual is free from sin and made righteous ... Just as the law in requiring works before faith exists is a sign to the individual leading him to recognize his utter lack of faith and righteousness, and to conclude he is conquered, so love in its fulfillment of the law after faith intervenes is a sign and a proof to the individual of his faith and righteousness.⁵³

Luther insisted that the person precedes the act, that ethics is always the ethics of people, and that one cannot have moral acts apart from moral people.⁵⁴ He expressed this thought repeatedly in his book *On Christian Liberty*. Here he states:

⁵¹ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 70.

⁵² Ibid., 84; WA 17: II, 166, 15 (Fastenpostille, 1525, I Cor. 13:1).

⁵³ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 70; WA 17: II, 97, 29 (Fastenpostille, Romans 13:8).

⁵⁴ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 84.

Good works do not make a good man[sic], but a good man [sic] does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man [sic], but a wicked man [sic] does evil works; so that it is always necessary that the 'substance' or person itself be good before there can be any good works, and that good follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says, 'A corrupt tree does not bring forth good fruit, a good tree does not bring forth evil fruit.'⁵⁵

For Luther, the justification that makes one just and a doer of good works is a free gift.⁵⁶ It is a foreign gift that comes to us from the outside.⁵⁷ One appropriates this sanctity by faith in the Word of God that promises the forgiveness of sins. Faith as such is never unethical faith. The person of faith is sanctified and does good works. Justification and sanctification are thus for Luther two aspects of the same process and therefore mutually interdependent.⁵⁸

Luther insisted that a living faith expresses itself in works of love.⁵⁹ These good works follow spontaneously and not under the compulsion of the law. Although the law itself does not change, the Christian ceases to be a slave of the law and becomes a lover of the law. Good works are the free expression of this new faith active in love.⁶⁰ The Christian life reflects the attitude of faith toward God and love toward the neighbor. For Luther, faith in God through Christ is the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 85; Phila. Ed., II, 331; cf. WA 32: 520, 10 (Exp. Matthew 7:16-20, 1530-32).

⁵⁶ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 84; WA 39: I, 129, 12 (Disputation on Luke 7:47, 1535).

⁵⁷ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 84; WA 40: II, 352, 33 (Comm. Psalm 51, 1532).

⁵⁸ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 85-6; WA 45: 703, 1 (Exp. John 15, 1537); WA 12, 289, 28 (Exp. I Peter, 1523).

⁵⁹ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 87.

⁶⁰ Ibid.; WA 2: 560, 21 (Comm. Gal. 5:1, 1519).

necessary presupposition for love towards the neighbor and thus the source of all ethics.⁶¹

For Forell, this new basis for ethical action, faith active in love, sounds at first very similar to the Roman conception of faith formed by love (*fides caritate formata*), however, Luther explained the difference fully and in detail. Human love does not and cannot form faith; on the contrary, all true Christian love is the result of the creative activity of faith. "Faith does not rest but serves the neighbor in love" -- this is Luther's conviction that is at the basis of all his utterances about the relationship between faith and works, dogmatics and ethics.⁶² Luther substituted for the Roman slogan of "faith formed by love" the biblical word "faith forming love" or "faith active in love" (Gal. 5:6). For Forell, if the principle of Luther's ethics can be defined in relation to its source in God as "justification by faith," it can be described in relation to its outlet as "faith active in love."⁶³

According to Luther, all ethics, individual as well as social, must be understood from the key-principle of love. "Faith brings you to Christ and makes Him your own with all that He has; Love gives you to your neighbor with all that you have."⁶⁴ Faith and hope are the Christian's attitudes in regard to God, but

⁶¹ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 89; WA 40: II, 37, 15 (Comm. Galatians).

⁶² Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 89-90; E.A., 52, 158: "We have frequently said that although man [*sic*] is justified by faith and owns Christ without the help of works, yet works are not left behind but follow with certainty. For faith does not rest but serves the neighbor through love and contends with the other sins and lusts in the flesh until death."

⁶³ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 89-90. WA 40: I, 275, 12 (Comm. Gal., 1531).

⁶⁴ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 101; WA 10: I, (2), 38, 2 (Adventpostille, 1522, Matthew 21: 1-9).

love is the resulting attitude towards the neighbor.⁶⁵ Since love has its source in the relationship that God establishes with the faithful, it does not depend upon the reaction it elicits from the neighbor.⁶⁶ Forell affirms that Luther considered love not a means to an end but the ethical end itself.⁶⁷

Luther saw the social-ethical implications of this principle very clearly. "Whom does it benefit?" was the key question concerning any work. It must benefit the neighbor and society; otherwise the work is worthless. For Luther, good works are socially useful, they are works done within the community and for the community:

A man [*sic*] is to live, speak, act, hear, suffer, and die for the good of his wife and child, the wife for the husband, the children for the parents, the servants for their masters, the masters for their servants, the government for its subjects, the subjects for the government, each one for his fellow man [*sic*], even for his enemies, so that one is the other's hand, mouth eye, foot, even heart and mind. This is a truly Christian and good work, which can and shall be done at all times, in all places, toward all people.⁶⁸

This Christian love must be directed not to those who, reasonably speaking, are the best risks but to those who are in greatest need. For Luther, "Love does not consider its own reward or its own good, but rewards and does

⁶⁵ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 101. WA 17: II, 278, 11 (Festpostille, 1527, Luke 12:35-40).

⁶⁶ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 101. WA 36: 358, 23 (Sermon, Nov. 24, 1532): "God has commanded me that I should show my love to my neighbor and favor everybody, be he [*sic*] friend or foe. Just as our Heavenly Father does by letting His [*sic*] sun rise and shine over the evil and the good. And He [*sic*] does good unto those who blaspheme Him [*sic*] day and night and who abuse His [*sic*] gifts through disobedience, blasphemy, sin, and shame. Similarly, He [*sic*] lets it rain for the grateful and the ungrateful alike, gives the gifts of the soil, money, property to even the worst knaves on earth. Why does He [*sic*] do it? Because of His [*sic*] pure love, which fills His [*sic*] heart to overflowing and which is outpoured freely to everybody without exception, be he [*sic*] good or bad, worthy or unworthy."

⁶⁷ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 101-2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 103; WA 41, 7; 40, 14.

good. For that reason it is most active among the poor, the needy, the evildoers, the sinners, the insane, the sick, and the enemies."⁶⁹ Christians must also remain aware of the temptation to be alert and courageous in defending the rights of the powerful, but negligent and cowardly when the wrong is done to the poor and despised. People who chose this easy path and take from the poor to give to the rich are "hypocrites within and have only the appearance of defending the truth. For they well know that there is no danger when one helps the rich, the powerful, the learned, and one's own friends, and can in turn enjoy their protection and be honored by them."⁷⁰ Luther admonishes those who refuse to help the needy:

It is very easy to fight against the wrong which is done to popes, kings, princes, bishops, and other big-wigs. Here each wants to be the most pious, where there is no great need ... But when something happens to a poor and insignificant man [sic], there the deceitful eye does not find much profit, but cannot help seeing the disfavor of the powerful; therefore he [sic] lets the poor man [sic] remain unhelped.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 103-104; WA 17, II, 101, 6 (see, Fourth Sunday after Epiphany): "God does not say, thou shalt [sic] love the rich, the powerful, the learned, the holy. No, the free love and the most perfect commandment does not apply to such special persons, but it knows no consideration of person at all. It is the false, carnal love of the world which looks only to the person and loves only so long as there is profit and hope. When hope and profit are gone, then love disappears also. But this commandment demands free love for everybody, whoever he [sic] might be, friend or foe. This love does not consider its own reward or its own good but rewards and does good. For that reason it is most active among the poor, the needy the evildoers, the sinners, the insane, the sick, and the enemies. Confronted by these people this love has the opportunity to suffer, bear burdens, serve, and do good. This keeps love busy, always, and everywhere. And note how this commandment makes us equal before God and suspends all differences of calling, person, rank, and work. For since this commandment is given all men [sic] everywhere, a king and prince (if he claims to be a human being) must confess that the poorest beggar and the leper are his neighbors and his equals before God. Therefore, he does not only owe him [sic] help but according to this commandment he must serve him [sic] with everything he has and does."

⁷⁰ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 104; Phila. Ed., I, (Treatise on Good Works), 217.

⁷¹ Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 104; Phila. Ed., I, 218.

In all situations, the Christian constrained by a faith active in love gives him or herself to the needy neighbor just as God gave to humanity in Christ. The application of Luther's ethical principle made all service of God, if carried out in this world, service of the neighbor. For Forell, this ethical principle was of fundamental importance for the development of Luther's social ethics:

For Luther did not believe that this Christian service which is the result of the Christian faith should only be rendered to individuals; on the contrary, the Christian must serve the "world," the same "world" which is the kingdom of the devil. However, the response from the neighbor, be he [sic] an individual or the member of a collectivity, can in no way modify the concept of Christian service. The Christian acts in society because he knows that it is in the living community that God wants to be served. 'To love God is not only a matter of correct ideas, as the foolish monks believe, for to love God means to love the neighbor. For God says, 'If you love me, then think and do that which helps your father and mother, your child, wife or husband, your master or mistress.' This is what I want, see whether you are doing this wherever you can. Then you will know whether you love God or hate Him [sic]." He [sic] also knows that God has said, "If you want to love and serve me, do it through your neighbor, he [sic] needs your help, I don't." This is faith active in love.⁷²

The will of God to love our neighbors is not without difficulty. Even though Luther argues that because of the self-giving of God and our participation in God's love, "there will arise a spontaneous impulse and desire gladly to do God's will," Christians still do not find it an easy task to love neighbors purely and unselfishly.⁷³ This is due to residual sin and the realization that the love of God mediated through us is still imperfect. This state of affairs requires a constant effort to seek the good of the neighbor.

⁷² Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 110-1; WA 25: 222, 44 (Scholia to Isaiah 35:4, 1532-1534); WA 16: 322, 8 (Sermons on Exodus, 1524-27, 17:3); WA 52: 461, 12, 15 (Hauspostille, 1544).

⁷³ Peura, *Union With Christ*, 94.

The marginal community of the Southwest and of other parts of the nation and world can agree with Peura's contention that "at times we have to use our reason and all of our best abilities to discover in different situations what is the good of the neighbor."⁷⁴ This observation applies to the interpretation of justification by faith when the neighbor and her experience are different from one's own. Faith active in love takes on a different hue. The good that the neighbor seeks as a justified person of faith may be justice and solidarity in unjust situations. To serve actively in love in this situation requires a proactive justice in unjust situations. The next section examines this aspect of justice as fundamental to the doctrine of justification when interpreted from the underside of history.

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith From the Latin American Perspective

Elizabeth Bettenhausen

Contemporary theologians distinguish the way the doctrine of justification by faith is interpreted by those on the margins of the global community. In "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," Lutheran theologian Elizabeth Bettenhausen argues for an understanding of justice as intrinsic to the doctrine of justification when viewed from the perspective of the oppressed marginal groups of Latin America.⁷⁵ She points out that Luther's social context in which he formulated the doctrine of justification was vastly different from the contemporary

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," *Word & World* 7, no. 1 (1987): 59.

social reality of Latin America. The world of Luther was medieval and feudal. One obtained justice in the social realm through adherence to the law for the sake of public order: Justice in this context "was thought to consist in the observance or enforcement of the 'law' to protect rights 'deriving by custom from [one's] position in the social hierarchy.'"⁷⁶ The social hierarchy was well defined and rigid: nobility/ecclesiastical orders at the top with descending stations for women, children, servants and finally peasants on the bottom rung.

