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# The Asbury Journal

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>From the Editor, <em>Robert Danielson</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Listening to the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) Sermon Listener</td>
<td><em>Danny Román-Gloró</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Liberation and Engagement: Toward a U.S. Latino/a Diaspora Missiology</td>
<td><em>Angel Santiago-Vendrell</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>“If Only They Knew”: Preparing Cross-Cultural Missionaries for Service in Latin America</td>
<td><em>Rachel Coleman</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>The Vital Role of the Laity in Revitalization: A Case Study of Misión Cristiana Elim</td>
<td><em>Robert Danielson and Mario Vega</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Counseling: an Expression of the Ministry of the Church</td>
<td><em>Javier Sierra</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Features**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>From the Archives: A. A. Allen in Cuba (From the Carver Healing Collection)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Book Reviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>Books Received</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Asbury Journal

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The Asbury Journal publishes scholarly essays and book reviews written from a Wesleyan perspective. The Journal’s authors and audience reflect the global reality of the Christian church, the holistic nature of Wesleyan thought, and the importance of both theory and practice in addressing the current issues of the day. Authors include Wesleyan scholars, scholars of Wesleyanism/Methodism, and scholars writing on issues of theological and theological education importance.

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From the Editor

As of July 1, 2012, the Hispanic population in the United States numbered 53 million or 17% of the total population. From July 1, 2011 to July 1, 2012 the Hispanic population grew by 1.1 million, while the entire population of the U.S. grew by only 2.3 million, making Hispanics almost 50% of the growth. Of the entire Hispanic population in the U.S., 37.6 million speak Spanish as their first language at home. What does this mean for the Church? What does it mean for Asbury Theological Seminary? What does it mean for the pastors, counselors, educators, and missionaries we train? How do these facts affect the way we structure sermons, worship time, or church ministries? These are key questions that need serious theological thought and study.

Asbury Theological Seminary began to address these questions back in 2001 with the development of the highly successful Latino/Latina Studies Program at the Florida Dunnam Campus, with certificate classes in Spanish to help meet the growing need for Spanish language theological education. The establishment of the Justo L. Gonzalez Resource Center in 2011 was another important step in this direction, and was followed by a partnership with the Evangelical Methodist Seminary-University of Costa Rica in San José, Costa Rica in December of 2011. Discussions still continue on plans to develop a Spanish language MA degree program in the near future. The Asbury Journal wanted to celebrate these moves with this special bilingual edition, and add to the growing Spanish language academic literature available for Spanish speaking students.

In this issue we present five articles in both English and Spanish as we attempt to address issues of concern for the Latino/Latina Christian community. Danny Román-Gloró presents an insightful article that examines how Latinos/Latinas in the pews evaluate what is a “good” sermon. Angel Santiago-Vendrell explores the contextual missiology of three key Cuban-American theologians living in exile, and how this exemplifies diaspora missiology. Rachel L. Coleman interviews Latin American mission leaders to learn ways North American missionaries can improve their outreach to Latin America and be more culturally appropriate in that context. Robert Danielson and Mario Vega present a growing trend of transnational church movements that are moving into the United States along with transnational immigrant communities, by examining one such movement from El Salvador. Finally,
Javier Sierra presents pastoral counseling to the Latino/Latina community as a form of ministry that builds on existing cultural values of relationships and advice-giving. These articles are just a small contribution to the growing theological literature on the Hispanic church, but by making them available in Spanish, Asbury hopes to be a part of that growing theological dialog.

I want to give a special thanks to Kelly Godoy de Danielson, our special guest Spanish editor, for all her hard work in translating some and editing all of the Spanish language material in this issue. This issue would have been impossible without her. She is also the photographer of our cover image for this issue, which was taken in July of 2013 in Santa Ana, El Salvador at the local fiesta in honor of Saint Anne, the patron saint of the city and the mother of the Virgin Mary. On the saint’s day in many Roman Catholic communities, local groups of men and women take places of honor in carrying their local saint through the city in celebration. With fragrant flowers, bright colored banners, and lively music, the people display the high level of religious devotion found in all parts of Latin America, as well as the beauty and exuberance of traditional types of worship. The church in the United States has much it can learn from the Latin American church and the Latinos/Latinas who live in our community. As this community continues to grow and influence the Church, Asbury has a key role to play in educating future theological educators in both Spanish and English.

End Notes

1 These are just some of the U.S. Census facts listed on their website for the celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month in October of 2013. It can be accessed at: http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb13-ff19.html.
Danny Román-Gloró

Listening to the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) Sermon Listener

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of an ethnographic study on preaching within the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community. The study explored the preaching event from the experience of the listener. The US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listener represents a unique group of individuals that have a particular experience of preaching, which can provide insights on how preaching constitutes a vehicle for shaping and re-shaping a religious and social community. Through the use of in-depth interviews of a diverse group of US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listeners a series of characteristics of a good sermon were identified.

Key Words: preaching, US Hispanic/Latino (Latina), co-creation of meaning, transformation, ethnicity, Bible

Danny Román-Gloró is the pastor of Sunset Congregational Church in Miami, Florida and a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Communication and the Arts at Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia. He also has a Doctor of Ministry degree.
Introduction

Preaching remains a pervasive communication event among the world religious groups. As Clifton Guthrie argues, “It (preaching) rivals the classroom lecture and the live singing performance as the most enduring form of live public oral communication in a world otherwise awash in print and electronic media.” However, preaching, particularly in the Christian community, is not a communication event that involves an active speaker and a passive audience. Unlike other forms of communication, Christian preaching occurs within a specific community of individuals that is actively involved in the process of hearing the sermon, and making moral, ethical, emotional, and religious choices based on the preacher’s words. Through preaching, a gathered group of people is formed into a community of faith.

Despite the pervasive nature of the sermon, the study of preaching as a communication event is limited. Homiletical theory and preaching are interdisciplinary efforts that bring together fields as diverse as Biblical Studies, Hermeneutics, Theology, and Communication; and its impact extends into the lives of individuals and communities. However, because of the transcendental nature of preaching, the impact of the sermon as a communication vehicle for the formation of personal and communal identity has been marginally explored. As Guthrie contends, “Homiletics as a field remains curiously detached from related fields such as persuasion studies in psychology, the psychology of religious experience, new sociology research on conversion and group adherence, or theories of ritual behavior in cognitive science…” This circumstance has begun to change as homileticians and scholars from other disciplines have begun to interact and observe the preaching event as a communication event. This work has begun to focus on the preaching event as a means to understand communication patterns within a specific social milieu; and in ways to increase the effectiveness of the individual preacher on any given religious setting.

While several studies have begun to provide insights into different areas of preaching, the amount of research focusing on the listeners’ perspective is limited. This limited amount of research becomes negligible when the focus is racial/ethnic minority sermon listeners. Thus, the purpose of this study is to add to this burgeoning area of study, by exploring the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) experience of the sermon as a communication event through the identification of the characteristics of a “good” sermon as perceived by the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listener. By focusing on the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listener, this study seeks to start a conversation on understanding the preaching event as a phenomenon in which meaning is co-created, thus informing the practice of preaching within the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community and the Church at large. By
seeking such a goal, this research project can become a building block in the process of understanding the religious communication patterns within the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community and other Christian communities. Finally, this study is not meant to be exhaustive, but an attempt to begin a conversation about the impact of the sermon within the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) Christian community. Specifically, this study seeks to answer this research question: What type of sermon characteristics does the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) listener identify as making a good sermon?

The Sermon as Symbolic Interaction

Homiletics has been consistently defined as the art of preparing and preaching sermons. It is fitting that homiletics is called an “art,” because it is a multi-disciplinary effort that crosses a spectrum of theological disciplines and communication theories. This multi-disciplinary effort is distilled into a product that is a synthesis of two complex processes: the preparation of the sermon and the delivery of the sermon. The preparation of the sermon is a theological task that involves the intersection of dogmatics, Biblical exegesis and practical theology. As Karl Barth argued “…we cannot think of any one of these disciplines without the other two, nor can we speak of any of them in isolation without speaking of the others as well.” Having completed the preparation of the sermon, the preacher engages rhetorical and other communication theories in order to communicate the sermon to the audience. Therefore, homiletical theory concerns itself with the choices that the preacher makes on the use of the Bible, theology, and communication when preparing and delivering a sermon.

From a communication perspective, the sermon has been defined as a communication event where meaning is co-created between the audience and the speaker. As Craddock explains, “A Sermon is a communication and therefore is to be located as much among a particular group of listeners as with a particular speaker.” Hence the sermon should be understood as “…a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.” This definition of the sermon from a communication perspective does not negate other theological definitions or understandings of the sermon (e.g. Martin Luther stating that preaching the Word of God is the Word of God). What this definition facilitates is the understanding that the sermon, as it is being preached, is shaping and reshaping the reality in which the preacher and listener operate. In theological terms, the community of faith is being transformed by the power of the Gospel as the sermon is being preached. Thus, the Christian community of faith is formed into a community through the process of communication embodied in the sermon. This definition of the sermon allows Craddock to stress that he
trusts “…the listeners to arrive at their own conclusions, to do their own thinking and believing in trusting and deciding.”

In this paradigm, through an exchange of symbols, the listener and the speaker share subjectively in the objective truth (the Gospel of Jesus Christ) being communicated. This exchange certainly fits within George Mead’s understanding of how communication is the foundation for the formation of community,

That is what makes communication in the significant sense the organizing process in the community. It is not simply a process of transferring abstract symbols; it is always a gesture in a social act which calls out in the individual himself the tendency to the same act that is called out in others.

Therefore, in the preaching event, the sermon listener is an active participant in the communication process, not simply consuming information, but actively making choices and interpretations based on the sermon. Thus, the sermon listener forms his/her own opinions about which sermons communicate effectively as well as the characteristics that make-up those effective or good sermons. At the same time, the preacher must learn from the listener in order to improve his/her effectiveness.

**Ethnicity/Culture as Listening Filters**

Since the sermon is a communication event where meaning is co-created, it is important to understand which filters are actively used by both the listener and the speaker in the event. One of these filters is ethno-culture. Since this is a very specific lens or filter it is necessary to define it.

A simple definition of ethnicity is offered by the Child Safety Services, Queensland Government, Australia:

Ethnicity – belonging to a group that shares the same characteristics, such as country of origin, language, religion, ancestry and culture. Ethnicity is a matter of biological and historical fact and is not changed by the culture in which a person grows up.

This definition resonates with a definition offered by Shibutani and Kwan: “An ethnic group consists of those who conceive themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others.” Therefore, “ethnicity” does not reflect a single aspect of an individual, but represents a combination of all those non-physical features that distinguishes him/her from those around her/him. Furthermore, it is implied that each ethnic group has a particular set of features that have been shaped by their history and experiences, and that particular set is not repeated in other groups. As missiologist David J. Hesselgrave, explains:
“There are over 3500 ethnic groups in the world and yet no two of them have identical cultural configurations. Each of these societies has a culture which is systemic and patterned.”19 That is why the “labels” that have been designed and popularized by the US Census Bureau (Hispanic, Asian, White, Native American, etc.) are helpful, but can be misused or distort the understanding of ethnicity and culture.20

From the above descriptions, it is clear that the elements that distinguish an ethnic group are also the elements of what we understand to be a culture. Like “ethnicity,” “culture” has many definitions. A useful definition has been developed by the Child Safety Services of Queensland, Australia:

Culture - describes what people develop to enable them to adapt to their world, such as language, gestures, tools to enable them to survive and prosper, customs and traditions that define values and organize social interactions, religious beliefs and rituals, and dress, art, and music to make symbolic and aesthetic expressions. Culture determines the practices and beliefs that become associated with an ethnic group and provides its distinctive identity.21

As this definition argues, culture is developed as individuals “…adapt to their world.” This resonates with the idea forwarded by Andy Crouch. He argues that culture is “making something of the world.”22 For Crouch human interaction with the world around us is what produces culture. As Crouch explains,

Culture is, first of all, the name for our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it’s given to us and make something else. This is the original insight of the writer of Genesis when he says that human beings were made in God’s image: just like the original Creator, we are creators. …God gives the primordial man and woman the same task that the baby almost immediately undertakes with the raw materials of her vocal chords, lung and mouth—the same thing that our human ancestors did with stone and fire and pigment on cave walls. They go to work with these recalcitrant raw materials (even the Garden before the fall, it seems, required tilling and keeping), forming and reshaping the world they find themselves in. They begin “making something of the world.” 23

As human beings “make something of the world,” a set of beliefs, customs, values and traditions are developed. These elements, which can be called a “worldview,” are what help the individual interpret, understand and interact with the world around him/her, giving meaning to his/her life.24 This sense of identity shapes actions and thought processes. Orlando Crespo explains:
As human beings it is impossible to live outside of these integrated systems of belief, values, customs and institutions, for they give us the connectedness and belonging that are essential to the human heart. It is in this environment of culture that God gives us the sense of identity and dignity that are necessary for physical, emotional and mental wholeness. It is culture that frames all that we do…

As can be seen from these definitions, ethnicity and culture are interwoven and do not exist without the other. An individual’s ethnicity can be identified by the cultural traits that he/she demonstrates (including language, religion, cuisine, etc.) and vice versa. Of course, this assessment can only be made in general terms, since an individual’s personal circumstances or experiences might alter his behavior as to “mask” his ethnicity/culture. As theologians Jeter and Allen argue, “People of the same race, ethnicity, and social class can operate out of different worldviews.” Nonetheless, a balance must be achieved between understanding that an individual can “deviate” from her/his ethnically defined cultural traits, and the general characteristics of the group. If such a balance is not developed, any ethnic group can be eliminated and turned into individuals.

Therefore, it is the ethno-culture of an individual that acts as a central lens through which said individual interprets his/her experiences, and in consequence a central filter through which the individual hears and understands a sermon.

The Sermon as a Research Object

The pervasive nature of the sermon and preaching has attracted a certain level of attention from scholars and researchers, which have studied the phenomena from various perspectives. Clifton Guthrie’s review of the research on preaching details the different types of studies that have been conducted on the preaching event. These studies range from the preachers’ topic, to the relationship between preaching and persuasion, as well as the qualities that make a sermon more effective, and how the training of clergy impacts the effectiveness of the sermon. However, despite the efforts made through these studies, the sermon as a communication event continues to be minimally explored. In part, such a state of research into the preaching event is born out of the multidisciplinary nature of preaching, and the fact that most preachers are trained in seminaries and schools of theology, which are focused on the interpretation of the Bible and theology, and not on the communication of said theological enterprise. As Guthrie argues, “As an academic discipline homiletics has fashioned itself almost exclusively as a field of humanities rather than seeing its object of study—the preaching
The Asbury Journal 69/1 (2014)

The sermon—as a human enterprise that benefits from being scrutinized by a wide range of investigative methods.”

Recently, this state of affairs has begun to change as efforts have begun to emerge in the study of the sermon as a communication event, and to focus on the study of the listeners’ perspective. Most recently, Allen, et al. conducted a study titled Listening to Listeners. This massive study, which has produced five books and several articles, was conducted in the Midwest region of the USA using extensive in-depth interviews and focus groups. The study focused on the listeners and their experience of the sermon, as well as trying to determine how the congregation listens to the sermon.

One of the obvious voids in the studies conducted on the sermon is the lack of work among ethnic/racial minority congregations. While some of the work has been carried out among African-American clergy, and the Allen et al. study did include some African-American congregations, the idea of exploring the preaching event as a communication event among racial/ethnic minorities is anemic. Among the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community two studies have been conducted. A study conducted among Hispanic/Latino (Latina) clergy, which focused on the preacher’s understanding of how to develop an effective sermon for Hispanic/Latinos (Latinas); and a study of Hispanic/Latino (Latina) laity (or sermon listeners), that focused on creating a picture of the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) that would aid a majority culture preacher in preparing sermons cross-culturally for the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) listener. This limited amount of research creates a vacuum of information concerning the sermon as a communication event among US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) congregations.

The Sermon within the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) Community

According to the literature, preaching within the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community follows the structure of preaching in other communities. Most books on preaching used within the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community focus on the use of classical or Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory. Thus, the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) homiletical literature focuses on Bible interpretation, sermon development, different styles of sermon delivery, and the role of the preacher within the community of faith.

All these textbooks present a number of characteristics of effective preaching. While each author provides his/her own ideas on the characteristics of an effective sermon, in general terms the literature reflect similar characteristics. First, the sermon must be based on the Bible. The biblical text, either used in a single portion or in several portions, is considered the core of the sermon. The second characteristic is closely related to the first. Since, the sermon is based on the Bible, the sermon
then, is a vehicle to convey the teachings of Jesus Christ and other doctrines of the Christian faith. Thirdly, the goal of the sermon is geared towards personal transformation. The sermon is prepared and delivered with the desire to engender spiritual, moral, and psychological change within the individual; thus, it is expected to be a transformational agent in the lives of the listeners. A variation of the idea of personal transformation is the idea of corporate transformation through political and social liberation. This characteristic focuses on the sermon as a vehicle through which communities are empowered to transform societal and political structures to create a more equitable society. Finally, the sermon should seek to engender an emotional connection with the audience. As the preacher delivers the sermon, he or she seeks to affect the emotional state of the audience, since it is believed that an emotional response signifies an appropriation of the message being delivered. While the description of the emotional reaction being sought by the preacher is inconsistent, it is clear that an emotional reaction signifies personal transformation.

Method of the Study

The chosen methodology for this study was the ethnography of communication. The ethnography of communication is a socio-cultural approach grounded in the idea that discourse within a particular group engenders a particular cultural experience. Within this methodological perspective a phenomenological-hermeneutical approach was utilized to seek an understanding of the preaching experience of the study participants. In this perspective, phenomenological refers to how the researcher orients him/herself to the lived experience of the research participants, while hermeneutical refers to the interpretative role the researcher plays in reporting the lived experience. This approach allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of what the individual(s) experiences in a particular communication phenomenon, and how that experience informs his/her understanding and/or appreciation of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, in-depth interviewing was chosen as the methodology to gather data, because it provides an opportunity for a more detailed exploration of the topic, and the lived experience of the individuals being interviewed.

Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted among US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listeners. Of the 25 interviewees, 19 were women and 6 were men; 7 were high school graduates, 15 were college graduates, and 3 had post-graduate degrees. Among the 25 interviewees, two were Roman Catholic, ten attended non-denominational churches, and 13 belonged to several protestant denominations (including Presbyterian Church in America, Christian Church Disciples of Christ, Southern Baptist Convention,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Assemblies of God). The interviewees represented a variety of nationalities, including: 8 Puerto Ricans, 5 Cubans, 3 Columbians, 2 Mexicans, 2 Dominicans, 2 Peruvian, 1 Honduran, 1 Ecuadorian, and 1 Venezuelan.

The interviewees were recruited through several venues, including personal contact through word of mouth, social media, and invitations posted in bulletin boards in a local Christian university. The interviewees were selected using a four-fold criterion: first, all the participants were of Hispanic/Latino (Latina) descent. Second, to narrow the scope, participation was limited to individuals professing to be Christians, which included Protestants (including various denominational and non-denominational expressions), Roman Catholics, and other expressions of the Christian faith. The choice to narrow the scope of the study was determined by the role that preaching has within the Christian faith, as compared to other religions. Third, it was expected that the participant would have some level of involvement in religious worship services, where they would be exposed to the listening of sermons. The last characteristic was that participants must not engage in preaching either as clergy or lay-preachers. This criterion sought to eliminate individuals that had received some level of training in the preparation of sermons, and thus their opinions about the topic would reflect the bias created by their training. There was no specific strategy to recruit participants that would give preference to a particular pattern of denominational backgrounds, ages, educational level, economic status, nationality, etc. The specific pattern that emerged reflects the willingness of individuals to participate in the research project, and not a conscious effort on the part of the researcher to discriminate among participants.

On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes, with some extending over an hour and one lasting for two hours. The length of the interviews was determined by the interviewees’ engagement of and/or interest on the topic. The questions for the interview were designed as open-ended questions with the goal of exploring the opinions held by the interviewees concerning the sermon as a communication event.

As stated before, the purpose of the study is to discover the characteristics of a “good sermon” from the perspective of the Hispanic/Latino (Latina) listener. The question might be posed as to why seek to define the characteristics of a “good sermon,” and not the characteristics of an “effective sermon.” The literature in the field places the burden on the preacher developing “effective sermons.” However, the idea of an “effective sermon” can only be measured by determining the intended goal of the preacher, and not the experience of the listener. Once the goal of the individual preacher is ascertained, the researcher could determine if the goal
of the preacher was achieved. However, the intent of the preacher can only be measured from individual preacher to individual preacher, and it is very difficult to generalize and/or replicate. The idea of this study was to reverse the process, and explore the experience of the listener in order to determine what they consider as the characteristics of a sermon that produces the listener’s desired outcome or experience. By seeking the characteristics of a “good sermon,” the burden is on the listener’s lived experience, and not the preacher’s intent. Only the listener can determine if the sermon had an impact on his/her life, and the weight of the impact that the sermon had. By focusing on the characteristics of a “good sermon,” the study seeks to determine how the listeners are impacted by the sermon, and how that impact may be replicated in different Hispanic/Latino (Latina) faith communities.

In the analysis of the data, three (3) ideas emerged that could not be qualified as characteristics of a good sermon. These three (3) ideas, the Purpose of the Sermon, the Bible as the Foundation of the Sermon, and Identification with the Preacher, act as a paradigm through which the sermon is analyzed by the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listener as s/he experiences the preaching event.

The Purpose of the Sermon

Almost unanimously, the interviewees stated that the purpose of the sermon is to have a transformative encounter with God. The sermon was perceived as a transcendent experience that brought the listeners in a direct encounter with God. According to the interviewees, this encounter produces an affective, moral/ethical, and religious change in the life of the listener. Further, the interviewees described the encounter as a moment in which the listener hears God’s voice through the sermon. While the descriptions themselves varied, all the descriptions reflected the idea that the sermon is an encounter with God. Interestingly, some of the descriptions of the encounter with God were not positive. Some interviewees stated that the sermon is a confrontation with God in which God rebukes, challenges, and admonishes the individual listener and the gathered community audience to a lifestyle change. It is interesting to note the interviewees did not describe the experience as necessarily pleasant. The interviewees stated that at times this encounter is an emotionally painful event that produced an affective and spiritual catharsis, which produced moral/ethical and affective changes in the part of the interviewees. Despite the negative feelings engendered by the encounter, the interviewees asserted that the purpose of the sermon was fulfilled when it produced such a confrontation, since the confrontation produced a renewed desire to grow closer to God. Although the nature of the encounter can be experienced as a confrontation, the interviewees
stated that the delivery of the sermon does not need to be confrontational in nature. For the interviewees, the confrontation happens in the content and/or the main idea conveyed by the sermon and not the delivery style (issues of delivery will be addressed later).

Some interviewees, while describing the sermon as an encounter with God, believed that the encounter carried a message from God that produces wisdom, allowing the listeners to make personal, familial, and social decisions in relation with what is perceived as the will of God. These interviewees believed that the sermon is an encounter with God that facilitates focusing on an individual’s personal identity in relation to a different moral and religious understanding.

In contrast, the two Roman Catholic interviewees understood the whole Mass as an encounter with God, and saw the sermon as part of that encounter, but not as a separate entity from the Mass. This distinction is reflective of the theological traditions that separate Roman Catholics and Protestants on the nature of the sermon. While Roman Catholic doctrine and practice place a level of importance on the Liturgy of the Word, which includes the homily or sermon, the Eucharist holds a higher place of esteem within the Mass. In contrast, Protestants hold in higher regard the reading of scripture and the sermon itself. While the two Roman Catholic interviewees held a different belief for the purpose of the sermon itself, it is important to note that they believed that the sermon is an important tool for personal moral/ethical development.

The Bible as the Foundation of the Sermon

Almost unanimously, the interviewees (the two Roman Catholic interviewees being the exception) believed that the sermon must be based on the Bible. By “based on the Bible,” the interviewees stated that preachers must use a portion of the Bible from which to design the message for the sermon. Further, a large portion of the interviewees expressed a preference for sermons that explain what a particular portion or portions of the Bible mean, and how the ideas within that text can and should inform the moral/ethical choices of the individual. For the interviewees, the idea of the Bible as the foundation of the sermon has a direct correlation with the purpose of the sermon as an encounter with God. Thus, in their minds, the sermon can fulfill its purpose as an encounter with God, when the sermon is based on the Bible. Further, most of the interviewees believed that when the sermon is not based on the Bible it lacks transcendental authority or endowment. Finally, the interviewees stated that there was no preference on how many texts (a single or multiples) of the Bible were used to craft the sermon. Hence, the
emphasis expressed was on the use of the Bible, and how it was explained rather than a preference for a textual or thematic sermon.

