

CHAPTER FIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOUTHWEST

Chapters One, Three, and Four developed the thesis that two central doctrines of the church – the *imago Dei* and justification by faith – require the perspective of the Hispanic/Latina community as well for a more inclusive and faithful exposition of these doctrines. This community contributes to the understanding of these doctrines by their theological voice and experience of marginality.¹

In Chapter Two, we examined popular religion as a locus of epistemology and the significance of this venue for understanding how a marginal community interprets knowledge of itself and of the sacred in light of its history and experience of faith. This examination was necessary in order to show that popular religious symbols, forms, and rituals affirm the human dignity of the marginalized community in ways that are often missing from more conventional traditions and practices.

In Chapter Three we expounded on the historical denial and denigration of the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community. The review of the historical and theological arguments from the sixteenth century revealed a false assessment of Native American ontology that violated the *imago Dei* of the native people. We disclosed how people of faith such as Bartolomé de las Casas defended the humanity of the indigenous people and how contemporary Hispanic/Latina theologians, historians, and ethicists continue to affirm this

¹ For similar perspectives from the global context, see Wolfgang Greive, "The significance of justification in the world's contexts."

defense by a retrieval of historical and theological arguments that reaffirm the human dignity of the marginal community.

In Chapter Four we showed how popular religious practices and symbols of the faith community in four Hispanic/Latina congregations in Texas served as the medium for the communities' theological self-understanding, expression of faith and affirmation as *imago Dei*. We argued that this popular experience of faith provides a locus of epistemology for the community that serves as a source of knowledge and revelation of the sacred and of the self in relation to the sacred. This locus also provides a source of knowledge and revelation for ethical deliberations and faithful living. We discovered that, in the context of the Southwest, the people experience their understanding of justification by faith not only through the abstract concepts of the doctrine – that all are justified *coram Deo* – but through an embodied experience of popular religious expression that affirms and celebrates the incarnational nature of the justification and justice of God. We noticed how their popular religious expression serves as the vehicle for an exposition of faith that recovers and affirms the epistemologically real and true nature of their cultural identity, historical experience and theological vocation as the recipients of the moral agency and justice of God.

In Chapter Four we also observed that faced with a cultural environment that often denies their right to exist as a people, and that strips them of their dignity and identity by the imposition of foreign ideological agendas, the Hispanic/Latina community turns to popular religious expression as a medium for their self-understanding and affirmation as a people of God. The rituals and

symbols of popular religious expression recover and affirm their dignity and identity as a people who are justified *coram Deo* in the gracious gift of faith. These popular religious practices embody the corporate nature of their self-understanding as a community of faith. They affirm the gift of their native language and empower their cultural and theological identity as *protestantes* within the larger catholic reforming movement. They also provide the venue for a counter-cultural statement that affirms their place and vocation in the historical project of the reign of God.

In Chapter Four we also examined the doctrine of justification by faith from a global context in an effort to show the significance of context for the interpretation of the doctrine in the witness of the Lutheran tradition. We noted that in the context of the Southwest the doctrine finds renewed expression in the Hispanic/Latina community through the medium of popular religion. We observed that this doctrine, which is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, is much more than a forensic concept appropriated by an intellectual faith or by mere adherence as dogmatic truth. We learned that the Hispanic/Latina community appropriates the doctrine concretely by incorporating the historical experience of marginality and the cultural ethos of the community in its confessional expression. The community reflects its sense of dignity restored and justice regained by its own vehicles of faith expression. In this analysis we grasped one of the principle tenets of this dissertation that popular religion serves as a medium for the cultural affirmation and theological expression of the doctrine of justification by faith among the Hispanic/Latina community. In the

final analysis, this medium expresses the central dogmatic truth of the church -- that all people of faith are justified *coram deo* by the free gift and gracious act of faith in the Lord of history and creation. Popular religious practices allow the community to proclaim that in the justified community all foreigners are welcome and no one is a stranger. This expression of faith affirms and celebrates their restored dignity and vocation of justice in the service of the reign of God. Chapter Five will examine the historical context of the Southwest in more detail and the ethical implications that arise from the doctrine of justification by faith in the context of marginality and exclusion.

A Historical Narrative: *Los Luteranos Protestantes*

In order to understand the import of the doctrine of justification by faith as interpreted through the lens of popular religion and as an expression of a people with a violated dignity over generations, one first has to understand their history and social location. As a specific point of reference I offer my own experience as a lens to evaluate this social reality. As a Hispanic/Latino of south Texas I am a son of St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan, Texas. As was noted in Chapter Four, this community of faith has been a witness to the reforming tradition for almost eighty years. St. John is located almost immediately adjacent to a prominent Roman Catholic basilica in a predominantly Roman Catholic community and is the oldest Hispanic Lutheran Church in the continental United States.²

² The Protestant witness of the Hispanic community gave rise to acts of enmity between the Hispanic/Latina Roman Catholic community and the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community during

This Protestant community of Hispanic Lutherans embraced the reforming tradition during the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) when the winds of social change and political upheaval were sifting México and the Southwest with a vengeance. Hispanic/Latinas first became Lutherans in south Texas during these years when many Mexican immigrants crossed the United States-Mexican border seeking refuge from political persecution, social upheaval and economic depravation.³ The father of this writer and his extended family were among these immigrants. They experienced the indignity and danger of crossing the border illegally because they were denied permission to enter at the border crossing. Their only alternative was to cross the Rio Grande River under the cover of darkness. Many immigrants continue to cross over to a land that was formerly Mexico by wading or swimming across the river.

U.S. immigration laws determined the basis and rationale for legal entry into this country.⁴ Inability to read (presumably in English) was a basis for

the development of the mission. The *Luteranos* were considered heretical and attempts were made to destroy and disparage the mission start. This type of conflict was not without historical precedent. True to the Reformation heritage, the *Luteranos protestantes* defined themselves theologically over against the Roman Catholic tradition and faith. This disjuncture in the community contributed to a further alienation and marginalization among Hispanic Lutherans.

³ For a good synopsis of this history, see Rodolfo Acuña, "Greasers Go Home: *Mexican Immigration*, the 1920's," *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 86-91.

⁴ The United States passed its first immigration law with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Supreme Court upheld the Act in part by citing the threat posed by the Chinese to White labor. This was a telling example of law reifying racist hysteria in a society fixated on the idea of race and intent on forcing new immigrants into procrustean racial hierarchies. See, Ian F. Haney López, "Chance, Context, and Choice in the Social Construction of Race," *The Latino/a Condition*, 9-10. See also, *The Chinese Exclusion Case: Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 130 U.S. 581, 595 (1884).

disqualification.⁵ The immigration authorities denied legal entry to the family because the grandmother of this writer was illiterate. Her social condition of poverty and lack of education served to penalize her family at a time when the social conditions of her country forced many immigrants to become displaced refugees.⁶ The family was forced to abandon and relinquish ownership of ancestral land and property by ideological forces beyond their control.⁷ This group of immigrants was not only poor but they were also defenseless against the ideological hegemony of a more powerful nation that penalized anyone who did not conform to the legislative requirements of the immigration laws.⁸

Immigrants such as these were a defenseless people caught in the middle of two neighbor nations with a history of enmity dating back to the Mexican-American War and the failed and violated Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848.⁹ The United States did not want them or the conquered people of northern Mexico

⁵ The General Immigration Act of 1917 imposed an \$8 head tax and set literacy qualifications for all immigrants. See Moisés Sandoval, "Mexican Migration to the Midwest and East," *Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in the USA since 1513*, ed. Moisés Sandoval (San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1983), 256.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷ For a similar experience shared by New Mexicans as a result of the Mexican-American War of 1846, see Tomás Atencio, "The Empty Cross," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 38-9. For similar events throughout the Southwest, see Moisés Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 195-6, 218-9.

⁸ For the immigration history, national policies and laws that determined the treatment of three racial groups with similar histories of conquest, exploitation and legal disadvantage, see Michael A. Olivas, "My Grandfather's Stories and Immigration Law," *The Latino/a Condition*, 253-4; Russell G. Moy, "Resident Aliens of the Diaspora: 1 Peter and Chinese Protestants in San Francisco" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, 20 November 2001). Olivas and Moy indicate that the treatment of the Native Americans, Chinese and Mexicans in United States law shows commonalities of racial animus, legal infirmity, and majority domination of legal institutions guised as "political questions." The control and supply of the labor force provided by these groups was the central issue behind these laws.

(now known as the American Southwest) and Mexico could not care for them or defend them against the giant of the north. The terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo included the purchase of northern Mexico by the United States. The treaty also called for the respect of the culture, language, citizenship and property rights of the native peoples of the Southwest.¹⁰ These terms and rights were not only violated but in many instances continue to be violated by the United States up until the present time. In effect, these immigrants did not cross the border. The border crossed them.¹¹

The treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo redefined the political boundary that separated the two nations. As a result of this treaty Mexicans who crossed the Rio Grande River illegally became undocumented persons. The father of this writer and his family experienced this reality. Folks could no longer travel back and forth without interruption. This political determination decreed that anyone who crossed the border illegally would have to acquire legal status or citizenship.¹² These immigrants would have to reacquire an identity if that was

⁹ González, *The Story of Christianity* 2: 246-50; David Maldonado, "Hispanic Protestantism: Historical Reflections," *Apuntes* 11:1 (1991), 3-16; Edwin Sylvest Jr., "Hispanic American Protestantism in the United States," *Fronteras*, 287-90.

¹⁰ González, *The Story of Christianity* Vol. 2, 246-50; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 195.

¹¹ For the theological and psychological implications of this experience in the history of the Mexican-American people, see Virgilio Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 13-31.

¹² The father of this writer did not seek citizenship in this country. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.) classified him as a "resident alien" up until his death in 1998. His refusal to obtain new citizenship status was a form of protest to a foreign and imposed identity. He expressed his sense of loyalty to his native land by reminding everyone that he would not sell his flag: "*Yo no vendo mi bandera!*" He was one of the first educators of the Mexican exiled community in south Texas. As a Mexican citizen, he belonged to a fraternal organization of the exiled community known as "*Los mejicanos de afuera.*" As an orator at civic functions commemorating the independence of the Mexican nation he exalted the pride of national and cultural heritage that is characteristic of the Mexican people. His strong sense of identity and his resolution to keep it in a foreign land reflects a persistent determination to resist the conquest and the imposition of a foreign identity by a dominant group. See, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa,

possible in a land that was formerly Mexican territory but was now under foreign occupation.¹³ They experienced a sense of ambiguity in their status as *mojados*, *pochos*, *gente del otro lado*, *los atravesados*; in short, as aliens in their own land.¹⁴ Immigrants who cross the border are recipients of this historical and existential legacy. They cross over to former Mexican territory to join relatives of the borderlands or to seek employment in the service industry of this nation. They become *illegal aliens* and non-persons who are stripped of their identity. They experience a sense of non-being.¹⁵

The mother of this writer was born in south Texas soon after her parents and her family crossed the border to seek asylum from the ravages of the Mexican revolution. Members of both families were disenchanted with the Roman Catholic Church because of the religious hegemony exercised over the vast majority of the people and because of the failure of the church to serve their sacramental and pastoral needs.¹⁶ Neither of the two countries nor the church affirmed their dignity as human beings or as a people created in the image of

Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza, 2d. ed., (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999); Suzanne Oboler, "Hispanics? That's What They Call Us," *The Latino/a Condition*, 3-4.

¹³ Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 19-20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-1, 32-3; *idem*, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 17-8; for a historical overview, see Machado, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 63-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The mother of this writer tells the story of how her father was asked to be the sponsor of a child in the rite of baptism. When the family arrived at the Roman church in their village in México the priest refused to baptize the child for some reason now lost in oral history. My grandfather then took out his gun and explained to the priest in no uncertain terms that he *would* baptize the child! My grandfather became one of the first Latino converts to attend and become a part of the Lutheran mission in San Juan, Texas.

God.¹⁷ They were a people caught in the middle of two nations.¹⁸ They were considered non-persons.¹⁹

The Lutheran mission of south Texas provided the suffering, poor, marginal and immigrant Hispanic/Latina community an alternative Protestant and reforming faith tradition that made a difference in the lives of these immigrants.²⁰ The family of this writer found acceptance at this mission.²¹ These immigrants confessed their faith as a people in exile in a place where their language was now considered foreign and displaced.²² They were like the exiled Hebrews who sang the songs of Zion by the waters of Babylon.²³ Their created space for being

¹⁷ See Moisés Sandoval, "Mexican Migration to the Midwest and East," *Fronteras*, 261-2. Sandoval points out that "the church in México had been an ally of the establishment, amassing wealth and acquiring title to large tracts of land. One goal of the revolution was to break up these large holdings and distribute land to the peasants." Manuel Gamio wrote that "the Mexican church was more concerned with riches and power than with evangelical duties" Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930], 24). Jorge Lara-Braud indicates that "the traditions of anti-clericalism and noninstitutional [sic] Catholicism were deeply embedded in Mexicans before they came to the United States" (Jorge Lara-Braud, "The Status of Religion Among the Mexican-Americans" [Paper delivered at joint meeting of American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, Fort Worth, Texas] March 7, 1971).

¹⁸ Texican writer Pat Mora describes the borderlands as *nepantla*, which means "place in the middle" in Nahuatl, one of Mexico's indigenous languages. Mora describes what it is like to live in that "place in the middle," where so many Latinos and Latinas live. It is a place where they live, struggle, love, fight, and strive to define who they are as the community of the new diaspora (Pat Mora, *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993]). For an excellent essay on this history, see Daisy L. Machado, "A Borderlands Perspective," *Hidden Stories*, 49-50; idem, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 63-4; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 17-8.

¹⁹ See Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 19-20.

²⁰ See T. M. Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

²¹ A lay worker by the name of Irene Mellenbruch and her family initiated the early missionary work with the Hispanic/Latina community. See, Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

²² See, for example, the various essays that expose the complexity of this experience in Delgado & Stefancic, eds., *The Latino/a Condition*, 557-8.

²³ González, *Mañana*, 41.

and belonging had shifted as tectonic plates shift underneath the surface of the land. The Lutheran mission became the safe place and space for belonging and for confession of faith. This Protestant tradition affirmed their lives as a people of God. It provided a scriptural witness for their self-understanding at a time in the history of this nation when the national policy and ideology of Manifest Destiny maligned their *Mexican-ness*.²⁴ They were called Greasers, Meskin, wetbacks and other derogatory terms that reinforced a racist attitude and policy towards a people who were considered a mongrel race.²⁵

The early missionaries welcomed the Hispanic/Latina community into the larger Lutheran family of the American Lutheran Church. In sharing their faith they transmitted their Anglo-American faith tradition to the exiled community.²⁶ These early missionaries were faithful in proclaiming Word and Sacrament ministry at a time when being Lutheran and Hispanic/Latino was not popular. In a very real sense the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina community of south Texas experienced a history of double marginalization. This community experienced

²⁴ D. L. Machado, "A Borderlands Perspective," *Hidden Stories*, 54-5; Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of National Expansionism in American History* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987), 179-80; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 285-6.