The superordination and subordination of classes and stations were taken for granted as natural law and considered part of the "natural" order of the family and of society.⁷⁷ The social station defined the duties and the vocation of each person. The view in the Augsburg Confession is "the medieval picture of an organic, hierarchically ordered society, in which the various classes of [human beings] had been ordained to serve one another's needs."⁷⁸ In this context, "the function of justice was to preserve the existing hierarchy, rather than to provide criteria for social reform. In short, while we can recognize elements of our own notion of justice in feudal thought, feudal society clearly lacked our idea of social justice as a goal to be achieved."⁷⁹

With this medieval picture as their lens the Reformers redefined the soteriological significance of all work. The system of hierarchical civil stations

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.; see also, David Miller, *Social Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 289.

⁷⁹ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 60; see D. Miller, *Social Justice*, 281.

became the sole vehicle for the expression of the "new obedience" of faith.⁸⁰ For Bettenhausen, the interlocking social dependencies are the *loci* of the commands, laws, obedience, good order, ordinances of God, stations, and calling to which the Augsburg Confession refers.⁸¹ In this context the Gospel does not challenge this hierarchical view of society in history. Rather, it enables each believer to fulfill her or his station and its attendant responsibilities with new "affections" of the heart.⁸²

The Reformation ethic posited that out of the "inward and eternal mode of existence and righteousness of the heart" (Augsburg Confession XVI) the "true Christian" would forego claiming her or his rights with the feudal system.⁸³ As such, the superiority of eternal life supersedes the temporal well-being for the individual Christian, who is thus free to exercise self-denial in response to the other's need and in obedience to feudal, civil authority.⁸⁴ Luther adheres to this belief:

I said above that these things do not concern a Christian, and that he cares nothing about them. He lets anyone who will rob, take, cheat, scrape, devour, and rage – for the Christian is a martyr on earth. Therefore the peasants ought properly to stop using the name Christian and use some other name that would show that they are men who seek their human and natural rights rather than their rights as Christians. For obtaining their rights as Christians

⁸⁰ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 60.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 60-1.

would mean they should keep quiet about all these matters and complain only to God when they suffer.⁸⁵

Luther's thought reflects the idea of the individual believer as dependent on God alone and thus free to sacrifice all rights in society.⁸⁶ At the same time, those who occupy stations of civil authority and responsibility are particularly bound to protect the rights of all. This means that they are obligated to maintain justice according to the law, and if they are truly Christian, to moderate the severity of the law when human need and so-called "rights" demand it. The "freedom of the Christian" is thus an individual, inward freedom *coram Deo* that takes a personal form of self-sacrifice and a public form of social responsibilities.⁸⁷ The public order in this context provides the material content of social dependence and justice. Seen in this way "liberation" could be said to refer to the religious freedom of the Christian which, according to Bettenhausen, does not give immanent freedom in terms of economic, political, or social status.⁸⁸ Rather, it is the mark of the Christian not to claim this freedom but to wait for official authority to grant it.

The freedom of the gospel is valid only in matters relating to the relationship between you and God, and not in matters between you and your neighbors. For God does not want robbery with sacrifice [Is 61:8]. Neither does he want anything to take place or anyone to do anything that is harmful to one's neighbor. In fact he wants everything to be done for the benefit of one's neighbor.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Martin Luther, "Admonition to Peace," WA 46:40.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 61; Martin Luther, "Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows," WA 44:313-4.

From the perspective of the Reformer, justice is the legal enforcement of the rights and responsibilities attendant to one's place in society.⁹⁰ For Luther the Christian foregoes any rights if claiming them would violate the social order.⁹¹ The Christian is obligated to accept the responsibility entailed within the organic, hierarchically ordered society.⁹²

Bettenhausen indicates that the socio-historical conditions that supported this concept of justice changed with the advent of capitalism and the political liberalism that emerged out of the Enlightenment. In effect these changes broke the medieval hierarchical structures of social dependence. A new theory of individualism emerged that "abandoned any notion of a natural hierarchy in society, and began instead with the idea that men were born free and equal, possessing sets of rights which derived from their inherent natural capacities."⁹³ Autonomous individuals, not stations and orders, became the basic unity of society: "a man's [*sic*] duty was no longer to remain within his station, but instead to take on whatever tasks, and reap whatever rewards, his abilities would allow him."⁹⁴ Justice became associated with merit as a procedural criterion that allocates reward and punishment.

This criterion [requital of desert] is stressed to the exclusion both of the protection of rights and of the fulfillment of needs. Of course, in individualist theory the rights of property are inviolable, and contracts must be enforced, but the ultimate ground for these views

⁹⁰ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 61.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 62; see also, D. Miller, *Social Justice*, 289.

⁹⁴ Bettenhausen, 62.

is either utilitarian or else resides in the conception of justice [as requital of desert].⁹⁵

For Bettenhausen, both the concepts of justice as requital of desert or of justice as fairness, a theory of the self as one who promotes the social good, do not adequately address the notion of justice of marginal groups such as the Hispanic/Latina community of the United States. She acknowledges how theologians within oppressed groups in the United States are turning to a corporate model of pluralism (as opposed to the liberal, individualist model). She notes how in the corporate model, oppressed groups have standing in the ethical question of justice. In this view, justice entails equality of condition, not merely individual meritocracy and equal opportunity. The general definition of justice as "communal right relationship" can be made more specific with respect to a "substantive conception of what is good for human persons" by a practical criterion: "the meaning of justice is discerned particularly by the way the community deals with those who are most margined or are not well placed to defend their own needs and interest."⁹⁶

Bettenhausen further indicates that the social statements of the church concerning economic justice do not take into account the perspective of the oppressed.⁹⁷ The universal judgments made about the human imply that the oppressed are included. This is an example:

⁹⁵ Ibid., 62; see D. Miller, *Social Justice*, 291-2.

⁹⁶ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 64; Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 177.

⁹⁷ The ELCA has recently attempted to address this perspective. See "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread; Sufficient, Sustainable, Livelihood for All: A study on economic life," ELCA social statement (1996). Many and diverse folk were interviewed for this project; however, the

Because human beings, both individually and collectively, are self-centered, self-serving, and self-justifying, their defining and doing of justice are inevitably tainted by the rationalization of special interest. This sinful rationalization often leads to such errors as the pitting of benevolence against justice and the confusion of justice with righteousness.⁹⁸

She stresses that the institutional ethic of the church has in the past operated on the assumptions of liberal moral theory in which only the "objective, disinterested, universal observer" of a Kantian universe is authorized to make moral judgment.⁹⁹ These assumptions are then identified with self-sacrificial Christian love. The effect is to throw into question every attempt by the marginalized groups of Christians to achieve just participation in the church and in society. These groups are then charged with the norm of self-sacrificial love construed in individualistic terms and hence prevented from acting on a corporate view of justice that is tainted with the label *sinner*s for so doing.¹⁰⁰ The question then becomes one of a differing social-historical location that is subsumed by a dominant view and interpretation. The result is an over-arching ethic that condemns the Christian oppressed to self-negating passivity with regard to their own well-being. Their attempts at justice are construed as *self-interest* and therefore *sinful* because they fall outside the realm of *sacrificial love*.¹⁰¹

perspective of the generic poor who were addressed in this study would have been helpful to understand their conceptions of justice as they apply to their own particular situation.

⁹⁸ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 65-6.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 66-7.

Bettenhausen raises various key questions in relation to the problem of the self-interest of the oppressed group and the individual self-sacrifice posed in Lutheran ethics: "Is there any relationship between the person as justified and the person as a historical being constituted in part by social-historical relationships? Is the justified self a social self at all? Or does the justifying Word in some sense separate the self from the world and thus make self-sacrifice only an apparent risk?"¹⁰² These are significant questions from the perspective of the marginal community where sacrificial love and self-sacrifice are often easily equated resulting in the negation of the self and in the empowerment of the oppressor. In these groups being the servant of the neighbor may mean aiding and abetting an evil oppressive system that violates the human dignity of both oppressor and oppressed. In this scenario, "serving the neighbor" may require "redirecting the neighbor to God" in the interest of justice and mutual love. Further, *the self* is often misinterpreted and defined by a dominant group in a way that negates the self-understanding and empowerment of marginal groups as historical moral agents.¹⁰³ In a study of Lutheranism, Eric Gritsch and Robert Jenson write the following:

The self before God and the self before men [*sic*] do not necessarily coincide. That I shall be one self, the same before God and before men, is what I await from the last Fulfillment. Now I hang between two selves, "crucified" in my moral self-fulfillment.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid., 67

¹⁰³ See, for example, Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha*.

¹⁰⁴ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 67. Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 149.

This division of the self into eschatological and historical selves is a view of Christian freedom much like the freedom of the deontological self in contemporary liberal philosophical ethics.¹⁰⁵ That is, justification presupposes, indeed creates, an "antecedently individuated self" which is wholly free, unbounded by community and history. This self is simultaneously bound to be the "servant" of the neighbor but, as subject, without any means of relationship with the neighbor. Only by denying the common natural humanity which the justified self shares with others, i.e., only by "self-sacrifice," is the justified self able to "be a little Christ" to the neighbor. The salvation of the individual and the transformation of the historical group and the universe are still contrasted and separated.¹⁰⁶ The result is a lack of connection between the "real" self and the social-historical self. They are parallel lines that do not meet.¹⁰⁷ This bifurcation of selves really means that God becomes a substitute subject for human beings in historical action.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 67.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.; Ruth L. Smith, "The Individual and Society in Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Marx" (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Boston University, 1982), III.B.3. In an analysis of Reinhold Niebuhr's view of moral agency, Smith finds two views of the self: the formal, free, transcendent self, which is capable of self-sacrificial *agape* in inter-personal relationships, and the social-historical self which is determined by competing interests in the political balance of power in collective society. She argues that Niebuhr remains individualistic in his ethics even while he attacks the atomism of bourgeois society after the collapse of organic feudal society.

¹⁰⁸ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 67. J. Miguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberation Perspective," *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 62. In this study, Bonino indicates that "traditional Protestant theology – and much Roman Catholic post-Vatican II thought, which follows a parallel line – is so concerned with the prevention of any "sacralizing of human projects and ideologies" that it seems to some of us to result in emptying human action of all theological meaning. The God-reference seems to mean the relativization, the restriction, the limitation of any human project or achievement to the realm of the penultimate, and therefore, whether explicitly or

Bettenhausen is not off the mark in her analysis and critique of the Lutheran understanding of the self for the formulation of Lutheran ethics:

The historical quietism of Lutherans politically and the tendency to separate economic issues from faith is due not simply to a misapprehension of the Reformation teaching about good works as the fruit of faith. It is also due to the separation of the historical self, the self *coram mundo*, from the justified self, the self *coram deo*, and the substitution of divine agency for human agency in the justified self. Justification by grace through faith is supposed to generate freedom before God, and out of this freedom from self-righteousness neighbor love is to flow. But unless some fuller articulation of sanctification of the social-historical person is made in Lutheran ethics, it is not possible to maintain that it is a human being who is loving the neighbor. Then "history is a meaningless game and [our] humanity a curious detour."¹⁰⁹

Bettenhausen urges for a new articulation of justification that takes into account Luther's own denial of a body/spirit dualism and the contemporary view of the person as a unity of individual and social identity. This is necessary because if the whole individual-social person is the auditor of the Word, then the individualistic interpretation of justification is therefore wrong. She reminds us that the person is constituted in part by relationships of political, economic, cultural, and social identity. These relationships must also be addressed by the Word of grace:

It is the social-historical self who is declared righteous, not a self abstracted from this identity. Thus, justification must address the unjust dependence of the oppressed, for this oppression is part of who the oppressed are. Justification, whether called forensic or a "metalinguistic event" (Gritsch and Jenson), must be not only an "unconditional eschatological pronouncement" of the acceptance of the individual sinner for Christ's sake. Justification should no

implicitly, to that which is perhaps dispensable, optional, or at least not "ultimately" significant!", 50-1.