Once again, the two Roman Catholic interviewees differed from their Protestant counterparts on this idea and did not place prominence in the use of the Bible as the basis for the sermon. Both of these individuals acknowledged the importance of the Bible. However, they considered that the sermon could also be based on other religious texts within the Christian tradition, i.e., the writings of saints, Popes, or church theologians, and/or the personal experiences of the preacher. This distinction with their Protestant counterparts could be reflective of the emphasis that Protestants place on the use and centrality of Bible in the Christian life and preaching.50

Identification with the Preacher

The last of the three foundational ideas is the listeners’ identification with the preacher. For the interviewees, this was a crucial aspect of the sermon experience. While the interviewees did not openly acknowledge this idea, the interviews revealed that for most of them, their relationship with the preacher, the preacher’s personal and religious identity in and outside of the preaching moment, how the preacher uses the Bible to craft the sermon, and how the preacher interacts with the audience outside of the preaching moment had a significant impact on the quality of the sermon. Such a view of the sermon listeners’ relationship with the preacher correlates with Kenneth Burke’s idea of Identification.51

For the interviewees, Identification occurs through different sources: the correlation of the preacher’s private life to his/her public religious life; the perceived personal commitment in the part of the preacher to the well-being of the local church or religious community; and the preacher’s level of candidness as s/he shares his/her religious, emotional, or personal struggles in relation to the message being conveyed in the sermon. According to the interviewees, these personal characteristics, which they use to relate or identify with the preacher, assist them in engaging the sermon at both an emotional and religious level.

The Characteristics of a Good Sermon

The interviews revealed three (3) major characteristics of a “good” sermon for the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listener. These three characteristics focused on the content of the sermon. There were also a set of minor characteristics that emerged from the data, which can be understood under the rubric of the delivery or presentation of the sermon.

The most consistent characteristic identified by the interviewees was the idea that a “good” sermon is transformational. According to the interviewees,
The Asbury Journal 69/1 (2014)

since the sermon is an encounter with God and is based on the Bible, then a “good” sermon is transformational. For the interviewees, a “good” sermon confronts the individual listeners and the community as a whole to live differently. For the interviewees, this reorientation of the behavior is reflected through a realignment of the individual’s identity in relationship with God. As stated above, this confrontation can be emotionally difficult. As Maria a 26 year-old mother of two explained it, “the sermon must pierce your life… it has to force me to say ‘I have to change this or that…” However, the interviewees understood the confrontation as part of a spiritual, emotional, and/or moral/ethical developmental process, which for the interviewees makes the individual more reflective of the character of God. According to the interviewees, a “good” sermon achieves this aim by providing a vision of a lifestyle reflective of biblical teachings. Some of the interviewees expressed this transformation in very practical terms, such as being a better father or employee or daughter, or how to better cope with the challenges of daily life. Nonetheless, the idea was one of transformation. Joel a 32 year-old police officer explains, “…the Holy Spirit controls what the person hears… God uses that word specifically to teach a particular idea… for a specific purpose in my life… so that I can do God’s will.”

In contrast to popular wisdom, interviewees reject the idea of the sermon as a motivational speech. By motivational speech, they meant a sermon designed and focused on the purpose of engendering self-help and personal empowerment to achieve personal goals. Most interviewees expressed the belief that a motivational speech is superficial, and does not produce the desired spiritual change. However, they did believe that a sermon can have motivational elements, such as the idea that an individual is capable of affecting changes in her or his behavior, and lifestyle, and that the individual is endowed by God with the necessary resources to address personal challenges. Nonetheless, they believed that these personal ideals could only be achieved through the supernatural and transcendental experience of God in the individual’s life, and that the sermon should be reflective of that idea, and not the self-empowerment found in contemporary motivational speeches.

The second characteristic that emerged from the interviews is the idea that a “good” sermon resonates with the Truth. The interviewees believe that a “good” sermon “sounds” true to the daily experience of the listeners and the intersection of God’s plans or will with that experience. For Milagros, a 42 year-old banker, the sermon has to be “a mirror in which I see my life as it is.” Similarly, Charlie a 34 year-old barber described the sermon as reflecting, “the story of my life… the challenges that I face.” While Aradi a 62 year-old retiree, stated: “I want to hear how my life and God’s will interject.” The idea that a “good” sermon resonates with the Truth reflects a desire for an
authentic encounter with God that transcends the mundane and provides the listener with an alternative vision or life narrative based on God’s will. When pressed on this issue, the interviewees believed that this characteristic is achieved when the preacher is honest. As Jose, a 21 year-old student, stated: “the preacher… doesn’t pull any ‘punches’… is not afraid to make people uncomfortable.” The idea of the sermon resonating with the truth, as described by the interviewees, correlates with Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm, and the role that MacIntyre assigns to narrative in his moral theory. They both argue that human beings use narratives as the means to understand and process truth statements or ideas. This leads to the use of narratives to help us arrive at moral and/or ethical decisions. The interviewees’ desire for the sermon to consist of a true narrative, and their use of the sermon narrative as a means to incorporate their personal narrative to the biblical narrative confirms both Fisher and MacIntyre’s ideas, and the need for preachers to make sure that the sermon becomes a point of intersection between God’s narrative and the listeners’ narrative in order to encourage transformation.

The last of the three characteristics is that a “good” sermon connects the Bible to daily life. Interviewees almost unanimously agreed that a “good” sermon helps the audience connect the ideas and teachings of the Bible with the challenges and experiences of daily life. The idea is for the audience to see how biblical teaching can inform the decisions and actions that affect their familial, work, and personal relationships; their personal commitments within society; and their moral/ethical choices. As Geovani, a 28 year-old sales clerk explains “…the sermon needs to be concrete, so that I can use it as a guide.” While, Helen a 29 year-old teacher, stated “…the sermon needs to be explicit about how the Bible applies to my life.” In addition, the interviewees believed that as the preacher demonstrates the relevancy of the biblical text to the audience’s experiences, the desire for personal change increases. Again the interviewees almost unanimously agreed that the way for the preacher to relate the Bible to daily life is for the preacher to illustrate his points with “real life” stories from his/her personal life or related events within the community or society-at-large. In contrast, the interviewees rejected the idea of the preacher focusing on politics or associating biblical teaching with partisan politics. For interviewees, the relevancy of the Bible for their daily lives was more important than the possible connections with current political/social problems that might be highlighted by the preacher. As Lizette, a 33 year-old computer technician, stated, “…the sermon is not for talking politics, I get enough of that on the news.”
Delivery/Presentation Concerns

The interviewees shared several items (which can be considered issues of delivery or presentation) that in their opinion were critical to experiencing a “good” sermon. There was no unanimous set of characteristics in this area. However, a few characteristics or ideas were mentioned several times. First, a good sermon is well prepared and has a strong organizational structure. The ideas flow well and the different parts relate to each other. As Cintia, a 32 year-old sales clerk, stated, “…it has to be well organized and make sense, not thrown together.” For the interviewees who raised this point there is no emphasis on a particular structural design (deductive, inductive, or storytelling) as long as the sermon is well organized. Second, the preacher must create a sense of personal connection with the audience by using a conversational style with a common vocabulary, without a judgmental tone, or “talking down” to the listeners. Claudia, a 32 year-old lawyer, described it as, “…don’t yell at the congregation, don’t be condescending; speak to us clearly so that we can understand you.” The preacher should also keep eye contact with the audience. A few interviewees complained that when the preacher reads the sermon it becomes a distraction. Third, the preacher can and should show emotions, but not use histrionics. According to the interviewees, those over-the-top performances detract from the moment. As Vanessa, a 33 year-old unemployed cook, stated, “…if you get too emotional it feels like a show; emotion is ok, but it should be normal.” Finally, while there was no agreement on the optimal length of a “good” sermon (some stated one hour, others 20 minutes), the average of the responses to the question was 35 minutes.

Conclusion

This research project accomplished its purpose by identifying the characteristics of a “good” sermon from the perspective of the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) sermon listener. The identification of these characteristics can help preachers within the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community to develop sermons that are more likely to effectively communicate the intended ideas to the listeners. In addition, this study demonstrates that sermon listeners have a clear understanding of the type of sermon characteristics that make the preaching event an effective tool of religious communication. Finally, since the listeners are able to identify these characteristics, the study affirms the idea that the listeners are active participants in the preaching event, which makes the preaching event a phenomenon where meaning is co-created. This reality invites preachers from all ethnic groups within the USA and across the globe to seek a better understanding of their listeners, and to discover their perspective in what makes a “good” sermon.
Despite the study’s positive results, the project leaves some questions unanswered. First, would a larger and more diverse pool of participants create a different set of characteristics or confirm these findings? While the groups of interviewees represented a diverse cross section of the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community, the interviewees reflected a larger percentage of college graduates than the national average for US Hispanics/Latinos (Latinas). This collective characteristic has the possibility of masking some nuances within the findings. Second, would a larger representation of Roman Catholic participants create a different set of characteristics? The number of Roman Catholic interviewees was not representative of the percentage of Roman Catholics among US Hispanic/Latinos (Latinas). Such a variance could have an effect on the identified characteristics. Given the theological and sociological differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants it may be more effective to conduct separate studies within each of these communities and then compare results. Third, what are the emotions or emotional response that a “good sermon” produces in the listener? What role do emotions play in the processing of the messages received from the preacher? This is an area well beyond the scope of the study; however, it can be a significant contribution to our understanding of the role sermons play in the life of the individual and the community beyond the religious/ethical sphere. Finally, how do the findings of this study compare to the idea of a “good sermon” within other ethnic groups within the USA? The focused group of this study was the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community and the lived experience of that community; however, trying to understand how one group compares to others can help educators in seminaries and theological schools in the process of curriculum design for the preparation of clergy.

Preaching is a complex task. However, listening to the listeners can help the preacher to communicate more effectively and perhaps achieve better outcomes. Therefore, this study has begun a process of helping preachers within the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) community become better communicators. By helping these preachers develop a better understanding of their audience, the process of effective communication with their audience can improve dramatically. I hope that this study will become a conversation starter and a source of information that will benefit the US Hispanic/Latino (Latina) Church and the Church at large.
End Notes

1 This study was made possible through a grant from the Louisville Institute, Louisville, KY.


5 Ibid., 65.


16 I use this term to delineate the culture that ethnic groups develop and to distinguish it from other types of cultures developed by social groupings.


23 Ibid. 23.

24 Ibid. 24.


30 Ibid. 67.


36 This reflects the fact that most Hispanic/Latino (Latina) homiletical theorists in the USA have been trained in using the same textbooks and homiletical schools of thought as other ethnic groups.

37 Ibid.


46 Following the US Census Bureau definition, a Hispanic/Latino (Latina) is an individual whose ethnic background originates in Central or South America, and the Spanish-speaking island-nations of the Caribbean Sea area.


51 Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969. Identification is the term used by Burke to explain the level of relatedness between the audience and the speaker. Burke used the word Substance to refer to the overall make-up of a person, including: physical characteristics, beliefs and values, education, socio-economic background, etc. The more congruence between the Substance of the speaker and that of the audience, the more Identification occurs. Burke refers to the intersection of both Substances as “consubstantiation,” a term he borrowed from Martin Luther’s theological description of what occurs during the Holy Communion or the Eucharist.


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Abstract

Diaspora missiology is emerging in some evangelical circles as the new paradigm that would complement traditional missiology. In this article, I will describe and analyze the writings of three first generation Cuban-American theologians and their understanding of how to construct theology in diaspora. First, I will present the multiple origins of the Latino/a population. Second, the metaphor of the Promised Land will be described and assessed though the lens of the prosperity gospel. Third, the writings of Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Justo González, and Fernando Segovia on theology in the diaspora will be described and analyzed. Finally, a Latino/a missiology of social engagement will emerge out of the three theologians discussed.

Key Words: diaspora missiology, Cuban-American, theology, social engagement

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Introduction

According to Sadiri Tira, diaspora missiology has emerged as a biblical and strategic field of missiology and is defined by the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation as a “missiological framework for understanding and participating in God’s redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin.” One of the biggest proponents of diaspora missiology is Enoch Wan, professor of missiology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. For Wan, the missiological constructions in the American Society of Missiology and the Evangelical Missiological Society represent the “traditional” way of doing missiology.

Wan sees traditional missiology as polarized and dichotomized in terms of their continual separation between evangelism and social action and the ambivalent attitude between Western paternalism and contextual self-theologizing. For Wan, traditional missiology follows the colonial patterns of assigning geographical spaces to mission, from here (the West) to there (the rest of the world), in which sending is more important than receiving. Contrary to traditional missiology, Wan argues that diaspora missiology is contextual and holistic by integrating evangelism and social action, and by erasing all geographical boundaries. It follows the lead of God in going wherever God places people spatially and spiritually. Nonetheless, at closer examination, diaspora missiology seems more of an attempt to resurrect the “people groups” theories dating back to the 1970s than an effort to really struggle with the theological developments of diaspora communities already present in the United States or Europe. For example, Wan points out, “Research has been carried out on the unreached people who are seen as living in a borderless world where they move in from everywhere to everywhere. Diaspora missiology is a new research area that not only studies the phenomena of the diaspora but also finds strategies and practical ways to minister to them.” Thus, Wan is targeting people on the move who are not Christian, but who are coming from one of the “unreached peoples” areas in the world. It is ironic that this is exactly one of the points in which diaspora missiology is supposed to contrast and present a better option than traditional missiology. Wan argues, “In the paradigm of traditional missiology, priority is given to the ‘unreached people groups’ in the most ‘unreached’ regions of the world over ‘reached people’.” Is not this what Wan is advocating, this time targeting “unreached people groups” in the United States, Canada, and Europe? What happens when the group in diaspora has been there for a while, and has a long Christian history? Is diaspora missiology an evangelical invention to renew the quest for the unsuccessful 10/40 Window Program? Do people groups still matter? The Latino/a diaspora should be taken as an
example of how people in diaspora have been doing missiology in North America for generations.

Multiple Origins of the Hispanic Population in the USA

The increasing growth of the Hispanic/Latino population during the last five decades is staggering. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1950 approximately four million Hispanics lived in the United States, most of them in New York, Florida, California, and Texas. The most recent figures coming from the Census Bureau in 2011 revealed that there are more than fifty million Hispanics in the United States representing 16.7% of the total population. However, Hispanics are not a monolithic or homogenous group. Instead, Hispanics are a highly diverse population representing twenty Spanish-speaking nationalities as well as some of the earlier settlements in the United States.

Within this constituency, Mexicans outnumber any other Hispanic group with over 60%; followed by Puerto Ricans with 9%, Cubans with 3.5%, and Dominicans with 2.8%, while people from South and Central America account for 13% of the Hispanic population respectively. Excluded from the term Hispanic are Brazilians, Guyanese, and Surinamese from South America. According to the 2010 Census, the population of the United States grew by 27.3 million people, or 9.7%, between 2000 and 2010. By contrast, the Hispanic population grew by 43%, rising from 35.3 million in 2000 to 50.5 million in 2010. Geoff Hartt mistakenly claims that immigration is the fuel for much of this growth. In reality, the growth of Hispanics has been a natural increase in the existing population. In a reversal of past trends, Latino population growth in the new century has been more a product of the natural increase (births minus deaths) of the existing population, than it has been of new international migration. Of the 10.2 million increase in the Hispanic population since 2000, about 60% of the increase (or 6 million) is due to natural increase and 40% is due to net international migration, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures.

For some people, the increasing number of Hispanics in the United States provokes fear of a threat to the life of the nation. Samuel P. Huntington’s statement can summarize this fear:

The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two poles, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream US culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the
Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge to its peril.12

One great example of this type of paranoia or xenophobia regarding stereotypes of Hispanics in the United States happened in the NBA finals. The National Basketball Association (NBA) finals always bring the excitement of teams competing for the ultimate prize, the Larry O’Brien trophy. In the 2013 finals, the San Antonio Spurs and the Miami Heat battled for the prestige of being the NBA champion. On game three of this series on Tuesday, June 11, something transformational and revealing happened. A fifth grader, 11 year-old Sebastien de la Cruz sang the national anthem. Fans in the arena exploded with applause as Sebastien finished the anthem while other fans in twitter posted hateful remarks about the singer. Even though Sebastien de la Cruz was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas, people saw a brown boy wearing a traditional mariachi costume and assumed he was an illegal alien. Tia Ermana Jordan, an African American tweeted: “Why do they have this illegal immigrant singing the National Anthem?” Jackson Wadden tweeted, “What’s up with this little Mexican kid singing the anthem at the Heat game.” Ben Koeck tweeted, “This kid is Mexican why is he singing the national anthem. You are not American # Go Home!” The reaction of these Americans begs the question: what does it means to look illegal?13 How can his or her physical characteristics, actions, or demeanor determine someone’s legal citizenship status? From the hundreds of hateful tweets against de la Cruz, it seems that he was judged as an illegal immigrant by his physical appearance and demeanor. Is his brown skin the signifier of illegality? Or was the mariachi clothing he was wearing the signifier of non-citizenship?

Apart from bigotry and ignorance, what triggered these people to react so hatefully against someone they considered to be an illegal alien? Cisneros argues, “citizenship and civic belonging are continually reenacted, reiterated, and read (lacking) on certain bodies through their individual and social performances.”14 In other words, to demonstrate citizenship is to act in a certain way that is acceptable to the norm. To perform any type of difference could compel people to judge the performer as alien and not belonging to the core or center of power. Cisneros points out, “In contrast, U.S. citizenship and civic identity are enacted through a ‘national affect’ that connotes American-ness, which includes the English language, public displays of nationalism, and certain markers of socio-economic class and race.”15 In the midst of suspicion, stereotypes, and discrimination, Hispanics should adopt a strategy of thriving in the Promised Land by formulating missiological principles of liberation.
Hispanics/Latinos in the Promised Land

One of the greatest challenges that Latinos/as face is to be absorbed into the main operational frameworks of North American culture. For example, many Latino/a congregations are composed of recent immigrants that see the United States as the Promised Land. The metaphor of the Promised Land, to designate the United States as providentially chosen by God to accomplish God’s purposes on earth, has been part of the North American experiment since its very beginning. The Puritans of New England had a clear vision on how God was directing their steps to tame the American wilderness through the providential guidance of God. Election became one of the most fundamental themes to understand the relationship of God to the new forming nation. The identification of the emerging nation with the Israel of the Old Testament prompted the assurance that the Promised Land given by God to God’s people was reenacted in the American experiment. This identification led to the notion that North America had a ‘manifest destiny’ to spread its blessings to the rest of the world.

The heyday of North American expansionism and imperialism was in the 1880s. Until this period, ‘manifest destiny’ was conceived as continental expansion. However, as Gerald Anderson argues, “when the United States reached the limits of prospective continental expansion, there developed agitation for expansion beyond North America.” One of the biggest proponents of manifest destiny in the 1890s was Josiah Strong. In Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Current Crisis, Strong analyzed the conditions in the United States as playing a major role in world history, guided by the providence of God to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Strong believed that [men] of that generation in the United States (1890s) would determine the course of the future of humanity. He proposed that the progress of Christ’s kingdom in the world for centuries to come depended on the actions of American Christians in that decade. Apart from all of the technological developments that took place during the nineteenth century, Strong showed another conglomerate of evidences in “the great ideas which have become the fixed possession of men within the past hundred years.” He highlighted individual liberty, honor to womanhood, and the enhanced valuation of human life as the prevailing tendencies in U.S. society.

For many of the people who received the gospel from North American missionaries, the United States was constructed as the Promised Land, the land that flows with honey and milk to prosper the world. Therefore, the imagery that many people have of the United States in the world is one of technological, economic, social, cultural, and religious prosperity. Eliazar Fernandez describes the experience from a Filipino context:
Since colonization entails political and economic control as well as mental control, the coming of Filipinos to the shores of America has been driven not only by the search for ‘greener pastures,’ the primary factor, but also by their image of America. For them, America represents the land of endless opportunities and coming to America the fulfillment of that to which they aspire in life. White America represents what is good and beautiful, noble and laudable, while brown Philippines represent what they despise in themselves.22

Hiram Almirudis, a life-long Hispanic Pentecostal pastor and educator from the Church of God, Cleveland, TN, argues that one of the biggest challenges within the Latino/a Church of God is the promotion of a philosophical and theological language that blesses the secular tendencies of the United States. For him, Hispanic/Latino Pentecostals see everything in terms of production, prosperity, success, and statistics which are the indispensable factors of corporations.23 According to Almirudis, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, and Robert Tilton are more quoted in Latino/a Pentecostal sermons than Jesus Christ himself.24

In her article “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?” Hanna Rosin corroborates Almirudis remarks by quoting Billy Gonzalez complaining about the preaching of “apostle” Garay, pastor of Casa del Padre, which is “hard to get used to because Garay talks about money in church all the time.”25 Garay’s preaching style and sermons come directly from the playbook of Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin. For example, he follows Hagin’s four laws for a prosperous life in his interpretation of Mark 5:25-34: “say it, do it, receive it, and tell it.”26 Garay argues, instead of saying I am poor, say I am rich. Instead of saying I want a home, go and get a home. Once you put your faith into action God will grant you the home. After God grants you the home then tell it to everybody.27 It is clear that what is promoted by Garay and the prosperity gospel asserts that Christians have the power to control their own destinies if they only have faith in God. As Hagin argues, it is about “how to write your own ticket with God” in which he claims having a vision of Jesus Christ telling him: “If anybody, anywhere will take these four steps, or put these four principles into operation, they will always receive whatever they want from Me, or from God the Father.”28 According to the Pew document, "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion," the overall influence of renewalist Christianity is clearly evident in specific religious practices and beliefs. For instance, Hispanic Pentecostals are more likely than most other Christians to read the Bible regularly, share their faith with nonbelievers, take a literal view of the Bible, and express belief in the “prosperity
gospel” that God blesses those who have enough faith with good health and financial success. 

It is clear that one element missing in the descriptions provided above is that the promotion of social justice is lacking in the rhetoric of the prosperity gospel because it promotes only personal individualistic economic gain. As Fernando Segovia points out, “Indeed, it seems that, as core values, the pursuit of money and individualism could easily override and subdue, with their great power and allure, all other values of the society.”

Therefore, the greatest challenge that Latinos/as face is to be absorbed into the main operational frameworks of North American culture. For example, many of these congregations are composed of recent immigrants that see the United States as the Promised Land. The metaphor of the Promised Land is more appealing to immigrants who want a better future for their families in the United States. But as we know, the American dream is an elusive reality for many who never see that dream materialized. In this sense, the consumeristic, individualistic, and selfish attitude that predominates in North American mainstream culture is also active in Latino communities. Praising God in a strange land becomes easy for these communities as they try to make inroads and achieve the American dream.

Exile and Diaspora as Metaphors of Engagement

The first generation of Latino/a theologians who tried to develop a theological stance using their own contextual reality and experience were mostly Cubans. Among them, Fernando Segovia, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Justo Gonzalez are the most prominent. All of them have developed through the years some type of correlation between their own Cuban exile after Fidel Castro in 1959, and the exile of the Israelites to Babylon. An analysis of their hermeneutics of exile revealed an overriding commitment to a liberationist paradigm in which the authors see a particular correlation between their contextual reality and the reality experienced by the Israelites in the Bible. Segovia would depart from this type of correlation to propose a hermeneutics of otherness and engagement, while still working from within a liberationist paradigm.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz: Exile as a Way of Life

Ada María Isasi-Díaz was born and raised in Havana, Cuba. From an early childhood, Isasi-Díaz was part of the Roman Catholic Church. She did her primary education with the Sisters of Saint Ursula and entered their convent as a novitiate nun in 1960. After her education with the Sisters of Saint Ursula, Isasi-Díaz worked with the poor and marginalized in Lima, Peru, for three years. She argues that she was born a feminist in 1975 after
coming to a deeper understanding of the interconnections of sexism, ethnic prejudice-racism, and economic oppression-classism at a conference on Women’s Ordination in Detroit. In 1983, she enrolled in the master of divinity program at Union Theological Seminary in New York and finished her PhD in Christian ethics in 1990. Since then, Isasi-Díaz has seen herself as an activist theologian struggling to defend the cause of Latinas in the United States and other women around the world.  

For Isasi-Díaz, Psalm 137 has been a fountain of life in the midst of sadness in a strange land. Isasi-Díaz recounts how Psalm 137 became part of her life, when she first read it after arriving in the United States from Cuba. She points out,  

Yes, I understand perfectly what the psalmist was trying to capture in the words of Psalm 137. Exile is a very complex way of life. The anguish of living away from one’s country might seem to indicate how much one remembers it. But then, an intrinsic part of the anguish is fear that, because life goes on, one might forget one’s country. ‘May my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not count Jerusalem the greatest of my joys.’

The correlation of her experience of exile from Cuba with the exile of Israel from Jerusalem opened her eyes to the reality of living in a strange land as a ‘minority,’ a Hispanic. According to her, it was this process of becoming a ‘minority’ that drove her to understand the ethnic and racial prejudices that operate in the United States. Therefore, her writings have shown a binomial hermeneutic of oppression/liberation. This binomial hermeneutic of oppression/liberation is most clearly presented in her concept of mujerista theology. Mujerista theology is a liberation theology, which uses as its theological locus the cultural and contextual location of the religious experiences of Latinas living in the United States. As Latinas struggle to create a new future as a marginal group who have suffered oppression because of their gender and race, they are aware that their past condition, as well as their present one, is rooted in a system that has worked against them throughout history. It is out of this struggle against an oppressive system that Isasi-Díaz finds hope, because hope makes the struggle possible. Consequently, Psalm 137 becomes cathartic in the way it helps exiliadas with their own pain of losing the place they called home. Even when the whole system is against them, Latinas see in Psalm 137 the possibility of change that rekindles their hope even when they do not see the expected results for their projects for liberation. Therefore, Psalm 137 has helped Latinas to live an exile existence as a ‘vocation.’ Exile becomes a vocation, a lifestyle that strives to create equal opportunities for marginalized Latinas, because it encompasses the seeds of liberation. To live as an
exile in the land of plenty involves a countercultural project directed against the consumeristic and individualistic aspects of North American culture that is directly in opposition to the values of the kingdom of God.