²⁵ Stephen F. Austin, who had been granted colonization rights by the Mexican government, revealed racist feelings pervasive during the Texas revolution for independence from Mexico. In a document written to Mary Austin Holley, August 21, 1835, Austin wrote that the battle was one of barbarism waged by a "mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race, against civilization and the Anglo American race." For an excellent exposition of this history, see Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1983); idem, "Initial Contacts: Niggers, Redskins, and Greasers," *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader*, 158-9; Kenneth L. Stewart and Arnoldo De León, *Not Room Enough: Mexicans, Anglos, and Socioeconomic Change in Texas, 1850-1900* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 218-9.

defense by a retrieval of historical and theological arguments that reaffirm the human dignity of the marginal community.

In Chapter Four we showed how popular religious practices and symbols of the faith community in four Hispanic/Latina congregations in Texas served as the medium for the communities' theological self-understanding, expression of faith and affirmation as *imago Dei*. We argued that this popular experience of faith provides a locus of epistemology for the community that serves as a source of knowledge and revelation of the sacred and of the self in relation to the sacred. This locus also provides a source of knowledge and revelation for ethical deliberations and faithful living. We discovered that, in the context of the Southwest, the people experience their understanding of justification by faith not only through the abstract concepts of the doctrine – that all are justified *coram Deo* – but through an embodied experience of popular religious expression that affirms and celebrates the incarnational nature of the justification and justice of God. We noticed how their popular religious expression serves as the vehicle for an exposition of faith that recovers and affirms the epistemologically real and true nature of their cultural identity, historical experience and theological vocation as the recipients of the moral agency and justice of God.

In Chapter Four we also observed that faced with a cultural environment that often denies their right to exist as a people, and that strips them of their dignity and identity by the imposition of foreign ideological agendas, the Hispanic/Latina community turns to popular religious expression as a medium for their self-understanding and affirmation as a people of God. The rituals and

symbols of popular religious expression recover and affirm their dignity and identity as a people who are justified *coram Deo* in the gracious gift of faith. These popular religious practices embody the corporate nature of their self-understanding as a community of faith. They affirm the gift of their native language and empower their cultural and theological identity as *protestantes* within the larger catholic reforming movement. They also provide the venue for a counter-cultural statement that affirms their place and vocation in the historical project of the reign of God.

In Chapter Four we also examined the doctrine of justification by faith from a global context in an effort to show the significance of context for the interpretation of the doctrine in the witness of the Lutheran tradition. We noted that in the context of the Southwest the doctrine finds renewed expression in the Hispanic/Latina community through the medium of popular religion. We observed that this doctrine, which is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, is much more than a forensic concept appropriated by an intellectual faith or by mere adherence as dogmatic truth. We learned that the Hispanic/Latina community appropriates the doctrine concretely by incorporating the historical experience of marginality and the cultural ethos of the community in its confessional expression. The community reflects its sense of dignity restored and justice regained by its own vehicles of faith expression. In this analysis we grasped one of the principle tenets of this dissertation that popular religion serves as a medium for the cultural affirmation and theological expression of the doctrine of justification by faith among the Hispanic/Latina community. In the

final analysis, this medium expresses the central dogmatic truth of the church -- that all people of faith are justified *coram deo* by the free gift and gracious act of faith in the Lord of history and creation. Popular religious practices allow the community to proclaim that in the justified community all foreigners are welcome and no one is a stranger. This expression of faith affirms and celebrates their restored dignity and vocation of justice in the service of the reign of God. Chapter Five will examine the historical context of the Southwest in more detail and the ethical implications that arise from the doctrine of justification by faith in the context of marginality and exclusion.

A Historical Narrative: *Los Luteranos Protestantes*

In order to understand the import of the doctrine of justification by faith as interpreted through the lens of popular religion and as an expression of a people with a violated dignity over generations, one first has to understand their history and social location. As a specific point of reference I offer my own experience as a lens to evaluate this social reality. As a Hispanic/Latino of south Texas I am a son of St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan, Texas. As was noted in Chapter Four, this community of faith has been a witness to the reforming tradition for almost eighty years. St. John is located almost immediately adjacent to a prominent Roman Catholic basilica in a predominantly Roman Catholic community and is the oldest Hispanic Lutheran Church in the continental United States.²

² The Protestant witness of the Hispanic community gave rise to acts of enmity between the Hispanic/Latina Roman Catholic community and the Hispanic/Latina Lutheran community during

This Protestant community of Hispanic Lutherans embraced the reforming tradition during the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) when the winds of social change and political upheaval were sifting México and the Southwest with a vengeance. Hispanic/Latinas first became Lutherans in south Texas during these years when many Mexican immigrants crossed the United States-Mexican border seeking refuge from political persecution, social upheaval and economic depravation.³ The father of this writer and his extended family were among these immigrants. They experienced the indignity and danger of crossing the border illegally because they were denied permission to enter at the border crossing. Their only alternative was to cross the Rio Grande River under the cover of darkness. Many immigrants continue to cross over to a land that was formerly Mexico by wading or swimming across the river.

U.S. immigration laws determined the basis and rationale for legal entry into this country.⁴ Inability to read (presumably in English) was a basis for

the development of the mission. The *Luteranos* were considered heretical and attempts were made to destroy and disparage the mission start. This type of conflict was not without historical precedent. True to the Reformation heritage, the *Luteranos protestantes* defined themselves theologically over against the Roman Catholic tradition and faith. This disjuncture in the community contributed to a further alienation and marginalization among Hispanic Lutherans.

³ For a good synopsis of this history, see Rodolfo Acuña, "Greasers Go Home: *Mexican Immigration*, the 1920's," *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 86-91.

⁴ The United States passed its first immigration law with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Supreme Court upheld the Act in part by citing the threat posed by the Chinese to White labor. This was a telling example of law reifying racist hysteria in a society fixated on the idea of race and intent on forcing new immigrants into procrustean racial hierarchies. See, Ian F. Haney López, "Chance, Context, and Choice in the Social Construction of Race," *The Latino/a Condition*, 9-10. See also, *The Chinese Exclusion Case: Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 130 U.S. 581, 595 (1884).

disqualification.⁵ The immigration authorities denied legal entry to the family because the grandmother of this writer was illiterate. Her social condition of poverty and lack of education served to penalize her family at a time when the social conditions of her country forced many immigrants to become displaced refugees.⁶ The family was forced to abandon and relinquish ownership of ancestral land and property by ideological forces beyond their control.⁷ This group of immigrants was not only poor but they were also defenseless against the ideological hegemony of a more powerful nation that penalized anyone who did not conform to the legislative requirements of the immigration laws.⁸

Immigrants such as these were a defenseless people caught in the middle of two neighbor nations with a history of enmity dating back to the Mexican-American War and the failed and violated Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848.⁹ The United States did not want them or the conquered people of northern Mexico

⁵ The General Immigration Act of 1917 imposed an \$8 head tax and set literacy qualifications for all immigrants. See Moisés Sandoval, "Mexican Migration to the Midwest and East," *Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in the USA since 1513*, ed. Moisés Sandoval (San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1983), 256.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷ For a similar experience shared by New Mexicans as a result of the Mexican-American War of 1846, see Tomás Atencio, "The Empty Cross," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 38-9. For similar events throughout the Southwest, see Moisés Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 195-6, 218-9.

⁸ For the immigration history, national policies and laws that determined the treatment of three racial groups with similar histories of conquest, exploitation and legal disadvantage, see Michael A. Olivas, "My Grandfather's Stories and Immigration Law," *The Latino/a Condition*, 253-4; Russell G. Moy, "Resident Aliens of the Diaspora: 1 Peter and Chinese Protestants in San Francisco" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, 20 November 2001). Olivas and Moy indicate that the treatment of the Native Americans, Chinese and Mexicans in United States law shows commonalities of racial animus, legal infirmity, and majority domination of legal institutions disguised as "political questions." The control and supply of the labor force provided by these groups was the central issue behind these laws.

(now known as the American Southwest) and Mexico could not care for them or defend them against the giant of the north. The terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo included the purchase of northern Mexico by the United States. The treaty also called for the respect of the culture, language, citizenship and property rights of the native peoples of the Southwest.¹⁰ These terms and rights were not only violated but in many instances continue to be violated by the United States up until the present time. In effect, these immigrants did not cross the border. The border crossed them.¹¹

The treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo redefined the political boundary that separated the two nations. As a result of this treaty Mexicans who crossed the Rio Grande River illegally became undocumented persons. The father of this writer and his family experienced this reality. Folks could no longer travel back and forth without interruption. This political determination decreed that anyone who crossed the border illegally would have to acquire legal status or citizenship.¹² These immigrants would have to reacquire an identity if that was

⁹ González, *The Story of Christianity* 2: 246-50; David Maldonado, "Hispanic Protestantism: Historical Reflections," *Apuntes* 11:1 (1991), 3-16; Edwin Sylvest Jr., "Hispanic American Protestantism in the United States," *Fronteras*, 287-90.

¹⁰ González, *The Story of Christianity* Vol. 2, 246-50; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 195.

¹¹ For the theological and psychological implications of this experience in the history of the Mexican-American people, see Virgilio Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 13-31.

¹² The father of this writer did not seek citizenship in this country. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.) classified him as a "resident alien" up until his death in 1998. His refusal to obtain new citizenship status was a form of protest to a foreign and imposed identity. He expressed his sense of loyalty to his native land by reminding everyone that he would not sell his flag: "*Yo no vendo mi bandera*." He was one of the first educators of the Mexican exiled community in south Texas. As a Mexican citizen, he belonged to a fraternal organization of the exiled community known as "*Los mejicanos de afuera*." As an orator at civic functions commemorating the independence of the Mexican nation he exalted the pride of national and cultural heritage that is characteristic of the Mexican people. His strong sense of identity and his resolution to keep it in a foreign land reflects a persistent determination to resist the conquest and the imposition of a foreign identity by a dominant group. See, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa,

possible in a land that was formerly Mexican territory but was now under foreign occupation.¹³ They experienced a sense of ambiguity in their status as *mojados*, *pochos*, *gente del otro lado*, *los atravesados*; in short, as aliens in their own land.¹⁴ Immigrants who cross the border are recipients of this historical and existential legacy. They cross over to former Mexican territory to join relatives of the borderlands or to seek employment in the service industry of this nation. They become *illegal aliens* and non-persons who are stripped of their identity. They experience a sense of non-being.¹⁵

The mother of this writer was born in south Texas soon after her parents and her family crossed the border to seek asylum from the ravages of the Mexican revolution. Members of both families were disenchanted with the Roman Catholic Church because of the religious hegemony exercised over the vast majority of the people and because of the failure of the church to serve their sacramental and pastoral needs.¹⁶ Neither of the two countries nor the church affirmed their dignity as human beings or as a people created in the image of

Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza, 2d. ed., (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999); Suzanne Oboler, "Hispanics? That's What They Call Us," *The Latino/a Condition*, 3-4.

¹³ Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 19-20.

¹⁴ Ibid, 20-1, 32-3; idem, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 17-8; for a historical overview, see Machado, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 63-4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The mother of this writer tells the story of how her father was asked to be the sponsor of a child in the rite of baptism. When the family arrived at the Roman church in their village in México the priest refused to baptize the child for some reason now lost in oral history. My grandfather then took out his gun and explained to the priest in no uncertain terms that he *would* baptize the child! My grandfather became one of the first Latino converts to attend and become a part of the Lutheran mission in San Juan, Texas.

God.¹⁷ They were a people caught in the middle of two nations.¹⁸ They were considered non-persons.¹⁹

The Lutheran mission of south Texas provided the suffering, poor, marginal and immigrant Hispanic/Latina community an alternative Protestant and reforming faith tradition that made a difference in the lives of these immigrants.²⁰ The family of this writer found acceptance at this mission.²¹ These immigrants confessed their faith as a people in exile in a place where their language was now considered foreign and displaced.²² They were like the exiled Hebrews who sang the songs of Zion by the waters of Babylon.²³ Their created space for being

¹⁷ See Moisés Sandoval, "Mexican Migration to the Midwest and East," *Fronteras*, 261-2. Sandoval points out that "the church in México had been an ally of the establishment, amassing wealth and acquiring title to large tracts of land. One goal of the revolution was to break up these large holdings and distribute land to the peasants." Manuel Gamio wrote that "the Mexican church was more concerned with riches and power than with evangelical duties" Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930], 24). Jorge Lara-Braud indicates that "the traditions of anti-clericalism and noninstitutional [*sic*] Catholicism were deeply embedded in Mexicans before they came to the United States" (Jorge Lara-Braud, "The Status of Religion Among the Mexican-Americans" [Paper delivered at joint meeting of American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, Fort Worth, Texas] March 7, 1971).

¹⁸ Texican writer Pat Mora describes the borderlands as *nepantla*, which means "place in the middle" in Nahuatl, one of Mexico's indigenous languages. Mora describes what it is like to live in that "place in the middle," where so many Latinos and Latinas live. It is a place where they live, struggle, love, fight, and strive to define who they are as the community of the new diaspora (Pat Mora, *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993]). For an excellent essay on this history, see Daisy L. Machado, "A Borderlands Perspective," *Hidden Stories*, 49-50; idem, "Kingdom Building in the Borderlands," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 63-4; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 17-8.

¹⁹ See Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 19-20.

²⁰ See T. M. Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

²¹ A lay worker by the name of Irene Mellenbruch and her family initiated the early missionary work with the Hispanic/Latina community. See, Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

²² See, for example, the various essays that expose the complexity of this experience in Delgado & Stefancic, eds., *The Latino/a Condition*, 557-8.

²³ González, *Mañana*, 41.

and belonging had shifted as tectonic plates shift underneath the surface of the land. The Lutheran mission became the safe place and space for belonging and for confession of faith. This Protestant tradition affirmed their lives as a people of God. It provided a scriptural witness for their self-understanding at a time in the history of this nation when the national policy and ideology of Manifest Destiny maligned their *Mexican-ness*.²⁴ They were called Greasers, Meskin, wetbacks and other derogatory terms that reinforced a racist attitude and policy towards a people who were considered a mongrel race.²⁵

The early missionaries welcomed the Hispanic/Latina community into the larger Lutheran family of the American Lutheran Church. In sharing their faith they transmitted their Anglo-American faith tradition to the exiled community.²⁶ These early missionaries were faithful in proclaiming Word and Sacrament ministry at a time when being Lutheran and Hispanic/Latino was not popular. In a very real sense the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina community of south Texas experienced a history of double marginalization. This community experienced

²⁴ D. L. Machado, "A Borderlands Perspective," *Hidden Stories*, 54-5; Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of National Expansionism in American History* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987), 179-80; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 285-6.