¹⁰⁹ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 67; Bonino, *Sanctification and Liberation*, 62.

longer be interpreted by "lordship" and enslavement, the feudal categories of Luther's "The Freedom of a Christian." Rather, categories must be used which point to the interdependence of persons – categories of community.¹¹⁰

For Bettenhausen the question is not "What is necessary for my individual salvation?" with its concomitant answer of faith: "The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none." The question is rather, "Given that human life is embodied in a personal form that is both individual and social, how can salvation be articulated in a way that does not address only the individual aspect of the self?"¹¹¹ She suggests that Luther's statement, "descending beneath oneself into the neighbor"¹¹² is an image from a hierarchical social view that suggests a monarchical self that is condescendingly emptied (and which is articulated by Luther in terms of *kenosis*).¹¹³ This imagery is perhaps inevitable given the options of dependence and independence. If, however, one adds the option of interdependence, then *kenosis* as a prototypical norm for human agency becomes not love of neighbor necessarily, but possibly denial of neighbor.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 69; see Gritsch and Jenson, *Lutheranism*, 43.

¹¹¹ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 69.

¹¹² Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," WA 31:371.

¹¹³ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 69.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*; see, for example, Roy Herdon SteinhoffSmith [sic], *The Mutuality of Care* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 127-8. Smith examines the case of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman and observes that this encounter between the powerful and the powerless adds three insights to the analysis of the politics and economics of domination and condescension. First, this situation in which ruling economic elites use, discard, and protect themselves against the masses of the excluded poor is not new. Jesus treated the Syrophenician woman and her daughter as nonhuman "dogs," not members of the social household or economy. Second, religion authorizes this affliction of the afflicted. Jesus was following prescribed Jewish law, the code that defined ethical religious practice, when he labeled the woman and her daughter as unclean refuse to be discarded. Third, the story reveals that resistance to this system begins with those it afflicts, not

Oppressed groups in particular are often told to take *kenosis* as the theological enforcement of their "low estate."¹¹⁵ In this scenario, justification and justice are terms that are mutually exclusive. For Bettenhausen, a new articulation of *social* justification by grace through faith raises a whole set of questions quite different from the questions generated by works righteousness in the sixteenth century.

Even though Bettenhausen addresses the issue of justification and justice from the perspective of the marginalized community of the Third World, her critique strikes a chord with the experience of the Hispanic/Latina community of the United States. If the marginalized are those folks who do not have equal access to justice in the public forum or access to the common good by virtue of their marginalized status within the First World, then the Hispanic/Latina community qualifies as a community that shares this common experience of exclusion and marginality. The stark socio-economic inequalities present in the social conditions of the Third World are similar to those found and experienced by members of the Hispanic/Latina community within the United States.¹¹⁶

with the elites; with the Syrophoenician woman, not with Jesus. The woman taught Jesus that realistic hope and renewed vision for healing and empowerment is rooted in the mutuality of care.

¹¹⁵ Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," 69.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, David Traverzo, "Towards a *Relectura* of the History of the Church from a Latino Perspective: Reform, Rediscovery, or Revolution?" *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 4, no. 1 (1996): 50-1. Traverzo indicates that the Latino community is that group of persons, of Latin American cultural and historical roots, who embody a history of oppression and human disfranchisement in the U.S. They are the downtrodden segments of society, who are and join the majority in the world. They are the ones "who live on the fringes and at the bottom of society." Their common experience of poverty, alienation and disempowerment is characteristic of an oppressed population. See also, O. E. Costas, *Liberating News!: A Theology of Contextual Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); idem, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982); Joan Moore and Harry Pachón, *Hispanics in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1985), chapters 1-6; Jesús García, "The Hispanic Population in the United States," *Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 20-465; Deidra Martínez and Sonia Pérez, *State of Hispanic America* (Washington, DC.: National Council of La Raza, 1993).

Raising the issue of justice and justification within this context also begs the question of what it means to be justified by faith as a member of this community. To seek the liberation of the oppressed within the context of the First World raises similar questions of justice for those who confess justification by faith as the mark of their theological identity.¹¹⁷ If justice and justification are interpreted as terms that are not mutually exclusive then justification destroys human hierarchies and thus disrupts all societies and reverses their structures of oppression. Justification as the incarnate justice of God empowers the powerless as historical agents and equips the economic and politically powerful for service to the least of the community.

In the context of the First World community, the justified are being asked to reexamine their faith and the implications of their confession in order to raise the questions of injustice present in the lives of neighbors who share the same confession of faith but from a different socio-economic perspective. This is necessary because the conditions of inequality created by the systems and forces of globalization and by the systems of economic exploitation and political oppression are shared by neighbors both within and outside the borders of a nation that is the model of the First World.¹¹⁸ To be a forgiven saint who is set

¹¹⁷ Traverzo notes that a *relectura* or rereading of church history from a Latino perspective urges us to recognize that more than mere verbal eloquence and impotent contemplation will be necessary in a Latino/a social reality that bears the marks of impoverishment, disfranchisement, and alienation. He observes that so-called "main-stream" theological and historical disciplines, and their methods and discourses, stand accused as silent accomplices – by "omission" – of the oppression of many. Thus, a rereading of church history and of theological disciplines is necessary in order to rectify what has been an oppressive history. (Traverzo, "Towards a *Relectura*," 50-1).

¹¹⁸ Ekkehard Heise, "The implications of the doctrine of justification in the Latin American context," *Justification in the World's Context*, 203-4. Heise points out that in Reformation times,

free to serve the neighbor in this context is to bear the needs of the neighbor in their experience of marginality. This confession of faith and the theological identity on which it is based compels one to examine the nature and systems of social sin that create these conditions of injustice and oppression as well as to inquire as to the nature of justice that is required to address these conditions.¹¹⁹

Vitor Westhelle

Lutheran theologian Vitor Westhelle offers yet another critique of the doctrine of justification. He indicates that Lutherans are quick to claim their *simul iustus et peccator* status without examining the nature or the effects of sin.¹²⁰ He indicates that sin is not only individual but also social. It is found in systems of oppression. He makes the observation that liberation theology has been critiqued for placing too much of an emphasis on the social nature of systemic sin and the need for liberation from these structures of anti-life as a social project too closely identified with the reign of God. What concerns Westhelle is the naiveté of such a critique that raises the problem of sin to the level of universals and thus makes it the exclusive norm. He notes how Lutherans have historically been

justification meant that people were liberated from an oppressive religious system and that today, people are oppressed by different ideologies and powers (economic and communication systems, political as well as religious ideologies). He argues that in the Latin American context, the message of justification must be proclaimed concretely and directly and it must be relevant to practical life, if it is to be understood as the Good News of the God who is incarnated in the poor and who has set up his cross among the crosses of this world. He further argues that it would be the task of Latin American Lutheran churches to clarify their meaning of justification in this context. As an example, he observes that at its synod in 1995, the Evangelical Church of the River Plate (ECRP) most vigorously condemned "the unjust demonic and sinful order which oppresses us."

¹¹⁹ See, for example, the various global perspectives that address the complexity of this issue in diverse contexts in *Justification in the World's Context*.

¹²⁰ Vitor Westhelle, "Luther and Liberation," *Dialog* 25, no. 1 (1986): 51.

cautious of identifying any social project as the reign of God. But he also observes that Luther did not make the theological leap from particular sin to the universal and that any review of justice and justification in a contemporary context needs to take the particular perspective into account.¹²¹

For Westhelle the leap into the universal is not alien to Luther's theology, since Luther defines theology "as the study of the relationship between the sinful human being and the God who saves and justifies."¹²² He shows that Luther was able to reflect *theologically* on the important issues of his day without ever abandoning the particular content of sin, a subject Luther addressed in his treatises.¹²³ For example, Westhelle argues that Luther addressed the systemic nature of sin when he attacked the practice of usury by those who would call themselves preachers of the Word.¹²⁴ Luther abhorred this practice which he claimed required correction for the sake of justice in the social realm and for the sake of faithfulness in the individual realm. Westhelle indicates that the saint and sinner dialectic is in reality a confession of eschatological faith and not an excuse for noninvolvement in social ethics.

¹²¹ Ibid., 54-5.

¹²² Westhelle, "Luther and Liberation," 52; Martin Luther, WA 40/1:589.

¹²³ Ibid.; see, for example, Martin Luther, "An Admonition to the Pastors to Preach against Usury," WA 51:331-424, esp. 353, 409. In this treatise, Luther railed against preachers who did not speak against usury and thus "make a comedy of their preaching office ... and turn themselves against the truth ... Such people cannot promote the gospel." Earlier Luther had compared these preachers who generalize their preaching so much that they do not turn against the usurer *in particular* (but only against sin and the sinner *in general*) to those who want to dam a flood (Luther's favorite metaphor for social injustice and political anarchy) with a wired fence.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 53.

Westhelle also argues for justice in the social realm in his critique of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms. He proposes a creation theology that takes into account the myth of origin of the *particular* human family and the sense of belonging that is a *created space* from within the creation. He argues for a working definition of justice that takes into account the classical criteria of the Reformed tradition (law and gospel) without compromising the nature of justification as something that is done for us by faith alone. For Westhelle, "between justification and justice there is no equation, no mediation: justice has no other criterion of its own but to subject oneself exclusively to God's command."¹²⁵

José Miguez Bonino

Protestant theologian José Miguez Bonino also indicates that Protestantism has been guilty of the fear of making any social project into the reign of God.¹²⁶ The result has been that the tradition has fallen prey to a type of quietism that acknowledges the justification of the believer (the vertical plane) without acknowledging the implications of justice in the social realm (the horizontal plane). His critique is an indictment on the failure of the tradition to make the horizontal dimension of faith as critical for faithfulness as the vertical

¹²⁵ Westhelle, " 'The Third Bank of the River': Thoughts on Justification and Justice," *Justification and Justice* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1992), 29-30; for a biblical view of justice from a Latin American perspective, see Mercedes García-Bachmann, "The Difficult Path from Justification to Justice," *Justification and Justice* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1992), 37.

¹²⁶ José Miguez Bonino, "La Justicia del Cristiano," *Lutero Ayer y Hoy* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Ediciones La Aurora, 1984), 52.

dimension of faith. For Bonino and other contemporary Latin American theologians the failure of the praxis of justice is a failure to acknowledge the social reality of flagrant injustice in human relations.¹²⁷

Elsa Támez

Elsa Támez is another Latin American theologian who addresses the issue of justice and justification from the perspective of the excluded of history. These are the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed of Latin America. She raises the issue of the recovery of these excluded human beings whose dignity has been trampled upon by the forces of injustice and dehumanization. These individuals are the most vulnerable of society and have been turned into things or objects of exploitation. She calls this dehumanization the malaise of *thingification*.¹²⁸ For Támez, justification is a gift of God that empowers the poor and the oppressed to be historical agents and subjects of their own history for the sake of the transformation of the structures of oppression. The gift of justification brings about humanization, justice and liberation and counters any condemnation of the excluded of history. She calls this gift the logic of life and justice as opposed to the logic of anti-life and death that is characteristic of the structures of oppression.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Ibid; Also see "Statement of a Consultation, Justification and Justice: A Meeting of Lutheran Theologians of the Americas," *Word & World* 7 (1987); *Justification in the World's Context*, Document No. 45.

¹²⁸ Elsa Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 33.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 42.

Támez, Westhelle and Bonino all indicate that context and historical circumstances are important for any application of the doctrine of justification by faith. Walter Altmann is yet another Latin American theologian who concurs with this assessment. He argues that justification is a doctrine that cannot be imparted or received as a part of the tradition in an ahistorical and abstract way. To do this would be to do violence to the same people who have suffered and endured under an adverse history.¹³⁰ In a similar vein, Támez argues that the poor and the marginalized have suffered injustice throughout their history and are sinned against by a dominant culture of conquest and by ideologies of oppression. She argues that these oppressed are more conscious of their sins than are the powerful who inflict suffering upon them and that one cannot equate the sins of the powerful with the sins of the weak and of the sinned against. Thus, justification as a doctrine needs to be put in context in order for it to be a doctrine of life, gift and humanization. This calls for a different logic altogether.