**Justo González: Exile as Mañana**

Justo L. González was born in Havana, Cuba, August 9, 1937. There, he carried out studies in philosophy at the Universidad de la Habana and completed his Bachelor Degree in Theological Studies at the Seminario Evangélico de Teología in Matanzas, Cuba, in 1957. After obtaining S.T.M. and M.A degrees, in 1961 he became the youngest person to be awarded a Ph. D. in historical theology at Yale University, and also became one of the few first generation Latino theologians in the USA to come from a Protestant background. In 1964, he was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament by the Methodist Church. Besides his passion for connecting theology with the life of the church through his publications, his most cherished and valued activity is the mentoring and encouraging of Hispanics and other minority scholars. No wonder he was the founding Director of the Hispanic Summer Program (now Director Emeritus), the founding president of the Association of Theological Education for Hispanics (AETH), the first Executive Director of the Hispanic Theological Initiative, and the founding editor of Hispanic theological journal *Apuntes* (now Editor Emeritus). No wonder he continues to serve as a consultant on Latino leadership training to seminaries and denominations in the USA and abroad.

González’s book *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* describes the way in which Latinos/as in the United States are formulating a theological perspective grounded in their own traditions and cultures. In addressing the question of Latino/a identity, González describes Latinos/as as a mañana people, with long standing roots in the United States, a people in search of unity and solidarity, a people beyond innocence, and a people in exile. According to González, the narrative of this history is important to understand, because it brings to light why some Latinos/as are bitter about such an expansionist ideology that robs their identity and subsumes them as second-class citizens in their own land. Therefore, Hispanics are mañana people who were here before the settlers came, and who remain here for a long time to come.
Second, González perceives a growing sense of unity and solidarity within the Hispanic community based on similar socio-cultural developments. On the socio-political side, Hispanics are aware of their “meager participation as a group in the decisions that shape our lives.” Even though González was writing over twenty years ago, the social conditions have not changed much. Hispanics are still on the lower strata of family income, with a high rate of unemployment and underemployment, and an alarming rate of High School dropouts. González points out, “Hispanic Americans are beginning to unite out of the sheer political necessity of presenting a common front against the powers that would otherwise keep us subservient.” On the other hand, there is a resurgence in adopting cultural patterns from their countries of origin. It is no wonder that culture became one source of doing theology for Hispanic theologians. It is not an idolizing of culture or a naïve adaptation of cultural patterns, but rather, the acknowledgement that cultures are both full of the grace of God, and are also human constructs ingrained with sinful tendencies that are detrimental to the wellbeing of the community, one such example being machismo.

Third, Hispanics are aware that their history is not that innocent, unlike many in the majority group who have a sense of history that covers up some of the most disturbing points of their own history. Most of these historical accounts are recreated with a mythical aura that seldom gets at the problematic nature of the original events. For example, we are told that the “pilgrim fathers” came to this land in their quest of religious freedom, and that is the reason why this land is constructed as a land of freedom. González points out, “that most of the early settlers denied that freedom to any who disagree with them is mentioned, but is not allowed to play a central role in the interpretation of events…the West was won, we are told. But how, and who ‘lost’ it, is not part of our national consciousness.” On the other hand, Latinos/as have understood that theirs is not an innocent history full of great heroes of mythical proportions. On the contrary, Latinos/as know the facts that our Spanish forefathers raped and killed our native foremothers, that their land and riches were lusted after, that we were the builders of a massive movement of slaves coming from Africa, and that injustice was not merely an occasional misstep, but rather it was systemic in our history. Therefore, Hispanics have always lived beyond the myth of innocence.

Finally, for González, Hispanics are an exile people. For some Hispanics this could be an actual and literal exile, which involves people coming for political, economic, or ideological reasons. For González, if a person has lost the hope of returning to his/her land of birth and has adopted the new land as his/her own, such a person should not be considered a Latin American in exile in the United States, but rather a Hispanic American,
because he/she has no other land. However, that person remains in exile, an exile in his new adoptive land with a new identity as a Hispanic American.\textsuperscript{43} Also, for González, those who are born in the United States from Hispanic immigrants or Hispanic U.S. citizens are exiles in their own land. Ambiguity is the characteristic that defines both groups. Literal exiles are grateful for being in the United States, but they are also angry.

González gives two reasons: 1) because they have come to realize that they will always be second-class citizens, exiles in a land not their own; and 2) because they have come to realize that their land of refuge is the land that created the need for exiles in the first place.\textsuperscript{44} Hispanic Americans born in the United States are also in a state of ambiguity.

González proposes that the experience of such ambiguity of living in between worlds as an exile people could be the most powerful hermeneutical tool for Latinos/as. He calls this strategy “reading the Bible in Spanish.”\textsuperscript{45} For González to read the Bible in Spanish means “a reading that includes the realization that the Bible is a political book; a reading in the vernacular, not only in the cultural, linguistic sense, but also in the sociopolitical.”\textsuperscript{46} In other words, reading the Bible in Spanish means reading it with a political agenda of salvation/liberation. It is a non-innocent reading of the sociopolitical realities that were confronted in the Bible by human beings who struggle in diverse circumstances.

There should be a reason why the Bible does not depict just the victories of its heroes such as David winning battles, but also his failures, such as killing Uriah and having sex with his wife. For González, such a story was not socially and politically neutral, because it revealed clearly who was in control, and who had the power to change the circumstances. This is what González means when referring to the Bible as a political book, because in it we encounter issues of power and powerlessness.\textsuperscript{47} This is a vocative reading that seeks not so much to interpret the Bible, as to allow it to interpret our own context and ourselves as well. González points out, “reading is always a dialogue between the text and the reader. It is not only the text that speaks and the reader who listens, but also the reader who asks questions of the text, and the texts responds…It is I, from my context and perspective, who read the text. In order for there to be a true dialogue, the text must engage me, not as I would be had I lived at the time of the Babylonian exile, but as I am here and now.”\textsuperscript{48} Therefore, doing missiology in Spanish should take into consideration how power is constructed in the Hispanic communities and how such power could be used for their own benefit or liberation.
Fernando F. Segovia: a Diaspora Hermeneutics/Theology of Otherness and Engagement

Fernando F. Segovia was born in Cuba in 1948. On Monday, July 10, 1961 at age thirteen, he began a journey from the world of Latin American civilization, by way of Cuba, to the world of Western civilization, the North American version; from the world of the colonized to the world of the colonizer, but most importantly, from a world that was his own to a world in which he became the stranger, the “other.” He obtained his masters in theology (MA) in 1976 and his doctorate (PhD) in 1978 from the University of Notre Dame. He taught at Marquette University from 1977 to 1984. Since 1984 he has been professor of early Christianity at the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University.

Segovia has become one of the best known Latino biblical scholars of the New Testament. As a biblical critic, his interests include Johannine Studies, method and theory, ideological criticism, the history of the discipline, and its construction in early Christian antiquity. No other Latino writer has done more work on developing a Latino hermeneutics than Segovia. His proposal is a diaspora hermeneutics of otherness and engagement.

For Segovia, the diaspora is constituted by “the sum total of those who presently live, for whatever reason, on a permanent basis in a country other than that of their birth...though usually involving a combination of sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors.” Diasporas are complex and multidimensional realities with a variety of meanings. Like González, Segovia distinguishes between a metaphorical and a literal diaspora. In its metaphorical sense, the term could be applied to those born in the country or those lands annexed or possessed by the country. In the literal sense, the term applies to first-generation immigrants who remember their country of birth, but live in the present in the country of adoption. Segovia situates himself in the literal sense of the term as a “flesh and blood first generation exile.” As a first generation immigrant to the United States in the 1960s from Cuba, Segovia knows too well that at the very core of his migration was a political reality rooted in the Cold War. He sees such a “cosmic journey” of migration as involving a variety of complex scenarios:

from the world of Latin American civilization, by way of its Caribbean version, to the world of Western civilization, in terms of its North American variant; from East to West, from the world of state-control communism to the world of capitalist liberal democracy; from North to South, from the traditional world of the colonized with honor and shame as dominant cultural values, to the industrialized world of the colonizers, with the dollar at its core value; from a world that
was mine, which I knew and to which I belonged without question, to a world where I represented the “other”—the alien and the foreigner…the journey of exile has never ended; indeed, exile has become my permanent land and home—the diaspora.52

This experience of exile has grounded, informed, and shaped Segovia’s development as a biblical scholar. At the core of this description is the realization of biculturalism and otherness. Biculturalism and otherness constitute the fundamental way of life for Latinos in the United States. Biculturalism reveals two essential aspects: 1) that Latinos live in two worlds, the world of their former place of birth and the current world, operating quite at ease in each world, and dealing with the scenarios that each world presents; 2) while Latinos navigate between two worlds, they do not belong to either of them.53 This paradoxical and alienating experience of living in two worlds and not belonging to either of them creates in Latinos/as a very ambiguous existence in which Latinos/as are always aliens and strangers.

The external perception of Latinos/as by members of the dominant culture encapsulates them in a bubble of sameness in which all Hispanics are the same, regardless of the diversity within the Latino/a community. Ironically, Latino/a theologians do the same by adopting the terminology of the dominant group and erasing intra-group conflict as if suddenly they had disappeared under the umbrella term “Latino/a.” Despite the negative descriptions of Latinos/as by the dominant group, this sense of otherness should be viewed as the source of their identity. Segovia argues, “We must claim our otherness and turn it into precisely what it is, our very identity, using it constructively and creatively in the interest of liberation.”54

In this next step, the “otherness” of Latinos/as becomes a methodology of engagement because they realize that even though they do not belong fully to either world, they do stand in both worlds. This otherness embraces biculturalism as a positive force making it possible for Latinos/as to have two homes, two voices, or two faces.55 In this sense, Latinos/as know these two worlds from the inside out and as such understand that both worlds are at the end constructions. In this paradoxical situation, Latinos/as possess a privileged knowledge in understanding that their own existence is a construction and as such it is in need of revision and recreation. According to Segovia this process of self-identity should have three foci: “a) self-appropriation, or a revisioning of our past and our history with our own eyes; b) self-definition, or a retelling of our present reality and experience in our own words; and c) self-direction, or a reclaiming of our future and self-determination in terms of our own dreams and visions.”56 The biculturalism that Latinos/as experience leads them to the recognition of all “others”
(negative) as others (positive). In this process, Latinos/as must embrace and integrate those fundamental qualities that make them bicultural.

According to Segovia, Latino/a theology should be postmodern, postcolonial, and liberationist. Thus, a Latino/a theology should be a theology of hybridity, struggle, and life. Such theology takes the sociocultural present as the principal condition to construct a discourse about God in the diaspora. Because it understands that the dominant group has constructed them under a label, “Hispanic/Latino,” it has the capacity not to define and construct others, but to let others define themselves. It should be postmodern in accepting the subjectivity of all knowledge, going beyond the modern myth based on objectivity and universality. Segovia points out,

I look upon it as inductive, contextual, and pluralistic. In other words, all socioreligious discourse about the world, the otherworld, and the relationship between such worlds is seen as tied to a perspective, as born out and forged in praxis- a construct grounded in reality and experience, contextual to the core- with a view of reality and experience as culturally and historically differentiated and in constant flux; and pluralistic at heart- with an acceptance of the multitude of constructs reflecting and engaging a variety of realities and experiences across history and culture.”

The contextuality of the theological task makes it explicit for Latinos/as to reflect on their current existence in the diaspora in postcolonial categories. As people living in exile in the United States and at the margins in that society, Latinos/as “are becoming increasingly aware of the degree to which the United States, the land of our refuge, is also the land that created our need for exile in the first place.” Therefore, Latinos/as are called to a process of decolonization, of critique against the current system and its dehumanizing tendencies. The dehumanizing tendencies of Latinos/as in the United States calls for a liberationist theology that takes the exile community as locus theologicus incorporating such an exilic present with a utopian vision of justice, peace, equality, and love.

Conclusion

Isasi-Díaz, González, and Segovia are all Cubans who came to the United States in a specific socio-political context of turmoil between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was the context for the Cold War, of two different worldviews competing for supremacy on how to build society. The context of the Cold War was so traumatic to Segovia that he even describes the experience of exile as a “cosmic journey.” Isasi-Díaz has a deep indescribable sorrow because he was away from the land that
witnessed her birth. In her exilic condition, Isasi-Díaz uses Psalm 137 as a cathartic text that helps her to deal with the ongoing pain and longing to go back to Cuba. She correlates the biblical material of the Jerusalem exile with her own condition of exile in almost romantic terms, identifying Cuba with Jerusalem.61

What could be considered missiological elements in mujerista theology is explicitly delineated when the stories of Latinas in quest of their own destiny through the liberating praxis of the “historical project”, are assessed in light of the common denominator of salvation as liberation. Isasi-Díaz argues, “Latinas’ historical project is based on an understanding of salvation and liberation as three aspects of one process.”62 Following liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, Isasi-Díaz argues that there are not two histories, the history of salvation and secular history, but rather history is one reality in which the salvific action of God in Christ is always present in the here and now.63 Salvation occurs in history as the liberationist work of Christ to free the captives from their oppression. The conceptualization of salvation as liberation is recapitulated in the manifestation of the kingdom of God, as this worldly reality, that is in opposition to the anti-kingdom, as conceptualized by the present condition of misery and oppression. Liberation as used by mujerista theology is a concept that enables people to deal with their religious practices in history as a subversive enterprise.64

Unlike Isasi-Díaz who longed for Cuba and expected to return, González knew that he would live and die in Babylon. There is no turning back. Cuba is not Jerusalem. He points out, “Our Zion is not the lands where we were born, though we still love them, for us those lands are gone forever—and, in any case, since we have lived for a long time beyond innocence, we could never equate those lands with Zion.”65 For González, the Zion that the Latino/a community should strive after is the Zion that comes in the eschatological reign of God, which is breaking in at every moment into history. He proposes, as a missiological strategy, reading the Bible in Spanish. As mentioned above, reading the Bible in Spanish means reading it with a political agenda of salvation/liberation. It is a non-innocent reading of the sociopolitical realities that were confronted in the Bible by human beings who struggle in diverse circumstances and we should gain wisdom from such stories to confront the present reality of living in a different land.

Segovia departs from the approaches of correlation used by Isasi-Díaz and González, and proposes a hermeneutics of otherness and engagement. This hermeneutics takes the biculturalism and otherness of Latinos/as as its starting point. Biculturalism and otherness constitute the fundamental way of life for Latinos in the United States. Biculturalism reveals two essential aspects: 1) that Latinos live in two worlds, the world of their former place
of birth and the current world, operating quite at ease in each world, dealing with the scenarios that each world presents; 2) while Latinos navigate between two worlds, they do not belong to either of them. This in-betweenness creates a new way of looking at otherness in a positive sense. This otherness embraces biculturalism as a positive force making it possible for Latinos/as to have two homes, two voices, or two faces. In this sense, Latinos/as know these two worlds from the inside out and as such understand that both worlds are at the end constructions. In this paradoxical situation, Latinos/as possess a privileged knowledge in understanding that their own existence is a construction and as such it is in need of revision and recreation. This process of recognition and recreation unfolds a new configuration in which Latinos/as engage others by embracing their mutual human condition in this world. This is done through a postmodern, postcolonial, and liberationist theology that bursts with hybridity and the struggle for life.

The three theologians discussed in this article represent the first generation of Cuban immigrants to the United States. Their contribution is priceless in the development of Latino/a theology in the United States. However, as all of them would say, they are just theologizing from their own experience of exile and diaspora rooted in the Cuban crisis of the early 1960s. Their experience is very different from that of Puerto Ricans who became a colony of the United States as a war prize in 1898 in the Spanish-American War. Also, these theologians all speak to only the first generation of immigrants in diaspora. Second and third generation Latinos/as who are completely assimilated within the dominant culture probably would have problems understanding diaspora in the same way that the first generation did. To complicate things farther, Latinos/as are marrying people of other nationalities creating a triangulation of cultures in which the Latino/a is part of a more fragmented whole. For these and other reasons, missiologist Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi prefers to use other metaphors to describe the work of Latino/a churches in the United States. Cardoza’s metaphor of mission is walking the tightrope, to describe the balancing act in cross-cultural encounters. His use of the term ‘border’ as a place of interpenetration in cultural encounters, and his most recent metaphor of missiology at the shore, between the dry land and the sea, are cutting edge, and provide new potential to explore the future missional character of the Latino/a churches in the United States.
End Notes

3 Ibid., 100.
4 Ibid., 137.
5 Ibid., 98.
8 Ibid., 20.
14 Ibid., 133.
15 Ibid., 133.
20 Ibid., 4.
21 Ibid., 5.
22 Eleazar Fernandez, “Exodus Toward Egypt: Filipino-American’s Struggle to Realize the Promised Land in America” in, The Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on


24 Almirudis does not offer any example of these preachers in his article to substantiate his case. Even though I take it to be an exaggeration, the point remains clear, Hispanic Pentecostals have appropriated the prosperity gospel as an interpretative Christian goal in North America.


31 Rosin, “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?”


34 Isasi-Díaz, “By the Rivers of Babylon,” 150.


37 Isasi-Díaz, “By the Rivers of Babylon,” 158.

39 Ibid., 31.

40 Ibid., 34.

41 Ibid., 36.

42 Ibid., 39.

43 Ibid., 41.

44 Ibid., 41.

45 Ibid., 75-87.

46 Ibid., 84.

47 Ibid., 85.


52 Ibid., 209-210.

53 Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics,” 61. This argument will focus only in the adoptive land and will bypass the experiences of Latinos/as when they go back home. For many of us there is no home to go back to. Segovia also describes the alienation and otherness that Latinos/as confront when they visit the world of their birth. “We realize that our traditional world is no longer ours: our association with it has become remote, at best intermittent, and passive. In fact, from the point of view of our former world, we encounter yet another script ready for us to play and follow, outside of which we can venture but not very far. The script has a name, emigrant or expatriate getting ahead in the land of freedom, justice, and opportunity; and an even more ironic value judgment: culturally disconnected but economically superior.” (Page 64). Samuel Solivan offers a good example of this perspective, when he points out, “In Puerto Rico we are not received as full fledged Puerto Ricans; we are really not Puertoriqueños. In New York City, our place of birth, we are also not received as true Americans, but as Puerto Ricans—that is, as foreigners. It is this crisis of identity that greatly informs much of our pathos.” Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos, and Liberation: Toward a Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 25.

54 Ibid., 65.

57 Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 198-201.
58 Ibid., 199.
59 González, Mañana, 41.
60 Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 209.
61 Isasi-Díaz, “By the Rivers,” 158.
62 Isasi-Díaz, En la Lucha, 35.
63 Ibid., 35.
65 González, Mañana, 42.

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Abstract

Drawing on the perspective of Latin American church leaders, “If Only They Knew” details common cultural, linguistic and ministry errors made by U.S. missionaries in Latin America, offers preparation strategies for new missionaries to the region, and proposes action and reflection questions for mission-sending agencies and missionary candidates.

Key Words: Latin America, missionary, culture, language learning, humility

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Introduction

We live in perhaps the most exciting missionary age in church history—the age of sending missionaries “from everywhere to everyone” (Escobar 2003). That “everyone” still includes Latin America, but a Latin America with mature national churches, energetic theologians and a burgeoning missionary vision of its own. So what do potential missionaries from the United States need to know, do and be in preparation for service in Latin America, with Latin American partners?

In preparation for answering that interrogative, an informal survey was sent to Latin American Christian leaders (pastors, seminary administrators, and denominational leaders) in five countries. Thirteen leaders from four countries responded to the survey. The ten male and three female respondents represent an average of 14 years in ministry. Participants were asked to respond to two open questions: (1) In your experience, what is the biggest error (cultural, ministerial, attitudinal, etc.) made by U.S. missionaries who come to serve in Latin America? (2) If you could participate in the training of missionaries for Latin America, what would be the most important advice you would give the missionary candidates, and why?

In what follows, the survey questions and responses will give shape to the text, as we allow the voices and perceptions of Latin American ministry partners to guide this important conversation. Interaction with the secondary literature will follow rather than lead the discussion. Action and reflection questions will be posed for mission sending agencies and missionary candidates as they prepare for 21st century ministry in Latin America and with Latin American partners. Lord, give us ears to hear and the will to respond!

What We Wish They Knew: The Biggest Errors and the Best Advice

Survey participants were invited to identify common errors made by missionaries from the United States and to offer advice to a new generation of missionaries-in-training.

Biggest errors

Cultural errors. Over and over again, with a gracious blend of tact and frankness, survey respondents highlighted a perceived arrogance and insensitivity towards the host culture as the most glaring error made by missionaries from the United States. A Latin American leader described this cultural attitude with penetrating insight: “One of the biggest mistakes missionaries make is thinking that their culture of origin is better than all the rest and presenting it in their ministry as the ideal toward which all other cultures should aspire.” Another leader spoke of the negative results when missionaries demonstrate lack of appreciation and respect for the culture of
the country in which they are serving: “This leads to lack of understanding of the culture and to the failure to dedicate themselves to correct language learning. This lack of appreciation for the new culture is reflected in constant cultural comparisons, with the missionary’s culture of origin presented always as the model of excellence in contrast to negative evaluations of the culture in the country of service.”

A variety of causal factors could be at work in this tendency toward cultural hauteur and insensitivity among U.S. missionaries. Three in particular are worth mentioning here. First, as Eugene Nida pointed out in his classic work, Understanding Latin Americans, there is a failure to realize how deep are the cultural and historical differences between the northern and southern regions of the Americas; this can cause missionaries from North America to make incorrect assumptions about “how things work” in Latin America and about how Latin Americans think and perceive the world:

Too often people in the Americas rather blindly assume that they are all alike. Do they not share a common cultural background in Europe? Are they not bound by links of a common Christendom? Are they not similarly new nations in the New World? But these apparent similarities only tend to mask certain basic differences which, if unrecognized, contribute to continued mutual suspicion and even hostility. . .. Most North Americans expect similarities, when in reality there are radical diversities; and they assume understanding, when in actuality people are often talking on quite different wavelengths (Nida 1974:3).

The second factor related to cultural arrogance is the flip side of the first: a limited understanding of one’s own culture of origin, in this case, the missionary’s U.S. context. Andrew Atkins argues that this lack of cultural self-awareness is a “blank spot” in missionary preparation, one which urgently needs to be filled with a practical analysis and understanding of the cultural norms which shape the missionary:

Our parent culture helps to create our inner being, spiritually, emotionally, mentally. It spills over to our physical life as well. What we are taught, learn, and apply about our faith is in the North American context. We take that cultural gospel overseas. . . . Our expectations, dreams, aspirations, value system, body language, communication, fears, and joys are all culturally determined. If missionaries ignore the depth of their cultural formation, they are bound to be frustrated overseas (Atkins 1990:267).
Although it can be difficult to achieve full cultural self-awareness while still within one’s own context, without the mirror of another cultural paradigm to reveal the unconscious biases, patterns and blind spots of one’s culture of origin, missionaries-in-training can benefit from studying analyses of their own culture, both from insiders and from the Latin American perspective. Atkins, for example, identifies eight cultural characteristics that both shape the U.S. missionary and also create points of friction when he or she engages with persons of other cultures. People from the cultural majority in the U.S., he says, are highly educated, rich, jealous of personal rights, full of hope, insulated (from pain and inconvenience), free, individualistic and performance-focused (1990:268–269). Missionary sending agencies and missionary candidates should grapple with the behavioral, attitudinal, social and even ecclesial implications of these culturally ingrained patterns. For instance, how will it feel for an individualistic, performance-oriented missionary to serve alongside (and perhaps under the authority of) a social, relationship-oriented Latin American ministry partner? How will the missionaries prepare themselves to respond in a Christ-like way to the clash of cultures? What patterns and practices will prepare missionaries to be humble learners from the host culture and what obstacles could prevent them from adopting a learner’s posture?

The third factor that contributes to cultural arrogance and insensitivity is a particularization of the second: a failure to recognize how deeply engrained “Americanism” is in the American psyche and how tightly it has become interwoven with religion in the U.S. context. “Americanism” is the “confidence that we [the U.S.] are God’s new Israel, the political harbinger for all future ages, the redeemer nation that performs periodic regenerating sacrifices for the world” (Leithart 2012:151). This strange intermingling of faith and nationalism is often a major blind spot for U.S. missionaries, and leads to the assumption that the world is eagerly longing not only for the gospel but also for its American accouterments.

What specific steps can mission-sending agencies and missionary candidates take in order to elevate their cultural awareness, both of the host culture in Latin America and of their own culture of origin? What practices and preparation will break the stranglehold of Americanism on the worldview of missionary candidates? And what spiritual and organizational patterns must be cultivated in order to produce missionaries who will be humble learners of all that God would teach them through the local culture?

**Linguistic errors.** As was seen above, inextricably related to perceived cultural arrogance and insensitivity is the perception that often missionaries do not invest sufficient time, energy and prayer into mastering the local language. Respondents were universally sympathetic to the difficulties of
learning a second language (particularly those who had experienced that challenge for themselves); nonetheless, they were firm in their conviction that failure to make a sustained effort at language learning conveys a particularly negative message to the missionary’s national partners. One respondent said, “Some missionaries do not demonstrate any interest in perfecting their language skills, but a devotion to ‘deep’ language learning, more than anything else, conveys love for the country and the people.”