²⁵ Stephen F. Austin, who had been granted colonization rights by the Mexican government, revealed racist feelings pervasive during the Texas revolution for independence from Mexico. In a document written to Mary Austin Holley, August 21, 1835, Austin wrote that the battle was one of barbarism waged by a "mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race, against civilization and the Anglo American race." For an excellent exposition of this history, see Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1983); idem, "Initial Contacts: Niggers, Redskins, and Greasers," *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader*, 158-9; Kenneth L. Stewart and Arnoldo De León, *Not Room Enough: Mexicans, Anglos, and Socioeconomic Change in Texas, 1850-1900* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 218-9.

marginalization as a Protestant community within a much larger Hispanic/Latino Roman Catholic community and experienced marginalization as a Hispanic/Latino community within a much larger foreign and dominant Anglo-Saxon and English-speaking culture.²⁷ They became the new *mestizo Protestantes*.²⁸ They experienced life on the margins and life in the crossroads of history. Their identity was constantly challenged and subjected to revision by a national policy of Manifest Destiny that would impose cultural, political and socio-economic hegemony over their marginal existence.²⁹ They inherited a faith tradition of Protestant missionaries who at times had a different interpretation for their religious and cultural practices.³⁰ These missionaries may not have fully

²⁶ Most of the early missionaries were of German or Scandinavian heritage from the upper Midwest who received their theological education at Luther and Trinity theological seminaries. See Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

²⁷ See González, *Mañana*, 21-2.

²⁸ Barton uses the metaphor of a tapestry to describe the interplay of both Mexican- and Anglo-American religion and culture. He observes that "viewed as a cultural and religious tapestry, *los Protestantes* have historical patterns resulting both from their Spanish and *mestizo* heritage and from the insertion of Anglo-American Protestantism into this heritage" and that "individuals participating in each of these communities, such as Anglo-American missionaries, wove enduring strands of Protestantism into this cultural and religious fabric." He notes that the Mexican-Americans themselves contributed to the weaving of their own history and identity and left enduring legacies in the transmission of the tradition they adopted and in their eventual challenge of certain legacies (Barton, "In Both Worlds," 2-3, 8-9).

²⁹ See *The Latino/a Condition*, 165-9.

³⁰ The idea that "the Mexican" needed conversion from a life of superstition and idolatry is exemplified in a pamphlet written by the Reverend Alvin H. Koehler who was the director of the missionary work in south Texas and México from 1933 to 1948. During this time he served as the pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan. Koehler notes the *negative* effects of the popular religious practices of the Mexican people. Their devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe and other Roman Catholic rites and rituals put in question the authenticity of their faith and compelled the missionary to evangelize with the *positive* gospel of love and peace and pardon in Jesus Christ to ensure their salvation. It was his posture that in order "to win" the Mexican soul for Christ one had to understand the customs, traditions, and superstitions of the people because these were the keys that would unlock their hearts. See A. H. Koehler, *Keys to the Mexican Soul* (San Antonio: *El Mensajero Luterano*, n.d.), 1-12; H. C. Ziehe, *A Centennial Story of the Lutheran Church in Texas: 1851-1951*, 189-93.

realized the impact of the ideological influence of Manifest Destiny on their evangelization efforts.³¹ What is clear is that they served the community with great dedication and often with minimal salaries.³²

Protestant historian Paul Barton indicates that the Mexican-American *Protestantes* experienced a constant tension as they maintained their Mexican-American identity in relation to Anglo-American Protestants and their Protestant identity in relation to their Mexican-American Roman Catholic neighbors. *Los Protestantes* struggled to maintain their unique identity while experiencing marginalization as a double minority – a religious minority within the larger Mexican American community and a cultural minority within their Protestant denomination. They were marginalized within their Mexican-American community because of their religious beliefs and activity and within their denomination because of their skin color and ethnicity.³³

³¹ Barton argues that the national ideology of Manifest Destiny contributed to a perception of Mexicans as inferior beings and to their subordination in the life and ministry of the church (Barton, "Inter-ethnic Relations Between Mexican Americans and Anglo American Methodists in the U.S. Southwest, 1836-1938," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 60-84; D. L. Machado, "Latinos in the Protestant Establishment: Is There a Place for Us at the Feast Table?" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 85-103). The Lutheran missionary endeavor was also plagued by racism. The Synod held workshops to address this complex issue in Hispanic-Anglo church relations (Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 17-8). Missiologist David Bosch looks back upon the phenomenon of "manifest destiny" and mission and observes that in North America and elsewhere, one has to beware of facile deductions: "both those who insist (as some mission apologists still do) that the missionary flame's ignition was purely religious, and those who, for whichever reasons, contend that it was merely a matter of national identity or expansiveness, miss the point that, only too often, the religious and the national impulses were fundamentally not separable" (David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997], 302).

³² See Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

³³ Barton, "In Both Worlds," 2-3; For Barton, the idea of marginality serves as an overarching concept that implies exclusion, powerlessness, and subordination to members of the dominant society. Characteristics of marginality include: (1) paternalism and dependency; (2) subordination to those wielding power; (3) inaccessibility to opportunities for self-realization, such as education, leadership development, and employment; (4) segregation and exclusion; (5)

Los Protestantes constructed their unique religious identity in the midst of their Mexican American community – a group of its cultural affiliation – and their cultural identity through their contact, or lack of contact, with the predominantly Anglo-American denominations. To a great extent, their religious and cultural identity was shaped as they stood between these two groups, one representing the religious and cultural context of their ethnic heritage and the other representing the ideals and values of the dominant society. As such, *Los Protestantes* represent a unique mixture of Mexican-American ethnicity with Anglo-American religion and culture. They maintained their ethnic identity insofar as they remained in the *barrio* and in other Mexican-American neighborhoods. They developed their religious identity through internalization of the religious world-view and value system presented by Anglo-American missionaries. For Barton, the religious message of Anglo-American Protestants was embedded in a larger evangelical culture that was also appropriated by *los Protestantes*. Thus, this group represents a new *mestizaje* – a mixture of *Mexicano*, *Tejano*, *Neomexicano*, and *Californio*, cultures and ethnicity with Anglo-American

inequality of finances, social status, and distribution of resources; and (6) neglect. Barton indicates that these characteristics describe various ways in which Mexican American Methodists and other *Protestantes* of the Southwest experienced a subordinate status within their church (Barton, "Inter-ethnic Relations Between Mexican-Americans and Anglo American Methodists" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 60-84).

Protestant religion and culture.³⁴ The Mexican-American *Luteranos* of south Texas are a part of this larger history of *mestizo Protestantes*.³⁵

At times a jarring dissonance results when both the secular and church cultures treat the Hispanic/Latina peoples and other marginal groups as second-class citizens or even worse as non-persons.³⁶ The Hispanic/Latina community in the Southwest is located on the margins of the dominant Anglo-Saxon church community. Their historical experience and theological voice is often missing at church councils or at major church forums. In this context the Spanish language as a medium for the proclamation of the gospel is often challenged as unorthodox and considered offensive.³⁷ These types of assaults trample upon the identity and dignity of the *Luteranos Protestantes*. These types of actions or non-actions violate the scriptural injunction to love the stranger as oneself: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of

³⁴ Ibid.; Rubén P. Armendáriz, "The Protestant Hispanic Congregation: Identity," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 239-40; González, *Mañana*, 21-2; idem, "Reseña Bibliográfica," *Apuntes* 3 (invierno, 1983): 95.

³⁵ See T. Michael Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6. The writers point out that a double standard existed in regards to Anglo-Mexican relations in the church and that the native "Mexicans" of Texas were considered "foreigners" and treated in a paternalistic fashion. The commonly held assumption was that Whites could "do" ministry to Hispanics because they knew what was best for them. This led to limited leadership training and involvement in decision making by Hispanics themselves.

³⁶ Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1.

³⁷ James E. Bennett, "From the Bishop," *The Vista*, 2. This writer experienced this reality in the ministry when he was chastised for reading a scripture in Spanish at a Pentecost service and for reciting the Lord's Prayer in Spanish at an Easter service. This experience is not unique. It forms a part of the historical memory and legacy of cultural oppression of the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina community.

Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:22-34, NRSV). These actions also contradict Luther's understanding of service to the neighbor and his understanding of making the scriptures and the teachings of the church available in the language and music of the people.³⁸ They contradict the Reformation tradition.

As evidenced by the analysis of the four congregations in Chapter Four most Hispanic/Latina Lutheran church communities are comprised of immigrant populations that do not share the history or language of the immigrant population of the dominant culture. An ocean does not separate the Old World from the New World so as to sever any linguistic and cultural ties to a former country of origin. Whereas some common experience may be shared with regard to assimilation pressures, the overall experience of the people of the Southwest is a constant subjection to discriminatory practices and to cultural derision because of the difference of language and of cultural roots.³⁹ The subtle and at times blatant message conveyed by the unwritten rules of the culture and by the laws that enforce these practices is that the Hispanic/Latina community and immigrant

³⁸ Walter Sparr, "Preaching and the Course of the Reformation," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, 175-6; WA 15: 38.8-9; WA 12: 259; Robinson-Hammerstein argues that the congregation's need to be given the vernacular is reinforced by historical reflection and justification and that Thomas Muntzer also makes this point: "When the Germans were first christianised [sic], there was no German language: Latin was understood. Latin also provided a unifying force in Western Christendom. But language was always only a means of communication; and now that the German people have their own language, it must be used to make them understand God's will" (Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," *The Transmission of Ideas*, 148).

³⁹ This is a typical experience of the Hispanic/Latina community of the borderlands. As a people caught in the middle of two nations they have often been derided by both Mexico and the United States as a people who do not belong to either country and who do not speak either Spanish or English *correctly*. As a result, Mexicans often call these hybrid people *pochos* and Americans often call them *spics*. See Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 20-1.

population *do not belong* in this country.⁴⁰ If the social location of this community is within the Southwest by virtue of birthright the message conveyed is straightforward: members of this community do not qualify for positions of authority whether secular or religious.⁴¹

In the context of the Southwest the message of justification takes on a different nuance and avenue of expression. In this context the forensic interpretation of the doctrine will not necessarily convey *what is real* to the people in their self-understanding. The question that caused so much *Angst* for Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, "How can I find a merciful God?" is not the central question that causes unrest in the conscience of this community. The theological questions of this community most often concern the nature of justice in an oppressive culture. Their questions gravitate towards understanding the role and place of the church in affirming their *dignidad* as a people of God. Their questions concern how best to provide food and shelter and education to the many immigrants who continue to cross the border both legally and illegally. If relatives cross the border illegally or if their dignity is trampled or violated along the way through such common occurrences as rape or death by *coyotes*,⁴² then

⁴⁰ Consider, for example, the anti-illegal alien initiative of California's Proposition 187 that attempted to deny health care, education, and other public services to undocumented immigrants. This proposition was highly criticized for its racist overtones and for its lack of recognition of the contribution of illegal immigrants to the state and national economy. See, Linda S. Bosniak, "Undocumented Immigrants and the National Imagination," *The Latino/a Condition*, 99-105.

⁴¹ See Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 29-30; T.M. Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 17-8.

⁴² The Spanish and English languages share the term *coyote* to identify night-prowling desert canines. The border lexicon applies this term to men and women who assist groups of Mexican nationals across the southern U.S.-México border, usually at night through the desert, at often exploitative prices. See, Elvia R. Arriola, "Lone Star and the Faces of Despair in INS Raids," *The Latino/a Condition*, 230-6. For colorful descriptions by selected interviewees in an oral history project, of repeated and successful efforts to cross the California-México border on foot, see

the question posed by this community may take on a more urgent posture: "What can we as the church and as members of the one human family who receive the justice of God by faith in Christ do to bring healing to these children of God and to prevent these injustices from occurring?"

Faced with such urgent questions the Hispanic/Latina community experience their sense of justification *coram deo* not only by their emphasis on the forgiveness of their sins (which they do not discount), but in their appropriation of the justice of God which they receive and acknowledge as a gift of redemption and as a vocation of service to the neighbor. They experience both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the justice of God by their identity with the One who suffered their injustice as a marginalized innocent who was condemned as a non-person. They can identify with the Son of God whose dignity was stripped and violated by the religious and political authorities of his day. They can identify with His history and His story because it is their history and their story. They are the unjustly accused who bear the marks and wounds of being a *persona non grata* in their own land and among their own people.

Dignity Restored: A Response by two Hispanic/Latina Ethicists

Ismael García and Ada María Isasi-Díaz are two Hispanic/Latina ethicists who offer new constructs and ethical proposals for a restoration and affirmation of the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community. They base their arguments on their analysis of popular religious expression and the ethical

Marilyn P. Davis, *Mexican Voices/American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990).

principles that under-gird this particular experience. I will attempt to place their ethical perspectives and proposals within a framework proposed by Lutheran ethicist Robert Benne who offers a constructive proposal for contemporary ethics from a Lutheran perspective.⁴³

Benne critiques the positivism of modernity and neo-liberalism, insisting on the retrieval of the principles that give Lutheran ethics their fundamental grounding. For Benne, the central principle of Lutheran ethics is identical with its central theological principle: justification by grace through faith on account of Christ.⁴⁴ As George Forell so succinctly put it:

Luther said that 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. It was Luther who 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.⁴⁵

The principles of justification by faith and the forgiveness of sins are the heart of Lutheran ethics. The ethical response and responsibility of the individual and of the church are based on this theological premise. The central principle of the tradition gives direction to the calling of the Christian in the world and to the church in public life. The life and identity of the justified and forgiven Christian is transformed by this encounter with the Christian gospel. As Benne states:

We meet God in our creation in his image. We are given the capability of entering into covenantal relationships with God and with each other. We are given both an eternal and temporal

⁴³ Benne, "Lutheran Ethics," *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; George Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 84.

destiny. We are given a meaningful story in which to fit our obedient lives. We are meant for covenantal existence.⁴⁶

Benne contends that Lutheran social ethics does not lead in a specific ideological direction, but rather provides a framework for doing social ethics or public theology.⁴⁷ Lutheran ethics in general contain theological assumptions that stipulate how the church and public life should be regulated. When we recover the theological principles that undergird what is distinctively Lutheran ethics, we end up with theological assumptions concerning the nature of public life and public policy. He notes that the Lutheran ethical tradition sets a general direction for public policy that tends toward "Christian realism," a general tendency that can be refracted in a number of different policy directions.⁴⁸ By examining these theological assumptions, Benne can offer a more expansive interpretation and challenge to traditional Lutheran ethics. His perspective of the tradition allows us to expand the particular notion of Lutheran ethics beyond the theological, ecclesiological, and epistemological confines of the tradition. While this posture places Benne in a potential place of vulnerability, his framework can allow him to address the contemporary challenges of the present reality while remaining faithful to the tradition.

The retrieval of Lutheran theological principles in an effort to address contemporary challenges makes Benne an appropriate dialogue partner within the scope of this chapter. I have attempted to re-conceptualize theological arguments of the tradition based on a retrieval of the doctrines of justification by

⁴⁶ Benne, "Lutheran Ethics," *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

faith and of the *imago Dei*. The re-conceptualization of these theological principles has allowed me to reconstruct an ethical proposal that affirms the human dignity of all people and of the foreigner in particular. Other ethicists may differ from my position, but my theological re-conceptualization based on the theological, ecclesiological, and epistemological history and praxis of the Hispanic/Latina community has allowed me to arrive at a position consistent with the self-understanding of the community. In so doing, I have hopefully contributed to the strength of the theological principles of the Lutheran identity.