For Támez, the act of justification by faith makes men and women subjects of their own history.¹³¹ In the context of exclusion and oppression this ability to see the self as a historical agent with a voice and ability for proactive justice is particularly empowering for those whose freedom, will, and humanity has been negated by structures of anti-life. For the excluded of history, freedom is a luxury of the powerful, self-will is often reduced to subservience and

¹³⁰ Walter Altmann, "Justification in a context of exclusion – Latin America," *Justification in the World's Context*, 117-8.

¹³¹ Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 141; Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1969). For Támez and Alves, the emphasis on the human being as a subject who creates history is indispensable in situations of exclusion and oppression.

resistance to those in power, and humanity as defined by the privileged serves a utilitarian and economic purpose. In this sense Tamez pushes the edge on Luther by providing a more inclusive perspective on the theological axioms that are at the center of the dialogue on justification by faith.¹³² Specifically, the power of justification for Tamez consists in the following:

- a) It makes human beings worthy persons, conscious of their right to life, their right over every law that kills, a right that is inviolable because it proceeds from the grace of God.
- b) It allows one to discern sin and recognize the capacity of human beings to destroy and exclude their neighbors, acknowledging that every human being is a sinner: The justified person can never forget that he or she is a sinner.
- c) It allows people to know that men and women are not alone in the defense of and struggle for life. The solidarity of the Triune God in justification has given them the security of God's company even though they are sinners.
- d) It goes to the extreme of making the human being not only a friend, but also a part of the divine lineage through Jesus Christ. The poor then immediately recognize that they are human beings of dignity and worth, in that they recognize that they are part of that divine lineage.¹³³

For Tamez, the power of justification lies in its life-giving potential. It is a principle that diminishes the strength of the law. In the context of exclusion, "the law" enslaves and dehumanizes for it excludes and justifies the oppression of the

¹³² For example, Luther's critique of the peasants during the Peasant's War reflects a hierarchical interpretation of his axioms. See Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 96-7. Matheson points out that the real crime of the peasants was not their disorderliness but their alarming propensity to create a new egalitarian order. Further, the real nightmare for the defenders of the social order was not the peasants' casual violence or plundering, but that they developed their own chancelleries and social programs, and that they championed an alternative vision of the *ordo rerum*, the divine order. See also Peter Bickel, *The Revolution of 1525. The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., and H.C. Erick Midelfort (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); James Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal and Kingston; London and Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Tom Scott and Bob Scribner, *The German Peasants' War. A History in Documents*, ed. and trans. Tom Scott and Bob Scribner (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1991).

¹³³ Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 141.

weakest members of society. Támez interprets the law in the broad sense to refer to the logic of the entire socioeconomic and cultural system, which includes the laws of the market, judicial law, and the implicit and explicit norms of a way of life.¹³⁴ In a similar fashion, she interprets sin as a social and historical fact, including the absence of brotherhood and sisterhood and of love in relationships between people. Sin includes the rupture of friendship with God and with other human beings, and consequently, the inner division with the human being as well. All who live within this logic turn into slaves for they do not have the ability to decide or to act on their decisions. The law usurps its place because sin takes command over the law. The law then functions according to the standards of sin. In this complete inversion of society, to fulfill the law is an act of sin, for sin is expressed in the law. Sin, then, "acts through the law and uses the law ... Sin operates through the legal structure and its prevailing law, and not through the transgression of the law."¹³⁵ For Támez human beings cease to be truly human when they cease to be free, that is, when they obey a law that negates their freedom, will, and humanity as subjects and co-participants in the construction of their historical project. In the context of oppression, the law marginalizes and enslaves for the law sanctions the structures of anti-life that negate the human worth and dignity of all people.

With the eruption of the logic of life in Jesus Christ and verified in justification by faith and not by works of any law, the excluded recover their ability

¹³⁴ Ibid, 142.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

to distinguish God's truth about themselves and about others.¹³⁶ Together with this discovery the excluded become aware of their freedom as historical subjects, participants in the divine lineage as children of God, and brothers or sisters of Jesus Christ. The good news of justification by grace through faith liberates the excluded. Tamez heralds:

They are freed not only from the stigma of insignificance with which they have always been evaluated by the society that excludes them, and which they have internalized by the power of the sin of discrimination, but they are freed as well from the fatal feeling of incapacity for deciding their own destiny as historical subjects. In that freedom, the excluded will recover confidence in themselves, self-affirmation, the loss of fear of deadly forces that diminish the human being and superimpose themselves in the uncertainty and despair that gnaws away at life. The poor are called to be "protagonists with God."¹³⁷

Tamez, Bonino and Westhelle are three Latin American theologians who speak from the perspective of the marginalized and excluded of history. Their perspective resonates with the experience of the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina community of this nation. For them, context and social location matter when interpreting the life-giving potential of the doctrine of justification. The marginalized and excluded people of the Southwest share a similar view and ask similar questions regarding their freedom, will and humanity in light of justification. For this community these theological axioms take on a different hue when interpreted from the perspective of the marginalized. Freedom to serve God and neighbor may invoke principles of justice and equality that have been absent from the political, economic and theological roundtable. The will that is

¹³⁶ Ibid, 143.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

subject to sin may in Christ be redirected to challenge the structures of anti-life and the laws that oppress and maintain a people in subservience. Humanity as redefined by the standard of moral agency and co-creatorship may mean that the oppressed and excluded of history will have a voice in the construction of their historical project.

The Hispanic/Latina community of the United States participates in the reality of exclusion. They are a people historically victimized and assessed as non-persons by both the church and society. The structures of both failed to critique such ideologies as Manifest Destiny and the consequences of capitalism in such areas as labor exploitation and the dehumanization of the weakest. Immigrants often endure many injustices, as they are the foreigners and the powerless in a land of conquest.

The reality of the southern neighbors is very similar to the reality of the Hispanic/Latina community in the United States. In this nation the third and fourth world is located within the economic system of the first world. Inequality, injustice and the denial of human dignity are often greater in this context. The Latin American critique asks difficult questions of the doctrine of justification by faith for it is at the center of the Lutheran heritage. These theologians consider that for the church to remain faithful to her Reformation and confessional heritage she must criticize and reexamine the doctrine in light of the excluded of history.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ See, for example, Giacomo Cassese, *Desde la reforma: El impacto de la reforma protestante en los grupos destituidos* (PuebloUnido Editores, n.d.).

José David Rodríguez Jr. indicates the same when he observes that our confession compels us to retrieve those elements of the early church that made the Christian movement a prophetic voice.¹³⁹ The church is a confessional and reforming movement within the church catholic and is located within the global empire of the United States and its system of capitalism. To confess the faith in Spanish in this context means to question our confession so as to avoid the exclusion of marginal groups who often feel dehumanized by dominant cultural and ideological forces.

For Támez, everyone is equal *coram deo* when justified by faith. The excluded recover any sense of lost dignity in the act of justification that is the gracious act and gift of God.¹⁴⁰ These are the *good news* that Hispanic/Latinas and all excluded groups in this country are longing to hear from our pulpits on Sunday mornings. This is the message of dignity and justice restored by an act of grace in the life of the believer. It is also a message that impels one to social justice and critique as an act of faithfulness and love for the neighbor and her dignity.

Justification by Faith in the Context of the Hispanic/Latina community of the Southwest

The theologians of the global community agree that the doctrine of justification requires a contextual application if it is to be meaningful and relevant for particular groups of people who share a different and diverse life experience

¹³⁹ Rodríguez, "Confessing the Faith in Spanish," 351-2.

¹⁴⁰ Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 33-4.

and who raise different theological questions from that of sixteenth-century Germans.¹⁴¹ The Hispanic/Latina community of the Southwest is such a context. In this context the symbols of popular religion convey the people's understanding of justification by faith. They express their theological identity with this doctrine through the indigenous symbols of their culture. They manifest their understanding and appropriation of this doctrine in a tangible manner through their vocation of service to the neighbor. The following empirical analysis of four Texas congregations attempts to show the nexus between popular religious expression and the doctrine of justification by faith in the context of exclusion and marginality. The findings may reveal some ambiguity in the primacy granted certain symbols. But overall, they reflect the notion that popular religious symbols serve as an indigenous witness to a culturally appropriated understanding of this central doctrine.

The Experience of Four Texas Congregations

In the summer of 1999 I visited four congregations in Texas with the purpose of examining their worship practices and liturgical symbols. It was my intent to examine the practice of popular religion in the worship settings of these four Lutheran congregations to see what role, if any, this form of faith expression played in the life of the community. I would also attempt to discern how the community affirms their human dignity by worship practices and symbols that are

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Wolfgang Greive, "The significance of justification in the world's contexts: Towards a new interpretation of the doctrine of justification," *Justification in the World's Contexts*, 11-2.

directly related to their cultural identity and to their theological self-understanding as a justified people of God. A questionnaire was used for this purpose.¹⁴² It was handed out to each of the worship participants after each service.

St. John's Lutheran Church, San Juan

St. John Lutheran Church is a seventy-six year old congregation located in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas. The church is about twenty miles from the U.S. - Mexican border. It was founded in 1924 and is the oldest Hispanic congregation in the continental United States. This is a congregation that has been served by both Hispanic and Anglo pastors and laity throughout its long history.¹⁴³ It currently holds services in both English and Spanish. Many of the English-speaking congregants are winter Texans from the Midwest who reside in south Texas during the winter months. Some of these have become associate members. Others have relocated to south Texas and have transferred their membership to St. John. Most of the Spanish-speaking members are bi-lingual. Some of these attend the English-speaking service. It is a bi-lingual congregation. It holds two worship services each Sunday that accommodate the worship experiences and expectations of two different ethnic groups.

Perhaps some early history is in order at this point. St. John was originally started as a mission of the Texas district of the Ohio Synod that later merged with the Iowa and Buffalo Synods to become the American Lutheran

¹⁴² See appendix 1.

¹⁴³ The current pastor is David Carrillo who is originally from Eagle Pass, Texas. He is a graduate of the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

Church.¹⁴⁴ There were several Hispanic and Anglo clergy and laity who labored intensively to jump-start the mission until the first pastor could be called.¹⁴⁵ In November of 1923 the Board of Foreign Missions called the Reverend Albert Ell of St. Boswell, Saskatchewan, Canada to serve in the San Juan mission field.¹⁴⁶ He arrived in San Juan in 1924 and began conducting Spanish worship services.¹⁴⁷ He served as the first pastor of St. John until 1927. He was German

¹⁴⁴ See T. Michael Mackey, ed., "The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas," 25-6., and also, Flachmeier, *Lutherans of Texas In Confluence*, 85-6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. These included Pastors F. A. Neumeister, H. F. Richards, R. A. Dapper, and William Durkop who was a graduate of Luther Seminary. He conducted the first baptism in Spanish in 1923. He baptized a six year old by the name of Jesús Cantú. The parish workers included Simón Camarillo, originally a Presbyterian from México who was attracted to the mission by the singing he heard one Sunday morning. He was an avid Bible student and came to be capable Lutheran teacher and lay-preacher. Other church workers included Manuel Alaniz, Suzanna Rodríguez, Marianna Camarillo, Mike Domínguez, the Álvarez sisters who were Methodists, Manuela Bravo, Irene Mellenbruch and Germán and Librada Vásquez and their daughter Lydia who came to south Texas from Puerto Rico in 1928. Germán was a church worker found to be scripturally grounded and ordained. He served as the pastor of St. John between 1929 and 1931. Lydia became an elementary teacher at the Lutheran school for Mexican children founded in San Juan. Another Puerto Rican, Demetrio Texidor, was ordained in 1926 and followed Vásquez as the pastor of St. John between 1931 and 1933. See Ziehe, *A Centennial Story of The Lutheran Church in Texas, 1851-1951* (Seguín, Texas: South Texas Printing Company, 1954), 180-1. Rubén P. Armendáriz observes that during the first half of the twentieth Century, U.S. Hispanic churches depended to a large degree on imported pastors from Latin American countries where Protestant missionary work had already taken place. These pastors were not expensive and they were orthodox, certain of the abyss that separated the Church of Rome from the true Church of Jesus Christ ("*La Iglesia Evangélica*"). They set the tone for Hispanic Protestant church life in the United States, often in inspiring ways. Armendáriz points out that these pastors may not have been fully cognizant of the alienating nature of the anti-Roman Catholic dogma they inherited and the schism this would cause among members of the Hispanic/Latina community. See Rubén P. Armendáriz, "The Protestant Hispanic Congregation: Identity," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 263-4.