As Thomas and Elizabeth Brewster have repeatedly affirmed, the language learning process is not a mere prelude to communication or ministry, but is itself effective communication and ministry. The Brewsters relate an anecdote from missionary anthropologist Charles H. Kraft, who was once asked how much time should be spent in language learning by a short-term missionary who would only be on the field for two months. Kraft’s answer was, “Two months.” The questioner pressed him: “What about one who stays six months?” Kraft answered, “Then spend six months in language learning.” The same question was posed about a missionary who would stay on the field for two years. “There is nothing he could do that would communicate more effectively than spending those two years in language learning.” Kraft continued, “Indeed, if we do no more than engage in the process of language learning we will have communicated more of the essentials of the Gospel than if we devote ourselves to any other task I can think of” (Brewster and Brewster 1982:160). This attitude is quite distinct from the usual pragmatic approach to language study taken by most North Americans:

Typically, missionaries complete many years of schooling and are conditioned to think of themselves as ‘prepared’ to carry on a ministry. Learning the language is viewed as the major barrier that stands between these ‘prepared’ people and a fruitful ministry in the new country. So, of course, they must learn the language in order to get on with the job. Language study is thus viewed as a hurdle to be quickly passed so that they can then get on with doing what they are ‘trained’ to do (Brewster and Brewster 1982:161).

The Brewsters argue that the posture of language learner communicates a “total life message” to members of the new community where the missionary is serving (1982:161), a message of one’s willingness to be taught by the members of the host culture. Roman Catholic missionary Jon Kirby agrees with the Brewsters and goes even further, speaking of the language learning process in terms of “conversion”:

Language learning is indeed ministry but not just because it communicates the missioner’s words or Christ’s words, or even the missioner’s entire life-message”—though this
is partially true. It is ministry primarily because it witnesses to a conversion process: the conversion of the missioners themselves. Missioners are really responsible for only one conversion, their own! But the witness of this conversion will influence the lives of those around us. Language and culture learning stretches and deepens our faith, demands the humble posture of one who has much to learn from a new font of knowledge in open dialogue, and by the discovery of a new reality through our new culturally attuned preceptors, the missioner both experiences a genuine conversion and sows the seeds for future conversions (Kirby 1995:137).

John Carpenter, an itinerant missionary professor, is a dissenting voice in the discussion of missionary language learning; he questions the importance that the Brewsters and Kirby assign to learning the local language and argues that not all missionaries are “gifted” with language skills and therefore should be excused from focusing so much time and energy on the acquisition of the new tongue: “Those who simply do not have the gifts to master another language should not be made to try to master it and should not be placed in ministries that require fluency in the language. . . . Prospective missionaries should be tested for their language learning ability and assigned (or even rejected) based, in part, on that” (Carpenter 1996:348).

Carpenter’s arguments are made exclusively from the perspective of the missionary and do not take into account the perceptions of the receiving culture, like those expressed in our survey, but he is probably correct that assessment of language learning skills should have a higher priority in the preparation of missionaries. Mission-sending agencies and missionary candidates must explore not only missionaries’ aptitudes but also their attitudes toward and practices of language learning. What adjustments need to be made to facilitate and encourage the kind of life-long language learning that will not only communicate to our Latin American partners our willingness to learn from them, but will also result in deeper understanding of and appreciation for their culture?

Two practical issues about language mastery surfaced in several survey responses. First, national leaders perceived a persistent discrepancy between the language skills of married, male missionaries and their wives. One respondent said, “Many times the wife does not speak the local language because she has no contact with the church or with people outside her home and children.” This is an important point for mission organizations and national partners to address. What practical steps can be taken to ensure that missionary wives and mothers have equal access to relational language learning? What new patterns of ministry will be necessary? What reordering of values and praxis, within the missionary family, within the mission sending
organization and within the expectations of national partners, will contribute to changing this paradigm?

The second practical language issue that was highlighted in the survey is something that goes far beyond “knowing the right words to say.” This is the issue of direct versus indirect speech, which is as much a cultural pattern as a linguistic one. As one respondent puts it: “In my culture, people are less direct than in the American culture. Missionaries should learn to speak the truth with more politeness.” That is, they should strive to speak with politeness defined in the terms of that cultural context, which might mean circling around the point, approaching it with what might seem to Americans like excessive finesse and even flattery, rather than ir directamente al grano (getting straight to the point). This is especially true in confrontational, speaking-the-truth-in-love situations, but also in normal, everyday conversation. This writer learned, for example, after a decade in Latin America, that the long, drawn-out “preliminaries” of phone conversations (e.g., “Did you rest well? How about the rest of the family? How’s your mother’s health?”) were not dispensable elements but were essential relational components of the communicative interchange, without which one might never arrive at “the point” for which the conversation was headed.

Ministerial errors. The ministerial errors noted by survey respondents were all variations on a single theme, which is really a counterpoint to the melody of cultural arrogance and insensitivity noted above: missionaries’ unwillingness (or inability) to adapt their understanding of ministry to the local context. One participant commented: “Missionaries often come with a ‘package’ or model of how things should be done, and many times this model doesn’t bear fruit, because it is not contextually appropriate to the place where they are ministering.” Another observed that missionaries sometimes are so closely wedded to their vision of “the plan,” that they seem rigid and unyielding to those who propose other ideas. One respondent acknowledged that some missionaries grow to recognize the need for contextualization, but struggle with the flexibility necessary to accomplish it: “Having observed missionaries since I was a child, I realize that some of them bring and subtly impose their own ministerial culture. When things do not go according to that imposed pattern, they get frustrated. Some realize that the culture is not going to change, so they attempt to shift their own paradigms, but always within the limits of their own imposed conditions.”

Gregory Klotz, professor of modern languages at Taylor University and a Lutheran missionary with 20 years of experience in Latin America, reflects on how missionaries fall unconsciously into this trap of arriving in Latin America with a single culturally conditioned and tradition-shaped pattern of “church” in their conceptual toolbox.
As a missionary, I go overseas with this view of the church in my head. Although I go as a product of seminary education and understand the doctrines of the historical church as well as denominational differences, I have not been taught the semiotics of culture— the skill of communication or the artful use of symbol and meaning in communicating the gospel. Yes, I have been taught to ‘preach,’ but this too is a communicative form which is codified in structure and social context— an acceptable way of speaking in my social context, which historically developed into the present form. So, I enter Latin America with this idea of church and theology. I set up an organizational structure that depicts denomination, I begin having Bible studies in homes, I begin to form a group with a church president, an offering deposited in a bank, preaching, etc. My downfall is not that the church takes this shape; my downfall is my ignorance in assuming that these ‘shapes’ or ‘social forms’ have the same meaning in that social context of which I am not a part (Klotz 2012:248).

Klotz asks the kinds of questions each mission-sending agency and missionary candidate needs to consider if new missionaries to Latin America are to avoid falling into the trap of what this writer calls the “Sinatra Syndrome”— “I’ll do it my way!” These questions need to be explored together with Latin American ministry partners in each local context: “How would they [i.e., the local population] envision the church organization in their social setting? What about the ministerial offices, the way education takes place, and the substance of that education?” (2012:249). As Klotz notes, even the expectations of pastors are culturally conditioned, having more to do “with the expectation of leadership according to the leadership models within the social structure than theological reasons for that office” (2012:249).

**Best advice**

Survey respondents continued to offer their insights with gentleness, cortesía, and grace, expressing over and over their gratitude for the service of missionaries past, present, and future, and providing words of wise counsel for those preparing to serve in Latin America and with Latin Americans.

**Spiritual preparation.** Given the cultural, linguistic, and ministerial errors noted above, it may surprise readers that in response to the question about “your best advice for missionary candidates,” survey participants did not immediately shine a laser light on those particular areas. Their most urgent concern was the spiritual preparation of the missionary. The words of counsel that occurred over and over were: dependence, patience, humility, prayer, love, and a teachable spirit. Latin American leaders see these qualities as the basis
for a missionary posture that will effectively avoid the errors mentioned in
the previous section. As one leader put it: “The most indispensable things
for a cross-cultural missionary are dependence on God and a teachable spirit,
because in the experiences of missionary life, it is the missionary who often
learns the most, since God has the capacity to teach us through the most
unexpected things and persons.” In similar fashion, another leader encourages
missionaries: “Be ready to learn! It is impossible to be significant in the life
of someone without the exchange of life.” This portrait of a spiritually
prepared missionary- teachable, humble, and dependent on God, in imitation
of Christ himself- emerges particularly clearly in these insightful words of
another leader from the region:

Missionaries need to know and remember that ‘the work’
in which they are going to serve is God’s work. Now, this
has many implications, from the ‘furlough’ that can provide
a simple affirmation of this truth [i.e., the work can go on
without you], to dying to our own interests, our own ego. We
can find all this in the example of the Master. The work of
God cannot be understood apart from the cross of Christ
himself and how he himself went through it. Why is this
so important in the context of our question? I believe this
continual discovery of the work of God (which cannot be
taught in a missiology class) not only prepares us to act
faithfully in the divine commission which has been entrusted
to us; it also prevents us from ‘dying’ early in our career and,
better yet, it revives us and encourages us to hold to the hand
of the One who ‘did not withhold his own Son, but gave him
up for all of us.’

Cultural preparation. And what about those cultural errors that the survey
revealed? What practical advice do these Latin American leaders give to
potential missionaries that will help them avoid repeating those blunders?
Operating out of the spiritual foundation just described, missionaries are
encouraged to study the culture (before and after they arrive on the field),
with the goal of learning the history, the economy, the mentality and even the
literature of the country where they will be working. They need to study the
culture from a position of respect, recognizing and renouncing any tendency
to measure all other cultures by their own:

Give up cultural comparisons! It is demeaning and disheartening
to have someone come into your country from another culture
and begin comparing everything unfavorably with his or her context. “Renunciation” in this context means accepting
another culture, different from my own, even if I don’t like
all its norms and practices. True identification with the people
I’m serving means accepting and trying to enjoy their culture, even if sometimes it’s not truly enjoyable. That is the price the missionary pays.

Ministerial preparation and praxis. The leaders who responded to the survey had a great deal to say about the ministerial preparation and praxis of missionaries. Participants were consistent in encouraging missionaries to come with the express ministerial purpose of multiplying themselves (2 Timothy 2:2) in local leadership. “Multiply yourselves in others,” counsels one national leader. “Develop your leadership in others, so that when you must return to your country, you won’t have to worry about whether the ministry will carry on and continue developing in your absence. I’ve seen many successful, missionary-led ministries that never recovered from the missionary’s absence.”

Conclusion

This article has highlighted common cultural, linguistic, and ministerial errors made by U.S. missionaries serving in Latin America, it has offered wise counsel to missionary candidates from Latin American church leaders, and has raised reflection questions for both missionary-sending agencies and missionary candidates. Although the focus of the article has been on oft-observed errors, those who contributed to the survey are far from pessimistic. Survey respondents value the missionary call and welcome this new day of missions, this era of “sending missionaries from everywhere to everyone.” They welcome those who come to work in their context, because, as one participant put it, “There are groups of people right in our midst who are invisible to our eyes, but a foreigner can see them because God has laid them on his or her heart.” They also rejoice that we live in a time when Christians of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds are called to do mission together, working side by side as teammates in carrying out the Great Commission. In the hope-filled and courage-producing words of one respondent: “The missionary God whom we serve will give us understanding, little by little, as we seek his face. He changes hearts in a supernatural way, he gives a heart of flesh to feel what others feel, to act according to the mind of Christ, to see what God sees.”
End Notes

1 The respondents include 8 pastors, 3 seminary leaders (rector or dean) and 2 denominational leaders. The countries represented are Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico. This author deeply appreciates the participants’ willingness to speak frankly and honestly with the goal of helping the next generation of cross-cultural missionaries who will serve in Latin America and with Latin American partners across the globe. Some survey comments have been edited for grammatical smoothness and, in some cases, to preserve the confidentiality of the responses. The author guarantees that all quoted material accurately reflects the words and intent of the respondents. Any quoted material within the text that does not have source information in parentheses is from the confidential survey responses.

2 Respondents were asked to limit their observations to their interaction with missionaries from the United States.

3 A third open question was included in the survey: “What other observation(s) would you like to make about the work of cross-cultural missionaries in your context?” Responses were generally expressions of gratitude or reiterations of things said in answer to the first two questions.

4 The questions are posed for both the sending agencies and for the missionary candidates themselves. Not all missionaries serve with organizations which provide extensive pre-field training for candidates, and even those who do pass through such training must be pro-active and intentional, “second-mile learners” in regards to the cultural context of the place where they will serve. The questions are intentionally left open and unanswered, requiring agencies and missionaries alike to grapple for themselves with the implications.

5 It is important that we as U.S. missionaries take seriously this perception, even if the perceived attitude is far from our intent. We must be open to learning from our Latin American ministry partners what actions or omissions communicate this attitude that is perceived by them, in their context, as cultural arrogance or insensitivity.

6 Carpenter’s caveats are tinged with more than a hint of defensiveness, perhaps reacting out of his own admitted struggles with language learning.

7 This respondent’s observation about direct versus indirect approaches to “speaking the truth” holds true for most countries in the region.

8 This author’s conversational style is very direct, even for a North American. Adapting to the more indirect, meandering style of conversation was a small but very difficult change that paid rich dividends in new depths of communication and cultural understanding.

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ROBERT DANIELSON AND MARIO VEGA

The Vital Role of the Laity in Revitalization: A Case Study of Misión Cristiana Elim

This paper was originally presented at the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements Conference held in Toronto, Canada in association with Tyndale University College and Seminary. The conference was held in October of 2011. The Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements is part of Asbury Theological Seminary.

Abstract

Immigration from Latin America to the U.S. is often seen as the movement of individuals across borders, but it often impacts communities as well, including religious organizations. Because of the cell-group focus of Misión Cristiana Elim in El Salvador and the large number of Salvadoran immigrants, it is not surprising that this movement is also growing rapidly as immigrants move into new areas. This case illustrates how one Hispanic church movement is growing transnationally through immigration.

Key Words: El Salvador, Misión Cristiana Elim, Pentecostalism, immigration, transnationalism, diaspora

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Introduction

In January of 2003, a Salvadoran immigrant, named Rosa Campos, gathered a group of seven people in her home in Toronto to worship together. After one month, there were so many people coming, the group had to move to a basement to continue meeting. After three months, they rented an auditorium to hold 250 people. Today they rent a bigger space to hold about 1,000 people. This group is based on a cell model and currently has 35 cells with six supervisors, and people attend from countries as diverse as Honduras, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and even Romania, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. While the majority remains Salvadoran, this church is now reaching out to a larger immigrant community.¹

This situation is not an isolated case, and the importance of immigration and its ties with revitalization should not be lightly ignored.² While El Salvador might be easily dismissed as the smallest nation in Latin America, except for the Caribbean island nations, it has a major presence in terms of immigration. According to the data from the 2010 U.S. Census, Salvadorans are the fourth largest Hispanic group in the U.S. after Mexico (with almost 32 million people), Puerto Rico (with 4.6 million), and Cuba (with 1.7 million).³ While these groups each grew from the 2000 Census (54%, 35%, and 43% respectively), the 1.6 million Salvadorans in the U.S represented a growth of 151% from 2000. If they continue at this rate of growth, Salvadorans will surpass Cubans to become the third largest Hispanic group in the U.S. by 2020, and they will be coming close to the number of Puerto Ricans. With this rise in immigrants, a similar growth in their churches is to be expected, and Misión Cristiana Elim is without a doubt, the largest indigenous Pentecostal movement in El Salvador.

History of Misión Cristiana Elim

While both Protestantism and Pentecostalism entered El Salvador at about the same time in the early twentieth century, both faced opposition and grew slowly in the heavily Roman Catholic dominated culture of Central America. The civil war of the 1970’s and 1980’s left a spiritual vacuum as foreign missionaries left the country and the Roman Catholic Church faced its own leadership crisis with the assassination of Archbishop Romero. This spiritual vacuum would be filled by the attraction of Pentecostalism, and it was in this period that Misión Cristiana Elim was born. Elim was a movement founded in Guatemala by Dr. Othoniel Ríos Bárquelas, who sent Sergio Sólorzano to start the movement in El Salvador with nine people in May 1977.⁴ Elim in El Salvador split from the Guatemalan group over doctrinal issues in 1983, but continued a slow, steady growth.
only grew at an amazing pace during the civil war, but spread outside of El Salvador as refugees left the country.5

In 1985, Misión Cristiana Elim encountered the cell church growth ideas of David Yonggi Cho of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea.6 The following year, under founding pastor Sergio Sólorzano the twenty-five churches of the organization decided to close and the pastors become zone pastors of one united cell system. By adapting the cell growth system to the Salvadoran context, Elim began an explosive level of growth, so by 1988, attendance at their cell meetings numbered 20,000.

In 1995 Elim faced a major leadership crisis. Due to financial and sexual indiscretions by Pastor Sólorzano, the church leadership attempted to discipline their pastor and founder, but in 1997 he left the church. Mario Vega, a zone pastor from El Salvador’s second largest city, was picked to lead Elim. Under the leadership of Mario Vega and his commitment to the cell growth model, the church began to grow rapidly. Elim began to try and bring all of its cell groups together for a rally once a year. Comiskey notes, On November 8, 1998, Elim filled two stadiums simultaneously; on November 14, 1999, they filled three stadiums; and in November 2000, the church filled five stadiums with some 120,000 people attending events. In November 2002, Elim Church gathered more than 150,000 people spread over eight football fields.7

While much depends on how you calculate membership, this rapid growth led some to suggest that Elim might even be the second largest church in the world after Yoido Full Gospel Church.

In July of 2009, Pastor Mario Vega was asked to give the prayer at the inauguration of President Mauricio Funes.8 This was only the second time a Protestant was given this honor, and it was the first time a Pentecostal leader was given such prominence in Salvadoran politics. Pastor Vega continues to maintain connections with Cho’s Full Gospel Church and through a network of cell growth leaders in the Joel Comiskey Group9, where Pastor Vega blogs on a weekly basis.

Organization of Elim

The structure of Elim is a highly organized cell structure. In an interview, Manuel Vásquez,10 an Elim pastor, related that there are only fourteen “churches” in Elim, one for each capital city of the fourteen departments of El Salvador, with San Salvador and Mario Vega being the main “church” and the others being districts. The districts are divided into zones, and under each zone pastor are a number of supervisors, who meet with individual cell leaders. Pastor Vásquez related that as district pastor, he oversees about
550 cells with about 15 people in each cell. Communication occurs through weekly meetings at most levels, but *Elim* also was an early proponent of radio and television mass media and has also spread on the internet.11 With their organization and radio network, *Elim* was able to organize its people within 24 hours of a massive earthquake in 2001 to arrange services and emergency assistance even before government aid began.12 Pastor Mario Vega13 has explained that every new convert to *Elim* begins a 26 week discipleship program which begins with theological training and spiritual formation, but quickly moves into leadership training as well. Every *Elim* member is a potential cell leader.

Due to its focus on the cell growth model, which empowers lay leadership, its strong spiritual foundation, and the tremendous movement of Salvadoran people out of the country as immigrants and refugees, *Elim* has unconsciously become a transnational immigrant church. Immigrants with a background in *Elim* can form their own cell groups anywhere they go, and as they get bigger they can self-replicate. Without any organized mission plan, *Elim* has now planted daughter churches in the United States, Central America, and even Europe.14 These daughter churches are organized along the same pattern as *Elim* in El Salvador, but they still look to Mario Vega and the mother church for theological leadership.

**Elim’s Theology and Training of the Laity**

*Misión Cristiana Elim* does not do its cell work as if it were an innovative idea, but from a conviction that it is about returning to the model of the New Testament church. Within that model, individual Christians had a much more active life than is currently understood. During the Reformation, Luther developed this idea from scripture, which is now referred to as “the priesthood of all believers.”15

The basic idea for *Elim* is that the functions of evangelization and education are not just the privilege of a few professionals dedicated to those functions but the work of all Christians. This is supported by Romans 15:14, “I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” (NIV). The role of ministers is to train believers to do the work of the ministry. As Ephesians 4:11-12 notes, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Consequently, ministers are called not to monopolize the function of teaching the saints, but to make a minister out of each of those saints. Every Christian should perform his/her teaching function in a small group, in their homes.
The New Testament has 32 verses that refer to the mutual edification that Christians should practice. It is said that Christians should love one another, exhort, teach, bear, forgive, serve, edify and host one another. It is also said that Christians should pray for one another, confess their faults to one another and bear the burdens of one another. The scenario presented in the New Testament is of an active church, very involved in the work of the ministry. Very different from the idea of a passive congregation where all “religious” functions are left to the pastor.

The core values of a cell or house meeting are: evangelization, fellowship and edification. These are the necessary components in every cell and must coexist in a balanced way. The primary purpose of cell work is not to seek the edification of a mega church; the most important purpose is to open up space so that each Christian can live the values of the universal priesthood of all believers. This also allows for the practice of effective principles for evangelization and mutual edification to occur.

In some cases, with God’s plans, because of the gifts given to each minister, and because of the environment, a cell can help give rise to the formation of a mega church. But if such a thing does not happen, what matters most is the experience of living the values and principles of the model. There are mega churches that are not cell churches and there are many churches that are cell churches but not mega churches. One thing does not necessarily imply the other.

What is implied in the cell work is that every believer is seen as a potential minister of the Gospel. And for that purpose, a training course for new cell leaders has been designed by Elim that is offered to each convert the week after his/her conversion, at the latest. This course lasts for 6 months and consists of 26 lessons that are imparted once a week. When a person believes in Jesus he/she is invited to start the training course. Of course, this person does not know the purpose of the course and he/she is not asked if they want to be a leader or not. Misión Cristiana Elim believes that as a new Christian he/she must practice their universal priesthood. In this way, each new convert sees the cell work as something natural to his or her new Christian life. Apart from that, he/she is involved with a cell from the very beginning. So, for the new convert, his/her new faith involves both the small gathering in the houses and the large gathering in the church building.

The first week of the training program, the convert receives a teaching entitled: “And now what?” Here he/she is taught about what happened the day of their conversion. They are encouraged to continue in the Christian life assuming their role as a Christian. Then, successively, the new convert is carried through themes such as the Bible, prayer, baptism in water, etc. After 13 weeks and an equal number of themes of basic Christianity, the
person begins to receive training on cell work. They start with themes such as defining what a cell is, what are the components of a cell, how they multiply, and so on. On the way, the person understands that he/she has been called and is training to become a new leader.

At the end of 26 weeks it is expected for that person to have received the baptism in water and to be ready to receive a cell as the person in charge. Multiplication of leaders is key to produce the multiplication of cells. In fact, the cell work is a leaders’ formation strategy. Cells only multiply when a new leader has been formed. You would probably think that a period of six months of training is too short to give a cell to a new believer. But we must not ignore the fact that although the training lasts six months, the new leader will continue to meet each week with his/her zone pastor. In addition, the new leader will have a coach, who is in charge of no more than five cells who will also counsel the new leader once a week, meeting with him or her and his or her cell group.

The training course for leaders is really only an introduction to a lifestyle that is to continue through the rest of our existence. For new believers, this is the Gospel they have known and so they do not conceive of Christianity differently. After 25 years of cell work, generation after generation of Christians have entered into this process to form a culture in which each member is conceived as a person with ministry responsibilities within and outside the church building. A Christian life is not limited to the schedule of weekly church services, but extends throughout every day and night. Neither is it limited to the church building, but it extends into neighborhoods and houses wherever the believer goes.

**Revitalization of the Church in Diaspora**

We began with the story of Rosa Campos in Toronto, Canada. Today, Misión Cristiana Elim has about 50 such groups across the U.S., each growing through cell groups with lay leadership and spreading in a vibrant way throughout Hispanic communities. In the process, they can provide a model for how immigrant transnational churches can be a vital part of the revitalization of the Church.

Not all transnational immigrant churches are like Elim. Given both the context of Salvadoran immigration and the ecclesiastical structure of cell groups led by empowered laity, Elim has the advantage of many potential leaders spread throughout a number of nations. Elim has succeeded because of several key internal factors. First, Elim uses a cell structure of leadership, which trains all members to be potential leaders. Second, they create a strong network of zones and supervisors, which allow gifted leaders to come from within the church. Third, Elim has a theologically strong and passionate leader.
to oversee the entire movement. Fourth, Elim holds a Pentecostal theology that emphasizes the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which allows people with limited educational opportunities, but who possess natural leadership abilities to succeed. Fifth, the cell church system requires little in the way of financial resources to start and maintain a church.

In addition, Elim has had to deal with both positive and negative elements of globalization and transnationalism. On the positive side, the political socio-economic situation has led to massive immigration, and unconsciously this has helped the spread of Misión Cristiana Elim. This has led to a growing network of people and churches across many cities and nations. In turn, these groups through the unofficial avenues of remittances help meet the immediate needs of many people in poverty in El Salvador, and some of these resources find their way back to Elim in gifts, tithes, and offerings from daughter churches as well as individuals.¹⁸

On the negative side of transnationalism and globalization, Elim in El Salvador is faced with growing social problems, for which people often turn to the church for help. Issues, such as the rise in gang violence and family related problems which result from split families and the emotional scars of children who feel abandoned by their parents, are growing.¹⁹ Financial costs rise, as the leadership needs to travel and communicate across national borders. The daughter churches outside of El Salvador will also face different challenges in each of their cultural contexts, and these challenges may not be well understood by the leadership back in El Salvador. Some of these challenges will also occur as more and more non-Salvadorans join this movement and bring concerns and issues, which may be unique to their places of origin.