Ismael García

Human Dignity and the Image of God

Ismael García argues that our human dignity is a gift derivative of the *imago Dei*.⁴⁸ He examines the film *Mi Familia* as a way to interpret the unique and distinct cosmovision of the Hispanic/Latina family and the particular ethics that undergird it. García shows how the cultural elements of syncretism and symbiosis are significant aspects of popular religiosity that inform the ethics of the family and of the community. He reveals what is significantly distinct of the Hispanic/Latina hermeneutic; that is, the use of popular religion as a locus of epistemology for the cosmovision and ethics of the community.

García indicates that our dignity is never lost, but is trampled upon by unjust laws, prejudices, and discrimination that aim to dehumanize the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ García, *Dignidad*, 130-1.

community.⁵⁰ These attempts to destroy or deny the human dignity of the community are a denigration of the *imago Dei* and a failure to esteem the sacred in the other. For García, the foreigner has dignity by virtue of his or her creation. Faith and participation in the Christian community affirms this sacred dignity. The community of faith provides the context for moral reflection and practical moral decision-making. The community also provides the resources, that is, the stories, symbols, traditions, visions, and interpretations of God, self, and world that ground those choices.⁵¹ The community allows for a reinterpretation of the sacred worth of the person by her theological discourse and by the rituals that express the redemptive work of the Christ as exemplified by justification by faith.⁵²

By the term "God's image," García means several things. First, he means human rationality or the capacity to think and communicate in universal categories. He points out that the oppressors have justified their conquest and subjugation of persons, races, or nations by denying their humanity and participation in the *Logos* of God.⁵³ Second, he means human freedom and the capacity to transform the world through work. He maintains that creative transformative work enables the human not just to satisfy basic needs, but also to create and sustain culture. Third, he means the human capacity for infinite self-transcendence, which gives one the power to stand back and make of

⁵⁰ "Ismael García, "Speaking of Dignity," *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*, 114, no.1 (1998): 20.

⁵¹ García, *Dignidad*, 51.

⁵² Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 37-8.

⁵³ García, *Dignidad*, 130; González, *Mañana*, 103-4; Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 39-40.

oneself, nature, and all of one's creations, objects of reflection and transformation. The capacity for self-transcendence makes one aware of one's religiosity and one's sinfulness. Self-transcendence brings awareness of a created dependence upon God as the proper ground of one's being. Fourth, being created in the image of God means that one has the capacity to care, that is, the capacity to come out of oneself and recognize, listen to, and serve others. Without this capacity one would not understand the providential nature of God's love, or the paradox that one finds life when given away in service of others. García contends that Hispanics understand the notion of being created in the likeness of God mostly in terms of the relational nature of human life as a reflection of the relational nature of God's inner being and God's relation to the world.⁵⁴

For García, human beings have value because God created them, willed them to be, and made them partners in the realization of the purposes of God. This realization takes into account human failures that God redeems and transforms into the loving purposes of God. Because humans are dependent on and related to God in these three ways, they are bestowed with their own unique dignity. They have value and dignity through God, but it is their value and dignity.⁵⁵ The value and dignity of the human is a gift in the act of creation that is ever present and irrevocable. One does not merit this gift and performance or accomplishments do not bestow it. One has value and dignity because God is

⁵⁴ García, *Dignidad*, 131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the Creator of the good and because one belongs to God. All share in this gift equally as the unique individuals that God creates. One cannot ever lose one's value and dignity. The treatment of others should reflect this awareness.⁵⁶

The Ethics of Recognition and Care

Having value and dignity entitles one to recognition, respect, and care. For García, recognition, respect, and care demand more than just a change of attitudes and the cultivation of proper dispositions. They entail a concrete transformation of social relationships. Relations of oppression and domination among social groups do not fit the criteria of respect and care for the other. García points out that individuals, nations, cultures, and social groups are not respected and cared for when some benefit from the contributions of all, and where some are defined in principle as more valuable than others. For him, individuals and social groups receive due recognition, respect, and care when they have what they need to live, can develop their capacities, and can become genuine, self-determining human beings.⁵⁷ He notes that participation in the social, political, and cultural spheres that determine the fate of the collective existence is at the heart of recognition, respect, and care as creatures of God.⁵⁸ He refers to this type of moral engagement as the ethics of recognition and care.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 53-4.

Given the uniqueness of one's being, one needs to be recognized and respected for one's differences and particularities. One's particular acts, one's particular structures of meaning and attachments must also be recognized and cared for. For García, "these structures are essential for our identity. Our dignity is tied to our being the particular individuals we are, to the development of our capacities in the company of others, and to expressing our uniqueness in a context of mutual care."⁶⁰ He observes that Hispanic Christians use the language of care because it emphasizes establishing and nurturing new relationships and the importance of life together in community. It stresses the obligations one has to attend to the needs of others in a context of mutual and reciprocal concern.⁶¹

For García, to be human is to be responsive, in an affirmative way, to God's grace and purpose for humanity and the whole of creation.⁶² As God's innermost being is communal love and care, so one is to be loving and caring in relating to others. Reflecting the Triune God, to be fully human is to live in harmonious relation with those who are different, to empower them in their difference, and to create community with them. He indicates "we are most human when the other's need and well-being are taken into account as we go about enhancing our own."⁶³ The human finds true self in the process of reconciling and reuniting what has been selfishly and forcibly kept separated.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 133.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

This reunion of the separate, which is love, is intrinsically intertwined with justice, or the creation of social structures that enable us to relate to one another in a context of mutual aid, recognition, and respect. To be for the other means more than just not interfering, it means caring for them in positive ways, just as we care for our parents, our children, and our spouses. Being human is to be caring and other-directed within all spheres of life.⁶⁴

García addresses the question of what is normatively human by pointing out that God created humanity in God's image as men and women. Thus a rereading and reinterpretation of biblical stories is often necessary in order to unveil the patriarchal bias that has been so damaging for women. One must recognize that we are created as social and for social relationships. This is the nature of human community. As he states:

To be human is to be joined in relations of fidelity and mutual cooperation. It is to live by the medium of dialogue, by listening to one another, by recognizing and respecting one another, and by serving one another's needs. To be human is to have the power that allows each to name their world and their being.⁶⁵

To care for and recognize the value of the other is to treat others with dignity. This entails an acknowledgment and valuation of difference. For García, when we name others, we deprive them of the power to name themselves, and make them in our likeness, as for example, Adam did to Eve after the fall, and move from mutuality and creative freedom into domination and oppression. He indicates that in the act of naming Eve, both Adam and Eve lost their capacity to

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 136.

be for the other, to recognize, respect, and care for each other, and thus their capacity to be truly human.⁶⁶ According to García, in our social context the quality of our humanity can be measured by the way we personally and socially treat the most vulnerable of our communities, as for example, women and children. This power to name the other and to treat them in a way that is less than human is of particular relevance in the context of the Southwest where naming the most vulnerable as "alien" or "illegal" is a statutory basis for discrimination and unjust treatment.⁶⁷ These laws dehumanize the nation and desensitize the national conscience by their enforcement. They promote a view that names the good creation "evil" and the evil practice "good."

García indicates that as self-transcendent creatures, we are historical beings committed to the realization of higher possibilities of life. This means that the Hispanic/Latina community has a task to do, assisting the sacred intention of ordering and nurturing the good creation. In this task one finds not only emotional and material well-being, but also meaning and purpose. To be human for García is thus to be committed historically to acting in ways that anticipate and give us glimmers of God's Kingdom of love and justice.

The Church as a Community of Resistance

García examines the experience of the Hispanic/Latina community in the United States from the point of view of their struggles for community building and

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ruben J. García, "The Racial Politics of Proposition 187," *The Latino Condition*, 118-9.

as a church of resistance.⁶⁸ He looks at the diverse multiethnic Hispanic/Latina experience from the larger perspective of a social group that shares diverse moral values but a common historical experience and struggle with marginalization and oppression. He provides a view of the community's quest for justice by examining the religious faith experience of the people as a medium for the liberation of the community from the social, cultural and political forces that oppress and divide it. He believes that a shared theological perspective may provide a way out of the impasse created by the plurality of competing interest claims and moral value priorities, which at times divide the community. His theological and ethical perspective affirms the fullness of life of the Hispanic/Latina community as a people created in the image of God. He contends that such moral values as freedom, equality, power, community, justice and order are values that Hispanics proclaim as essential to what it means to be human, to live a good life and sustain a human community. He believes that the Christian tradition provides a way for analysis of these issues as derivative from the creative agency of God for the fullness of humanity. These value commitments also promote a solidarity and witness toward the creation of a more inclusive and compassionate community.⁶⁹

García uses the religious experience of the Hispanic community as the method to critique the church and the political forces that prevent the church from

⁶⁸ Ismael García, "A Theological-Ethical Analysis of Hispanic Struggles for Community Building in the United States," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 289-90; idem, "Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Church as a Community of Resistance," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 4, no. 3 (1996), 42-73.

⁶⁹ García, "A Theological-Ethical Analysis of Hispanic Struggles for Community Building in the United States," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 302.

and belonging had shifted as tectonic plates shift underneath the surface of the land. The Lutheran mission became the safe place and space for belonging and for confession of faith. This Protestant tradition affirmed their lives as a people of God. It provided a scriptural witness for their self-understanding at a time in the history of this nation when the national policy and ideology of Manifest Destiny maligned their *Mexican-ness*.²⁴ They were called Greasers, Meskin, wetbacks and other derogatory terms that reinforced a racist attitude and policy towards a people who were considered a mongrel race.²⁵

The early missionaries welcomed the Hispanic/Latina community into the larger Lutheran family of the American Lutheran Church. In sharing their faith they transmitted their Anglo-American faith tradition to the exiled community.²⁶ These early missionaries were faithful in proclaiming Word and Sacrament ministry at a time when being Lutheran and Hispanic/Latino was not popular. In a very real sense the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina community of south Texas experienced a history of double marginalization. This community experienced

²⁴ D. L. Machado, "A Borderlands Perspective," *Hidden Stories*, 54-5; Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of National Expansionism in American History* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987), 179-80; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 285-6.

²⁵ Stephen F. Austin, who had been granted colonization rights by the Mexican government, revealed racist feelings pervasive during the Texas revolution for independence from Mexico. In a document written to Mary Austin Holley, August 21, 1835, Austin wrote that the battle was one of barbarism waged by a "mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race, against civilization and the Anglo American race." For an excellent exposition of this history, see Arnaldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1983); idem, "Initial Contacts: *Niggers, Redskins, and Greasers*," *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader*, 158-9; Kenneth L. Stewart and Arnaldo De León, *Not Room Enough: Mexicans, Anglos, and Socioeconomic Change in Texas, 1850-1900* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1; Sandoval, *Fronteras*, 218-9.

marginalization as a Protestant community within a much larger Hispanic/Latino Roman Catholic community and experienced marginalization as a Hispanic/Latino community within a much larger foreign and dominant Anglo-Saxon and English-speaking culture.²⁷ They became the new *mestizo Protestantes*.²⁸ They experienced life on the margins and life in the crossroads of history. Their identity was constantly challenged and subjected to revision by a national policy of Manifest Destiny that would impose cultural, political and socio-economic hegemony over their marginal existence.²⁹ They inherited a faith tradition of Protestant missionaries who at times had a different interpretation for their religious and cultural practices.³⁰ These missionaries may not have fully

²⁶ Most of the early missionaries were of German or Scandinavian heritage from the upper Midwest who received their theological education at Luther and Trinity theological seminaries. See Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

²⁷ See González, *Mañana*, 21-2.

²⁸ Barton uses the metaphor of a tapestry to describe the interplay of both Mexican- and Anglo-American religion and culture. He observes that "viewed as a cultural and religious tapestry, *los Protestantes* have historical patterns resulting both from their Spanish and *mestizo* heritage and from the insertion of Anglo-American Protestantism into this heritage" and that "individuals participating in each of these communities, such as Anglo-American missionaries, wove enduring strands of Protestantism into this cultural and religious fabric." He notes that the Mexican-Americans themselves contributed to the weaving of their own history and identity and left enduring legacies in the transmission of the tradition they adopted and in their eventual challenge of certain legacies (Barton, "In Both Worlds," 2-3, 8-9).

²⁹ See *The Latino/a Condition*, 165-9.

³⁰ The idea that "the Mexican" needed conversion from a life of superstition and idolatry is exemplified in a pamphlet written by the Reverend Alvin H. Koehler who was the director of the missionary work in south Texas and México from 1933 to 1948. During this time he served as the pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan. Koehler notes the *negative* effects of the popular religious practices of the Mexican people. Their devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe and other Roman Catholic rites and rituals put in question the authenticity of their faith and compelled the missionary to evangelize with the *positive* gospel of love and peace and pardon in Jesus Christ to ensure their salvation. It was his posture that in order "to win" the Mexican soul for Christ one had to understand the customs, traditions, and superstitions of the people because these were the keys that would unlock their hearts. See A. H. Koehler, *Keys to the Mexican Soul* (San Antonio: *El Mensajero Luterano*, n.d.), 1-12; H. C. Ziehe, *A Centennial Story of the Lutheran Church in Texas: 1851-1951*, 189-93.

realized the impact of the ideological influence of Manifest Destiny on their evangelization efforts.³¹ What is clear is that they served the community with great dedication and often with minimal salaries.³²

Protestant historian Paul Barton indicates that the Mexican-American *Protestantes* experienced a constant tension as they maintained their Mexican-American identity in relation to Anglo-American Protestants and their Protestant identity in relation to their Mexican-American Roman Catholic neighbors. *Los Protestantes* struggled to maintain their unique identity while experiencing marginalization as a double minority – a religious minority within the larger Mexican American community and a cultural minority within their Protestant denomination. They were marginalized within their Mexican-American community because of their religious beliefs and activity and within their denomination because of their skin color and ethnicity.³³

³¹ Barton argues that the national ideology of Manifest Destiny contributed to a perception of Mexicans as inferior beings and to their subordination in the life and ministry of the church (Barton, "Inter-ethnic Relations Between Mexican Americans and Anglo American Methodists in the U.S. Southwest, 1836-1938," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 60--84; D. L. Machado, "Latinos in the Protestant Establishment: Is There a Place for Us at the Feast Table?" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 85-103). The Lutheran missionary endeavor was also plagued by racism. The Synod held workshops to address this complex issue in Hispanic-Anglo church relations (Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 17-8). Missiologist David Bosch looks back upon the phenomenon of "manifest destiny" and mission and observes that in North America and elsewhere, one has to beware of facile deductions: "both those who insist (as some mission apologists still do) that the missionary flame's ignition was purely religious, and those who, for whichever reasons, contend that it was merely a matter of national identity or expansiveness, miss the point that, only too often, the religious and the national impulses were fundamentally not separable" (David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997], 302).

³² See Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6.