¹⁴⁶ This information was obtained from the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through Joel Thoreson, Assistant Archivist, via electronic mail dated July 13, 2000.

¹⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that the baptismal registry of the church bears the name *San Juan Evangelista* (St. John the Evangelist). This would have made sense in the context of Protestant ministry with the Spanish-speaking Hispanic/Latina community. However, current members do not remember a time when the church was not called St. John Lutheran Church. This may reflect the inculturation of the faith tradition. The transmission of the Lutheran tradition by the Anglo missionaries served to promote the "Americanization" of the Hispanic/Latina community that consisted of many recent immigrants from México.

and had been a Catholic priest prior to his conversion to Lutheranism.¹⁴⁸ According to the minutes of the Board of Mexican Missions Ell came into the Joint Synod of Ohio from the Missouri Synod.¹⁴⁹

This early history of the first pastor is significant because it reveals the theological training and teaching that was to influence several generations in their understanding of God and of the Lutheran tradition.¹⁵⁰ In an oral interview conducted by this writer with a member of the first confirmation class taught by Pastor Ell, this writer learned that the concept of God was that of a stern father figure whom one was to fear and obey.¹⁵¹ The emphasis of the teaching was on the first person of the Trinity.¹⁵² The second and third persons of the Trinity were not emphasized as much as the first person. The interviewee noted that the

¹⁴⁸ The mother of this writer, Manuela Alanís, is the last surviving founding member of the church. She remembers Pastor Ell speaking fluent German with his parents who lived with him in San Juan. She was a member of the first confirmation class taught by Pastor Ell in 1924. Manuela's father, Arnulfo Treviño, was a Mexican immigrant who converted to the Lutheran tradition as a protest against the hegemonic influence and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church in México. He was a member of the subaltern group of *los desposeídos* who fled Mexico during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20.

¹⁴⁹ Via electronic mail dated July 13, 2000, Joel Thoreson of the ELCA reported to this writer that Pastor Ell had been a Catholic priest and that the Lutheran World Almanac for 1922 lists Ell in Perry, Oklahoma, and as a member of the Missouri Synod. The Ohio Synod, Canada District Report for 1921 says: "Berufen haben angenommen: ... Pastor A. Ell von St. Joseph, Mo., aus der Missourisynode an St. Boswells, Flowing Well, und Morye, Sask., die ich vorläufig zu einer Parochie vereinigt habe."

¹⁵⁰ To a certain extent one can only surmise the influence of this pastor's theological formation and teaching on his parishioners. However, this writer was able to gain some insight of the persona of the pastor from his interview with his mother who is the last surviving founding member of the church. She was one of the first confirmands instructed by Pastor Ell and took organ lessons from him at his home where he lived with his parents.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Manuela Alanís on July 7, 2000 in San Juan, Texas. This image of God may be a reflection of German Lutheran piety that was transmitted to the parishioners by the early missionaries.

¹⁵² This is an interesting observation when one considers the Christocentric nature and history of Lutheranism as a movement that has emphasized the second person of the Trinity.

contemporary proclamation of the scriptures and religious education reflect a more pronounced Christocentric emphasis. She also noted an observable difference in worship styles. The current trend resembles the more evangelical style or what is referred to as the charismatic expression of praise with the singing of *coritos* as a natural and spontaneous expression of worship.¹⁵³ Worship at the time of the founding of the church was conducted in a very reverential and quiet manner. She assumed that this was the Protestant tradition of worship expression.¹⁵⁴ The liturgy and hymnody followed the classic German liturgical styles and hymnody that were simply translated into Spanish in the early books of worship.¹⁵⁵ She recalled how surprised she was when the guitar was introduced into the worship experience by a young Anglo pastor during the decade of the seventies.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ This spontaneity in worship that is expressed through the singing of *coritos* is symbolic of the way the people have appropriated their cultural context into the worship experience. It is an appropriation of their cultural identity as Hispanic Lutherans who prefer to worship God in the language of the heart (in their native language) and in the freedom and language of the Spirit. It is not uncommon for parishioners to lift their hands in praise of God or to clap their hands while singing these *coritos*. This represents a marked difference from the worship style and reserved piety of Euro-American Lutherans. *Coritos* also function as a way to express the adoration of the Third Person of the Trinity in a way that has not been allowed through classical hymnody. For a similar perspective from the Pentecostal and Caribbean experience in Philadelphia, see Aponte, "Coritos", 61-2.

¹⁵⁴ This writer remembers this style of worship in the decades of the fifties and sixties when he received his religious training and instruction in preparation for his confirmation in 1967 by the Reverend Norton MacCaughan who came from Minnesota. Reverend Holger Nielsen, a Danish immigrant from Iowa, baptized this writer in 1954. He was a graduate of Trinity Seminary.

¹⁵⁵ See for example, *Manual de Culto Cristiano* (New York: The United Lutheran Church in America, 1940); *Culto Cristiano* (New York: Publicaciones "El Escudo," 1964); *Himnos de Fe y Alabanza* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966).

¹⁵⁶ This young pastor is credited with setting the stage for a more relaxed style of worship that reflected the style and manner of his generation. The native Mexican pastor who followed him also played the guitar and incorporated it into the worship setting with the singing of *coritos*. These little choruses or songs of the people continue to be a popular form of worship.

The first pastor to serve at St. John had been a Roman Catholic priest who converted to Lutheranism. One can only surmise the influence of his theological formation and conversion on his parishioners who at the time were defining themselves theologically over against the Roman Catholics of the community.¹⁵⁷ What is clear is that the schism that developed between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans divided the community and even families who no longer shared the same religious perspective.¹⁵⁸ The Hispanic Lutheran evangelicals or *protestantes*¹⁵⁹ began to develop their own religious and cultural ethos based on an imported German model of worship that was foreign to their cultural history and theological roots. As each religious community adopted and embraced a different theological position they also adopted and embraced the

¹⁵⁷ T. Michael Mackey, ed., "The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas," 26. These writers noted that the opposition to the Lutheran mission by the Roman Catholic community was very strong. The Roman Catholics threatened the Sunday school efforts and in fact started a counter-mission, warning people against the Lutherans. What these writers did not document or note was the effect of this missionary and theological schism on the fabric of the Hispanic cultural identity. Both Roman Catholics and Lutherans shared historical, cultural and theological roots and both were a people living on the margins of society. To be defined theologically over against a member of one's own cultural and familial community was the equivalent of a double marginalization and victimization. For a similar perspective from the Cuban exile community see González, *Mañana*, 14-5.

¹⁵⁸ This has been true in the family of this writer and is a division that has brought respectful and at times painful distance within members of the family. This is not an uncommon experience within the Hispanic Protestant and Roman Catholic community of south Texas.

¹⁵⁹ Rubén Armendáriz indicates that the word *protestante* or Protestant is no longer commonly used by Hispanic Protestants in order to define themselves within the Christian tradition. Rather the word *evangélico* (evangelical) is the commonly used term of definition. The sense and meaning in English refers to evangelical churches. The meaning grows out of an understanding of the act of evangelizing, communicating the *evangélio* (gospel), and converting persons to Protestantism. This is a word enclosed in a legacy inherited from nineteenth-century missionaries who initiated Protestant missionary work with Hispanics. See Armendáriz, "The Protestant Hispanic Congregation: Identity" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 246. For many Hispanic/Latina Lutherans of south Texas it is more common to say "*Soy Luterano*" (I am a Lutheran) as a way to define oneself as Protestant. The term *evangélico* in south Texas usually refers to members of the evangelical free churches that have made significant inroads among the Hispanic/Latina community within the latter half of the twentieth century.

symbols of the faith that would define them theologically and spiritually for several generations.¹⁶⁰

The questionnaire that was distributed to the parishioners of St. John in the summer of 1999 contained a series of questions that was aimed at discovering and discerning the symbols of faith that have played a significant role in affirming the faith, culture and dignity of the people of God in San Juan, Texas. Eight multiple-choice questions were asked of the thirty folks who attended the Spanish service.¹⁶¹

Each of the questions contained multiple-choice answers. A subsidiary question asked the respondents to pick the preferred symbol of faith as the one granting a sense of dignity and/or cultural affirmation. 72% of the respondents picked the cross as the primary symbol of identity. 55% felt that this symbol conferred dignity to their lives. Over half of the respondents acknowledged that their sense of dignity or self-worth was affirmed by the rituals of baptism (70%),

¹⁶⁰ Anthropologist Mary Douglas gives a concise definition of a religious "symbol" as "a person, place, thing, event, or relationship carrying a meaning or significance that cannot be verified or disproved empirically, or that points to something beyond itself." See Peter W. Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 242. However, religious symbols do not function solely at an individual level. There is a communal significance to religious symbol. Robert Wuthnow, also following Mary Douglas, speaks of humans in society creating symbolic boundaries to achieve social order. He holds that "the very nature of our thinking and our behavior takes place in terms of symbolic boundaries. Otherwise, we would be unable to make sense of our worlds, not to ourselves or anyone else. So in this respect, symbolic boundaries are fundamental to all of social life. And rather than consisting merely of the nuts and bolts of social interaction, they include symbolism, ritual acts, gestures, discourse, moral obligations, commitments – all things we usually think of as being important when we speak of religion." Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 10. Religious symbols as such function as one bridge to the source that sustains a community, and in a Hispanic Protestant context this ultimate source is the triune God. See Apontes, "Coritos", 60. More will be said concerning the connection between popular religion as expressed through the active symbols of faith in the Hispanic Lutheran context.

¹⁶¹ See appendix 1.

confirmation (53%), the proclamation of the Word (60%) and by the singing of the *coritos* (57%). 57% replied that the *coritos* was a favorite form of worship. 55% picked the guitar as the preferred instrument of worship. 87% acknowledged that the use of the Spanish language in worship affirmed their cultural identity. 63% felt that the singing of the *coritos* affirmed their cultural identity and 50% felt that the guitar did the same.

The responses revealed the importance that the Hispanic community at St. John attributes to their Protestant Lutheran tradition as expressed through the communal rituals of faith and their own indigenous forms of worship and cultural symbols. The people interviewed found the *coritos* in particular to be a special vehicle and active symbol for the affirmation of their faith and the acknowledgment of their dignity as a special people of God. The use of the Spanish language in worship was highly esteemed as the language of their culture and of their history. The expression of their popular religious faith as expressed through their language and their forms of worship and symbols of faith can be interpreted as a creative communal way of being and a means of cultural self-identification for survival as a marginalized group.¹⁶² Their expression of faith represents the community's understanding of a relational God who is the creative source of their being.