From the example of Misión Cristiana Elim, several crucial elements for the success of immigrant churches can be observed. First, they will need a strong focus on lay leadership and teaching others to be leaders. Second, they will require a flexible structure, which allows the church to move and grow in uncertain situations. If the church is too centralized, local branches of the church might not have the opportunity to adapt to local needs that arise. Third, there will need to be a strong emphasis on theological training of the laity. Fourth, the church will need to have a well organized network that can help potentially isolated groups remain connected to the home church and its leadership as well as with other daughter churches.

Vibrant immigrant churches are springing up in the midst of the cities of Canada, the U.S., and Europe, often in areas where traditional churches are dying. Currently, many of these churches are functioning to help immigrants scattered by economic and political pressures to gather together into a new community, grounded in their cultural roots to deal with an often hostile new culture. Such churches often struggle to find leaders who understand their
home culture as well as the needs of their new environment, but churches like *Misión Cristiana Elim* may have found an effective solution through the empowering of lay leadership. Much more about the revitalizing influence of immigrant churches remains to be uncovered by studying churches like *Misión Cristiana Elim*. Meanwhile, people like Rosa Campos will continue to spread the gospel in house churches throughout the immigrant community in Toronto, Canada, the United States, and many other parts of the world, providing an essential avenue for the potential revitalization of churches in the West.

**End Notes**


2. In March of 1998, David Lopez from Los Angeles was sent to help organize a group in Houston that was forming. Currently this church now has 160 cell leaders and oversees a district spread out over Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, Rosenberg, and even Greeley, Colorado. The pastor estimates that 40% are Salvadoran, 20% U.S. born Hispanics, 15% Mexican, 15% Honduran, 5% Guatemalan, and 5% other assorted nationalities. The churches send money to support pastors in El Salvador and for other collaborative ministries. Once a year the pastor goes to El Salvador to meet with leaders and once a year leaders from El Salvador come to the U.S. to meet with pastors here. David Lopez of Iglesia de Restauracion, Inc., Mision Elim Internacional in Houston, Texas, Personal email, 20 Jan. 2011.


13 Mario Vega, Personal interview, 11 Jan. 2010 in Santa Ana, El Salvador.

14 According to their website (http://www.elim.org.sv/), Elim has churches in Belgium, Canada, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, and Mexico as well as the United States and El Salvador.

15 Luther did not specifically use this phrase, but the theological underpinning can be found in his 1520 tract, To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.

16 According to their website (http://www.elim.org.sv/), Elim currently has active churches in: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

17 N.C. Aizenman points out in an article that Elim is not just growing by immigration, but that many immigrants who were non-religious before immigrating are joining immigrant churches like Elim in the U.S., “Finding God in Their Adopted Homeland- At Churches Across Area, Central Americans Develop a Devotion They Never Had,” Washington Post, Jan. 22, 2006, Section A, page C1.


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_Counseling: an Expression of the Ministry of the Church_

Abstract

This introductory article is designed to introduce the concepts of pastoral counseling to the Hispanic community, which frequently does not have a developed ministry of pastoral counseling in their churches. This article discusses the biblical basis for this ministry and helps define it in light of the strong relational nature and existing practice of advice giving found within Hispanic cultures. Seeing pastoral counseling as an extension of community care and as more closely related to the informal practice of giving advice, helps make the ministry of pastoral counseling and pastoral care more accessible to ministries within the Hispanic community.

**Key Words:** pastoral counseling, pastoral care, church, ministry, Hispanic

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What is Counseling?

In any attempt at formal training in the area of counseling, be it clinical or conducted in the context of the church’s ministry, or just offered by those who want to help a friend find a better way out of a predicament, we must begin by providing a definition to help understand what counseling is and what it is not. One difficulty that makes this very complex, is the fact that the word “counseling” or any other connotation or term to suggest that activity, has been a part of our popular language long before it was assimilated and re-defined by professionals in the field of psychology and mental health. On the other hand, and as is nicely explained by Daniel Schipani, Spanish speakers have no consistent consensus on the meaning and use of the term. The richness of our language, the diversity of our people, and the geographic spread of Spanish speaking people complicate the reaching of a unified definition of what counseling and its practice actually means.

However, based on my personal and professional experience, I have concluded that most of the people I have had contact with in the Americas, intuitively assign this term to those activities where one person tries to help another by using words, or verbal and body expressions to provide some encouragement, relief, guidance, or solution to a problem. So far, I have not found much controversy in using the term “counseling” this way.

Let me use a personal illustration. Some time ago I was in the car with my then, 11-year old daughter, who shared with me a situation that happened at school to her, where she had listened and encouraged a classmate who had been discouraged by some school problems. After hearing her story, I commented that I thought she had advised her friend well and should consider a career in counseling. She just smiled in response to my remark. It was clear to me that she understood that her current role was to advise. It seems that even at an early age, the term “counseling” represented an activity that seemed natural for human beings.

Two questions that immediately arise are: “What do we mean when we say we are advising someone?” and, “In what way does this resemble the counseling process we are trying to address in this article?” Obviously, it would be very presumptuous to pretend to arrive at a definition that will satisfy everyone in his or her own diverse context. A more practical and achievable mission is to examine some ways of understanding this process, in order to see how it operates so that it becomes possible to facilitate the development of a community that helps others in all dimensions of life.

We begin with The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language’s definition of “counseling,” which is “the position of counselor, or the function of one who advises.” Obviously this is not a very precise definition for the purposes of our discussion. However, intuitively, this definition fits very well...
with what appears to be the most common or popular understanding of the counseling process, that is, the activity carried on by one who gives advice.

The same source continues to define “advice” as “an opinion or suggestion that is given or taken to do, or not to do, something.” The integration of both definitions could lead to the conclusion that the term “counseling” refers to the process of pointing someone in a certain direction, or to provide any criteria that helps the listener to resolve a doubt, conflict, or problem. This would be the activity that provides advice, that is, giving instruction, an opinion, or advice in order to help the counseled person out of their current situation. This understanding of the word “counseling” implies a directive attitude on the part of the person offering the advice, and a docile, passive, and/or receptive attitude on the part of the recipient. This also suggests a clear hierarchy, where counseling is perceived as an advantage, where one person has the knowledge and experience to guide the other person to their goal, plus it is assumed that the counselor has deciphered the maze of life and achieved a better situation than the one being advised.

The Bible offers a clear illustration of this model of counseling. In the book of Exodus we find the classic story of Moses, who after leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert on their journey to the Promised Land, stood in front of Mount Sinai when he visited his father-in-law Jethro. The biblical story says that,

The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?”

Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions.”

Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you.”

Given this tremendous spectacle, Jethro could not help but sympathize with his son-in-law and make some recommendations to help him successfully perform the task before the people. What’s interesting about this event is that in several of the translations of this passage, the word used to refer to these suggestions Jethro gives Moses is “advice”. In
that use of the word “advice”, Jethro immediately becomes a counselor. This is the case, then, where someone sees or hears what is happening, and using common sense, experience, and/or knowledge, provides suggestions or guidelines to facilitate the process in question. We have no evidence to indicate that Jethro was devoted to counseling as a profession, vocation, or even as a form of entertainment. However, he knew how to listen, observe, and provide timely advice. Jethro used his position as a patriarch, an elder, and as a father-in-law, which gave him the authority to advise the servant of God, who effectively applied the advice received.

This is a clear situation with which most of us can identify. I am sure many of us can relate situations where, after witnessing or hearing about something that seemed wrong or seemed to be going in the wrong direction, we used our array of personal experiences and knowledge to help. Situations like this make us counselors, if we agree with this way of defining counseling. Clearly, this type of counseling provides a service that every community needs. If only we were more attentive to the advice given by those who are ahead of us in life, and followed it, we would have saved a lot of headaches. However, this understanding of counseling does not do justice to more complex and organized processes found in its practice, whether in pastoral counseling or at the clinical level.

Continuing our exploration of the term and practice of counseling, we now turn to the contributions made by the area of pastoral counseling. For example, R. F. Hurding defines counseling as “an activity that seeks to help others achieve constructive change in some or all aspects of life, in the context of a caring relationship, where the boundaries are clearly defined.” Then the author continues differentiating counseling and psychotherapy by emphasizing two points; first, psychotherapy, according to Hurding, makes more deliberate and consistent use of psychological techniques and procedures, and second, the relationship that is developed in psychotherapy is essentially and exclusively, a professional relationship.

A definition like this perceives counseling as a discipline with a more “informal” character than psychotherapy, with a more personal and familial relationship, rather than a contractual relationship with a tone such as Hurding suggests occurs in psychotherapy. Here we suggest a model of pastoral counseling where psychological procedures are just tools of a second order, that is, to be used sporadically and only when needed, rather than to be understood as an integral part of any process of giving advice. One concern that arises in this approach is that when the author does not clearly present it this way, his definition implies that the practice of counseling does not require a professional level of training and structure to achieve maximum effectiveness in attaining the proposed level of care.
In an attempt to facilitate the understanding of the differences between these types of helping, Donald S. Browning offers three levels of pastoral work: pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and pastoral psychotherapy. Basically, Browning notes that the difference lies in the structural strength of the relationship given. That is, the level of the helping relationship is defined by the relational distance or closeness between the pastor and his or her parishioner. The more inclusive and closer relationship occurs in the context of pastoral care, since it includes formal and informal conversations, dialogues, and other types of interactions that do not respond to the limitations of space or time. You could say that this relationship suggests very vulnerable, fuzzy and fragile limits, while expectations are vast and varied.

At the other extreme, pastoral psychotherapy is presented as the most specialized of the three types. It is at this level that the relationship requires a contract with clauses specifying the expectations of the pastoral work. Additionally, this level of support assumes a professional framing, characterized by a greater distance of relationship modulated by therapeutic intentions, and for a fundamental and consistent use of psychological theories that inform the counseling process. Here the limits are much clearer and well defined.

Finally, we find pastoral counseling right in the middle of the two other levels mentioned. The relationship at this level requires more structure than in pastoral care, but not as much clarity of boundaries or rigidity like in pastoral psychotherapy. He argues that pastoral counseling is a mixture of certain features of the other two levels, producing a relationship with a certain level of professionalism and flexibility. The potential problem with this understanding of pastoral counseling is that if the elements are not mixed properly, the result could be counterproductive and even harmful.

Let me illustrate it this way. I run a similar risk when I am preparing my coffee. All good consumers of the pleasures offered by good coffee know that if you want to enjoy a good cup of that blessed elixir, it is necessary to combine a good quality coffee with other adequate ingredients. The optimum result is only achieved when the coffee is at the right temperature, has a hypnotic scent, as well as a flavor with the desired level of acidity. But what happens when we are faced with the differences of other people’s taste? For example, when I make coffee for my wife, I need to remember that she likes a mixture of half a cup of milk and a quarter cup of coffee, but not too hot, but I like it strong and warm, with only a little cream and no milk.

As you can see, this combination of ingredients can be very complicated, as we all have very different ways to “prepare” things. In processes much more complex and serious than the preparation of coffee, such as pastoral counseling, preferences may determine that a successful session for one
person, may be a big failure for another. Hence, it is necessary to have as clear a definition as possible, one that does not leave much room for confusion arising from personal preference or individual perspectives.

One last definition to explore here is that offered by Julia Batista Cortés, who argues that, “Pastoral counseling is the process by which the pastor facilitates an understanding of the conflictual situation and directs the counselee in deciding how to manage it. Faith resources, such as prayer, Bible reading and analysis, and reflection on God’s intervention in the lives of believers, are also utilized.”

In a previous page, and referring to the person of the counselor, the same author says: “…generally, a pastoral counselor is a helping professional with limited knowledge of the proper use of clinical models. However, some of these models can be turned into operational modalities of application, managed by counselors without extensive training.”

These two paragraphs summarize key ideas that require some more exploration on our part. The pastor is seen here as someone who facilitates a higher level of understanding or comprehension of the issue or conflict in question, while also focusing on advising about or recommending decisions that may affect the progress and possible outcome of the conflict or dilemma. In this role, the counselor is playing a quasi-managerial role, that is, the counselor is not fully in charge of the direction of the counseling, nor takes a position of an spectator of the process who is not involved in indicating the points that need to be addressed by the counselee. Again, we are talking about a delicate balance between observing and guiding, waiting, and taking the initiative.

The other striking point in this discussion is the idea that, although pastoral counselors have a limited knowledge and use of theories and clinical models, there is a possibility of integrating practical and abridged versions of some of these models, augmenting in that way, the skills and tools available to use in counseling. This is critical and non-negotiable for those who argue that pastoral counseling should be done only from the Bible and theology, without the intervention of theories and psychological or psychiatric practices. Unfortunately there are many examples of situations where the lack of clinical resources and tools did more harm than good, just as there are many cases where the pure clinical approximation, without any reference to faith and Christian spirituality, only caused more problems. There is a very important place for the direct or indirect use of the scriptures, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and the experience of faith in the counseling process, as well as the application of theories and psychological interventions.

On the other hand, the paragraphs mentioned above may be interpreted as implying the belief that pastoral counseling is the exclusive function of
the clergy of the church. That is, those who identify themselves as pastors, leaving no room for the pastoral ministry of the whole community of faith. Clearly, not all are called to counsel others, but many are, and the church itself, in its calling to minister and disciple others, has no choice but to include counseling as part of its pastoral service to others.

At this point, it is useful to remember Schipani’s words when referring to the pastoral care of the church, which suggests that it should be understood as: “... the multifaceted task of the community of faith, in light of God’s project for the world, in the midst of our concrete social reality.”13 In simple words, Jorge Barro says: “the pastoral role is, therefore, the mission of the whole and not solely the task of the pastor. Going much further, it is the charge of all the people (the universal priesthood of all believers) for all people.”14 That is, pastoring is everyone’s duty, to everyone. One of the aspects of this task is precisely the recognition that counseling is for you and your neighbors. In this sense, Schipani says “the church should be a place of health and healing, and an ecology of care and discipleship.”15 We are called, then, to allow the Holy Spirit to heal us, so that we can be used to heal others, becoming then, the true community of the King.16

How Do We Understand Counseling?

So far we have explored some authors, who from different contexts have reflected on the practice of counseling. My purpose has been to create a foundation that allows us to build our own understanding of this fundamental function of the church. As can be seen, all of these definitions make important contributions. My duty is now to try to integrate these definitions with my own experiences and knowledge of the practice of counseling. It is worth remembering that I use the term counseling in the generic sense, that is, in a general way and applicable to different levels of practice. When necessary, I will clarify my meaning more precisely.

Counseling is a contractual relationship between at least two people,17 where the counselor makes use of all available resources - spiritual and psychological - to facilitate the whole development of individuals and communities, and bring healing, restoration, reconciliation, and resolution to relationships and situations of conflict, injustice, and disease, thus collaborating with the Holy Spirit in the formation of a new person18 and establishing the Kingdom of God.

It is important to remember that there is no definition that satisfies everyone, here we can only propose one definition that can allow us to define the scope of our conversation, without sacrificing a pastoral psychology that is faithful to the sound doctrine found in the scriptures. However, the definition proposed in the previous paragraph includes elements that require further explanation. I intend to take on that task in the following pages.
Counseling as a Relationship

I will start by saying that counseling is primarily, and above all, a relationship or connection where, in an intentional and genuine way, the people involved create a common space for mutual knowing and understanding. This refers to the investment of time and the creation of the space required for a connection that is vital, authentic, and safe. On this point, I agree with Parsons when he says: “Therapy is realized in the counseling relationship and would not systematically occur outside of that context. The quality of the counseling relationship is, therefore, keystone to the helping process and thus needs to be of primary concern to all pastoral counselors.” In addition, the quality of that relationship will be defined by the level of investment that both sides make to think, feel, experience, and analyze together, mutually influencing each other in the process.

The idea of considering counseling as a relationship contradicts the tendency of many to rush to answer, do and solve, rather than take the necessary time to listen, experience, understand and know. I think we have all had the experience of trying to explain ourselves as well as possible but, without having finished explaining the situation, we were interrupted by our interlocutor, who already had some “advice” or opinion. Situations like these leave us with the impression that we were not heard or understood, much less known by the other; certainly there was an encounter, but not a relationship. Two people can meet without having to share or exchange, much less, know each other. The result is like trying to mix oil and water, both substances will always separate from each other, even if they are in the same jar. In other words, neither person can “contaminate,” or influence, the other.

There are more casual, or even accidental situations in counseling, where, if the people involved decide to, it is possible to generate the required quality of the relationship as we have defined it. We all remember the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Without sacrificing the theological purpose and hermeneutic wealth of this passage, I will dare to use it as an example of this point. It is clear from the passage that, humanly speaking, without counting divine omniscience; neither Jesus nor the Samaritan woman had met before this moment. Both share an encounter, seemingly casual, which became transformational, not only for her, but also for many in her community. Of note is the fact that Jesus takes the time to experience the heat and fatigue of the moment, and share it with this future disciple when he asks her for water. In the process of sharing the well and the water, he listens and responds. Jesus spends the time and pays the necessary attention to mark her life, and that of many others in her village. It is clear that the effectiveness of Jesus’ ministry responded to a variety of elements, and not only to his great ability to relate to those with whom he was in contact. However, there is much evidence that
confirms that those who physically met him were significantly affected by his availability and capability to both know the other person and be known by them. This is the kind of relationship that transforms and changes people.

Let us clarify that not all relationships are positive; there are some so destructive that people wish they had never occurred at all. Here, I am referring to a relationship that builds, creates, and re-creates those involved. This type of relationship is only possible as an extension of the grace and mercy of God, who interacts with Himself as the triune God, and who created human beings, the crown of creation, to relate to Him forever.23

The first chapter of the book of Genesis recounts God’s creative acts. For five days, God gave the task of creating day and night, the heavens, the oceans, seas and rivers, vegetation, sun and moon, and the flying, crawling, and swimming creatures of the earth; but it was not until the sixth day, that God, in relation to Himself, and as a team, created human beings. Only on this day do we read that the creative effort occurs in the context of a divine relationship, and as a product of the counsel of the Trinity. According to the biblical account, the rest of creation came after God spoke. There is no evidence in the text to argue that the Creator was given the task of consulting, thinking, or evaluating and as a team, create the rest of the universe, as happened when He created both man and woman. In the latter case, the Triune God got together, took time, and showed off creating the most sophisticated, complex, and beautiful part of creation.

Hoekema,24 when analyzing the original text, puts it as follows, “… we should interpret the plural as indicating that God does not exist as a solitary being, but as a being in fellowship with ‘others.’ Though we cannot say that we have here clear teaching about the Trinity, we do learn that God exists as a ‘plurality.’ What is here merely hinted at is further developed in the New Testament into the doctrine of the Trinity.”

In creation, human beings arise as an extension of the same divine nature: “… in the image of God, He created.” In other words, this creation is a representation of God Himself, carrying some divine traits. Hoekema25 argues that one of the divine aspects that God decided to share with humans was God’s relational nature, that is, as God does not live in solitude, human beings were created to interact, share, consult, and commune with each other. Everything good and bad happens in an environment shared by others, in relationship.

The text goes on to say that humanity was created with differences: “… male and female he created them.” Many tend to see differences as a threat because it is much easier to relate to those who look like me, think like me, and act like me. It is always more pleasant to relate to those who do not pose a challenge or a threat to us. Differences challenge us; they force us to leave our familiar preferences and consider the possibility that my perspective is
not the only one, nor the best. Nevertheless, differences also complement and enrich us. The only way I know I am different is when I notice the differences of others, which only happens when I relate to them. While I am alone, or just with those who look like me, it is not possible to see differences, and life becomes more dull and boring.

I remember the example my friend and colleague, Dr. Tapiwa Mucherera, shared with me. Tapiwa is a pastoral counseling professor who is originally from Zimbabwe, Africa. He did not realize the fact that he spoke English with an accent until someone in the United States told him. In his country, everyone who spoke English sounded the same, so he did not realize he had any particular accent. The difference in the pronunciation of English in this country caused him to realize that there are other accents in the world.

Finally, the new being created by God was appointed to a very specific mission, to relate with the rest of creation: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” On one hand, it is clear that it was God Himself who gave humans the mission and did not leave it as a choice. Jorge E. Maldonado explains it this way:

The church does not invent its ministries, only obeys what it has been called to. These are part of the overall mission of the church, which is none other than the mission of the Father, revealed in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and manifested with power through the Holy Spirit. So all ministries, including pastoral counseling, have their origin in God Himself. The church needs to assume the ministry of counseling as certainly pastoral.

Our being and doing come from God. It is God who gives meaning to our lives and our ministry. The other point that we rescue from that passage is the reference that the work of the church only occurs in a relational context. The kingdom of God is expressed in the context of a relational ecology, where we, first and foremost worship our king, and in obedience to his delegation and mandate, care for and manage the rest of creation but only in community, evaluating the impact that our intervention in creation has on the rest of the global community. We cannot fulfill our mission on earth without the company and help of others, nor can we neglect our mission and ecological responsibility.

What I want to emphasize here is that relating to others is part of our genetic code, part of our nature as human beings, and it is also the context in which the act of creation and re-creation by God occurs. In some measure, counseling provides a space for divine intervention in the lives of many people. It is in the context of counseling that God repairs much
of the damage done by destructive relationships or a lack of healthy ones. In other words, the frame of counseling is God’s workshop, where God, by the presence and direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, heals, re-places, re-builds, re-news, and transforms the damage done by sin and the work of the prince of darkness. It is imperative to conceptualize counseling as a multidimensional relationship where the Triune God is present and active, using therapeutic interventions, whether intentional or not, conscious or unconscious, and the verbal and non-verbal exchanges of those involved, to draw them near to Him.

In this sense, counseling becomes one more element of God’s redemptive plan. Paul summed it up this way: “For God was pleased to dwell in Him (Jesus) in all fullness and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.” The mission of God is to bring us closer to Him; and God, in His wisdom and grace, has decided to use the church as the missionary agent to carry out this supreme task, to the glory and honor of His name. It is in this context, that this missionary church, or agent of God’s mission, develops specific outreach ministries to those in need of reconciliation, in order to disciple them for Christ, so that they can enjoy the fruit of this reconciliation with their Creator, which is Shalom, the true and complete peace of God. Counseling is one of those ministries that the church uses to facilitate the encounter between God and His creation. Pat Contreras Ulloa defines pastoral psychology as, “… a ministry contributing to the overall health, by the restoration, growth, and empowerment of human beings, both in their personality and in their relationships, in their historic and cultural context, so that every person and every community can achieve the goal of human fulfillment, which God has called us to in Christ Jesus.”

In this sense, counseling can be seen as part of God’s redemptive relationship. It is in this context that the Holy Spirit’s presence is evident, by inviting counselees to gain new understanding of their life’s dynamics, hardships and sorrows, and a fresh vision of God’s plan for people’s lives. Of course, this is a relationship with unique characteristics and well-defined parameters, requiring special attention, or else, the relationship would lose its effectiveness and functionality.

Let us conclude, then, by claiming that counseling is a relationship between three persons, the counselor, the counselee and the Triune God, who uses every resource available, in the here and now of the therapeutic moment, to reveal Himself, bringing healing, restoration, and reconciliation to His creation. It is God’s presence, in that particular time and space that makes it Christian counseling; a concrete expression of the ministry to which the church has been called.
End Notes

1 Some very good arguments exist to suggest the use of the term “advise” instead of “counseling.” For example, Daniel S. Schipani, Psicología y Consejo Pastoral: Perspectivas Hispanas, by Daniel S. Schipani, Pablo Jiménez, eds., 3-25. Decatur, GA: Libros AETH, 1997, explains his choice of the term rather than pastoral counseling, and Paul Polischuck in El Consejo Terapéutico: Manual para Pastores y Consejeros, defined therapeutic advice as “a complex entity that encompasses a variety of approaches with the intention of helping other people.”

2 Leona Tyler, The Work of the Counselor, 3rd ed. 1969. Here we are assuming that the word and the practice of “counseling” is not unique, nor was an invention of the mental health disciplines. Gary S. Belkin, 1988, identifies six different resources from which the counseling profession originated. These resources date from the late 19th century. There are many historical evidences proving that counseling, especially as a practice, has existed since ancient ages.


4 It is important to note that my children live with two professional counselors and counseling educators, so it is a family practice to talk about counseling with them.


8 The term “informal” is being used to emphasize the non-use of rules, norms, and conventions required in the practice of psychotherapy.


11 Cortés, op. cit., p. 51.


15 Schipani, op. cit., p. 19.

16 The Kingdom Community refers to all those who belong to the kingdom of God. The Church, as a community, belongs to their Lord, who is the king of this new kingdom. This kingdom is present and active in the history of humankind, deeply interested in all aspects of the present and the future of those who know him and serve God, as well as those not yet participating in God’s kingdom. The
Church serves as the agent of this kingdom, infiltrating the lines of the anti-kingdom and doing the work commissioned by her Lord and King. For a wider and more in depth discussion of this topic, read the book *The Community of the King*, 2nd ed., 2004, Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, by Howard A. Snyder.

17 It should be clarified that this relationship can also be given to couples, families, and groups. Obviously these other methods require special skills and abilities.


20 Understand that here, counseling and therapy are synonyms, even if it can be argued that there are sufficient differences between them.