³³ Barton, "In Both Worlds," 2-3; For Barton, the idea of marginality serves as an overarching concept that implies exclusion, powerlessness, and subordination to members of the dominant society. Characteristics of marginality include: (1) paternalism and dependency; (2) subordination to those wielding power; (3) inaccessibility to opportunities for self-realization, such as education, leadership development, and employment; (4) segregation and exclusion; (5)

Los Protestantes constructed their unique religious identity in the midst of their Mexican American community – a group of its cultural affiliation – and their cultural identity through their contact, or lack of contact, with the predominantly Anglo-American denominations. To a great extent, their religious and cultural identity was shaped as they stood between these two groups, one representing the religious and cultural context of their ethnic heritage and the other representing the ideals and values of the dominant society. As such, *Los Protestantes* represent a unique mixture of Mexican-American ethnicity with Anglo-American religion and culture. They maintained their ethnic identity insofar as they remained in the *barrio* and in other Mexican-American neighborhoods. They developed their religious identity through internalization of the religious world-view and value system presented by Anglo-American missionaries. For Barton, the religious message of Anglo-American Protestants was embedded in a larger evangelical culture that was also appropriated by *los Protestantes*. Thus, this group represents a new *mestizaje* – a mixture of *Mexicano*, *Tejano*, *Neomexicano*, and *Californio*, cultures and ethnicity with Anglo-American

inequality of finances, social status, and distribution of resources; and (6) neglect. Barton indicates that these characteristics describe various ways in which Mexican American Methodists and other *Protestantes* of the Southwest experienced a subordinate status within their church (Barton, "Inter-ethnic Relations Between Mexican-Americans and Anglo American Methodists" *Protestantes/Protestants*, 60-84).

Protestant religion and culture.³⁴ The Mexican-American *Luteranos* of south Texas are a part of this larger history of *mestizo Protestantes*.³⁵

At times a jarring dissonance results when both the secular and church cultures treat the Hispanic/Latina peoples and other marginal groups as second-class citizens or even worse as non-persons.³⁶ The Hispanic/Latina community in the Southwest is located on the margins of the dominant Anglo-Saxon church community. Their historical experience and theological voice is often missing at church councils or at major church forums. In this context the Spanish language as a medium for the proclamation of the gospel is often challenged as unorthodox and considered offensive.³⁷ These types of assaults trample upon the identity and dignity of the *Luteranos Protestantes*. These types of actions or non-actions violate the scriptural injunction to love the stranger as oneself: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of

³⁴ Ibid.; Rubén P. Armendáriz, "The Protestant Hispanic Congregation: Identity," *Protestantes/Protestants*, 239-40; González, *Mañana*, 21-2; idem, "Reseña Bibliográfica," *Apuntes* 3 (invierno, 1983): 95.

³⁵ See T. Michael Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 15-6. The writers point out that a double standard existed in regards to Anglo-Mexican relations in the church and that the native "Mexicans" of Texas were considered "foreigners" and treated in a paternalistic fashion. The commonly held assumption was that Whites could "do" ministry to Hispanics because they knew what was best for them. This led to limited leadership training and involvement in decision making by Hispanics themselves.

³⁶ Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 20-1.

³⁷ James E. Bennett, "From the Bishop," *The Vista*, 2. This writer experienced this reality in the ministry when he was chastised for reading a scripture in Spanish at a Pentecost service and for reciting the Lord's Prayer in Spanish at an Easter service. This experience is not unique. It forms a part of the historical memory and legacy of cultural oppression of the Lutheran Hispanic/Latina community.

Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:22-34, NRSV). These actions also contradict Luther's understanding of service to the neighbor and his understanding of making the scriptures and the teachings of the church available in the language and music of the people.³⁸ They contradict the Reformation tradition.

As evidenced by the analysis of the four congregations in Chapter Four most Hispanic/Latina Lutheran church communities are comprised of immigrant populations that do not share the history or language of the immigrant population of the dominant culture. An ocean does not separate the Old World from the New World so as to sever any linguistic and cultural ties to a former country of origin. Whereas some common experience may be shared with regard to assimilation pressures, the overall experience of the people of the Southwest is a constant subjection to discriminatory practices and to cultural derision because of the difference of language and of cultural roots.³⁹ The subtle and at times blatant message conveyed by the unwritten rules of the culture and by the laws that enforce these practices is that the Hispanic/Latina community and immigrant

³⁸ Walter Sparr, "Preaching and the Course of the Reformation," *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, 175-6; WA 15: 38.8-9; WA 12: 259; Robinson-Hammerstein argues that the congregation's need to be given the vernacular is reinforced by historical reflection and justification and that Thomas Muntzer also makes this point: "When the Germans were first christianised [*sic*], there was no German language: Latin was understood. Latin also provided a unifying force in Western Christendom. But language was always only a means of communication; and now that the German people have their own language, it must be used to make them understand God's will" (Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and its Music," *The Transmission of Ideas*, 148).

³⁹ This is a typical experience of the Hispanic/Latina community of the borderlands. As a people caught in the middle of two nations they have often been derided by both Mexico and the United States as a people who do not belong to either country and who do not speak either Spanish or English *correctly*. As a result, Mexicans often call these hybrid people *pochos* and Americans often call them *spics*. See Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 20-1.

population *do not belong* in this country.⁴⁰ If the social location of this community is within the Southwest by virtue of birthright the message conveyed is straightforward: members of this community do not qualify for positions of authority whether secular or religious.⁴¹

In the context of the Southwest the message of justification takes on a different nuance and avenue of expression. In this context the forensic interpretation of the doctrine will not necessarily convey *what is real* to the people in their self-understanding. The question that caused so much *Angst* for Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, "How can I find a merciful God?" is not the central question that causes unrest in the conscience of this community. The theological questions of this community most often concern the nature of justice in an oppressive culture. Their questions gravitate towards understanding the role and place of the church in affirming their *dignidad* as a people of God. Their questions concern how best to provide food and shelter and education to the many immigrants who continue to cross the border both legally and illegally. If relatives cross the border illegally or if their dignity is trampled or violated along the way through such common occurrences as rape or death by *coyotes*,⁴² then

⁴⁰ Consider, for example, the anti-illegal alien initiative of California's Proposition 187 that attempted to deny health care, education, and other public services to undocumented immigrants. This proposition was highly criticized for its racist overtones and for its lack of recognition of the contribution of illegal immigrants to the state and national economy. See, Linda S. Bosniak, "Undocumented Immigrants and the National Imagination," *The Latino/a Condition*, 99-105.

⁴¹ See Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 29-30; T.M. Mackey, ed., *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, 17-8.

⁴² The Spanish and English languages share the term *coyote* to identify night-prowling desert canines. The border lexicon applies this term to men and women who assist groups of Mexican nationals across the southern U.S.-México border, usually at night through the desert, at often exploitative prices. See, Elvia R. Arriola, "Lone Star and the Faces of Despair in INS Raids," *The Latino/a Condition*, 230-6. For colorful descriptions by selected interviewees in an oral history project, of repeated and successful efforts to cross the California-México border on foot, see

the question posed by this community may take on a more urgent posture: "What can we as the church and as members of the one human family who receive the justice of God by faith in Christ do to bring healing to these children of God and to prevent these injustices from occurring?"

Faced with such urgent questions the Hispanic/Latina community experience their sense of justification *coram deo* not only by their emphasis on the forgiveness of their sins (which they do not discount), but in their appropriation of the justice of God which they receive and acknowledge as a gift of redemption and as a vocation of service to the neighbor. They experience both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the justice of God by their identity with the One who suffered their injustice as a marginalized innocent who was condemned as a non-person. They can identify with the Son of God whose dignity was stripped and violated by the religious and political authorities of his day. They can identify with His history and His story because it is their history and their story. They are the unjustly accused who bear the marks and wounds of being a *persona non grata* in their own land and among their own people.

Dignity Restored: A Response by two Hispanic/Latina Ethicists

Ismael García and Ada María Isasi-Díaz are two Hispanic/Latina ethicists who offer new constructs and ethical proposals for a restoration and affirmation of the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community. They base their arguments on their analysis of popular religious expression and the ethical

Marilyn P. Davis, *Mexican Voices/American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990).

principles that under-gird this particular experience. I will attempt to place their ethical perspectives and proposals within a framework proposed by Lutheran ethicist Robert Benne who offers a constructive proposal for contemporary ethics from a Lutheran perspective.⁴³

Benne critiques the positivism of modernity and neo-liberalism, insisting on the retrieval of the principles that give Lutheran ethics their fundamental grounding. For Benne, the central principle of Lutheran ethics is identical with its central theological principle: justification by grace through faith on account of Christ.⁴⁴ As George Forell so succinctly put it:

Luther said that 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. It was Luther who 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.⁴⁵

The principles of justification by faith and the forgiveness of sins are the heart of Lutheran ethics. The ethical response and responsibility of the individual and of the church are based on this theological premise. The central principle of the tradition gives direction to the calling of the Christian in the world and to the church in public life. The life and identity of the justified and forgiven Christian is transformed by this encounter with the Christian gospel. As Benne states:

We meet God in our creation in his image. We are given the capability of entering into covenantal relationships with God and with each other. We are given both an eternal and temporal

⁴³ Benne, "Lutheran Ethics," *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; George Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 84.

destiny. We are given a meaningful story in which to fit our obedient lives. We are meant for covenantal existence.⁴⁶

Benne contends that Lutheran social ethics does not lead in a specific ideological direction, but rather provides a framework for doing social ethics or public theology.⁴⁷ Lutheran ethics in general contain theological assumptions that stipulate how the church and public life should be regulated. When we recover the theological principles that undergird what is distinctively Lutheran ethics, we end up with theological assumptions concerning the nature of public life and public policy. He notes that the Lutheran ethical tradition sets a general direction for public policy that tends toward "Christian realism," a general tendency that can be refracted in a number of different policy directions.⁴⁸ By examining these theological assumptions, Benne can offer a more expansive interpretation and challenge to traditional Lutheran ethics. His perspective of the tradition allows us to expand the particular notion of Lutheran ethics beyond the theological, ecclesiological, and epistemological confines of the tradition. While this posture places Benne in a potential place of vulnerability, his framework can allow him to address the contemporary challenges of the present reality while remaining faithful to the tradition.

The retrieval of Lutheran theological principles in an effort to address contemporary challenges makes Benne an appropriate dialogue partner within the scope of this chapter. I have attempted to re-conceptualize theological arguments of the tradition based on a retrieval of the doctrines of justification by

⁴⁶ Benne, "Lutheran Ethics," *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

faith and of the *imago Dei*. The re-conceptualization of these theological principles has allowed me to reconstruct an ethical proposal that affirms the human dignity of all people and of the foreigner in particular. Other ethicists may differ from my position, but my theological re-conceptualization based on the theological, ecclesiological, and epistemological history and praxis of the Hispanic/Latina community has allowed me to arrive at a position consistent with the self-understanding of the community. In so doing, I have hopefully contributed to the strength of the theological principles of the Lutheran identity.

Ismael García

Human Dignity and the Image of God

Ismael García argues that our human dignity is a gift derivative of the *imago Dei*.⁴⁸ He examines the film *Mi Familia* as a way to interpret the unique and distinct cosmovision of the Hispanic/Latina family and the particular ethics that undergird it. García shows how the cultural elements of syncretism and symbiosis are significant aspects of popular religiosity that inform the ethics of the family and of the community. He reveals what is significantly distinct of the Hispanic/Latina hermeneutic; that is, the use of popular religion as a locus of epistemology for the cosmovision and ethics of the community.

García indicates that our dignity is never lost, but is trampled upon by unjust laws, prejudices, and discrimination that aim to dehumanize the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ García, *Dignidad*, 130-1.

community.⁵⁰ These attempts to destroy or deny the human dignity of the community are a denigration of the *imago Dei* and a failure to esteem the sacred in the other. For García, the foreigner has dignity by virtue of his or her creation. Faith and participation in the Christian community affirms this sacred dignity. The community of faith provides the context for moral reflection and practical moral decision-making. The community also provides the resources, that is, the stories, symbols, traditions, visions, and interpretations of God, self, and world that ground those choices.⁵¹ The community allows for a reinterpretation of the sacred worth of the person by her theological discourse and by the rituals that express the redemptive work of the Christ as exemplified by justification by faith.⁵²

By the term "God's image," García means several things. First, he means human rationality or the capacity to think and communicate in universal categories. He points out that the oppressors have justified their conquest and subjugation of persons, races, or nations by denying their humanity and participation in the *Logos* of God.⁵³ Second, he means human freedom and the capacity to transform the world through work. He maintains that creative transformative work enables the human not just to satisfy basic needs, but also to create and sustain culture. Third, he means the human capacity for infinite self-transcendence, which gives one the power to stand back and make of

⁵⁰ "Ismael García, "Speaking of Dignity," *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*, 114, no.1 (1998): 20.

⁵¹ García, *Dignidad*, 51.

⁵² Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 37-8.

⁵³ García, *Dignidad*, 130; González, *Mañana*, 103-4; Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 39-40.

oneself, nature, and all of one's creations, objects of reflection and transformation. The capacity for self-transcendence makes one aware of one's religiosity and one's sinfulness. Self-transcendence brings awareness of a created dependence upon God as the proper ground of one's being. Fourth, being created in the image of God means that one has the capacity to care, that is, the capacity to come out of oneself and recognize, listen to, and serve others. Without this capacity one would not understand the providential nature of God's love, or the paradox that one finds life when given away in service of others. García contends that Hispanics understand the notion of being created in the likeness of God mostly in terms of the relational nature of human life as a reflection of the relational nature of God's inner being and God's relation to the world.⁵⁴

For García, human beings have value because God created them, willed them to be, and made them partners in the realization of the purposes of God. This realization takes into account human failures that God redeems and transforms into the loving purposes of God. Because humans are dependent on and related to God in these three ways, they are bestowed with their own unique dignity. They have value and dignity through God, but it is their value and dignity.⁵⁵ The value and dignity of the human is a gift in the act of creation that is ever present and irrevocable. One does not merit this gift and performance or accomplishments do not bestow it. One has value and dignity because God is

⁵⁴ García, *Dignidad*, 131.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the Creator of the good and because one belongs to God. All share in this gift equally as the unique individuals that God creates. One cannot ever lose one's value and dignity. The treatment of others should reflect this awareness.⁵⁶

The Ethics of Recognition and Care

Having value and dignity entitles one to recognition, respect, and care. For García, recognition, respect, and care demand more than just a change of attitudes and the cultivation of proper dispositions. They entail a concrete transformation of social relationships. Relations of oppression and domination among social groups do not fit the criteria of respect and care for the other. García points out that individuals, nations, cultures, and social groups are not respected and cared for when some benefit from the contributions of all, and where some are defined in principle as more valuable than others. For him, individuals and social groups receive due recognition, respect, and care when they have what they need to live, can develop their capacities, and can become genuine, self-determining human beings.⁵⁷ He notes that participation in the social, political, and cultural spheres that determine the fate of the collective existence is at the heart of recognition, respect, and care as creatures of God.⁵⁸ He refers to this type of moral engagement as the ethics of recognition and care.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 53-4.

the Creator of the good and because one belongs to God. All share in this gift equally as the unique individuals that God creates. One cannot ever lose one's value and dignity. The treatment of others should reflect this awareness.⁵⁶

The Ethics of Recognition and Care

Having value and dignity entitles one to recognition, respect, and care. For García, recognition, respect, and care demand more than just a change of attitudes and the cultivation of proper dispositions. They entail a concrete transformation of social relationships. Relations of oppression and domination among social groups do not fit the criteria of respect and care for the other. García points out that individuals, nations, cultures, and social groups are not respected and cared for when some benefit from the contributions of all, and where some are defined in principle as more valuable than others. For him, individuals and social groups receive due recognition, respect, and care when they have what they need to live, can develop their capacities, and can become genuine, self-determining human beings.⁵⁷ He notes that participation in the social, political, and cultural spheres that determine the fate of the collective existence is at the heart of recognition, respect, and care as creatures of God.⁵⁸ He refers to this type of moral engagement as the ethics of recognition and care.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 53-4.