Their identification with the cross as a Protestant symbol of faith that confers dignity reflects their strong theological mooring in the Lutheran tradition. It is a symbol of empowering faith in that it confers a profound and ineffable

¹⁶² See Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha*, 45-8.

sense of self-worth to the marginalized community. In this community the symbol of the cross was more effective for conferring a sense of dignity than the Bible. This finding was a surprising discovery and reflects some ambiguity when compared with the experience of other Hispanic/Latina communities and the theologians and historians such as Justo González who interpret them.¹⁶³ In this community only 11% of the respondents picked the Bible as the source of their identity and only 18% responded that the Bible gave them a sense of dignity. This attitude towards the Bible may be due to several reasons. The first of these may reflect the hermeneutical method of interpretation and teaching by former pastors. The second reason may reflect how parishioners used the Bible for Biblical studies. The third may be due to the translation or version of the Bible of this particular community. Currently there is an increased emphasis on weekly Bible study. This practice along with a contextual hermeneutical method that reflects the historical experience of the people may lead to a renewed understanding of scriptural identity. This practice may change the self-perception of the community over time and may lead to a heightened awareness of the Biblical notion of human dignity.

A review of one of the earliest hymnals of the community may provide a clue for the low emphasis currently placed on the Bible as the grantor of human dignity. The lyrics of many of the hymns revealed a strong emphasis on the sinful condition of the believer and on the mercy of God in the act of redemption on the cross. This emphasis may reflect the German and Scandinavian piety of

¹⁶³ See González, *Mañana*, 22-26.

the composers and may account for the perception of the Bible as the descriptor of the human condition primarily in terms of sin rather than grace, and may explain the low perception of the Bible as the place where human dignity is conferred and affirmed. In contrast, the *coritos* offer an alternative view: God in Christ justifies and gives the grace of renewed hope and victory over individual and systemic sin and oppression. They convey a more gracious and hope-filled message in the context of their marginality and may explain why *coritos* are a popular form of worship in this community.

This community also gives a public testimony to the faith during the worship service through the *testimonios*. This manner of faith expression represents a departure from the liturgical form of worship of earlier years. They are a public confession of faith as empowering for the community as the communal confession of the church creeds. They often proclaim a message of victory over systemic sin, evil and oppression. They also create a spirit of solidarity among the faithful. They serve as vehicles for giving witness and confession to the activity of the Spirit of God in the life of the community during the week. The community is empowered by these acts of witness and confession. When a member of the faithful "rises up with courage and takes a stand" by denouncing injustice and by proclaiming a message of hope in the midst of adverse circumstances, the community is once again reminded that the God who justifies them is present with them in their struggles. The *testimonios* are a popular form of worship that reflects the unique cultural context and voice of marginalized people in the context of exclusion. This medium of faith and

witness also reflects and acknowledges the source of their creative being. They are a visible manifestation of an incarnate presence and voice of the Spirit in the life of the marginalized community. They offer an image of the Spirit of God who as the Third Person of the Trinity inspires their life and affirms their communal witness of faith in the midst of adverse conditions. They serve as a medium of culture that allows for the expression of the faith in the language of the people. They reflect an indigenous appropriation of justification by faith in the context of exclusion and marginality. The *testimonios* are a public act of confession that are often more powerful and disclosing of theological identity than the confession of historical creeds.¹⁶⁴

In Hispanic/Latina congregations such as St. John's, the expression of public testimony is also evident in the oral prayers of the people that are often a spontaneous response of gratitude for the love and mercy of God. This prayerful form of public witness is also an act of confession of faith. It is practiced in this congregation and serves as a public ritual for the edification of the community. The prayers also identify the concerns of the community, what the community values and how the community discerns the Spirit participating in their lives. The prayers of the people are often the form and substance of the theology of the community and the public witness of their sense of justification by faith.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ *Un Credo Hispano* written by Justo González is an example of an indigenous creed that expresses the historical journey of faith and public witness of the Hispanic/Latina community. The creed expresses the hope of the future reign of God when people of every hue will gather together at the promised *Gran Fiesta*. See *Alabadle!*, 114.

¹⁶⁵ For a similar perspective see Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Strangers No Longer," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 371.

Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey, Pharr, Texas

Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey was established as a mission church during the decade of the eighties in a *colonia*¹⁶⁶ known as *Las Milpas*¹⁶⁷ south of Pharr, Texas.¹⁶⁸ *Colonias* are land development areas that are characterized by minimal if non-existent infrastructure. Plots of land are often sold to potential buyers by unscrupulous landowners with the promise of further development. This development is often not realized unless the *colonia* becomes incorporated as part of an adjoining city such as Pharr, Texas. These *colonias* are economically depressed areas and the poor often live there in third world conditions. It is not uncommon for immigrants from México to live in these *colonias* during part of the year when they are not traveling north to look for employment in major urban centers. *Cristo Rey*, or Christ the King, began its

¹⁶⁶ *Colonia* is a Spanish word common in the border regions of the Southwest that refers to "a new quarter (neighborhood or district) of a city." See *Diccionario Porrúa De La Lengua Española* (1982), s.v. "*colonia*." In Spanish *colonia* is a perfectly acceptable word for neighborhood or quarter. The term as incorporated in Southwestern lexicon carries a negative connotation to mean an unorganized settlement of people living usually in a rural setting in substandard housing with inadequate water or sewer service infrastructure. For an excellent exposition of *colonias* as a border phenomenon see Chad Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 43-4.

¹⁶⁷ *Las Milpas* is a Spanish word for "maize-field." See *Diccionario Porrúa De La Lengua Española* (1982), s.v. "milpa." It is perhaps within the purview of the providence of God that this community was founded in what formerly were fields of corn, the staple food of the indigenous Hispanic/Latina people. It is in this place of food cultivation and harvest that the people have found a sacred space for their spiritual sustenance. One popular song frequently intoned by Central American immigrants refers to the Bible as "the rain that makes our *milpas* grow and makes the seeds of love and joy increase." See Harold J. Recinos, "Mainline Hispanic Protestantism and Latino Newcomers" in *Protestantes/Protestants*, 200.

¹⁶⁸ This was an experimental ministry begun in 1983 in the *colonias* of Hidalgo County with funds donated by mission partners. Pastor Paul Collinson-Streng was called as the mission developer of the *Colonia* Missionary Project. He served for three years and was followed by Pastor Ellis Méndez of El Salvador who served for a year. Pastor Bezaleel Hernández took over the mission development in 1986.

mission development as *Iglesia Luterana Maranatha* under the leadership of Pastor Bezaleel Hernández of El Salvador.¹⁶⁹ He began his ministry in a trailer where he served the many immigrants and foreigners from México and Central America who came to this country looking for better working conditions. The new church was officially incorporated and dedicated as *Cristo Rey* on Palm Sunday, 1992. It has served the community of the poor and the marginal of south Texas for almost fifteen years. The change of church name reflects their appropriation of the victory of Christ who on Palm Sunday entered into the beginning of his passion and ultimate victory over the powers of death and evil in Jerusalem. The church name reflects their historic struggle and existential passion as well as the victory of faith over the adverse conditions that have marked their arduous journey and exile as a people of God.

This writer was present at the dedication of the new church building in 1992. At the time it was not uncommon to see many of the faithful bring votive candles and religious jewelry and icons for a blessing from the pastor. The people brought the elements of their popular religiosity and piety as practiced in their countries of origin. There were many votive candles present at the altar. This was not an uncommon sight for a people whose faith tradition was Roman Catholic. These folks had received the pastoral care they required for their lives. A relationship of trust had been built over several years and many were learning

¹⁶⁹ Pastor Hernández received theological training by extension under the direction and supervision of Dr. Alberto Pereyra of the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest in Austin, Texas. He was ordained and installed as the pastor of *Cristo Rey* on Palm Sunday of 1992. He had previously received theological training at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

what it meant to be a member of the Lutheran reforming movement. On this particular day of the dedication of the church the bishop was present and his blessing was considered a most significant event. These were a people who were living in exile. Many were undocumented, and the church was their only safe haven and the sacred place of worship and pastoral care in a foreign and often hostile country.

At the time of my visit to the church in the summer of 1999 a new pastor was leading the congregation.¹⁷⁰ This change in ministry brought with it some changes as often happens when former ministries end and new ones begin. The votive candles were absent, but the style of worship remained evangelical in style. It was less Roman Catholic in appearance and in substance.¹⁷¹ It was apparent that there had been a transformation in the life of the community. It had become more "Protestant" in appearance without losing some of the cultural vestiges of the people. The answers to the questionnaires revealed that the people were still practicing their faith in the garments of their culture.

As folks arrived for worship they picked up a binder at the door containing *coritos*. The *coritos* were the principal form of worship in this setting. These folk songs provided a venue for an emotive response from the people as they worshipped God in their own manner and language. This form of worship was

¹⁷⁰ Pastor Alma Morales-Saavedra of Matamoros, México was a former Methodist pastor who received her theological training at the Perkins School of Theology at SMU. She assumed the role of pastor in July of 1995.

¹⁷¹ In an interview conducted on April 11, 2001 Pastor Morales-Saavedra indicated that her proclamation and ministry was more "Word" centered in an effort to promote the Protestant identity of the Lutheran tradition. She indicated that her style of leadership was a response to her understanding of the Protestant reforming tradition and tenet of the priesthood of all believers. It

familiar and comfortable. The couple that led the singing provided a sense of worship leadership that allowed the freedom to worship in a spirit of joy and praise accompanied by the clapping of hands. In this group 94% of the people picked the guitar as the preferred instrument of worship. 46% selected the cross as the principal symbol of identity whereas 38% selected the Bible as their principal symbol. When asked which one gave them a sense of dignity and self-worth 50% selected the cross and 38% selected the Bible. 63% opined that the proclamation of the Gospel affirmed their dignity. An overwhelming majority (94%) felt that their cultural identity was affirmed in their church. 83% felt that the use of the Spanish language in worship affirmed their cultural identity. 54% felt that the *coritos* affirmed their cultural identity.

Since there are no hymnals in this community, the *coritos* function as an active symbol of popular faith expression and cultural identity. The *coritos* were the primary vehicle for expressing worship and adoration. The lyrics of the *coritos* affirmed the love of God for the people. They indicate that God walks with them in their daily struggles. The guitar was the preferred instrument of worship. The Hispanic/Latina people often prefer this popular instrument rather than the organ. The cross and to some extent the Bible were the two most notable affirming symbols of their Protestant faith tradition. The Spanish language, of the home and of the heart, was their primary source of cultural affirmation. Since the *coritos* are sung in Spanish it was not surprising to find that 54% felt that this medium served to affirm their cultural identity and faith

was her goal to promote Biblical literacy and Lutheran identity in the training of the laity in preparation for their leadership in the church.

expression. These are a people who are living as strangers in a strange land where English is the dominant language and Spanish the language of suspicion and of derision. To worship in the language of the people is a sign and symbol of faith expressed freely and abundantly in a spirit of gratitude for the gift of their creation as unique human beings. Singing *coritos* in their native Spanish is a way of proclaiming *very good* to the creation and worship of God. *Coritos* also serve to denounce the forces that would oppress them and negate their sense of justification by faith.

St. John/San Juan Lutheran Church, Austin

St. John/*San Juan* Lutheran Church describes herself as one church with two languages. St. John was founded in 1946. The Hispanic ministry began in 1985 as a separate entity known as *Iglesia Luterana San Lucas*.¹⁷² The *San Lucas* church conducted services at St. John for twelve years until it relocated to another church sanctuary in 1997. Two years later *San Lucas* returned to St. John and became a part of the worshiping community with the new name of *San Juan*. *San Juan* now functions as a part of the St. John congregation but meets at a separate time to conduct worship services in Spanish.¹⁷³ The membership of the *San Juan* congregation is predominantly of Central American origin. 83% reported that they were immigrants.

¹⁷² Pastor Joaquín Figueroa of El Salvador was the mission developer and pastor of this congregation during a time of increased Central American immigration to the city of Austin. He is a graduate of the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest in Austin.

¹⁷³ Pastor Tim Anderson is an able bi-lingual pastor who formerly served as a missionary in Peru. He is an ardent supporter of Hispanic/Latina ministry in his church and synod. He is a graduate of Luther Seminary.