27 Note that Dr. Maldonado used the term “advice” to define the activity that has been defined here as counseling.

28 Colossians 1:19-20.


31 In order to not complicate things even more, we will use the terms pastoral psychology and pastoral counseling synonymously. This position invites a heated debate because, although the concepts are closely related, there are clear differences between them. Just to mention one, someone can argue that pastoral psychology refers to the theoretical discipline of the integrated pastoral psychology practice of the church, while pastoral counseling refers to the same activity of implementing psychological theories and concepts to shepherd others. One emphasizes the theoretical, while the other focuses on the practice.
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From the Archives: A. A. Allen in Cuba (From the Carver Healing Collection)

One of the most fascinating collections in the archives of B.L. Fisher Library is the Carver Healing Collection, which encompasses a large amount of material on various Pentecostal healing ministries, primarily from 1955 to 1994. One of the largest segments of this collection is devoted to the work of Asa Alonso Allen (1911-1970), a controversial figure in the faith healing movements of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Born in poverty in Sulphur Rock, Arkansas, he was converted by a woman evangelist in a small Methodist church in 1934 and went on to be ordained in the Assemblies of God as a pastor in 1936. By 1947 he was pastor in an Assemblies of God church in Corpus Christi, Texas. After hearing Oral Roberts speak in a Dallas tent meeting and seeing the miracles that occurred, he left the pastorate for full-time evangelism. He purchased a large tent and proceeded to hold tent revivals and healing services around the country. Allen mentored both R.W. Shambach and Don Stewart, and was connected early on to Gordon Lindsay’s Voice of Healing movement.
In 1955, A.A. Allen was arrested for drunken driving in Knoxville, Tennessee. He ended up leaving the state and forfeiting his bail instead of standing trial, although he held that he was innocent and that the devil was trying to destroy his ministry. The Assemblies of God and Gordon Lindsay withdrew their support of Allen. Allen formed his own ministry, Miracle Revival Fellowship, and began publishing *Miracle Magazine*, often calling on Pentecostal churches to be independent of denominations. He purchased the revival tent used by Jack Coe after Coe’s death in 1956 and ultimately founded A. A. Allen Revivals, Inc. and Miracle Valley Bible College in Phoenix, Arizona. These ministries were quite successful during his life, and as a result A. A. Allen took his revival and healing work abroad, making regular trips to Cuba and Mexico, as well as the Philippines.

The photographic images in this article are from an early revival A.A. Allen held in Cuba, probably in 1956 or early 1957. Many of these images were probably taken in Santiago de Cuba, where A.A. Allen established a revival center led by pastor Luis M. Ortiz of the Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal de Cuba. By 1958, Allen had established a radio network throughout Cuba with 11 radio stations, 25 new church plants, 40 national workers, and five radio programs including La Hora de Liberación, the Spanish version of Allen’s *The Hour of Deliverance* program which aired all over the United States. Ortiz and another pastor, Jose Montalvo, were involved in Allen’s Spanish ministry in Cuba from as early as 1954, and together opened the Santiago Revival
Center in 1956, although Ortiz also spent time in Venezuela and in Dallas, Texas working on the Spanish language tapes of La Hora de Liberación. Before the opening of the Revival Center, Ortiz made the broadcasts for the show from the church he pastored in Santiago. While Cuba was the first and primary focus of A.A. Allen’s Spanish language ministry, he also broadcast programs in Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Chile, as well as broadcasting into Spain from Morocco, since the Spanish government would not allow Allen to preach in Spain.

Allen appears to have been deeply committed to Spanish language ministry, as his only daughter Mary, and her husband Daniel G. Smith, were sent as the first missionaries of the Miracle Revival Fellowship to Mexico in 1959, and later Venezuela. But Cuba was Allen’s first and largest outreach in the Hispanic world. He did this at a very tricky time politically, after Batista came to power in a coup in 1952, but before Castro took power on January 1, 1959. During most of Allen’s Spanish language ministry in Cuba, the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) was in progress. A.A. Allen’s last revival in Cuba was actually held in April of 1959 (just months after Castro came to power), when Spanish-speaking pastors from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Florida came with Allen. In the report on this revival, Miracle Magazine reported, “Revolutionary soldiers, wearing beards and carrying long rifles, reminded us that although the revolution was ‘over,’ it was not forgotten!”
The last report on Cuba is from the August 1959 issue of *Miracle Magazine*, and sounds as if everything is normal. *Miracle Magazine* becomes silent on Cuba until October of 1960, when Cuba’s fall to Communism is cited as the reason to begin a revival campaign in Haiti to preach the Gospel, because, “Next year may be too late!” Spanish language ministry shifted to Venezuela following a revival there with pastor Luis G. Goldona and his brother Oscar in January of 1961. It is interesting to note, that while *Miracle Magazine* does not report on Cuba again, or the situation following the Communist Revolution for the ministry left in Cuba, the magazine itself goes from articles primarily devoted to healings and miracles, to consistently having at least one lengthy article in each issue devoted to promoting anti-communistic ideas or warning of communist plots in the United States. Clearly the effect of Allen’s ministry in Cuba had a powerful influence on his own views on ministry in general.

An A.A. Allen Revival in Cuba, the 1950s

A. A. Allen’s ministry stretched far beyond his Spanish-language work. He was one of the first healing revivalists to go on television, was an early proponent of what would become the Prosperity Gospel, and was seen by many as a slick con artist. However, he also was one of the first to desegregate revival meetings, was a strong advocate for the poor, and led thousands to Christ and an experience with the Holy Spirit. He critiqued denominations for relying more on Sunday Schools than converting people at the altar for their growth, and left a legacy of faith healing and revivalism in many different parts of the world.
The death of A.A. Allen was as controversial as his life. He was found dead in front of a television set in the Jack Tar Hotel in San Francisco, California at age 59. His blood alcohol level was .36 according to the coroner and numerous pain pills were found with him. Supporters claim that he was trying to deal with the pain of arthritis in his knee, while others, including the coroner, attribute his death to liver failure due to acute alcoholism.
The rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America owes much to the work of Pentecostal evangelists and faith healers, such as A.A. Allen, and many others who are less well-known, who helped plant seeds of faith among the poor and marginalized of the region. Cuba has undergone a very rocky history in the twentieth century, but current statistics show that in a country of 11.26 million people, there are around 1.04 million Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics compared to 5.87 million Roman Catholics, and according to the reports they continue to be one of the fastest growing groups in Cuba, as in much of the rest of Latin America. While modern Pentecostalism in Latin America can look very different from what A.A. Allen envisioned, it often still has a strong belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and bring miracles in the midst of daily life. A.A. Allen’s life once again shows that even with the many flaws of human beings, God has a way of using all of those who strive to follow Jesus Christ.

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary’s mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.
Endnotes

1 All photographic images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L. Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.

2 Biographical information for this article comes from the B.L. Fisher archive material as well as the Miracle Valley website (http://miraclevalley.org/aaallen.html) and The Voice of Healing website (http://www.voiceofhealing.info/05otherministries/allen.html).

3 B.L. Fisher Library archives contain many issues of A.A. Allen’s Miracle Magazine, and his other booklets and tracts, as well as copies of the legal documents and newspaper clippings from the DUI case in Knoxville.


9 See anonymous, “The Islands Call”, in Miracle Magazine, vol. 6 (1), October 1960, pages 6-7.

10 There is a special missionary issue of Miracle Magazine covering the Venezuelan revival in vol. 6 (8) from May 1961.

11 B.L. Fisher Library archives also contain a copy of the coroner’s report, memorabilia from A.A. Allen’s funeral and memorial service, as well as other newspaper clippings on his life and death.

The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy
Aristotle Papanikolaou
Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press
2012, 232 pp., paper, $27.00
ISBN: 978-0-268-03896-0
Reviewed by Nathan Crawford

In his *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*, Aristotle Papanikolaou argues for a more positive attitude on the part of Christian theology in relation to liberalism and the liberal project. Papanikolaou wants to counter the critiques of liberalism put forward by those in the theological camps of Postliberalism (namely Stanley Hauerwas) and Radical Orthodoxy (namely John Milbank), while also critiquing those Eastern Orthodox theologians that have been critical of Western liberalism. Instead, Papanikolaou mines his own Eastern Orthodox tradition to put forward an understanding of the political through a theology of divine-human communion.

The driving force behind *The Mystical as Political* is the doctrine of *theosis*. As Papanikolaou makes clear, this is a doctrine that is central to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of Christianity. However, he reorients the idea from becoming divine to the communion that takes place between the divine and human. With this in mind, he understands politics as the place that ensures the possibility of making a choice for divine-human communion to take place, as well as the choice to reject it. Interestingly, the political has to keep open the possibility of the non-church in order for the church to rightly complete its task of witnessing to the Kingdom of God. The community that is distinct from the church, though, is still created by God and so contains a good internal within itself. It is with this goodness that the church and Christian theology seeks to build connections, living out the aspects of the good internal to the “secular” community. By working together on those things that both communities hold as good—like freedom of speech and
religion, certain human rights, a commitment to democracy, etc.—the church and secular community can accomplish the work of both communities. This position that works from the divine-human communion means that Christian theology must engage in a nonviolent approach to all things, including the secular society. This nonviolence includes the threat and use of physical violence, along with violent rhetoric and intellectual violence (146).

In making the argument that he does, Papanikolaou offers a distinctive critique of two major streams of Christian theology in the contemporary world: Postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy. These two theological approaches have dominated much in the realm of political theology and Papanikolaou offers his position as a corrective. In regards to both, he posits the idea of the necessity for a secular world to exist so that divine-human communion can take place. Challenging the ontology of participation that Radical Orthodoxy utilizes, Papanikolaou talks of an ontological realism that acknowledges God as Creator of all things, but that also takes into account that there is that which is separate from God and the church. Against the work of the Postliberal school, Papanikolaou argues that theology cannot conflate the work of the church with the work of the secular world. While the two intertwine at times, they do have separate agendas and, in order for divine-human communion to take place, must stay separate. With these critiques, Papanikolaou can put forward a vision for the political as the place that gives the ability for divine-human communion to take place. From the divine-human communion that takes place in the church, the body of Christ can then begin to enter the political fray in a way that brings the secular into contact with the Kingdom of God. Through this interaction, the church can accomplish its mission of bringing the Kingdom of God to the whole world.

Four aspects of *The Mystical as Political* strike me as noteworthy. First, the text is a major contribution to the ongoing discussion between Christian theology and the political arena; however, Papanikolaou makes a significant contribution by giving an Eastern Orthodox voice to the conversation. Second, Papanikolaou gives a theological critique and embrace of the liberal project, offering criticism where necessary while acknowledging the positives. Third, he develops a distinctively Eastern Orthodox perspective on divine-human communion (*theosis*) that brings the doctrine to a place of relevancy in the contemporary world. Fourth, for Methodist and Wesleyan theologians, Papanikolaou’s approach to divine-human communion presents a great deal of insight for our own understandings of sanctification and Christian perfection, most notably how it functions in a political context.

In all, while an academic theologian writes *The Mystical as Political*, the text is lucid, clear, and will be a great help to many people who are struggling with the place of the Christian church in our contemporary world. Anyone that is
familiar with church history, discussions of Christian theology, and semi-aware of the political climate of the West will find many valuable contributions.

**Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views**
Beilby, James K., and Paul R. Eddy, eds.
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2012, ix, 230 pp., paper, $19.99

Reviewed by Fredrick J. Long

This well-edited “Four Views” volume by Baker (with footnotes and indices) fills a niche not covered by the “four views” books by Zondervan on, e.g., Salvation, Hell, Eternal Security, Divine Providence, Baptism or IVP on, e.g., Women in Ministry and Atonement. These books feature proponents presenting their views followed by the others critiquing these views. Absent here is a concluding essay. However, the forty-five page (!) introductory essay by editors Beilby (prof. of theology) and Eddy (prof. of biblical and theological studies) virtually justifies purchasing the book, in some ways outshining the other contributions.

The first essay by Wink (NT theologian) edited with Gareth Higgins (spiritualist peace activist) explicates “the World Systems” approach. For Wink, “The Satan of the Bible is more akin to an archetypal reality, a visionary or imaginal presence or event experienced within” (58). Satan is a human creation to label what is evil/wrong with the world, although “the experience of Satan is a brute and terrifying fact” (59). The responses echoed my own that Wink treats Scripture inconsistently, allegorizing plain texts and emphasizing certain passages at the expense of others.

Powlison (faculty of Westminster in pastoral counseling) presents “The Classical Approach” (a.k.a. from a reformed perspective), wearily walking through Eph 6:10-20 as if this were a manual on spiritual warfare. Nevertheless, Powlison rightly expounds that believers have access to God’s Messianic armor and, by practice of the means of grace, combat moral and spiritual evil in the world. Powlison concludes with two testimonial accounts of “problematic” exorcisms (one in the US; the other in the African context).

Boyd (pastor) presents “The Ground-Level Deliverance Model.” His exposition aligns quite well with the practical assumptions and practices of many Christians: *intercessory prayer matters in our resistance to evil forces*. The strength of Boyd’s presentation is in tracing the conflict of God against personal, spiritual powers in the OT followed by describing the NT understanding of victory over Satan through a life of discipleship to Christ in love and helping those oppressed.
Wagner (former missions faculty at Fuller) and Greenwood (deliverance minister) explicate “The Strategic-Level Deliverance Model,” discussing spiritual mapping, identificational repentance, prophetic decrees and acts, and power encounters, etc. Their reviewers (whose collective response is devastating) question the subjective nature of discernment and assessment of success, as well as their exegesis, use of mythic stories, and triumphalist perspective.

The essays and responses are thought provoking. However, it is diabolical that Matt 6:13 (“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One”), John 17:15 (“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the Evil One”), Eph 5:27 (“nor give the devil a foothold”), and 1 John 5:18 (“We know that no one who is born of God sins; but the One being born from God keeps him and the Evil one does not touch him”) are not cited, let alone expounded upon anywhere here; and James 4:7 (“Submit therefore to God; stand against the Devil and he will flee from you”) is cited (not quoted) only briefly in a footnote (106n5).

**Women’s Bible Commentary, 3rd edition**
Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds.
Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox
2012, 704 pp., hardback, $50.00
ISBN: 978-0664237073

Reviewed by David J. Zucker

For a one-volume, scholarly, and also readable, women’s commentary on the Bible (Hebrew Scriptures, Christian Scriptures, the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books) this work is unbeatable. The many authors are a who’s who of North American women scholars, some of who are also feminist scholars. This newest version of *Women’s Bible Commentary* is a revised, updated, and improved iteration of the superb first edition published twenty years ago. At over six hundred fifty pages, it is about fifty percent larger than the original work that Newsom and Ringe edited. Further, there are thirteen specially commissioned articles for this volume. These essays “sketch the interpretation of significant female figures from the Bible.” Amongst these special articles are, “Eve and Her Interpreters,” “Sarah, Hagar, and Their Interpreters,” “Miriam and Her Interpreters,” and “Job’s Wife and Her Interpreters.” In terms of the Christian Scriptures, there are articles on “Mary and Her Interpreters,” and “Mary Magdalene and Her Interpreters.” Other articles of special note include “How Women Interpret the Bible,” “Women as Biblical Interpreters Before the Twentieth Century,” “Women’s Religious Life in Ancient Israel,” “Beyond the Canon,” and “The Religious
Lives of Women in the Early Church.” There are also special articles in the Apocrypha section.

Feminist biblical criticism has changed profoundly in the past two decades. “Issues that were just beginning to be explored . . . the hermeneutical significance of sexual identity, analysis of masculinity, and postcolonial positioning” are now part of feminist criticism. Additionally, there has been an explosion of feminist biblical critics, women as well as men. The editors explain that they agonized over several issues: whether to limit this volume to women writers (and that answer was “yes”), which articles to include from previous volumes, and which younger women working in the field to ask to write new articles. Former authors were most gracious in stepping aside, and those who reappear here revised their previous work, in some cases significantly.

Not all biblical books are of equal interest in terms of a women’s commentary. Many chapters are but a half-dozen pages in length, others that raise feminist issues run ten to twenty pages. Chapters devoted to biblical books and to the works of the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical literature have three sections: Introduction, Content, and Bibliography. The commissioned articles, addressing the reception history of such women as those mentioned above (Eve, Sarah, Mary . . . but also Rahab, Deborah, Jael, Jephtha’s Daughter, Delilah, Jezebel, Judith and Susannah) feature the article with a Bibliography. Reception history articles often include observations on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim responses to these women, and their depiction in the arts.

What “sets the Women’s Bible Commentary apart from others is its authors’ acknowledged commitment to read the biblical texts through the varied lenses of women’s experiences in ancient and modern religious and cultural contexts.” While readers vary in their understanding of the Bible, for many women the authority of the Bible is often a matter of ambiguity or ambivalence. One of the editors explains, “women reading the Bible have found themselves on alien and even hostile turf.” In fact, both “the silence of women and their silencing – the contempt in which they are held and the violence with which they are treated – in the Bible mirror the realities of many women’s lives. For them, the Bible is experienced as giving a divine stamp of approval to their suffering” (Ringe, “When Women Interpret the Bible”).

The book also addresses the suggestion that readers often unconsciously are influenced by centuries of interpretation that are nearly indistinguishable from the text itself. Two examples are household codes in the Christian Scriptures, which mandate the submission of women (Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7), and the history of interpretation among Christians that “often contrasted the worst wrongs among the varied teachings concerned
with women in later rabbinic writings with the best of the values and practices related to women attributed to Jesus.”

While there is much to be gained in just reading this wonderful anthology, bibliographies throughout the book provide direction for further study.

Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling
Dean Flemming
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic
2013, 288 pp., paper, $24.00
ISBN: 978-0830840267

Reviewed by Jeremy B. Griffin

Dean Flemming, known for his book Contextualization in the New Testament, has written another work on a biblical theology of the mission of God, with the goal of helping the church properly understand its mission. Flemming introduces his argument in the introduction, saying that rehashing the debate of whether evangelism should be in word or in deed misses the overarching themes of mission in the Scriptures. For Flemming, being, doing and telling relate together and are inseparable in the mission of God’s people. His book joins the works of other authors, such as William Abraham, Craig Bartholomew, Michael Goheen, Darrell Guder, Ronald Sider, and Christopher Wright, who promote a similar understanding of mission for the church.

Chapters one and two cover select portions of the Old Testament, considering how Israel functioned in mission. Flemming maintains that Israel was to be a people to whom other nations were attracted, and Israel in mission was more about how they lived before other cultures than a message they brought to the surrounding nations. Chapters three and four cover the Synoptic Gospels, as Flemming looks at Jesus’ whole mission, which becomes the mission of the church, in word and deed, through proclamation and demonstration, with no dividing line between these actions. In each Gospel, Flemming gives its audience, purpose, and Jesus’ main function in that Gospel. Looking at the Gospel of Matthew, instead of skipping to the end of the Gospel to find mission in the Great Commission passage, Flemming promotes that the whole book be read in light of the final passage. Chapter five surveys the Gospel of John with Flemming viewing that mission is ultimately rooted in the loving character of God. Chapter six covers Acts with Flemming showing that the church should not only speak the good news but also demonstrate it through their actions and character.

Flemming confronts one of the most difficult issues in Pauline studies in chapter eight: whether Paul required churches to speak the gospel to
the watching world. Flemming carefully demonstrates that Paul expected churches to witness with their words and lives. I found this section to be one of the highlights of the book. Chapter nine covers First and Second Peter with Flemming noting that for Peter, doing good, holy conduct, and nonverbal witness were all forms of mission. Chapter ten surveys mission in Revelation, which is not the first place people turn to understand mission, but Flemming demonstrates that mission in Revelation, for the church, includes both separation from and engagement with the world.

This work is a challenging read for those who subscribe to the view that either proclamation or conduct in evangelism has precedence over the other, for as Flemming demonstrates, the mission of God is about the church engaging in being, doing, and telling, with these functions inextricably linked. This book provides an admirable biblical overview of mission and can be recommended to pastors, mission leaders, or professors who are looking for a book with a multifaceted approach to the biblical theology of mission.

Grace Under Pressure: Negotiating the Heart of the Methodist Traditions
Joerg Rieger and Jeorg Rieger
Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church
2011, 110 pp., paper, $12.95
ISBN: 978-0938162773

Reviewed by Nathan Crawford

In Grace Under Pressure, Joerg and Jeorg Rieger set out an agenda for the church as a place of resistance to empire. They do so by developing an understanding of the work of God in places of “pressure,” or those places where there is oppression and marginalization, where empire is in control. The Riegers argue that in these pressure points God’s grace is not only made evident, but that this is where God works. They believe that the exposition of God’s grace has implications for the way in which theology and church is done. First, they argue this overcomes a “top-down” approach to Christianity by understanding God as working from the “bottom-up.” This implication comes from the Riegers’ continued insistence upon the idea that Christianity begins with the least and moves to the greatest, instead of starting with the greatest and having these people set the parameters for Christianity. Second, their emphasis on God’s grace working under pressure leads to a way of thinking that does not embrace the liberal-conservative dichotomy and also does not slip into a “middle road” approach. Instead, the
Riegers make the argument that all of these approaches are asking the wrong fundamental questions as well as proceeding in a fundamentally problematic way in doing both church and theology. To overly simplify their argument, the Riegers contend that there must be an emphasis upon both orthodoxy and orthopraxy with an understanding of how each is tied to the other and influences the other.

The Riegers make their argument through an introduction, four chapters, and conclusion. The introduction serves as a clearing of the path by critiquing religious self-centeredness, which they say tends to make God in our image instead of our being made in God’s image. This opens the possibilities for offering a bottom-up approach that still evades being a middle way. The first chapter investigates the Riegers’ claim that Methodism flourishes when it recovers the place of God’s grace in the various pressures of life. They say that grace is not captured in the mainline but at the margins as God works in the least, not the greatest, an echo of both Jesus and John Wesley. The second chapter articulates how it is that Christians can find God’s grace in the margins by showing the necessity of both works of piety and works of mercy as means of grace. In doing this, following Wesley, the Riegers keep together love of God and love of neighbor in an intimately bound relationship where one is not possible without the other. By doing this, the Riegers also believe they challenge the structures that keep people poor, because the works of mercy are not merely charity, but the actual experiencing of God’s grace in the relationship one has with the oppressed. Chapter three, then, expands upon the role of the church when works of mercy are a means of grace. This chapter counters a “free-market capitalistic” understanding of grace (i.e., that grace is something that can be earned or commodified through certain actions) by arguing for grace as a gift from the One who cannot be commodified. In so doing, humanity can now see how God brings grace from the margins, where pain and suffering are prevalent, to create a new creation in the here and now. The fourth chapter details how Methodism has been involved in postcolonial approaches to empire. At times, this has resulted in becoming complicit in empire, but most of the time, as the Riegers show, Methodism works as a force of resistance to empire. He shows this by detailing various places that Methodism begins from the margins of society and reorients priorities around these, instead of trying to make the margins look like the broader culture. This chapter, then, shows how the embrace of bottom-up power has worked as a force for good inside of Methodism. The Riegers conclude the book by reiterating the need for alternative structures of leadership. Primarily, they advocate a church leadership that is predicated upon listening. They say that the means of grace, both piety and mercy, teach one to listen to both God and neighbor. Listening, then, opens the eyes of
the church to those places where we had not previously seen the work of God, in the margins of oppression and marginalization.

The Riegers’ approach and argument is impressive and necessary. However, *Grace Under Pressure*’s one weakness is in its lack of concrete examples. For those of us who do constructive theology, this is a continued critique. However, due to the nature of the Riegers’ book, examples of “pressure points” as well as instances where one theologized from such a point would be quite helpful. As it is, the Riegers point to places of pressure without being specific, as well as giving clues for a way of proceeding without being concrete. This could be a frustration to some readers. However, it should not deter people from reading what is a very compact, accessible, and clear approach to how church should be done, especially in light of current concerns with empire. Overall, I would highly recommend it to anyone involved in ministry or who is involved in training those who will be involved in ministry.

**1 and 2 Timothy and Titus**
The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary series
Robert W. Wall with Richard B. Steele
Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
2012, 416 pp., paper, $24.00

Reviewed by Isaiah Luke Allen

Opening this book, I silently asked: If scholarship does not advance from its current stalemate regarding the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, what value does new insight into their moral and theological message hold? Robert Wall, Professor of Scripture and Wesleyan Studies at Seattle Pacific University, where he has been for 35 years, offers a compelling response to this question. Wall has developed a critically astute canonical approach to interpretation, and he consistently applies it to the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) in this mature volume from Eerdmans’ *Two Horizons* commentary series.

Wall argues that, as sacred texts, the Pastoral Epistles derive their authority from the continued inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who speaks through them to new generations of the church that perform scriptural truth as canon in the absence of Paul. According to Wall, this argument diminishes the importance of, or contentions regarding, whether the historical Paul wrote them. As far as Wall is concerned, the customary arguments against historic Pauline authorship are not sufficiently convincing, but he does not enter into the debate. He does not seek to present new arguments for or
against Paul’s authorship of the pastorals, because Wall’s canonical approach obviates it as a relevant question. In a sense, the church has engendered a new moment of authorship (or authorization) by virtue of canonizing the epistles, so their authority derives from the solid evidence of centuries of canon “performance,” not the debatable provenance of Paul’s pen.