Given the uniqueness of one's being, one needs to be recognized and respected for one's differences and particularities. One's particular acts, one's particular structures of meaning and attachments must also be recognized and cared for. For García, "these structures are essential for our identity. Our dignity is tied to our being the particular individuals we are, to the development of our capacities in the company of others, and to expressing our uniqueness in a context of mutual care."⁶⁰ He observes that Hispanic Christians use the language of care because it emphasizes establishing and nurturing new relationships and the importance of life together in community. It stresses the obligations one has to attend to the needs of others in a context of mutual and reciprocal concern.⁶¹

For García, to be human is to be responsive, in an affirmative way, to God's grace and purpose for humanity and the whole of creation.⁶² As God's innermost being is communal love and care, so one is to be loving and caring in relating to others. Reflecting the Triune God, to be fully human is to live in harmonious relation with those who are different, to empower them in their difference, and to create community with them. He indicates "we are most human when the other's need and well-being are taken into account as we go about enhancing our own."⁶³ The human finds true self in the process of reconciling and reuniting what has been selfishly and forcibly kept separated.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 133.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

This reunion of the separate, which is love, is intrinsically intertwined with justice, or the creation of social structures that enable us to relate to one another in a context of mutual aid, recognition, and respect. To be for the other means more than just not interfering, it means caring for them in positive ways, just as we care for our parents, our children, and our spouses. Being human is to be caring and other-directed within all spheres of life.⁶⁴

García addresses the question of what is normatively human by pointing out that God created humanity in God's image as men and women. Thus a rereading and reinterpretation of biblical stories is often necessary in order to unveil the patriarchal bias that has been so damaging for women. One must recognize that we are created as social and for social relationships. This is the nature of human community. As he states:

To be human is to be joined in relations of fidelity and mutual cooperation. It is to live by the medium of dialogue, by listening to one another, by recognizing and respecting one another, and by serving one another's needs. To be human is to have the power that allows each to name their world and their being.⁶⁵

To care for and recognize the value of the other is to treat others with dignity. This entails an acknowledgment and valuation of difference. For García, when we name others, we deprive them of the power to name themselves, and make them in our likeness, as for example, Adam did to Eve after the fall, and move from mutuality and creative freedom into domination and oppression. He indicates that in the act of naming Eve, both Adam and Eve lost their capacity to

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 136.

be for the other, to recognize, respect, and care for each other, and thus their capacity to be truly human.⁶⁶ According to García, in our social context the quality of our humanity can be measured by the way we personally and socially treat the most vulnerable of our communities, as for example, women and children. This power to name the other and to treat them in a way that is less than human is of particular relevance in the context of the Southwest where naming the most vulnerable as "alien" or "illegal" is a statutory basis for discrimination and unjust treatment.⁶⁷ These laws dehumanize the nation and desensitize the national conscience by their enforcement. They promote a view that names the good creation "evil" and the evil practice "good."

García indicates that as self-transcendent creatures, we are historical beings committed to the realization of higher possibilities of life. This means that the Hispanic/Latina community has a task to do, assisting the sacred intention of ordering and nurturing the good creation. In this task one finds not only emotional and material well-being, but also meaning and purpose. To be human for García is thus to be committed historically to acting in ways that anticipate and give us glimmers of God's Kingdom of love and justice.

The Church as a Community of Resistance

García examines the experience of the Hispanic/Latina community in the United States from the point of view of their struggles for community building and

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ruben J. García, "The Racial Politics of Proposition 187," *The Latino Condition*, 118-9.

as a church of resistance.⁶⁸ He looks at the diverse multiethnic Hispanic/Latina experience from the larger perspective of a social group that shares diverse moral values but a common historical experience and struggle with marginalization and oppression. He provides a view of the community's quest for justice by examining the religious faith experience of the people as a medium for the liberation of the community from the social, cultural and political forces that oppress and divide it. He believes that a shared theological perspective may provide a way out of the impasse created by the plurality of competing interest claims and moral value priorities, which at times divide the community. His theological and ethical perspective affirms the fullness of life of the Hispanic/Latina community as a people created in the image of God. He contends that such moral values as freedom, equality, power, community, justice and order are values that Hispanics proclaim as essential to what it means to be human, to live a good life and sustain a human community. He believes that the Christian tradition provides a way for analysis of these issues as derivative from the creative agency of God for the fullness of humanity. These value commitments also promote a solidarity and witness toward the creation of a more inclusive and compassionate community.⁶⁹

García uses the religious experience of the Hispanic community as the method to critique the church and the political forces that prevent the church from

⁶⁸ Ismael García, "A Theological-Ethical Analysis of Hispanic Struggles for Community Building in the United States," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 289-90; idem, "Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Church as a Community of Resistance," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 4, no. 3 (1996), 42-73.

⁶⁹ García, "A Theological-Ethical Analysis of Hispanic Struggles for Community Building in the United States," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 302.

fulfilling her historic task. He argues that as the community of resistance Hispanic/Latinas are calling the catholic apostolic church to reclaim her prophetic function and her historical project as the instrument of God for the reconciliation of the world. This is a perspective that comes from below, that is, from the oppressed and marginal people of faith who are calling the church to look at herself critically so as to reclaim her mission and vision as the agent of proclamation of good news to all people, particularly the poor and the oppressed.

As a community of resistance Hispanic/Latinas challenge the church to fulfill her role in transforming the world. They argue that as the poor and the oppressed community they have a right to be heard, recognized and empowered as full members of the Body of Christ and as fully participating members of society. They declare to the church and to society that the marginalized are worthy of dignity because they have been created in the image of God. The church and the political institutions that govern society need to recognize and affirm all people's dignity as valued, accountable and responsible members of the faith community and nation. They can lead others if empowered by the church and recognized by the state. They can envision projects of service to humanity if given the freedom and space to express their visions of the just community. No longer silent, the community of resistance has a liberating word for the church and the world. The church will fulfill her historic task of the liberation of the oppressed if she listens to their message and embraces their dignity. Their acceptance and affirmation by the church will be a sign that the

church accepts her historical project of reconciliation of all people to the beloved community.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Ada María Isasi-Díaz uses the faith traditions and lived experience of the oppressed Latina women to express a *mujerista* theology of liberation.⁷⁰ She also uses the social sciences, cultural anthropology, and faith traditions of faith to describe the common experience of Latina women and their struggle for justice.⁷¹ She joins García in a perspective from the margins. Through the telling of stories she presents a perspective by Latina women for Latina women. The Latina community attempts to self-actualize through a theological self-understanding that empowers Latina women. The historical project of Latinas is the exercise of their moral agency. This means that Latinas reject and resist any attempts to be defined by patriarchal definitions, by cultural imperialism, or by ideological impositions that enslave and oppress them. As a theology of the margins, *mujerista* theology offers the Latina community an opportunity to be heard as a prophetic voice that declares Latina women participants in the historical project of liberation. Like García, Isasi-Díaz is a prophetic voice that challenges the status quo in both the church and society.

For Ada María Isasi-Díaz, the theme of justice is also an integral part of her liberation praxis. She observes that, for *mujerista* theologians, the “no greater love” message of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John “is nothing but

⁷⁰ See Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha*.

⁷¹ Isasi-Díaz, “Un poquito de justicia – a little Bit of Justice: A *Mujerista* Account of Justice,” *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 325-6.

the justice-demand that is a constitutive element of the gospel message."⁷² To seek justice for Latinas is to love God and neighbor for "our relationship with God affects all aspects of our lives, all human reality."⁷³

Isasi-Díaz interprets the theme of justice from the point of view of liberation. For Latinas, liberation means becoming agents of their own history, that is, participating in the realization of their *proyecto histórico*.⁷⁴ She uses the word *kin-dom* to make it clear "that when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in our world, we will all be kin to each other."⁷⁵ Her vision of the kin-dom of God is a vision of justice that embraces and reveals the expectations of Latinas for a just world order.

For Isasi-Díaz, to make justice a reality in the world means to denounce the structures that oppress Latina women and to announce a preferred future of their own making. This is what it means to be *en la lucha*, the struggle for self-determination that is a key factor in the struggle for liberation. For *mujerista* theologians, *justicia* "refers to the political, economic and social structures we struggle to build that will make oppression of anyone impossible. *Justicia* has to do with the understandings that guide us, challenge us, and enable us to survive daily."⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid, 326.

⁷³ Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Isasi-Díaz, "Un poquito de justicia," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 326.

⁷⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha*, 37.

Isasi-Díaz observes that "justice is a Christian requirement: one cannot call oneself a Christian and not struggle for justice."⁷⁷ Like García, Isasi-Díaz develops the theme of justice as a foundational theological principle for the liberation and empowerment of an oppressed community. Whereas García develops the theme of justice from the point of view of the creative agency of God, Isasi-Díaz sees it as an element of the *kin-dom* of God that the oppressed appropriate in their daily struggle to achieve it. Both are concerned with justice as the theological locus for the struggle against sinful social structures and for the liberation and empowerment of the community. Their work and analysis provides a voice for the oppressed community. They declare the inherent value (*dignidad*) of a people of God and their creative potential for participation in the *kin-dom* of God. Their voice indicates that the Hispanic/Latina community will no longer remain the passive object of the visions or projects of others, but a subject of its own destiny.

A critical observation of Isasi-Díaz is perhaps required at this juncture. Since Isasi-Díaz writes from an exclusively *mujerista* perspective, she fails to acknowledge the voice of Latino men or to inquire as to how the Latino (or for that matter male or female Anglo) perspective will contribute to the creation of the *kin-dom* that she regards as the historical project of the reign of God. Her invitation to participate in the struggle for justice with *mujeristas* can appear to be an exclusive invitation, one limited to the critique of dominant ideologies but without the voice of a more inclusive audience. This failure in no way diminishes the validity of her struggle or the strength of her arguments. It only reinforces the

⁷⁷ Ibid, 41.

idea for a more inclusive notion of community as a sign of the *kin-dom* of God where all are invited to struggle together for a more just world community.

The Struggle for Justice in the Southwest

The struggle for justice for Hispanics/Latinas has historical precedence in the legal and judicial systems of governance and in the public institutions of education. The institutions responsible for their protection and education have at times oppressed them the most. The attempts to define or manipulate identity through the coercive enforcement of the dominant language bear evidence of this oppression.

A case in point involves a child-custody hearing in a divorce case in Amarillo, Texas. On August 28, 1995, state district judge Samuel Kiser ordered Martha Laureano, a U.S. citizen of Mexican descent, to speak English at home to her five-year-old daughter. "[You are] abusing that child and relegating her to the position of a housemaid," the judge told Laureano after she acknowledged that she spoke only Spanish to the girl. "It's not in her best interest to be ignorant," Kiser said, threatening to end Laureano's custody unless she changed her method of communicating. Newspaper reports of the courtroom exchange roused the ire of the Hispanic/Latina community throughout the country and sparked an outcry from community leaders. The judge toned down his order and issued a partial apology a few days later, but as New York's *Daily News*

columnist Juan González indicates, "he was only echoing what many white Americans have believed for years."⁷⁸

The question of which language should pre-dominate in the American experience has caused contentious debate in recent times.⁷⁹ Backers of a constitutional amendment that would make English the official language say that the rising number of immigrants, especially the flood of Latin Americans during the past few decades, is threatening to balkanize the nation into warring linguistic groups, to make English speakers strangers in their own land.⁸⁰ This debate over language is not unique to this nation as virtually every modern nation-state confronts linguistic minorities within its borders. As Juan González points out, "we are in the unique position of being not only the largest English-speaking country in the world, but also the fifth-largest Spanish-speaking one, surpassed only by México, Spain, Argentina and Colombia."⁸¹

Over the years the debate over language has led to the dispute over multicultural education and the way the nation interprets the American historical experience. González notes: "Language, after all, is at the heart of an individual's social identity. It is the vehicle through which the songs, folklore, and customs of any group are preserved and transmitted to its descendants."⁸² National leaders and educators have long perceived English as a critical thread

⁷⁸ Juan González, *A History of Latinos in America: Harvest of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 206. See also, Sam Howe Verhovek, "Mother Scolded by Judge for Speaking Spanish," *New York Times*, August 30, 1995.

⁷⁹ See the various essays on this point in *The Hispanic/Latino/a Condition*, 557-624.

⁸⁰ González, *A History of Latinos in America*, 206.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 207.

in the national fabric because it provides a common means of communication and helps to bind the different immigrant groups into one American tapestry. Few would argue with the strength of this argument.

In his 1991 polemic, *The Disuniting of America*, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., rails against the rising "cult of ethnicity" or "compensatory history" by contemporary advocates of multiculturalism and bilingualism. González notes that, in the process, Schlesinger served up his version of the creation story of America: "Having cleared most of North America of their French, Spanish, and Dutch rivals, the British were free to set the mold. The language of the new nation, its laws, its institutions, its political ideas, its literature, its customs, its precepts, its prayers, primarily derived from Britain."⁸³ The fallacy of this version of history is that it suffers from the same flaw – "the failure to accept that the quest for empire, fueled by the racist theory of Manifest Destiny, divided and deformed the course of ethnic relations from our nations' inception, fragmenting and subverting any quest for one 'national language' and 'national culture.'"⁸⁴

There is little disagreement over whether English is the *common* language of the country. Yet, as González observes, "the very process of territorial expansion – not just immigration – created repeated battles throughout U.S. history over whether English should be the only recognized tongue."⁸⁵ A number

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid; see also Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 27-28, 122.