53% of this group chose the cross as the primary symbol of religious identity. 29% chose the Bible as their primary symbol and 21% chose the crucifix. When asked which symbol gave them a sense of dignity 29% chose the cross and 29% chose the Bible. 53% felt that baptism conferred a sense of dignity to their lives. 80% chose the guitar as the preferred instrument of worship and 94% felt that their cultural identity was affirmed in the worship service. 84% felt that the use of the Spanish language affirmed their cultural identity and 42% felt that the *coritos* did the same. This congregation uses the new Spanish hymnal *El Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* that contains many of the songs of the Central American and Caribbean people.

This congregation is composed of a group of people who arrived as immigrants and exiles in this country. They found in *San Lucas/San Juan* a safe refuge from the persecution and the lives of poverty that they experienced in Central America. When they came to this country as immigrants they brought their faith with them as their only sustenance. They also arrived with the hope for a better life. The church was able to meet them and welcome them at a critical moment in their lives. The church offered them a safe haven in a foreign land and provided the worship space to worship God in the language of their native countries. The people are grateful for this hospitality to the stranger. The symbols of their faith and of their culture of origin are respected here. They feel affirmed because they feel valued for who they are as a people of God. This affirmation is expressed through the power of symbols and symbolic language

that carry a meaning and significance for them through the medium of ritual.¹⁷⁴ The revelation of their self-worth and dignity is mediated through the symbolic language of Word and Sacrament that is at the heart of their religious universe.¹⁷⁵ The Spanish language is the sign and symbol of their cultural identity. It is affirmed through the rituals of the community.¹⁷⁶ The God of creation speaks to the people in their language in the dialectic of sacred encounter. With their own unique language, the people protest and resist the ethnocentricity of the dominant culture and mainline church.¹⁷⁷ In this community

¹⁷⁴ Philip Hefner defines ritual as "a set of actions that portray how human beings should behave in order to be in harmony with the fundamental nature of (their) reality. It is central to religion (although not confined to religion), and it acts out the behavior that is thought to be mandated by the basic myths to which the community holds" (Hefner, *The Human Factor*, 285). Harold Recinos points out that in the Lutheran parish of *La Comunidad* (The Community) in Washington, D.C., the Salvadoran community engages in a ritual process that reflects the subversive memory of their social martyrdom. Their weekly Bible Circle meetings are ritual occasions that involve (1) prayer and singing of popular protest songs, (2) Bible reading, and (3) mutual dialogue between men and women using the Scriptures to interpret themselves and to generate social categories of understanding. As a ritual document, the Bible is consistently read from the perspective of the poor and used to create a context for molding a collective protest identity and a heightened sense of community. Popular songs function as ritual structures that generate and reinforce a political self-identity in the context of a culture of struggle (Harold J. Recinos, "Mainline Hispanic Protestantism and Latino Newcomers" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 198-9).

¹⁷⁵ For Tillich, a symbol points to something beyond itself. The religious symbol points to the divine and is a true symbol only if it participates in the power of the divine to which it points. In this sense religious symbols are mediums of revelation of divine mystery that participate in the object of ultimate concern. (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 118-9). Joseph Campbell believed that the power of symbol "lies not in what meets the eye, but in what dilates the heart" (Adele Getty, *A Sense of the Sacred: Finding our Spiritual Lives through Ceremony* [Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1997], 85).

¹⁷⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 239. For Tillich, a sign bears no necessary relation to that to which it points, whereas the symbol participates in the reality of that for which it stands. For the Hispanic/Latino community the Spanish language is both a sign and a symbol. As a sign the language points to the nature and essence of their being and identifies them as a unique creation of God. As symbol the Spanish language participates in the self-definition of the people and provides the medium for the articulation of their faith.

¹⁷⁷ An example of this pernicious and pervasive attitude appeared in a critique to a message by the bishop of the Southwestern Texas Synod who had asked that his message be printed in Spanish as well as in English in the synodical newspaper. The sole reason for the complaint of the parishioner was that the message was being printed in the Spanish language! This kind of racism uses language as an arm of prejudice rather than as an arm of blessing in order to

of faith a female member of the laity elevates the elements for consecration when the pastor plays the guitar and sings the words of institution. The faithful appropriate their sacred dignity through the powerful visual imagery conveyed in this worship experience.¹⁷⁸ Through this participation the faithful claim their prophetic vocation and political agency.¹⁷⁹ They appropriate their sense of the justified priesthood of all believers who are further dignified in their role as worship participants and leaders of the church.

Iglesia Luterana San Miguel, Fort Worth

Iglesia Luterana San Miguel began as a mission start in 1994 with a worshipping community of ten people.¹⁸⁰ Today one hundred and seventy five families belong to the church. It is not uncommon to have four hundred and fifty folks attend worship services on Sundays. The majority are Mexican immigrants. Many of them were undocumented when they became a part of the community. *San Miguel* professes a prophetic holistic ministry that serves the entire individual. The church has a social ministry that addresses both the physical and

marginalize and dishonor the Hispanic/Latina people. This pervasive evil tramples on their human dignity (James E. Bennett, "From the Bishop" *The Vista* 11, no. 2 [1999]: 2).

¹⁷⁸ For women of the subaltern races this type of public role confers the affirmation of their own alterity. By becoming the subject of her theology she assumes a role previously denied her by ecclesiastical authorities and tradition (María Pilar Aquino, "The Collective 'Dis-covery' of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology" *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 240-58).

¹⁷⁹ Puerto Rican Lutheran pastor and educator José David Rodríguez, Sr. reminds us of the central prophetic vision of the gospel when he addresses the ministry and mission of the church. This prophetic vision is connected to God's revelation of the divine plan for the redemption of all creation. As a witness to this project taking place in the history of humankind, the church is called to participate in confronting those forces which, in opposition to God's plan, abuse the dignity of human beings by subjecting them to oppression and destroy the beauty and worth of the whole creation (José David Rodríguez, Sr., *El precio de la vocación profética* (México: Publicaciones El Faro, S.A. de C.V., 1994).

¹⁸⁰ Pastor Antonio Cotto is a dynamic Puerto Rican pastor who began the mission after his theological and pastoral formation and training at the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

the spiritual needs of the individual and the family. The ministry includes citizenship classes, English as a second language, computer training, financial counseling, housing allocation, a preventive medicine program and clinic and assistance with racial and discriminatory practices in the employment arena. This is a ministry that is provided as a service to the community in addition to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

42% of this group selected the cross as their primary symbol of religious identity. Perhaps as a reflection of their Roman Catholic background 29% selected the crucifix and 22% selected the Virgin of Guadalupe as their primary symbols of faith and identity. Only 6% selected the Bible as their primary symbol. When asked to select the symbol that gave them a sense of dignity or self worth 49% selected the cross whereas 15% selected the Virgin of Guadalupe and 16% selected the Bible. 46% answered that they received a sense of dignity through the ritual of baptism. 40% chose the guitar as the preferred instrument of worship. 70% felt that the use of the Spanish language in worship affirmed their cultural identity. 41% felt that the singing of the *coritos* also affirmed their sense of cultural and religious identity.¹⁸¹

San Miguel is an immigrant church of folks whose historical religious tradition has been Roman Catholicism. This became apparent in the vestibule of the church where votive candles were lit to an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The parishioners requested that an image of the Virgin be present in the church

¹⁸¹ A *corito* that was sung during this service was called "*De que color es la piel de Dios?*" (What skin-color does God have?). It was a powerful reminder to the community that God the Creator

sanctuary as she is a national and a religious symbol of identity for the Mexican people.¹⁸² The appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the Mexican people is an epiphany story of the salvation of God. She is one of the saints of salvation history who witnesses to the revelation of the love of God in Christ in the unique historical context of the conquest of Mexico by Spain.¹⁸³ She provides a symbolic form of a sacred *mestizo* identity for she carries an indigenous Christ in her womb. She looks like them and conveys a love for the marginalized *mestizo* people. They are the product of the conquest and the ones who live on the fringes of society. The Mexican immigrant community of *San Miguel* relate well with this image of the saint because like them she represents the outcast and the excluded. She is a medium for understanding salvation history in the Western hemisphere in the language of semiotics.¹⁸⁴ She reminds the people of *San*

loves all people regardless of their skin-color or racial mixture. It also served as a prophetic denunciation of the systemic racism that is prevalent in North American society.

¹⁸² See Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 11-13.

¹⁸³ For an excellent review of this story from the Protestant perspective, see José David Rodríguez, Jr. and Coleen Nelson, "The Virgin of Guadalupe" in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 13/6 (December 1986): 368-369. These authors point out that the true intent of the story is not to bring people to venerate an image of the Virgin. The purpose of the story is to challenge people then as well as today to join in the ancient biblical tradition attributed in part to the Virgin Mary, that is, to proclaim God's liberation of the poor and the oppressed who then participate with God in the liberation of the rich and the mighty. See also Alberto Pereyra, "The Virgin of Guadalupe, History, Myth, and Spirituality" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (August, 1997): 348-54.

¹⁸⁴ For an excellent study of the language of semiotics, see García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres*. García-Rivera shows how the little stories of faith of St. Martín de Porres carried the hidden meanings of the Big Story of faith. The Big Story of faith reveals that the poor and rejects of society are empowered to serve in the grand scheme of salvation history. The little stories reveal a reversal of roles and expectations. They disclose that the poor and the marginal are often the ones who are designated for a mission of healing and the transformation of society.

Miguel that she is one of *their* saints for she is the one who shares their *mestizaje* and their condition of exile.¹⁸⁵

The people of *San Miguel* also find empowerment through the sacramental rituals of the church as expressed in the language of the people. They are affirmed for who they are because Spanish is their primary language and the language of the heart. Their identity is further affirmed through the singing of the *coritos* that bring joy to the community and that serve as the active symbol of their religious faith, cultural identity, and prophetic denunciation of the systemic forces that would oppress them. *San Miguel* is a thriving church precisely because the faith and culture of the people are affirmed in ways that bring harmony to their fragmented lives. This is a prophetic church because the central message of justification by faith is at the heart of her mission. This church proclaims that God accepts, justifies, and empowers those who are rejected by society. This model church is located on the fringes of the city of Fort Worth. From that location she announces the good news that those who were rejected by two countries have become the messengers of justification by faith and the social agents of transformation.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ For the roots and dynamics of this story in the history and faith of the people, see Elizondo, *La Morenita: Evangelizer of the Americas* (San Antonio: MACC, 1980); also by the same author, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*. For a Protestant perspective on the role of the saints in the people's religion, see Ricardo Willy Rieth, *Lutheran Reformation, Saints and the People's Religion in Latin America*, trans. Luis Dreher (unpublished document). Rieth points out that the saints are recognized as companions on the faith journey and reminders of the origins of the Christian community. They are a form of imitation of faith and virtue. They also are a form of resistance of oppressed peoples in their struggle for liberation against those forms and burdens imposed upon them by official religion and systemic injustice.

¹⁸⁶ Virgilio Elizondo refers to this election and vocation of the marginalized Hispanic/Latina community as the "Galilee Principle: What human beings reject, God chooses as his [*sic*] very own" (Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 91).

Conclusion

The Hispanic Lutheran community is varied in its history and experience. St. John in San Juan as the oldest of the communities that were examined is the more traditional "Protestant" in character and theological formation yet reveals in its own way an expressive insistence that it be recognized as a Spanish-speaking community with its own language and popular forms of worship. All four congregations revealed this resistance to any form of worship that did not reflect their self-understanding as a people created in the image of God. Their common language in the exercise of their popular faith and devotion through liturgical forms of worship was a key tool for expressing their knowledge of God. Their language is also a symbolic medium for the revelation of their creation as *imago Dei* and of their redemption and vocation in salvation history as *imago Christi*.¹⁸⁷ The church sanctuary is the place where they meet to express this self-understanding. It is also the place where the divine mystery and *Logos* of God self-discloses in the language and worship forms of the people. This is the place of sacred encounter where the people are affirmed as a unique blessing to the world and commissioned as agents of transformation.