After an introduction to the Pastoral Epistles in general, with an explanation of the canonical approach Wall takes, the commentary is split into three sections for each book. The first of these sections is a linear, passage-by-passage, commentary consistently following Wall’s canonical approach. The second section is a “Rule of Faith Reading” of each major section of the respective epistle according to each of Tertullian’s major theological points. So, each epistle is interpreted section-by-section with respect to its contribution to theology of God the Father, then God the Son, God the Spirit, the church, and so forth. This multi-pass tactic may sound tedious, but it is remarkably rich in theological insight, especially as it deals with books that some critics have assumed offer little by way of theological depth. The final section for each book is a case study from the history of the church (each from the Wesleyan tradition of their author, Richard Steele) of how the teaching of these epistles is instantiated in Christian community. This format coincides with Wall’s canonical approach – the case studies embodying the canon of the historic church’s “performance” of Pauline truth. Lastly, the book contains customary author, subject, and scripture indices.

Lest anyone assume that a canonical approach is too credulous, Wall demonstrates scholarly rigor and intellectual honesty throughout the book. Genre considerations are a key touchstone for Wall. He reads the Pastorals as “succession letters,” which are meant to form congregations faithful to the “Pauline Apostolate” in his absence. Whether they were composed in the first or second century, the measure of their canonicity is the church’s acceptance and (even more tellingly) “performance” of them “as a sacred text” (3). This commentary, then, offers much to the pastor or church leader seeking insight into the moral and theological message of the Pastorals, unhindered by the myopic conventions of historical criticism.

In my opinion, Wall’s treatment of 1 Timothy is his strongest and most original exegesis in the book. It provides scholars an excellent extended example of the promising results of a sophisticated, consistently applied, critical canonical approach to a New Testament book. For scholars interested in critical canonical approaches, Wall definitely raises a standard.

Because the church’s historic “performance” is so crucial to Wall’s canonical approach, the book offers an intensive case study for each epistle, written by Richard Steele. The range of tradition that the examples come from is narrow (Wesleyan); but for that reason, the treatments are deep. The
embodiment of canon must take place within some particularity, so Steele wrote on a tradition within his expertise. More than helping exemplify and crown the canonical approach to scripture, the case studies were delightfully well written and provide insightful glimpses of history in their own right.

A very minor annoyance was the apparently inexplicable and inconsistent practice of transliterating Greek terms. Sometimes a Greek word appeared without transliteration, sometimes with, and sometimes only the transliteration appeared. Wall discussed grammar only occasionally, but it would have been helpful to choose one practice; and I do not see the value in transliteration, especially when the Greek spelling is absent.

My greatest criticism of Wall’s commentary is that the issue of authorship cannot be avoided concerning books that contain specific and explicit claims of such. In other words, as fresh and compelling as Wall’s canonical approach is, it begs the question. It is not a fault to dismiss the arguments for and against Pauline authorship on the basis of a canonical approach interested in the church’s acceptance and performance of them, but it is a fault to suggest that the canonical approach renders the matter obsolete. Further, as Wall knows, the church’s canonization was (has been) a process and practice of discernment, not an event. Inasmuch as the historical event of composition matters to interpreters, it matters to the church.

Wall hopes that his reading of the Pastorals as “succession texts” will invite the contemporary church to see itself in the same position as Timothy or Titus – successors to the Pauline apostolate with responsibility to carry on his irreplaceable apostolic deposit. In which case, authorship does not matter, for the church essentially re-authors the text in every generation. But, what if the church, as it is today, is reluctant to “re-authorize” a text that violates its sensibilities concerning truth-telling (e.g. by pseudepigraphy)? Shall it be condemned for “de-canonizing”? Further, each of the Pastorals suggest that a living, historic Paul would have continuing authority and influence in the congregations and would also live to see his faithful followers again. The succession analogy between Paul’s generation and our own is not so categorical as Wall implies.

Although Wall offers a compelling and worthwhile commentary on the Pastorals that would be a valuable addition to a scholar’s, biblical (especially Pauline) student’s, or pastor’s library, it is not an all-service commentary. For instance, on account of his canonical approach, Wall does not rehash or enter a full discussion of the state of the debate vis-à-vis authorship. No single commentary can stand alone, but Wall’s occupies a place on a continuum closer to niche than comprehensive. It would be an illuminating compliment to commentaries like those by Philip Towner (Eerdmans, 2006), Luke Timothy Johnson (Doubleday, 2001), or I. Howard Marshall (T & T
Clark, 1999). It is good for pastors, teachers, and scholars interested in the possibilities of a consistent and well-reasoned canonical critical approach.

The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott
Brian Stanley
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic
2013, 288 pp., paper, $24.00
ISBN: 978-0-8308-2585-1

Reviewed by Robert A. Danielson

Brian Stanley, the professor of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, is known for his scholarship and the accessibility of his writing in the history of various Christian movements. Stanley delivers on both counts in his newest book, the fourth volume in InterVarsity’s series A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World (projected to be five volumes when completed). In this volume, Stanley attempts to cover the historical developments in evangelicalism from the post World War II period to the year 2000. He divides this time period into three phases: an early phase from 1945-1958 when evangelicals were differentiating themselves from fundamentalists, the “long 1960’s” from 1958-1974 when evangelicals began to grow in influence, and the post Lausanne period from 1974-2000 when global forces began to move evangelicalism out of the English-speaking world to become a global force. Stanley admits up front that there are some difficulties in writing this book, since it is designed to be a history of evangelicalism in the English-speaking world and yet much of the dynamics of the later period takes place outside of the traditional focal points of Britain and the U.S.

Stanley succeeds admirably in the first two phases, providing fascinating insights into the growth of evangelicalism as an idea in the academy especially. The development of evangelicalism through Billy Graham, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Christianity Today in the United States and John Stott, InterVarsity Fellowship, and the Church of England Newspaper in Britain effectively demonstrates the various approaches taken across the Atlantic. True to the subtitle, John Stott and Billy Graham are covered in great detail, but many other figures of importance are also touched on. Stanley also takes care to relate movements and trends in evangelicalism in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, true to the focus of this work on the English-speaking world.

As predicted in Stanley’s introduction, the third phase of the globalization of evangelicalism is more problematic. Except for a brief discussion of the
East Africa Revival, and a more in depth coverage of Lausanne in 1974 and the role of young Latin American leaders René Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Orlando Costas, and Sergio García, the global spread of evangelicalism largely takes a backseat to developments in the United States and Britain. While Stanley has attempted to prepare the reader for this, it still comes as a letdown given the ambitious title of the work. While the charismatic renewal, the Toronto Blessing, and evangelical debates on women in ministry and homosexuality are all important, the growth of Pentecostalism in the Global South is perhaps the major defining shift for evangelicals in this time period. While Stanley does mention this, little is said about how this global diffusion occurred, the missionary movements and people who pioneered this, or the missiological implications. Granted, this is a tall order for an accessible history of evangelicalism in the English-speaking world, and Stanley has done the best possible job given an impossible task in under 300 pages. Stanley’s book is exceptionally well written, incredibly informative, and will be very useful in a wide range of settings, but I can’t help wishing the editors of the series had chosen a more realistic title, or provided an additional volume to cover evangelicalism and its spread outside of the English-speaking Global North. Failure to include this subject continues to perpetuate a Western dominated paternalism that is not really indicative of the current state of evangelicalism in the world.

Seven Events that Shaped the New Testament World
Warren Carter
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2013, xxi, 162 pp., paper, $21.99

Reviewed by Ryan K. Giffin

In the book *Seven Events that Shaped the New Testament World*, Warren Carter, Professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, explores seven foundational events that serve as onramps into the world of the early Christian movement. In this small yet substantive work, Carter provides readers with an introductory-level discussion of the complex social and cultural dynamics of the New Testament world via seven key historical events: the death of Alexander the Great, the process of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the rededication of the Jerusalem temple, the Roman occupation of Judea, the crucifixion of Jesus, the writing of the New Testament texts, and the process of “closing” the New Testament canon. The book contains an introduction, seven chapters
(one for each event), a conclusion, an index, and several helpful maps, charts, illustrations, and photographs sprinkled throughout the text.

On the first page of the introduction, Carter outflanks a critique common to similar introductory works with a disclaimer that “this book does not pretend to be comprehensive” and that “there are many, many other events that we could have highlighted” (xvii). It becomes clear to the reader that the purpose of highlighting these seven particular events has less to do with the events themselves, and more to do with how each event serves as a sort of launch pad for Carter to discuss the larger cultural dynamics and socio-historical realities that were significant for the world in which the New Testament was written. For example, the death of Alexander the Great provides a focal point for Carter to discuss Alexander’s influence on the spread of Greek language and Hellenistic culture across the ancient world, and the location of early Christianity within that world. Another example is Carter’s examination of the translation of the LXX, which opens a door for a larger discussion of how the first Christians negotiated their multicultural world by embracing the common language of the day, while simultaneously retaining their sacred Scriptures. Carter captures the thrust of his whole project in this way: “The seven events function as entry points into the worlds that constitute the complex multicultural environment in which the Jesus movement emerges” (xix).

The major strength of Seven Events lies in Carter’s unique approach to the material typically found in the voluminous number of introductory works on NT backgrounds on the market today. By organizing his work around these seven key events, Carter is able to cover key introductory matters in a format that provides readers with a helpful chronology of events and issues without being restrictive or woodenly linear. The result is a well-researched, yet highly readable and refreshing, account of the contexts of the NT and early Christianity. However, disappointment may come to readers expecting a full treatment of the seven events advertised on the cover of the book. The events themselves serve more as a means to Carter’s real end of discussing the shape of the NT world. In this way, the title of the book has the potential to mislead readers who anticipate any sort of extended critical analysis of the seven events.

Overall, Seven Events is to be commended to students, pastors, and teachers of courses on NT introduction. Such readers will find Carter’s work accessible, provocative, and full of helpful information on the world in which the texts of the NT emerged. In a modern world in which there are no shortage of works on NT introduction, Seven Events emerges as a unique and welcome contribution.
Second Corinthians  
Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament  
Raymond F. Collins  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic  
2013, xviii, 302 pp., paper, $27.99  

Reviewed by Fredrick J. Long

Currently one finds many short, non-technical, reader-friendly commentary series, such as the New Cambridge Commentary, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, Beacon Bible Commentary, and Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament. Raymond F. Collins’s contribution to Paideia reflects a seasoned theological interpreter engaging a very difficult text. For each pericope, Paideia commentaries treat “Introductory Matters,” “Tracing the Train of Thought,” and “Theological Matters,” further delineated into passage-specific sub-categories (e.g. “Jesus,” “Eschatology,” or “Paul’s Financial Independence”). Additionally, for Collins’ volume each passage has a “Rhetorical Flow” outline contextually locating each passage. The Paideia series states five goals, by which I can evaluate Collin’s contribution: 1) attending to ancient narrative and rhetorical strategies (fair), 2) explicating theological convictions and moral habits (excellent), 3) commenting on the final canonical form (good), 4) discussing the cultural, literary, and theological setting (fair-good), and 5) illuminating the text through judicious use of maps, photos, and side-bars (excellent). Contributors bring their strengths (and weaknesses) to bear in their exposition. The “fair” areas likely result from Collins’ lack of interaction with secondary sources; only fifty-seven modern authors are cited, one-fifth of Charles H. Talbert’s Ephesians and Colossians Paideia contribution with nearly three hundred. Despite this, Collins adequately treats matters of the letter’s compositional unity (11-14, 63, 141-42, 180, 193-94), although this detracts somewhat from focusing on the text’s canonical form.

But Collins far surpasses Talbert’s contribution (only forty-five) in sidebars and charts, with on average two information boxes found per two-page spread. The boxes provide lexical data, summarize scholarly discussions, contain brief quotations from Church fathers (e.g. John Chrysostom, 57, 79, etc.), and explain rhetorical/literary devices, such as hendiadys (40), paronomasia (41 and 204), ellipsis (108), anacoluthon (109), chiasm (126), preterition (181), homoeoteleuton (200), inclusio/ring composition (202), and anaphora (228). Particularly well-done are boxes discussing word plays (e.g. 41, 46, 77, 151) and providing word study data, e.g., paraklēsis “admonition, encouragement” and cognates (52), “in Christ”
and equivalent phrases (120), katalassō “I reconcile” (134), charis “grace” (178-79), leitourgia “public work” (186), koinōnia (188), and the virtue, vice, and hardship lists (138, 252-53).

Although sensitive to micro-level stylistic features (e.g. 184 and 200), Collins misses much. For example, his treatment of chiasms is very weak (but see 126 on 5:21) when identifying merely A-B-A structures (which in IBS terminology is intercalation), as in 7:5-16 and 7:8-13a. Collins fails to see here the extensive chiasm emanating out of 7:7b-9a, which is lexically based (rejoice-grieve-letter-regret/regret-letter-grieve-rejoice; observed by my M.Div. student Joe Driver), extending across 7:2-16. Another weakness is Collins’ inconsistent understanding of Paul’s psychology and discursive ability/performance in writing. On the one hand, he praises Paul’s rhetorical ability (“Paul was a master rhetorician,” 41) and warns against psychoanalyzing Paul (“The careful reader … should not psychoanalyze Paul’s experience of consolation and joy…” [161]), but then repeatedly indicates that Paul’s emotions affected his writing, resulting in syntactical inconsistency and ambiguity (e.g., 108-9, 159, 187, 195).

Overall, the commentary is good for its strengths: theological exposition, attention to word usage, and interest in moral formation. It is well written, attractively edited, and contains few typos or mistakes, although autos is misidentified in 10:1 as a relative pronoun (196).

Four Views on Christian Spirituality
Counterpoint Series
Bruce Demarest, ed.
Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan
2012, 240 pp., paper, $18.99

Reviewed by Benjamin D. Espinoza

Interest in spirituality in the United States continues to increase rapidly. Two-thirds of American adults consider themselves “deeply spiritual” (11), and tend toward practices of Zen meditation, Yoga, new age mysticism, and many others. This renewal of interest in spirituality warrants a discussion regarding Christian spirituality in its many expressions. In Four Views on Christian Spirituality, scholars from four of the larger Christian traditions come together to voice their traditions’ expressions of spirituality and engage in collegial discussion and critique. Published as part of the successful Counterpoints series published by Zondervan, this work is an engaging and critical foray into continuing dialogue regarding Christian spirituality.
Bradley Nassif argues that Eastern Orthodox spirituality is gospel-centric, emphasizing that the multiplicity of doctrines and practices in the Orthodox tradition is rooted in the soil of the gospel (29). For Nassif, Orthodox spirituality is a paschal spirituality, “where death to sin and newness of life has been won through the victory of the cross and Christ’s triumphant resurrection from the dead” (36). Orthodox spirituality is richly sacramental, recognizing that sacraments occur “whenever God’s grace communicates through the created order,” however, the Orthodox emphasize seven primary sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Repentance, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Anointing the sick) (38-39).

Scott Hahn notes that even though it finds numerous expressions throughout the world, Roman Catholic spirituality is rooted in familial themes, such as the invitation to become part of God’s family through spiritual adoption and participation in Trinitarian life. For Hahn, family is the core of Roman Catholic spirituality, whether it is participation in the sacraments, calling spiritual leaders “fathers” and “sisters,” becoming stewards of the Father’s creation, or viewing the world through a distinctively sacramental lens. Regarding the Roman Catholic approach to Scripture, Hahn writes that the “Bible does not stand apart from the church’s life, but at the heart of it. Scripture is the content and the context of all the church’s ritual and devotion” (92).

Joseph Driskill, representing the Mainline Protestant perspective, articulates his tradition’s commitment to intellectualism, social progress, community, lay leadership, and a personal relationship with God. Driskill candidly notes that mainline Protestantism has “enmeshed” itself with a modern worldview (114). This alignment with modernity manifests itself in numerous ways, namely approaching the Scriptures with a hermeneutic of both skepticism and appreciation, valuing the resurrection of Christ more for its symbolic power than its historical authenticity, and experiencing the Spirit of God more through community life than through rich times of worship and prayer. For Driskill, the future of mainline Protestant spirituality lies in a renewed commitment to social justice, racial reconciliation, peace advocacy, and the recovery of Christian practices.

Evan Howard represents the evangelical perspective, and recounts a robust history of evangelical spirituality across several denominational boundaries. He argues that evangelical spirituality is Protestant, theologically orthodox, committed to conversion, active, lay-driven, and seeks “bounded ecumenicity” (177). Howard highlights the evangelical emphasis on the primacy of Scripture in spiritual formation through reading and meditation. Listening to sermons, worshipping within the church community, intercessory prayer, thanksgiving, and praise are hallmarks of evangelical spirituality.

This volume is unique in that it allows for candid yet collegial discussion
between the contributors to follow each chapter. The contributors provide dense and succinct summaries of their traditions, acknowledging their differences with conviction while celebrating their unity with grace. While many of these responses elevate the traditional debates between theological camps, Driskill’s chapter on Mainline Protestantism receives the most biting criticism. Nassif expresses concern that mainline Protestantism is devoid of an ecclesiology based on historic orthodoxy (144-145). Howard argues that mainline Protestantism has either struggled with or flatly rejected an orthodox Christology (155). Hahn writes that mainline churches have transformed into upper-class social clubs, and that mainline Protestants have turned away from the divine and have become “this-worldly” (149-150). Apart from these stronger criticisms, the contributors write with a posture of humility toward one another and appear genuinely concerned about the witness of the church in a postmodern culture.

This book will be especially helpful for seminary students and pastors seeking to understand how different Christian traditions express their spirituality. Professors teaching courses in spiritual formation will benefit from using this work as a textbook, as it provides a model of collegial dialogue in a humble, engaging, and informative manner. While this volume contributes to the continuing conversation regarding Christian spirituality, the volume could have included other crucial perspectives such as Pentecostalism. The four traditions explored in this volume all have a charismatic wing, and Pentecostal/charismatic theology and practice continues to grow within these traditions and across the globe. Additional perspectives, such as Anglicanism and the emergent/emerging church go unnoticed. While the sheer breadth of Christianity precludes the inclusion of many perspectives in this volume, these movements deserve consideration in future volumes devoted to Christian spirituality.

**Scripture and Tradition: What the Bible Really Says**
Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology
Edith M. Humphrey
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2013, 182 pp., paper, $19.99
ISBN: 978-0-8010-2773-4

Reviewed by J. Jordan Henderson

At the 2010 Wheaton Theology Conference held in honor of N. T. Wright (see N. Perrin and R. Enns, eds., *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010]), the book was discussed by a panel of theological scholars. The panelists praised the book for its thorough and balanced treatment of the Bible’s role in theological discourse. They noted that the book’s approach is both scholarly and accessible, making it a valuable resource for students and professionals alike. The book’s focus on the Bible’s role in theological reflection is particularly relevant in today’s context, where the relationship between Scripture and theology is a perennial concern. Overall, *Scripture and Tradition: What the Bible Really Says* is a significant contribution to the ongoing conversation about the Bible’s role in theology.
2011]), Edith M. Humphrey expressed one longing for her former teacher: that “Bishop Tom would venture more deliberately into the world of the church fathers and more completely into the strange terrain of the Eastern Church” (Perrin and Hays, 178). Wright’s response, while showing respect for biblical interpreters of the past, nevertheless remained firmly rooted in the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*: “Tradition is important, but I will drink to Paul first and to tradition afterward” (Perrin and Hays, 182).

While Humphrey makes no claim that her most recent book *Scripture and Tradition* is written in response to Wright’s answer, it certainly could have been. For Wright’s answer begs a number of questions: To what extent are Scripture and tradition separable? To what extent did the early Church, prior to the closing of the biblical canon, recognize such separation? And what does Scripture itself, particularly the NT, have to say about the topic? These are questions wrestled with by Humphrey in this book.

Chapter One, “Lost in Translation,” focuses on the noun *paradosis* (tradition) and the verb *paradidōmi* (literally “to tradition”) as they are translated in many English Bibles, noting the “anti-traditional” bias evident as *paradosis* is often translated “tradition” when used in a negative sense, and “teaching” or “ordinance” when used more positively (25-44). She gives a more nuanced discussion of *paradosis* as it is discussed in the NT, beginning with “the manner in which the biblical writers themselves ‘traditioned,’ or handled, traditional material” in the time prior to and following the closing of the OT and NT canon (34-40).

In the next chapter, “Deadly Traditions,” she looks closely at Mark 7, often used to argue against tradition (45-68). She comments that this story itself is an example of “living Church tradition in the early years of the Church’s growth” (55). Without disputing the historicity of this scene, she remarks that the story is told in the context of later Church debate, hence Mark’s parenthetical comment “In this way, Jesus declared all foods clean” (7:19).

She next considers the positive apostolic witness toward tradition in the NT, especially in 2 Peter, Acts, and the Pauline corpus (69-90). She insists that these positive comments on tradition are vital for the Church today in the midst of “conflicts between the Scriptures, the ongoing life of the Church, cultural norms, the present leading of the Spirit, and the teaching of leaders” (87).

The following chapter (“The Blessed Delivery,” 91-108) explores God as both Giver and Gift as Christian tradition is passed on from generation to generation. Noting the apparently “chain of command” inherent in Jesus’ commissioning of the seventy in Luke 10, “from the Almighty One, to Jesus, to the Twelve (whom he has appointed in the previous chapter) with
the seventy, to us”—the gift that is passed on is both from God and is in fact God Himself (91-92).

In the chapter “Holy Tradition Versus Human Traditions” (133-157), Humphrey looks at the use of tradition in early Church history in order to discern a proper use of tradition in the Church today. She emphasizes the need to discern between “what is a tradition, and therefore potentially subject to change, and what is part of the Holy Tradition” (156; italics in original).

She concludes with a challenge both to those from backgrounds skeptical of Christian tradition as well as those such as her fellow Eastern Orthodox Christians that place a high value on Holy Tradition (159-172). To the former, she encourages them in light of the emphasis placed on tradition within the NT itself to a fruitful understanding of Holy Tradition, going beyond mere historical curiosity to reverence for what God has entrusted to His people to preserve and faithfully pass on. To the latter, in addition to differentiating between mutable traditions and Holy Tradition, she challenges them to “acknowledge where the Holy Tradition has come to have only a formal place in the community’s life,” and to reclaim it (170).

In a very slim volume, Humphrey has given a masterful exploration of a topic that has been debated for centuries. She succeeds in illustrating that the NT places a high value on true living tradition faithfully passed on among God’s people both orally and in written form, as well as that one cannot appeal to the principle of sola Scriptura itself without also drawing on a particular Christian tradition.

I have two minor criticisms of this book. First, since she seems largely to have an Evangelical audience skeptical of tradition in mind, her defense of tradition will still beg the question for many of her readers about traditions held about people in the NT that are not clearly expressed in the NT. For instance, if we concede that tradition is important to the NT authors, does this mean that later traditions concerning the birth and death of the Virgin Mary must necessarily be observed by Christians? This is not as simple as differentiating between “big-T” and “little-t” traditions, for major feasts in the Orthodox Church commemorate both of these traditions.

This brings up my second criticism: What exactly is Humphrey’s view of the place of Scripture within tradition? Is it elevated above, equal with, or beneath other components of the Great Tradition, such as liturgical rubrics, iconography, canon law, or hagiography? I did not see her answer these questions, although they are admittedly beyond her scope, which is to simply examine what the NT itself says about tradition. Here she succeeds magnificently.
Invitation to the Psalms: A Reader’s Guide for Discovery and Engagement

Rolf A. Jacobson and Karl N. Jacobson
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2013, 192 pp., paper, $17.99
ISBN: 978-0-8010-3644-6

Reviewed by Jeremia K Garrett

The Book of Psalms is one of the most enduring and endearing collections of poetry. For nearly 2,500 years, persons in the Judeo-Christian faith traditions have heralded the Psalter not only as a fine work of literature, but also as inspired Scripture. In recent history, with literacy becoming the norm in Western societies, a movement has begun in which individuals are encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. As an unintended result, the psalms, which were designed to be recited systematically as beautiful, communal poetry, often have been reduced to privatized and misunderstood statements of theology, morality, or history outside of their poetic context. In their book Invitation to the Psalms, brothers and experienced teachers Rolf and Karl Jacobson provide beginning students with a “tour-guide” to the Psalter that serves as a much-needed call to actively experience the poetry within.

Although the target audience only included beginning students, the book is perhaps increasingly more valuable for pastors wishing to preach from the Psalter, worship leaders wishing to use psalms for dramatic or musical presentations, and ultimately individuals outside of scholastic settings who desire to experience the psalms in a fresh, renewed way. It is rare to find a book intended for the academy that also has so many practical applications within the personal and social lives of church leaders and laity. The introductory information within the book is also invaluable in university and seminary settings for all non-specialized students wishing to understand how to experience the Psalter as Hebrew poetry. This is especially true for institutions that emphasize the Inductive Bible Study method as the primary approach to interpreting, understanding, and applying messages found within Biblical literature.

Towards the goal of experiencing the psalms, four main topics comprise the first five chapters of the book. After an inviting introduction, the authors begin the book by explaining how parallelism forms the basis of all Hebrew poetry, giving detailed examples of the different types of parallelism and explaining how to identify their various uses. Adding to this understanding of Hebrew poetry, they continue by discussing the various structures found within individual psalms and how these structures play the primary role of developing the intended message. The second and third chapters discuss how
to identify and understand the various genres of psalms, with chapter two explaining forms and chapter three explaining themes. In the fourth chapter, the Jacobsons provide a multifaceted and intricately linked discussion of how to inductively identify the persona of the psalmist within the psalm’s implied setting. The aim of this discussion is to encourage the reader to experience the motives behind the writing of the psalm so that the reader may be able to imagine what it would be like to participate in its setting and apply it to one’s own life. Chapter five provides a basic overview of metaphor and ties this into specific uses of metaphor within the Psalter.