⁸⁴ González, *A History of Latinos in America*, 207.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

of ethnic groups attempted to preserve their native languages at the same time they adopted English, while the government, especially at the federal level, sought just as strenuously to suppress efforts at bilingualism.⁸⁶

González notes three main trends in these battles. The first category includes the millions of immigrants who came here from Europe and Asia voluntarily seeking American citizenship, and who, by doing so, were cutting ties with their homelands, adopting the language of their new country and accepting a subsidiary status, if any, for their native tongues. The second category was made up of the slaves from dozens of African nations who were brought here in chains, forced from the start to give up their various mother tongues, and not permitted to acquire a reading or writing knowledge of English so that the slave-owners could more easily control and dominate them. The third encompasses those people who were already living in the New World when their lands were either conquered or acquired by the United States: the Native Americans, the French Creoles of Louisiana, the Mexicans, and the Puerto Ricans. These latter groups became American citizens by force: "Congress declared them so without any vote or petition on their part; it did not care what language they spoke nor did it seek their public oath of allegiance."⁸⁷

The result of the conquest of the Southwest was an imposed sovereignty on a Spanish-speaking people. Since they were still residing on their old lands,

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 208. In the case of Puerto Rico, the Jones Act of 1917 conferred citizenship upon the inhabitants of the island, but without the franchise. The conscription of the male citizens during World War I is considered the motive behind this legislation.

these "annexed" Americans could hardly consider themselves foreigners.⁸⁸ The annexation of the Southwestern states by the U.S. after the war with México turned the native peoples into persistent defenders of the right to use their own language. Some local administrators accommodated them, but the federal government reacted with hostility to any linguistic diversity.⁸⁹ González observes that throughout the past two centuries, Anglo historians consistently relegated the languages of these conquered nationalities to the margins of the American experience, dismissing their cultures as either primitive or nonexistent. Despite the marginalization, Hispanics/Latinas managed to preserve their language and traditions (of faith and culture) by fashioning a parallel subterranean storehouse of music, dance, theater, journalism, literature, and folklore – in English as well as Spanish.⁹⁰

González points out that, after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo imposed American citizenship on the Mexicans living in the annexed territories, Congress did not require its new subjects to swear allegiance to their new nation or to adopt a new language. Those who did not want to become citizens had to publicly register their refusal, but the lives of the *mexicanos* continued pretty much as before. He observes that as late as the 1870s, more than a quarter century after annexation, New Mexico's legislature operated mostly in Spanish. By then, only two of fourteen counties had switched to jury trials in English and most of the public schools conducted instruction either all in Spanish or

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

bilingually.⁹¹ This did not indicate a refusal to learn English. It meant that their opportunities to learn the language were minimal in isolated rural communities where they composed the overwhelming majority. As a result, New Mexico was one of the last territories to become a state (in 1913), but it boasted a *mexicano* majority until 1940. He notes that a similar process evolved in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, only there *mexicanos* remained the overwhelming majority for 250 years, with most residents retaining the use of Spanish while also being fluent in English.⁹²

González assesses that the Mexican, Puerto Rican, French Creole, and Native-American language experiences are markedly different from that of European immigrants, who, as American historian Schlesinger notes, "stayed for a season with their old language" before the next generation adopted English.⁹³ He is correct in his assessment that Spanish, Cajun, and the surviving Native-American languages are not "foreign." Rather, they are the tongues of long-settled linguistic minorities who were absorbed by an expanding multinational state.⁹⁴

González points out that international law has long recognized that linguistic minorities within a multiethnic state such as the United States have a right to protection against discrimination. Article 53 of the United Nations Charter

⁹¹ Ibid; see also, James Crawford, *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of "English Only"* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 51-52.

⁹² González, *A History of Latinos in America*, 210.

⁹³ Ibid, 211; see Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, 107.

⁹⁴ González, *A History of Latinos in America*, 211-2.

urges member states to promote "universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedom for all without distinction as to race, sex, *language or religion*."⁹⁵ Similar descriptions can be found in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in proclamations of the European and Inter-American states.⁹⁶

Those principles are routinely violated in this country, where federal courts prohibit discrimination because of a person's race, religion, or national origin, but continue to permit language discrimination. A classic example occurred in Texas in 1975 in the case of *García v. Gloor*. Héctor García, the plaintiff in the case, was a twenty-four-year-old native-born Texan who attended public schools in Brownsville and who spoke both English and Spanish. His parents were Mexican immigrants and the family always spoke Spanish at home, so he felt more comfortable in Spanish.⁹⁷

Gloor Lumber and Supply, Inc. hired García specifically because he could speak Spanish to its customers, but the company had a policy that employees could not speak Spanish *to one another* on the job. In June 1975, García was dismissed after violating the company rule several times, whereupon he filed a federal discrimination complaint. At the trial, the U.S. district court found that seven of the eight salesmen Gloor employed, and thirty-one of its thirty-nine employees, were Hispanic, that 75 percent of the customers in the Brownsville

⁹⁵ Ibid, 212 (italics added).

⁹⁶ Ibid; see also Manuel del Valle, "Developing a Language-Based National Origin Discrimination Modality," *Journal of Hispanic Policy* (1989-1990), 54-56.

⁹⁷ González, *A History of Latinos in America*, 211-2.

business area also were Hispanic, and that many of Gloor's customers wished to be waited on by salesmen who spoke Spanish. Alton Gloor, an officer and stockholder, testified that there were business reasons for the Spanish ban, among them: English-speaking customers objected to communications between employees that they could not understand; pamphlets and trade literature were only in English, so employees needed to improve their English skills; and supervisors who did not speak Spanish could better oversee their subordinates. The court ruled in Gloor's favor, finding no discrimination.⁹⁸

The case eventually went to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, which agreed in a May 1980 decision that "Mr. García's use of Spanish was a significant factor" in his firing. The court concluded, however, that García had not suffered national discrimination, even though he presented an expert witness who testified that the "Spanish language is the most important aspect of ethnic identification for Mexican Americans," and even though the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission supported his contention. The court's decision went on to say:

Mr. García was fully bilingual. He chose deliberately to speak Spanish instead of English while actually at work ... Let us assume, as contended by Mr. García, there was no genuine business need of the rule and that its adoption by Gloor was arbitrary. The EEO Act does not prohibit all arbitrary employment practices ... It is directed only at specific impermissible bases of discrimination, race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. National origin must not be confused with ethnic or sociocultural traits or an unrelated status, such as citizenship or alienage ... a hiring policy that distinguishes on some other ground, such as grooming codes or how to run his business, is related more closely to the employer's choice of how to run his business than to equality of employment.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 213.

In other words, because García was bilingual, he had lost any right to speak his language – the language for which he was hired and the majority language in the community – at work. Spanish was a “preference” of his, the court said, and an employer could legally ban it just as he could ban “persons born under a certain sign of the zodiac or persons having long hair or short hair or not hair at all.”¹⁰⁰ The court, according to González, thus performed a Solomon-like miracle. It severed García’s nationality from his language.¹⁰¹

Another area where the language of the law disparages the Hispanic/Latina community is in its reference to illegal or undocumented immigrants as *aliens*. The Immigration and Nationality Act, or INA, contains the provisions and structures of the current immigration law. It is codified in the United States Code (U.S.C.). Title 8 of the U.S.C., Section 1101 (a)(3), defines the term “alien” to mean “any person not a citizen or national of the United States.” Under this provision, “the term “immigration law” includes this Act and all laws, conventions, and treaties of the United States relating to the immigration, exclusion, deportation, expulsion, or removal of aliens.”

The Hispanic/Latina community considers the use of the word *alien* to be offensive because of its racist and exclusionary overtones. It is a term applied not only to the most vulnerable members of the community – the documented and undocumented labor force of this nation -- but also to the native peoples

¹⁰⁰ Ibid; see *García v. Gloor*, 618 F. 2d. 264.

¹⁰¹ González, *A History of Latinos in America*, 213.

who have lived in this country for generations.¹⁰² It is a racially charged description of native folk who have been defined as *aliens* for insidious reasons. A clear historical example is California's so-called alien land law, passed by the voters in 1920, which restricted the ability of non-citizens to own land. Another is Proposition 187 that was on the 1994 California ballot, a measure designed to bar state and local governments from providing non-emergency medical care, public assistance, social services, and education to undocumented immigrants. This measure requires California law enforcement, health and social service agencies, and public school officials to report persons whom they suspect of being undocumented to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.). This measure passed despite arguments that the initiative was nativist, racist, and motivated by antipathy toward undocumented Mexicans, and Mexican Americans in general.¹⁰³

Not only were fiscal arguments advanced for the passage of Proposition 187, but one of the initiative sponsors, Ron Prince, asserted: "[I]llegal aliens are killing us in California ... Those who support illegal immigration are, in effect, anti-American."¹⁰⁴ A voter's pamphlet contained the following argument: "Proposition 187 will be first giant stride in ultimately ending the ILLEGAL ALIEN

¹⁰² See, for example, Linda S. Bosniak, "Undocumented Immigrants and the National Imagination," *The Latino/a Condition*, 99-105.

¹⁰³ See Kevin R. Johnson, "Immigration Politics, Popular Democracy, and California's Proposition 187," *The Latino Condition*, 110-111; Ruben J. García, "The Racial Politics of Proposition 187," *The Latino Condition/a*, 118-124.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 112; Patrick J. McDonnell, *Prop. 187 Turns Up Heat in U.S. Immigration Debate*, L.A. Times, August 10, 1994, at A1.

invasion."¹⁰⁵ The Proposition 187 media director for southern California expressed even more disturbing concerns:

Proposition 187 is ... a logical step toward saving California from economic ruin ... By flooding the state with 2 million illegal aliens to date, and increasing that figure each of the following 10 years, Mexicans in California would number 15 million to 20 million by 2004. During those 10 years about 5 million to 8 million Californians would have emigrated to other states. If these trends continued, a Mexico-controlled California could vote to establish Spanish as the sole language of California, 10 million more English-speaking Californians could flee, and there could be a statewide vote to leave the Union and annex California to Mexico.¹⁰⁶

Those who drafted Proposition 187 reveal a sense of mixed motives behind the measure. Ron Prince, whose anti-immigrant animus apparently grew out of a business dispute with a legal immigrant he later claimed was an "illegal," conjured up racist imagery from another era: "You are the posse and SOS is the rope."¹⁰⁷ SOS was the proponent's acronym for "Save Our State." Besides suggesting that Proposition 187 opponents were "anti-American," Prince linked "illegal aliens" with criminals: "[t]he ... mindset on the part of illegal aliens, is to commit crimes. The first law they break is to be here illegally. The attitude from then on is, I don't have to obey your laws."¹⁰⁸

This kind of demagoguery is not new in California. Well before the advent of Proposition 187, Harold Ezell, Western Regional Commissioner of the I.N.S. in

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 112; Tony Miller, Acting California Secretary of State, California Ballot Pamphlet: General Election, November 8, 1994, at 54.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 112; Linda R. Hayes, "Letter to Editor," N.Y. Times, October 15, 1994, at A18.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 112; George Ramos, *Prop. 187 Debate: No Tolerance but Abundant Anger*, L.A. Times, October 10, 1994, at B3.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 115; Marc Cooper, *The War against Illegal Immigrants Heats Up*, Village Voice, October 4, 1994, at 28.

the 1980s, was infamous for comments made about "illegal aliens" – that they should be "caught, skinned, and fried."¹⁰⁹ Ezell explained that support for the measure was strong because "[t]he people are tired of watching their state run wild and become a third world country."¹¹⁰ Even the incumbent governor of the state ran on this anti-immigrant platform in an effort to win reelection.¹¹¹ The anti-immigrant platform ignored the fiscal contribution that undocumented immigrants make to the state and national economies by their taxable wages and disposable income. Instead, it focused on a particular immigrant group and blamed them for a lagging economy. Many behind this measure did so by the most insidious of historical practices reminiscent of Nazi Germany. Racist categories were used to disparage a group of people identifiable by their brown skin color because these human traits did not conform to the dominant racial category.¹¹² These were then blamed for the economic woes of the state. They were scapegoats who were referred to in subhuman terms. The law of the state then sanctioned the enforcement of this categorization and mistreatment of the most vulnerable of the community by the passage of Proposition 187.¹¹³

Implications for Mission and Ministry

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 115; Olga Briseño, *Mister Migra, Harold Ezell*, San Diego Union-Tribune, August 23, 1989, at F1 (quoting Ezell).

¹¹⁰ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 115; Daniel B. Wood, *Ballot Vote on Illegal Immigrants Set for Fall in California*, Christian Science, Monday, June 1, 1994, at 1.

¹¹¹ Johnson, "Immigration Politics," 112.

¹¹² Ian F. Haney López, "Chance, Context, and Choice in the Social Construction of Race," *The Latino/a Condition*, 9-16.

The violation of the dignity of Mexican immigrants and of Mexican-American and other Hispanic/Latina citizens who are considered aliens due to their historical and social location, skin color or language of origin has been a central concern and impetus for theological reflection on the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and justification by faith. This concern led to a review of the immigration law and the language therein which defines aliens as non-citizens who are subject to deportation or expulsion from this country. We noted that the law sanctions the oppressive treatment of the most vulnerable members of the community by the use of language that devalues their humanity. We also noted that the immigration laws have a history of abuse against citizens and undocumented foreigners who fit a certain racial Hispanic/Latina profile.¹¹⁴ I have contended that to deny the foreigner and native citizens their dignity by legal or illegal means violates the goodness of the creation that is affirmed by the principle of the *imago Dei*. To be treated and mistreated as an *alien* and thus in a manner less than humane denies and violates the human dignity that Hispanics/Latinas and all people receive as a gift of creation in the *imago Dei*.

Ismael García indicates that the gift of human dignity is irrevocable.¹¹⁵ It contains within it the un-alien-able (the inability to be foreign) and thus un-detachable rights to the goodness of communal life and human dignity. These gifts of creation cannot be negotiated away or usurped by the laws of any nation. To deny and violate the dignity of a people who are defined as aliens by statutory

¹¹³ Rubén J. García, "The Racial Politics of Proposition 187," *The Latino/a Condition*, 118-124.

¹¹⁴ Gilbert Paul Carrasco, "Latinos in the United States: Invitation and Exile," *The Latino/a Condition*, 77-85.

law and discriminatory enforcement practices violates the presence of the Christ, the *Imago Christi*, in the life of faith of this marginal community. The legal attempts to define a person's rights, status and treatment in terms of citizenship, place of birth, literacy, and dominant language proficiency, etc., subvert the divine intention to create and affirm all people as *imago Dei* with the inherent divine right of esteem and value as a part of the good creation. They do injustice to the very principles immortalized in the United States Declaration of Independence from oppressive British rule; that is, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [*sic*] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The unjust treatment of immigrants in a nation forged by immigrants violates the spirit of this declaration of freedom from colonial oppression. The mistreatment and violation of the vulnerable creates a double standard that declares that only those who fit a certain racial category and who speak the dominant language are welcome in this land of opportunity. When the nation ceases to be a land of freedom from oppression then the failure of the lessons of history confirms the notion that the oppressed have become the oppressor.