¹⁸⁷ Luther described the freedom and the vocation of the priesthood of all believers in the notion of "Christ to the neighbor." The notion was that God gives God-self as the Word in the historical birth of Christ and in the spiritual birth of Christ in the faith of the believer. Luther's understanding of participation with God or *theosis* helps us to understand the notion of the faithful as *imago Christi*: "Just as the word of God became flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man [*sic*] so that man [*sic*] may become God. Thus power becomes powerless so that weakness may become powerful. The *Logos* puts on our form and pattern, our image and likeness, so that it may clothe us with its image, its pattern, and its likeness. Thus wisdom becomes foolish so that foolishness may become wisdom, and so it is in all other things that are in God and in us, to the extent that in all these things he takes what is ours to himself in order to impart what is his to us" (See WA 1: 28, 25-32). Also, Martin Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 585-6; also, LW 31: 333-77. For further elaboration on the idea of

The research also revealed that the Lutheran Hispanic people express popular forms of worship in the Protestant tradition of protesting by resistance to anything that is not faithful to their self-understanding as a people of God. It showed that certain symbols that are highly valued by the tradition, such as the Bible, are not always the primary source of a people's theological identification when it comes to the question of human dignity. The sources of their self-understanding and empowerment may differ from the theological expectations of the tradition. The fact that the people did not pick the Bible as a primary symbol that confers human dignity may be due to a question that had not been asked of the tradition: Do the Holy Scriptures confer a sense of human dignity in the context of exclusion and marginality? The fact that the people did not pick the Bible in a tradition that values the primacy of Holy Scripture may be the result of the hermeneutical methods of previous generations of pastors who may have been trained without an adequate understanding of context and the hermeneutical methods required in the context of exclusion and marginality. The popular *coritos*, *testimonios*, and the oral prayers of the people, in contrast, are symbolic vehicles that affirm the people's understanding of themselves as a justified people of God and of their role and significance in the scheme of salvation history. These popular forms of worship and testimony grant dignity and hope to a people who share marginality as a way of life but who view themselves as empowered by the God who shares their history and concerns. The cross is their symbol of preference because it denotes victory over sin and

theosis or participation with the divinity of God, see Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," *Union with Christ*, 1-2.

death and over those systemic forces of injustice that oppress and negate their own unique creation and expression as *imago Dei* and *imago Christi*. The cross represents the grace-filled message of justification by faith. It is the bearer of their theological identity as *imago Christi*. The cross also serves as the medium for their prophetic denunciation of systemic forces that negate the sanctity and dignity of their lives.

The popular religious practices of Hispanic Lutherans reveal the special place of these symbolic forms in the self-understanding of the people. These forms are a locus of epistemology because they serve as the vehicles for the conceptualization of the sacred and for the affirmation of their identity as *imago Dei* and *imago Christi* in the dialectic of sacred encounter. For these reasons popular religion is an integral element for the understanding of people who are created in the image of God and redeemed and empowered by the saving work of the Christ, but who are often denied this recognition. It is the perspective of a people of faith and experience from the margins who resist any efforts to deny their humanity and agency as the justified people of God.

The analysis of these four congregations reveals that the people experience the affirmation of their dignity through certain rituals and symbols of the church and through their own indigenous forms of faith expression. All shared the insistence on the Protestant symbol of the cross as the primary symbol that grants a high sense of human dignity. At *Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey* in Pharr, Texas, the rituals of baptism and of the proclamation of the Gospel were seen as the primary ways for the affirmation of their human dignity. In this

community, the ministry of Word and Sacrament conferred both Protestant identity and the affirmation of their inherent goodness as a part of the creation.

For all four congregations, the Spanish language was the primary medium for the enactment of the worship rituals that allowed them to express themselves in the language of their self-understanding. Their language and musical instruments were primary symbols of their Hispanic/Latina heritage and identity. The popular rituals of faith unique to the culture included the singing of the *coritos*, the sharing of the *testimonios*, and the confession and public testimony of faith through their oral prayers and petitions. This was also the place where the people denounced the conditions of injustice and proclaimed the victory over the systemic forces that would oppress them.

The Spanish language in particular served to convey in a strong way their sense of *identidad y dignidad*. Their participation in the worship ritual in their own language affirmed their dignity as a *pueblo de Dios* created in the image of God and redeemed in the saving work of the Christ. The celebration and appropriation of their Hispanic/Latina identity through their own language served to confirm their self-understanding as priests and servants of God whose mission in part is to respect and celebrate the dignity of all people regardless of their ethnic background, national origin or immigrant status.

These four congregations share common elements of self-understanding. These include the Spanish language and the popular rituals of faith that serve as a witness and a reforming protest to the wider church. These also include the

recovery of their Hispanic/Latina identity and the affirmation of their Protestant identity as the justified people of God through their own cultural mediums. They express this recovery and affirmation of identity through their vocation and moral agency. They place a high priority in social ministry and social justice. The spirit and ministry of hospitality is visibly present in each of these churches. These communities welcome all people in a spirit of homecoming and with an attitude of outreach and service to anyone seeking a church home or a ministry of service.

These churches expressed a concern for the neighbor and the stranger. The people of St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan express this concern through an outreach ministry located across the United States - Mexican border in Reynosa, México. St. John serves the Mexican community at the *Cristo Rey* mission with a strong and dedicated involvement of its time and talents. Each week members of the community travel to the Spanish-speaking mission to conduct worship services and to minister to the community of the poor and the marginalized. This outreach ministry is supported by a strong lay leadership with a strong understanding of vocation as ministry to the neighbor and to the stranger.¹⁸⁸

In the case of St. John, the neighbor and the stranger are the Spanish-speaking Mexican poor of the slums of Reynosa who do not have adequate housing or the means to earn the basic necessities of life. The lay leadership recognizes and affirms the dignity of the Mexican poor for they have been created in the image of God. The leadership acknowledges that the poor of

¹⁸⁸ *The Vista*, A publication of the Southwestern Texas Synod 13, no. 4 (2001): 1.

México and the border region are children of God, *el pueblo de Dios*. They celebrate their culture with symbols and rituals that are indigenous to the people of México. They do not attempt to convert the people to Lutheranism with a catechesis developed in a Nordic-European context. Instead, they enter into the indigenous culture, language and faith of the people with an attitude of reverence and respect for their faith and dignity. This practice avoids any violence to their self-understanding as members of the church catholic. With this attitude in mind, the local leaders affirm the dignity of a people with a history of conquest and economic and political oppression. They affirm them as a part of the created goodness of God and as members of the justified community. They also serve as models of leadership and share in their vocation of service to the neighbor.

The ministry at *Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey* in Pharr, Texas from its inception has been a ministry to the immigrants and the poor of the border region. These have included both Central American and Mexican political and economic refugees. A strong leadership who recognized the inherent dignity of a people without a homeland has supported the ministry of hospitality to the neighbors and the foreigners from across the border. Both the clergy and the lay leadership are members of this group of exiled people. They serve and minister to people who live on both sides of the border. They share the common plight of alienation from two countries.

Their strong sense of social justice and ethical responsibility is evident in their ministry of outreach to the disenfranchised. They give voice to their ethical concerns in the community prayers. These serve as a testament and confession

of faith. This community reaches out to "illegal aliens,"¹⁸⁹ many found hiding from the border patrol in the wild bush country of south Texas. Many of these undocumented immigrants need medical and humanitarian assistance. They come seeking employment in the service industries that fuel the American economy. In the course of their trek north they often experienced the violation of their human dignity. Those who would attempt to help them, but who abuse them in their condition of vulnerability, often violate their dignity. This violation occurs on both sides of the border.

These people without a homeland receive the assistance and prayers of the *Cristo Rey* community as an expression of their vocation of service to the neighbor and the stranger. This faith community fulfills the ethical requirements of social justice inherent in the theology of justification by faith. They fulfill the ethical dimensions of this theology through a caring ministry of social and pastoral care. Their active involvement in this ministry is an indictment of other churches and of the state legislative and judicial systems that brand the foreigners as "illegal non-persons." The members of the *Cristo Rey* faith community live out their vocation of service to the neighbor and the stranger as the *pueblo de Dios*. This community affirms the dignity of the people through the sacramental rituals of Word and Sacrament. They practice their theology of justification by faith through their ministry to the neighbor. Their weekly rituals and symbols of worship reaffirm their confession. They live out their vocation by

¹⁸⁹ This is a term that has been imposed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.) of the United States. It is a term that has received much derision from the Hispanic/Latina community for its labeling of undocumented Hispanic/Latina people as "aliens" and non-persons

empowering others to fulfill the same ethical requirements of social justice that are conveyed in the message of justification by faith.

The ministry of St. John/San Juan in Austin, Texas is a ministry that prides itself in serving the stranger and the foreigner of México and Central America. The members of this community also share a strong sense of vocation that impels them to serve the growing Hispanic/Latina presence of the city of Austin. Many of the members are immigrants who upon their arrival in central Texas received their first spiritual and material sustenance from this community of faith. Their connection to this church family is strong and bears witness in their faithfulness to the Gospel imperative to reach out to the stranger.

The members of this community have a strong sense and appropriation of the understanding of the message of justification by faith, which they exercise in the worship ritual as the priesthood of all believers. They carry out this understanding of themselves in their daily lives as they minister to the members of the community and to those immigrants who continue to come north from México and Central America. Their vocation of service and ministry to the stranger provides a witness to the wider church that often struggles to bear witness to the ethical dimensions of justification by faith. This community reaches out to all people and especially to those who experience exile in a strange land. They empower each other through the ministry of Word and Sacrament and through their ministry and witness to the world.

whose human dignity is repeatedly denied and violated. The term is used herein as a protest and critique that is shared by the Hispanic/Latina community.

Iglesia Luterana San Miguel in Fort Worth, Texas has a strong ministry of empowerment of its members. The members share a strong understanding of vocation as service to the neighbor and the stranger. The diversity of the community and of the ministries of the church reflects the ethical component of the message of justification by faith. Strong lay leadership takes responsibility for a wide variety of ministries to the community. The members utilize their many skills and talents through their vocation as the justified priesthood of all believers. As the recipients of the ministry of the church they in turn serve the many immigrants who continue to come to Fort Worth for employment. This church serves as a model church for the ELCA in the training of missionaries. The clergy and lay leadership provide the wider church the methodology required for reaching out to those foreigners who are new to his country and who are seeking a welcome place of worship and ministry. Their strong sense of vocation as the justified people of God empowers them for service in the reign of God.

The strong sense of vocation that these four congregations reflect in their outreach to the foreigner and in their social justice ministries is an indicator of their understanding of justification by faith, the central doctrine of the church. By their concern for and involvement with the outcast and the foreigner, these congregations reveal a different reading of this central doctrine, one that is informed by the social conditions of marginality and poverty. It is a view from below that grants the justified a sense of empowerment in spite of the conditions and message of exclusion and marginality. Their understanding of this central doctrine provides the impetus for their involvement and service with those on the

fringes of society. Their rereading of this doctrine from the perspective of popular religion serves as a critique of the church and provides ethical implications for the mission of the church that will be examined in chapter five.

As the analysis of the four congregations disclosed, these Protestant communities express their own understanding and appropriation of the doctrine of justification by faith in the context of exclusion and marginality. The analysis revealed that the medium of popular religion provides a venue for understanding how marginal communities appropriate and express their sense of justification and justice.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ It is in this sense that Espín refers to epistemology as the processes of constructing theological knowledge and of a people *knowing* what is *real* within their culture (Espín, "The State of U.S. Latino/a Theology: An Understanding," *Perspectivas*, 36-7).