Each chapter consists of a thorough discussion of its topic alongside representative psalms and illustrative charts or figures. At the end of each chapter, the Jacobsons offer a brief conclusion followed by several ways to apply what the reader has learned in a “Going Deeper” section. Activities begin with basic self-discovery habits such a reading particular psalms in an educated attempt to experience them. In an effort to get readers to truly live the psalms, the Jacobsons also include outreach activities, inviting readers to share what they have discovered with others who have not studied the psalms. Each chapter closes with a brief list of additional resources for further reading.

To conclude the book, the Jacobsons include a sixth chapter that offers a theological interpretation of the primary message of the Psalter, as well as detailed explanations regarding how each genre of psalms contributes to this primary message. Although the stated purpose of the sixth chapter is to invite the reader to join the conversation by painting his or her own unique portrait of God, this final chapter rather seems to give the reader a front-row seat to observe how the Jacobsons express their own artistry. While their theological interpretation is thought-provoking and without contentious error, the conclusion leaves the reader reflective upon the Jacobsons’ theology of the Psalter rather than upon the theology of the Psalter itself. Even so, as with the other chapters, this final chapter concludes by inviting the reader to go deeper. In the final “Going Deeper” section, the Jacobsons encourage readers to return to the psalms to find and experience ten different images of God, and then they close the section and the book by suggesting readers take these experiences to friends in society, providing the additional resources section as a means to do so. As appendices, the book also includes a thorough scripture index and a helpful subject index.

While the book is an excellent introduction and invitation to the psalms, one essential area of experiencing Hebrew poetry is noticeably lacking—Hebrew poetry! The writers do include a discussion of a few theologically relevant words, such as ‘emet and hesed, but lacking are any examples of the poetry of the original language. As the Italian saying goes, traduttore,
traditore, in paraphrase: “there are no translations, only betrayals.” In order to fully experience the Hebrew poetry of the psalms, one must hear it alongside others in all its untranslatable anguished agony, blessed beauty, grating grief, passionate praise, royal richness, vehement vengeance, and Zionistic zeal. It can be assumed that the Jacobsons considered this, given that they specified their intended audience, limiting it to beginning students with no knowledge of Hebrew. Yet even someone who knows no Hebrew could appreciate simple examples of poetic word choice and rhythm such as found in the first verse of the Psalter:

‘asberei ba’ish ‘asher
lo’ balak ba’atzat resha’im
ubderek h ata’im lo’ ‘amad
ubmoshav letzim lo’ yashav

The experience to which the Jacobsons invite the reader is a worthwhile experience, but that experience remains incomplete without hearing the poetic Hebrew within a community, something the Jacobsons only offer to their readers by referring them to works such as James Kugel’s The Idea of Biblical Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

The Jacobsons have written an excellent book, and the reservations expressed above do not affect its endorsement. Whether within the academy or without, students interested in experiential, literary, narrative, or theological interpretations of the Bible—especially those that include Inductive Bible Studies—will find this an invaluable tool not only in understanding the Psalter, but also in experiencing it and sharing that experience. The Jacobsons have earned their place in these fields of Biblical interpretation, not by adding another textbook, but rather by adding a book that illuminates the Text, inviting the reader to enjoyably bathe or angrily burn in the various colors of light that are produced, ultimately inviting them to reflect that light for others to see.

Defending Constantine
Peter Leithart
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
2010, 373 pp., paper, $27.00
ISBN: 978-0-8308-2722-0

Reviewed by Steven Lane

Leithart’s Defending Constantine is a multi-faceted work that walks the line between history and theology. The “Constantinian” problem occupies the
focus of the book, both in terms of history (Did Constantine ‘convert’? What influence did he have on the Council of Nicaea? Etc.) and in terms of theology (Is a “Constantinian” political theology a viable one in the democratic 21st Century? Etc.). Leithart takes up the defense of Constantine against the attacks of John Howard Yoder and his theological family tree, such as Hauerwas. Leithart argues that Yoder’s reading of history is wrong, and because of this incorrect reading, Yoder then makes inaccurate theological statements, which in turn lead to bad theology. As such, *Defending Constantine* has, at times, a strongly polemic character.

Leithart begins with a review of the historical sources, starting with the latter half of 3rd Century Rome under the rule of Diocletian as a contextual framework. Diocletian attempted to unite the Empire through the persecution of Christians; Constantine would attempt to unite the Empire under the banner of the Cross. The political machinations of Rome following the retirement of Diocletian, along with the role Constantine and his family had in the affair, is well documented. Leithart also devotes a good deal of space to the incident at the Milvian Bridge and Constantine’s vision of the Cross. He does not merely recite Eusebius’ version of events, but attempts to reconstruct the incident from other sources. Once Constantine is in power, Leithart illustrates the ways in which Constantine is not a normal Roman emperor. Leithart uses art, architecture, and coinage, in addition to the more traditional edicts and histories, to illustrate that something radical separated Constantine from Diocletian and the imperial line. A chapter is also devoted to the supposed political interference at the Council of Nicaea, and Constantine’s role (or lack thereof) in the debates.

Once the historical groundwork is laid, Leithart turns to the polemical side of the work. He begins by attempting to dismantle the key pillars of Yoder’s “Constantinian shift” by drawing on the history that he has just laid out. Leithart argues that Yoder’s claims regarding the “pure” pre-Constantinian Church cannot stand. Leithart goes to great lengths to explain his reading of Yoder. Leithart does not construct a straw man out of Yoder’s arguments, but purposefully focuses on the presuppositions that Yoder relies on. Unlike too many popular books on Christians and political theology, Leithart is not talking past Yoder, but is challenging his theses head on. Ultimately, Leithart shows that the historical grounds on which Yoder builds his political theology are flawed. This is not to say, however, that Yoder and his disciples are necessarily wrong theologically. However, it does claim that they must reformulate the foundational building blocks of their theology, or risk falling into a-historical Gnosticism.

More than any other aspect, *Defending Constantine* is an example of historical theology fulfilling its purpose. The exceptional (wishful) naiveté that can
develop among systematic and moral theologies is shattered by the harsh realities of the historical Church. While that naïveté is what the Church should hope for, it is not what the Church actually faces. Political theology is undoubtedly the “messiest” of all theological endeavors.

The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works
Matthew Levering
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2013, 224 pp., paper, $24.99

Reviewed by Charles Meeks

The recent boom in academic publishing on the subject of Augustine does not appear to be coming to an end any time soon. This includes both new editions of his works and scholarly monographs on his life and thought. Yet, despite this influx of new (and mostly good!) reflection, novices to the Church Fathers in general and Augustine in particular are often left to fend for themselves in the vast sea of Augustine’s output. Even in a course in which primary texts are read, at an introductory level many students will be handed one or two of Augustine’s works without having a sense of how they fit into his staggeringly large corpus. Moreover, they will be highlighted as examples of certain characterizations of Augustine—here is Augustine the Pastor, here is Augustine the Philosopher, etc. This is problematic.

Thankfully, Matthew Levering has not only recognized the need for a new introductory work on Augustine, but has produced a fine one. In The Theology of Augustine, Levering intends to guide the interested reader on a journey through seven works he deems most important for synthesizing the fullest picture possible of Augustine the Theologian, through both theological and exegetical works: On Christian Doctrine, Answer to Faustus, a Manichean, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, On the Predestination of the Saints; Confessions, City of God; and On the Trinity. In surveying each of these works, Levering clearly summarizes Augustine’s logic while also drawing in secondary sources through excellent footnoting. Levering’s approaches to City of God and On the Trinity are especially praiseworthy, as he deftly navigates what at times are quite laborious arguments by Augustine in a way that draws out the essential meaning clearly. Levering’s conclusion is short, but insightful as he seeks to do what Augustine always wished: pull the readers back to the main point of everything, which is the love of God and the service of humanity.

The Theology of Augustine stands clearly in the stream of newer attempts
to offer a fuller picture of Augustine than in generations past. Where it differs from recent publications such as William Harmless’ *Augustine in His Own Words* and Paul Kolbet’s *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, however, is Levering’s refusal to get in the way of the text in order to compartmentalize which bits of Augustine are at the surface in each work; he even refrains from caricaturing certain works as “early” or “late” Augustine in order to make apology for some of Augustine’s less endearing notions. By refusing to treat Augustine in a piecemeal fashion, Levering does justice to his excellent introduction and conclusion.

Levering is no academic slouch, and has demonstrated multiple times in the last decade that he wields more than an average proficiency of understanding theological texts both Patristic and Medieval in his pursuit of reconciling the traditionally split disciplines of theology and biblical studies. It is therefore delightful to see a volume in which he explicitly establishes his mastery of Augustine. This work should be a boon to laypeople and Augustine novitiates alike for many years to come.

**W. E. Sangster – Herald of Holiness. Sanctification and Perfection in the Thought of W. E. Sangster**

*Studies in Evangelical History and Thought*

Andrew J. Cheatle


Reviewed by David Bundy

The subject of this volume is William Edwin Sangster (1900-1960). He was a preacher of mythic proportions, known around the world for his skill at that craft. In folklore and in the literature about the period, he is understood almost exclusively as a preacher; Cheatle demonstrates that Sangster was also an important theologian and churchman. As Kenneth Newport states in his “Foreword,” this volume “brings [the] ‘real’ Sangster to life” (xi). The volume, a Ph.D. dissertation at Liverpool Hope University, is a remarkable achievement. It is important for the scope of its research data, the method of dealing with the data, and the analysis. It is a significant contribution to the study of twentieth century Methodism, a much-neglected field of study.

Cheatle begins with a methodological introduction that acknowledges the diverse literary corpus of Sangster, which is preserved in various media and the attendant historiographical problems posed by that diversity. These vary from recorded sermons and radio interviews to his Ph.D. dissertation at the
University of London. The latter was written during the intense German bombing of London during which he stayed at his church, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, London, where a multitude was sheltered and cared for every night in the lower basements of the building. At breaks in the bombing he would ascend the stairs to his office to work on his dissertation, published as *The Path to Perfection* (New York: Abington, 1943). As Cheatle demonstrates, the articles published in widely diverse newspapers around the world provide a longitudinal basis for understanding the significance of the dissertation and the many other volumes published. As it is made clear, Sangster was able to change his mind and never ceased wrestling with the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification or Christian perfection.

Sangster’s theology of sanctification was heavily shaped by his experiences in ministry and his own spirituality. He began his ministry as a teenager at the Radnor Street Mission in London, a mission to the poor and downtrodden. He was at the same time a member of the Band of Hope, an organization committed to fighting the scourge of alcoholism in the industrial heartlands of Britain. This was followed by service in World War I as a chaplain. Because of this ministry experience, and the recognition of his skills, he was presented as a candidate for the Methodist ministry without his knowledge! Ministry in the industrial seaport of Liverpool and Scarborough followed. Eventually he was appointed to London.

Personal crises of assurance and his continuing theological reflection brought him into contact with the Oxford Group and his writings for a time reflected the thought and disciplines in that spiritual movement. The dissertation project provided an opportunity to wrestle in more formal fashion with the doctrine of sanctification, thinking about philosophical categories (78-80), eschatology (80-83), higher biblical criticism (83-92), and evolution (92-104). Cheatle gives special attention to the impact of this thinking on Sangster’s understanding of sin (105-130) as well as sanctification and perfection (131-165). The changes in Sangster’s perspective on these issues throughout his life are carefully delineated. Importantly, Sangster was doing this theological work while engaged in active ministry. This was theological reflection in intense discussion with the wide range of British culture.

The resultant theological analysis was received with enthusiasm in many circles, but in the conservative Holiness Movement (inside and outside Methodism), there was considerable concern. One expression of this concern is revealed in an Asbury Theological Seminary connection to the Sangster story. George Allen Turner, later Professor of English Bible at the Seminary, was a doctoral student at Harvard University when Sangster’s *The Path to Perfection* (New York: Abington, 1943) was published. Turner was working on similar themes, from a quite different perspective and in a radically different
context. The resultant “A Comparative Study of the Biblical and Wesleyan Ideas of Perfection to determine the Sources of Wesley’s Doctrine,” (Ph.D. Harvard University, 1946) took Sangster to task on several issues. Turner’s dissertation was published as The More Excellent Way: The Scriptural Basis of the Wesleyan Message (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1952). Sangster responded in a review published in the Methodist theological journal Religion in Life 22, 2 (1953), 310-311. He pointed out that Turner had misrepresented him at several points, most importantly on the question of sin. Turner argued that Sangster was promoting a version of sanctification with “little attention” to Wesley’s concept of “inward sin.”

A significantly revised edition of Turner’s book was published with the title, The Vision which Transforms: Is Christian Perfection Scriptural? (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964). This tome is more irenic toward Sangster and several of the criticisms were omitted from the new version; there were numerous complimentary comments about Sangster’s work. Unfortunately, as Cheatle indicates (114, et passim) Turner persisted in this misreading of Sangster, probably because of misunderstanding the philosophical, psychological, and theological categories with which Sangster was working and with which he was in dialogue.

Cheatle’s volume is an important contribution to understanding both Sangster and the discussions of Methodist theology, especially but not only as it relates to sin, sanctification, and perfection during the first six decades of the twentieth century. He includes the American and British Holiness scholars in the analysis as well as the more “mainline” Methodist thinkers.

The volume is enhanced significantly by an appendix (171-221) that inventories articles and letters published in the scholarly, religious, and secular presses. This is a huge contribution. It provides a database which future scholars of Sangster and his period will be obliged to use. It is arranged chronologically and a mere reading of the titles and the valuable abstracts provided by Cheatle can introduce one to the passionate Wesleyan theology of Sangster, and provide a window on the debates of forty years within British Methodism. A list of other Sangster sources (in various media), a bibliography of secondary literature and an index add further value to the volume.

In this book, thanks to the careful, detailed, nuanced analysis, Sangster emerges as an important theologian and a crucial figure in twentieth century Methodist theology.
Rich Church, Poor Church: Keys to Effective Financial Ministry
J. Clif Christopher
Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press
2012, 120 pp., paper, $14.99
ISBN: 978-1-4267-4336-8

Reviewed by Robert Baker

I just finished reading *Rich Church/Poor Church – Keys to Effective Financial Ministry* by J. Clif Christopher. Honesty compels me to admit I have had this book on my bookshelf since offering to write a review of it this past summer; it was also the smallest book on the “need to review” shelf. The reason the book sat on my bookshelf for so long is the title. This was going to be yet another book on how to financially manage one’s ministry, or so I thought.

I read the book in less than two hours at the B.L. Fisher library, when I was supposed to be catching up on class work. Christopher hooked me with the opening question from a congregant to a pastor who was trying to raise money for some project or another, “Can you honestly tell me that my church is the best place for me to give?” (2). This isn’t a question from a person that did not have the resources to share, or was not actively seeking a way to do so. This is a person honestly assessing the most effective use of her money in a plethora of other worthwhile charitable organizations competing for the same monies. And that is the crux of this book; not another “how to” church collection strategy or “how to” balance a ledger book. It is a book that presents how the financials of a ministry are directly affected by the fundamental execution of its mission. There is a lot of information packed into 107 pages.

Each of the ten chapters that follow the first begins with a matrix that compares the emphasis of the Rich Church with that of the Poor Church. The use of the words “Rich” and “Poor” do inevitably relate to each of the churches financial positions, however the emphasis of the argument is what each of the churches do that makes them “Rich” or “Poor.” The book focuses on the interconnections of church culture, learned habits of pastors, and what stimulates a person in a congregation to financially support the church mission in lieu of all the other competing financial demands. Not surprisingly what motivates a congregant to financially support a church is directly proportional to their perception of the church’s faithful and quantifiable mission of God. Also not surprising, to someone who has had a career working within for profit companies with competing needs for limited capital, the key is to be bold enough to ask for the resources and then be proactive enough to follow with personalized communications and status updates to ensure future support. Apparently Christopher does
not see much of either in the churches that come to him for help.

Christopher does not offer a cookie cutter approach of “do this” or “do that” as he weaves a balanced argument for emphasis and execution of mission, and I like that. Instead he relates types of efforts expended and/or avoided with their intended or unintended results. He talks about the pastor that has been trained to view donations and those that make the donations as separate from his or her proper duties; the avoidance of proper follow-up to donations and to the donors who step up and fill a need; the congregant(s) who tunes out the request from the financial committee’s help “close the gap” speech that is made part of a worship service, especially during holiday seasons. Christopher advocates a more proactive approach to stewardship with mission that sets clear goals and unmitigated examples of how the church’s resources are meeting God’s call to church mission. The last chapter is a simple game plan that a pastor and/or congregation can follow as a first step to digging itself out of the “poor church” syndrome. The chapter is again not an end all answer to a church’s challenge; however it is intended for what I believe to be nothing more than a simple construct from which to begin conversations.

Needless to say, I believe this is a great book for those of us that aspire to ministry in a denominational or congregational church, or active pastors of the same that are engaged in an endless “do loop” of financial crisis. My review attempts to briefly present the core tenants of what the author is attempting to impart to us the reader and some of my thoughts on what I believe he is communicating. In the end, faithfulness to the mission God has called His church to is all that Christopher is advocating.

**John Howard Yoder: Revolutionary Christian Citizenship**

**Yoder for Everyone**

John C. Nugent, Branson Parler, and Andy Alexis-Baker, eds.

Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press

2013, 150 pp., paper, $15.99


Reviewed by Nathan Crawford

To begin this review, let me point to a controversy that has erupted since the publishing of the book. John Howard Yoder has been accused, and seems to have admitted his guilt before his death, of abusing his female students and others under his guidance. The abuse was usually done through groping and/or pressuring females to have physical contact, although Yoder never seems to have engaged in sexual intercourse with these women. In
this regard, Yoder’s work as a theologian and Christian ethicist comes into question because of his staunch support of nonviolence and pacifism. While he argued for a nonviolent approach to all human endeavors that reflect the person of Jesus Christ, Yoder was engaging in such violent acts through sexual misconduct. Due to this, reading Yoder’s work becomes much more difficult and reviewing or judging it becomes nearly impossible. The people publishing the series “Yoder for Everyone” seem to agree, as they have recently made the decision to place a proviso at the beginning of the books detailing the controversy surrounding Yoder.

In order to write this review then, I will bracket the heinous acts that Yoder committed. Instead, I will try to engage his work on a merely theological and ethical basis, while acknowledging that Yoder not only failed to live up to his high ideals, but also lived a life in direct contrast to them. However, we must still engage his thoughts and weigh whether they can push us to be better and more Christ like than Yoder ultimately was.

The editors divide Yoder’s writings into three sections. The first section is entitled “The Witness of Jesus.” Here, we find a conception of Jesus as one whose teachings found a distinctive community, the ekklesia. This community is ultimately a political community, but operates under an alternative politics, relying upon its faith in Jesus Christ to do miracles and to make all things work together for the glory of God. The witness of Jesus for this community is one of active nonviolence, as one who actively resists the recourse to violence found in society-at-large. Instead, Jesus offers a way of being that is predicated upon peace, the activity of making peace (this is in contrast to the idea of just not causing violence). The second section, “The Witness of the Church,” builds upon the first by describing the kind of community that forms in light of Jesus’ call to nonviolence. For Yoder, the answer is a distinctive community that cannot merely be a number of individuals, but an elect group that comes from the wider society. This distinctive community is where people learn to walk in the footsteps of Jesus’ nonviolence through the church’s call to repentance and faith. The church is a place of discipleship, where formation takes place. This formation is a way of being church inside of a society that has recourse to violence. Part of the task of this church is discipleship, the creation of people who live the life of peace first given witness to in Jesus. As the church does this, it bears witness to the broader society as to what it means to live peacefully. The third section, “Witness in Action,” shows how the church acts as witness to the broader world through its actions. Specifically, the editors display essays where Yoder takes on those actions that display the peace of the church, such as voting, self-defense, paying taxes, the arms race, etc. In these essays, Yoder shows the “payoff” of proper discipleship to be allegiance to the Kingdom of God over, and at
times against, the kingdoms of this world. The witness of the church is the active peace that comes through proper discipleship. This peace shows the world what it means to have true peace and not just not-violence.

As I conclude, let me offer a few parting thoughts. First, I wish the editors had left some of the longer essays in their original form: the editors made the decision to cut certain essays due to their length. While I understand the goal was to make Yoder more readable for everyone, at times arguments seem truncated or the reader fails to get the full grasp of what Yoder is up to in his thoughts. This has the tendency to take away some of the complexity that is Yoder’s writing.

Second, this book was put together for the layperson in mind. Most of these writings are from lectures, popular level writing, or sermons in chapels. As such, the text was meant for more general audiences or beginning academics (such as undergraduates), perhaps to be used among a group at church. However, in light of some of the new revelations about Yoder, it would probably be better to find another set of writings for a group at church or in an undergraduate classroom. One could use writings by a number of thinkers in lieu of Yoder. In all, I would recommend this book to those studying Yoder in a classroom or doing research on him as a useful tool for getting more thoughts; however, as a book for a general audience, I am not sure that this book passes muster.

A Shared Christian Life
Ben Witherington, III
Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press
2012, xii, 186 pp., paper, $14.99
ISBN: 978-1-4267-5317-6

Reviewed by Jeff Hiatt

Ben Witherington provides a needed resource into Christian spiritual formation from a biblical-Wesleyan viewpoint. The essential spiritual formation goal of this book depicts the normal Christian life and spiritual growth process through the usual gatherings of Christians for Sunday worship, collective prayer, searching the Scriptures, and sharing Communion (179). This is both biblical and John Wesley’s regimen for making progress toward a life of Christ-likeness (cf. Chapter 3).

Witherington divides the book into two main parts that elucidate the corporate context (chapters 1-5) and the individual Christian experience (chapters 6-9) for spiritual maturation. You will not find spiritual asceticism,
or super-spiritual, individualistic elitism offered in these pages. As the reader gleans in this field, it will be in the company of others in the body of Christ who have the same Christian “fruit of the Spirit” goals as any ordinary Christian believer (68-9). It is a shared Christian life. The reader may encounter a personal desire to give full attention to God in worship, prayer, and the Lord’s Supper as means of experiencing God’s grace (ix)—God’s transforming favor to be like Jesus. Yet, the call to do so comes in the midst of the congregation. There is a fine balance of the emphases on the individual and the collective elements of the Christian life-in-process.

Although there is a healthy weight placed on personal piety, even this focus is tempered through the community activity of serving others. In fact, personal growth is more likely to occur rapidly when one is engaged in humble caring for another person. These acts of biblical charity, mercy, or social justice often become unintended, unsought moments of social holiness forming the personal Christian spiritual growth (147-9). Witherington highlights that Mr. Wesley believed that the Bible taught this other-centered pattern as its norm (cf. 149, note Wesley’s comments on the “Sermon on the Mount”). The traditional spiritual disciplines that other authors emphasize for individual-focused spiritual growth exercises are not covered (e.g., compare Richard Foster’s Celebration of Discipline, and Ruth Haley Barton’s Sacred Rhythms for those elements). Instead, Witherington presents a corrective to the lop-sided individual over-emphasis so often found today.

This book is poised to be used easily as a textbook at the undergraduate level, or for local churches that wish to provide small group collective study and spiritual growth for its members. The book is undergirded by astute scholarly acumen that unloads its profound content in non-specialist accessible language.
Books Received

The following books were received by the editor’s office since the last issue of The Asbury Journal. The editor is seeking people interested in writing book reviews on these or other relevant books for publication in future issues of The Asbury Journal. Please contact the editor (Robert.danielson@asburyseminary.edu) if you are interested in reviewing a particular title. Reviews will be assigned on a first come basis.

Allen, R. Michael

Appleby, David W. and George Ohlschlager, eds.

Bartholomew, Craig G. and Michael W. Goheen

Bauer, Michael J.

Billings, Rachel M.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph
Burnett, Richard, ed.

Cherry, Constance M.

Clines, David J. A.

Cole, Graham A.

Cook, John A. and Robert D. Holmstedt

Cowdell, Scott

Downs, David J. and Matthew L. Skinner, eds.

Dreier, Mary Sue Dehmlow, ed.

Dunn, James D.G.

Erickson, Millard J.
Flemming, Dean

Gentry, Caron E.

Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley

Green, Joel B. and Lee Martin McDonald, eds.

Hart, Addison Hodges

Heinrichs, Steve, ed.

Hobson, Theo

Horsley, Richard and Tom Thatcher

Hösle, Vittorio
Keener, Craig S.  

Köstenberger, Andreas J., L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles  

Lundbom, Jack R.  

McDonald, Lee Martin  

Moberly, R.W.L.  

Mouw, Richard J. and Douglas Sweeney  

Mounce, William D.  

Nation, Mark Thiessen, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel  

O’Rourke, Fran, ed.  
Penner, Myron Bradley

Reeves, James M.

Reid, Jennifer

Robbins, Vernon K.

Roeber, A. G.

Rosner, Brian S.

Ruth, Lester

Ruthven, Jon Mark

Schreiner, Thomas R.
Seow, C. L.

Setran, David P. and Chris A. Kiesling

Sharp, Mary Jo

Sprinkle, Preston M.

Sunquist, Scott W.

Terry, John Mark and J.D. Payne

Thiel, John E.

Thiselton, Anthony C.

Twelftree, Graham H.

Walter, Gregory
Waltke, Bruce K.

Wengert, Timothy J.

Woodbridge, John D. and Frank A. James III

Yates, Timothy

Yoder, John Howard
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