The affirmation of the dignity of native peoples and of those who are considered foreigners in the Southwest and throughout the nation is problematic and has at least four dimensions. This thesis has addressed the historical, social, legal/political and theological aspects of this marginal reality. The historical reality comprised the element of the Spanish conquest of the native inhabitants of these

¹¹⁵ García, *Dignidad*, 131.

lands and their denigration as subhuman beings who lacked the *Logos* of God and therefore the *imago Dei*. The historical element included the role of the Manifest Destiny ideology that justified the conquest and oppression of the native peoples of the Southwest. The social aspect addressed such issues as the racial categorization and legal demarcation as *alien* in an effort to control the racial mix of the immigrant pool and the nature of the labor force supplied by this social group. The social aspect also addressed such issues as the racism and ethnocentrism spawned by the ideology of Manifest Destiny in the Anglo-Saxon Protestant expansion in the Southwest. The racial ideology that was part and parcel of this doctrine affected all areas of life including the denial of the Spanish language as a legitimate expression of cultural identity both in the educational system and in the church.¹¹⁶ The legal/political aspect addressed the enforcement of the immigration laws and measures such as California's Proposition 187 that deny the marginal community the equal protection of the law and equal access to social services.¹¹⁷ The theological/ethical aspect addressed the role of the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and justification by faith in the affirmation of life and human dignity.

Faced with the nagging questions as to why those who are different are mistreated and oppressed and why many in both the church and the secular culture accept this reality as justifiable, I conclude that we are living with a logic that justifies these conditions as necessary and normative. I have argued that this logic is not based on faithful living according to the Gospel mandates but is a

¹¹⁶ Margaret E. Montoya, "Law and Language," *The Latino/a Condition*, 574-582.

product of a history of falsely-justified conquest. It is an erroneous logic that enslaves the oppressor as much as the oppressed. Both are in need of liberation. I propose another logic to reinterpret these dimensions of reality that have characterized the history of oppression of those considered foreigners in the Southwest. This is the logic of the underside. This logic involves a rereading of these dimensions from the Hispanic/Latina marginal perspective of popular religion. Through this locus, Hispanic/Latina theologians and ethicists interpret the perspective of the marginal community.

The doctrine of justification by faith provided the theological response for the affirmation of the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community. As members of the justified community, they celebrate their dignity as a gift of creation that is reaffirmed by faith in Christ. The Lord of history fulfills this act of grace in the act of redemption. Hispanics/Latinas can joyfully proclaim: "*Yo soy hijo/hija de Dios!*" ("I am a son/daughter of God!") in recognition and celebration of this *fait accompli*. This bold proclamation announces that in Christ no one is a foreigner and all receive a restored human dignity. Popular religious practices affirm this dignity and correct an oversight in traditional Lutheran theological expression. The religious practices and symbols of the marginal community as evidenced by the analysis of the four Hispanic/Latina congregations in Texas confirmed this argument.

¹¹⁷ See Richard Delgado, "The Black/White Binary: How Does It Work?" *The Latino/a Condition*, 369-375.

Lutherans have not always viewed the marginal community through the eyes of justification by faith.¹¹⁸ The Euro-centric interpretation of the tradition often failed to take into account the marginal perspective of the excluded of history. The result was a dissonance created by the doctrine of justification by faith on the one hand and the denial of justice in human relations on the other. The perspective of the excluded of history as expressed in popular religious practices allows a more fuller expression of this faith experience, one that grants dignity and affirms the goodness of their creation. This perspective took us to the margins as in the case of the primitive church that became a prophetic witness to the dominant culture of her day by the exercise of her marginal and subversive faith experience.¹¹⁹

The doctrine of justification by faith, the article by which the church stands or falls, affirms all who are different and estranged from community in a way that is unique to their cultural, linguistic and faith interpretive experience. Justified by faith the marginal community expresses their praxis of faith active in love in a ministry and mission of protecting and affirming the dignity of all people. As Ismael García points out this dignity is never lost, but it has been trampled upon.¹²⁰ The interpretation of the doctrine of justification from the perspective of popular religious practices took us to the excluded of history and to the experience of those whose dignity is trampled upon by unjust laws, prejudices and oppressive discrimination. These attempts to destroy or deny the human

¹¹⁸ An attempt was made to rectify this omission by the Statement of a Consultation: "Justification and Justice: A Meeting of Lutheran Theologians of the Americas," in Mexico City, 1985.

¹¹⁹ See Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, 32-56

dignity of the sacred creation violate the *imago Dei* and oppose the mission of the Christ in reaffirming the human dignity of all people. The church must take seriously the role of popular religion in the interpretation of justification by faith and the ethical implications that arise from the creation in the *imago Dei* that are celebrated by popular religious practices. Not to do so is to remove the doctrine from the center of the Gospel news. To take this epistemological turn is a matter of faith and confession.

The Role of the Church in the Defense of Human Dignity

Having reviewed how the Hispanic/Latino community understands herself and the way that she lives out her faith in a praxis of faith active in love and justice, we turn now to the question of the role and response of the wider church in the formation of a more just community. In the analysis of the four congregations we learned that the Spanish language was one of the primary symbols of the community for the expression of her understanding of justification by faith. We learned that language expresses values and serves as the vehicle that reaffirms the faith and praxis of the community. We also learned that Hispanic/Latina theologians and ethicists affirm this symbol as a formative and foundational element of the identity and expression of faith of the community. Their logic confirmed the notion that language is constitutive of being. It forms the essence of the ontology of the community (who we say we are as a people) and provides the framework for the construction of social reality. In light of this experience one is compelled to ask how the wider church understands and

¹²⁰ Ismael García, "Speaking of Dignity," *Insights*, 20.

promotes her theological identity, mission, and ministry with this community of faith. Historical experience reveals that the church faces new challenges in rethinking the logic of her pedagogy in such critical areas as theological formation and identity and mission and ministry with the Hispanic/Latina community.

The logic that affirms the dignity and identity of the Hispanic/Latina community has been operative, even if unconsciously, through the creative and empowering gift of the Spanish language. This gift affirms the faith of the people, but the wider church often fails to accept and appreciate its significance as the bearer of the *viva vox evangeli*. In Chapter One of this dissertation, we noted the opposition to the Spanish language in a message from bishop James E. Bennett to the Southwestern Texas Synod in the synodical newsletter *The Vista*.¹²¹ In his message the bishop responded to a critique by a parishioner who complained because his pastoral message to the church was printed in both English and Spanish. The bishop responded with an apologetics of the gospel in the language of the people. He defended the translation of his message into the Spanish language as an act of love and concern for all of the people of God in his synod. His response was an act of justice on behalf of the Hispanic/Latina community. This praxis of justice in the defense of the human dignity of this community of faith was an unconscious articulation of the logic of justification by faith that reaffirms the human dignity of all people through the gift of language. His confession of faith from the perspective of the logic of the Spanish-speaking marginalized community serves as a testimony to the wider church. It promotes

the view that the confession of faith in the language of the people cannot be an arbitrary option, but a deliberate act of a protestant and reforming nature. It challenges the church to accept her historic legacy of proclaiming the gospel of justification by faith in the language and religious practices of the people. This historic legacy began with the translation of the Bible into German by Martin Luther and continued with the appropriation of the gospel news in ways that were familiar to his community. This legacy continues to provide the yeast for the articulation of this logic in ways that are relevant for the mission of the church. The testimonial witness of the church requires this response.

The implementation of this new logic for the mission of the church can function in at least three different levels. In the first level, the curriculum for theological education at seminaries should reflect an intentional corrective that incorporates the new logic of the Hispanic/Latina reality. This inclusion is consistent with the historic logic of the reforming protestant witness. The revision should incorporate the protestant witness, history and contribution of the Hispanic/Latina experience in the Lutheran tradition. The intentional inclusion of these narratives will provide a more catholic perspective of the tradition. These revisions will influence the formation of future pastors and leaders of the church as they incorporate this new logic in their theological perspectives.

The second level affects congregations and the pastoral leaders who currently serve them. This new logic challenges pastors and congregations to formulate ecumenical coalitions that take seriously the full fellowship of traditions that have been estranged for centuries. Many of these traditions have not been

¹²¹ "From the Bishop," *The Vista*, 2.

involved in the social problems that affect the lives of marginal communities because of the fear of the foreigner. A common mission of service to the community would incorporate this new logic as part of a ministry that restores and advocates for the dignity of the foreigner. The intentional involvement by the local church in the lives of the marginal community recovers the tradition of the early church that celebrated the dignity of the foreigner as a part of the gospel narrative that celebrated new life in the community. The historic traditions of the *imago Dei* and of justification by faith are central to the understanding of human dignity. These traditions are vivified by the logic of Hispanic/Latina theologians and ethicists who recover this perspective from popular religious expression. Community life celebrates this gift of inclusion by the richness of the cultural tapestry.

The third level affects structural changes at the national and synodical church levels. Much strategic planning, leadership training, and sensitizing for mission occurs here. In a sense this pyramidal structure reflects a corporate model of management and stewardship that impacts the direction, praxis, and theology of mission. This new logic needs to be articulated at these levels as a part of the theological expression of the church. Many at the congregational level already understand this logic and express it with an ecclesiology that celebrates the priesthood of all believers. This priesthood includes recent immigrants and native peoples who speak the Spanish language. The four congregations that we examined reflect this experience. The structures of the

wider church should consciously incorporate this logic in her theological expression as a faithful exposition of her confessional heritage.

As the case of the bishop points out, not everyone understands or accepts this logic. The failure to understand or accept it violates the human dignity of all people, and of the foreigner in particular. The church needs to articulate this logic within a theological framework in order to protect and esteem the sacred nature and value of each person. I attempted to do this by an examination of the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and justification by faith. These doctrines assist the church to assess the sacred intention of the Creator of all people.

Since language serves as the vehicle for communication and is at the heart of a people, any missionary endeavor should incorporate an intentional inclusion of the local language as the means to affirm both the culture and the *imago Dei* that is expressed through the culture. A member of the priesthood of believers rejected the message of the bishop because it threatened his culture and misunderstood his theological identity. The message in the Spanish language represented a form of foreign intrusion into his monolingual world. The bishop pointed out that we do not live in this kind of reality and that the gospel knows no barriers. He did not express his logic within the theological framework of the *imago Dei* and justification by faith, but he responded with an intuitive logic that affirmed the value of the Spanish-speaking community as a people of God. Hispanic/Latina theologians and ethicists help us to understand that this logic protects and esteems the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community. They also help us to understand that this logic is at the heart of the mission and

heritage of the Lutheran tradition. Those who accept this logic choose to affirm the dignity of all people. Those who reject it reject the heritage and confession of the church. In the final analysis, the church will be held accountable for these choices.

The New Logic as a Corrective Voice from the Margins

In Chapters Three and Four, we told the story of the initial missionary work with the Hispanic/Latina community of south Texas. St. John Lutheran Church of San Juan, Texas, had its genesis in a German family who reached out to this community. This family witnessed to the gospel by serving the community in ways that expressed the compassion of their Lord. They ministered to the sick and communicated the gospel in the language of the people. They reached out to my family that had recently emigrated from Mexico. The *Luteranos protestantes* of south Texas owe their confession of faith within the reforming tradition to the witness of faith of the Mellenbruch family and to those faithful servants who followed their ministry and example.¹²² Their witness was not an arbitrary choice. They reached out with compassion in a deliberate attempt to serve the foreigner who did not speak English. As in the case of the message of the bishop these faithful servants may not have articulated the gospel of justification by faith with a logic that would diminish the racism and ethnic prejudice still prevalent in the church. By crossing their own cultural and ethnic boundaries, they built bridges of understanding with the Hispanic/Latina community. In so doing, they affirmed the dignity of the foreigner in the name of the gospel. I have attempted to articulate their logic within a theological

framework that is intrinsic to the Lutheran tradition and that will assist the church to avoid the racism and mistakes of the past. My attempt also aims to assist the church in welcoming the new immigrants who are now our neighbors.

The review of the literature on the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and justification by faith disclosed an ideologically biased perspective that required a corrective view. The review also revealed that the exclusive interpretation of these traditions by a dominant cultural group results in a particular perspective that is then imposed upon other groups as normative for the whole church. When the voice of the voiceless is absent from the theological roundtable human dignity is denied and violated. Ismael García, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Elsa Támez, and others offer corrective interpretations of these doctrines. They affirm the human dignity of the community and contribute to a new logic that serves as a corrective voice in the interpretation of these doctrines. These voices offer perspectives that reflect the "new ecumenism" among U.S. Hispanic Catholics and Protestants.¹²³ They are but a few of the many emerging voices that attempt to capture the shared experience of a people. They articulate the social and theological construction of reality as it is voiced and expressed in the communal life of faith.¹²⁴

¹²² H.C. Ziehe, *A Centennial Story of The Lutheran Church in Texas, 1851-1951*, 188-193.

¹²³ González, "Hispanics in the New Reformation," *Mestizo Christianity*, 238-259.

¹²⁴ For an excellent exposition of the Roman Catholic Hispanic/Latina perspective on the nature of being human see Miguel H. Díaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001). Díaz engages a variety of Hispanic/Latina Roman Catholic theologians in a conversation with Karl Rahner. He examines the social construction and anthropological understanding of the community from within the shared tradition of faith and engages Rahner in an attempt to contribute to the conversation of each. In this respect, Díaz does not present a Protestant perspective that examines the social construction, theological understanding, and experience of this particular community of faith.

The new logic will inform all areas of the ministry and mission of the church. It will assist in the formation of future pastors as structural changes are implemented at the seminary level to reflect this perspective. It will serve in the trenches of the church where human dignity suffers violation by discriminatory laws, unjust practices, and inhospitable and racist attitudes. It will affect the formation of future generations when the present generation of church leaders incorporates this new logic in the interpretation of these two doctrines. Faithfulness to the legacy of a tradition often depends on how the church interprets the historical, theological, and ethical experience of a people.¹²⁵ The new logic amplifies the interpretation and perspective of these doctrines by incorporating the religious history, popular practices, self-understanding, and ethics of the Hispanic/Latina community.¹²⁶ It offers renewed hope for the affirmation of human dignity of all people in the mission and ministry of the church.

The incorporation of the new logic in the curriculum of a seminary takes the form of a conscious decision for diverse perspectives. The inclusion of the historical experience of the Hispanic/Latina people reflects this conscious choice in the vision and mission of the church institution. The persons who serve as faculty, administrators, and staff represent the conscious or perhaps unconscious intent of the leadership. The mission and vision of the church is called into question when members of the Hispanic/Latina community are not represented among the leadership of these institutions.

¹²⁵ Robert Benne, "Lutheran Ethics," *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 11-2.

The Lutheran Seminary of the Southwest in Austin is responding to this new logic. They are incorporating local Hispanic/Latino faculty into its staff and revising the curriculum to reflect the historical, cultural and theological context of the Hispanic/Latina community. They are in a cluster relationship with the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest and the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in a concerted attempt to respond to this logic. All three institutions are more intentional in their strategies to be inclusive of this historical experience and witness of faith. A revisiting of the doctrines and traditions of the church with this logic in mind bears evidence to the constructive corrective in the new mission strategy of the seminaries and of the institutions that support their witness.

This new logic affirms the value of all people. It retrieves the original blessing and intent of the Creator – that all people should bear the mark of the *imago Dei* in the gift of their human dignity. If this project has furthered that blessing and intent, then may it serve as a witness to the Glory of God!

A Dios Sea La Gloria!

¹²⁶ See, for example, Miguel H. Díaz, *On Being Human*, 1-140.