

PERSPECTIVAS

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FIFTEENTH ISSUE – 2018

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FIFTEENTH ISSUE, 2018

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P E R S P E C T I V A S

FIFTEENTH ISSUE | 2018

Editorial [ENGLISH VERSION]

We are pleased to present the 2018 issue of *Perspectivas*, the Journal of the Hispanic Theological Initiative. This issue contains unique approaches to Latinx theology and food, issues of migration and the crisis of migrant children on the border, and the crisis in Puerto Rico, from a variety of historical, theological, and political perspectives.

In “*Sancochando* Theological Anthropology: One Puerto Rican Heavy Soup as Heuristic,” Héctor Varela-Rios, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Chicago Divinity School, expounds on a real-world practice in Puerto Rican cuisine, “*el sancocho*,” as a comparative construct for doing theological anthropology. In this way, Varela-Rios argues for theology as a “cultural production.” Without casting a value judgment on either side of the equation – Puerto Rican culture or constructive theology – Varela-Rios posits that these two “conversation partners” – culture and theology – are indeed integral to “cooking” a theological anthropology. Thus, in this case, the elements of cooking in the Latinx context – specifically, a uniquely Puerto Rican dish – become a model for the practice of constructive theology, most appropriately so in the field of reflecting on a theology of humanity.

It is precisely in order to construct a *humane* theology that our second author, Linda Dakin-Grimm, an immigration lawyer in Los Angeles, who just completed a master’s degree in Theology, approaches the current crises on the USA border in her essay, “US Christians Have Only *One* Response to the Suffering Migrant Children at the Border.” Based on actual experiences with immigrant children in her work on the border, Dakin-Grimm explores the theological bases for humane immigration policies and practices. Short of such policies, Christians and people of faith of all types are challenged to practice an ethics of resistance and disruption. Dakin-Grimm draws on the Hebrew Scriptures, patristic theology and such contemporary theologians as Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino and Jürgen Moltmann, as well as more recent work by Miguel De La Torre. This essay was completed before the most recent border crises with the separation of children from their families; so it is very much a prescient and cogent discussion of a theological basis for action from the perspective of a theologically trained lawyer and activist.

Another current event is foundational for the next set of essays in our issue, a special section of reflections on the recent crisis in Puerto Rico. Shortly after the disastrous pair of hurricanes, and exceedingly slow and inadequate response by both federal and insular governments, a forum on the situation in Puerto Rico was held at the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature in

November 2017. Several Puerto Rican scholars from various historical and theological perspectives responded to the call for efforts to understand and explain how this could happen to Puerto Rico. Three of those presentations, one from biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz, one from ethicist Melissa Pagán and one from theologian Loida I. Martell are included in our issue. Each, with various levels of emphases, identify the historical issues inherent in the colonial situation of Puerto Rico, describe the aftermath of the deadly hurricanes and the weak infrastructure allowed to perturb the Island for so long, and explore biblical, theological, and ethical resources in order to explain and energize responses to the immediate situation of devastation in the region.

Finally, among reviews of books by Latinx scholars about Puerto Rican theology, Christian vocation, “flesh theology,” Latin American church history and Mexican Pentecostalism, we offer an expanded book review “roundtable” of three reflections on Jacqueline Hidalgo’s important new work on the Book of Revelation and Latinx history and theology: *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement*. Professor Hidalgo, who teaches Religion and Latinx Studies at Williams College, explores how it is that we learn about the phenomena of “scripturalizing” – creating authoritative texts – from the interpretation history of the Christian book of Revelation but especially from a similarly “apocalyptic” and utopian text, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. The three reviews explore the contributions of Hidalgo’s book to the larger enterprise of biblical and religious studies, as well as understanding the role of religion and religious texts in Latinx and Chicanx cultures.

We hope you will enjoy engaging these important contributions to our ongoing work in Latinx religious and theological studies, and we congratulate our contributors for their very fine work.

Efrain Agosto
Senior Editor

P E R S P E C T I V A S

2018

Editorial [SPANISH VERSION]

Estamos encantados de presentarles la edición del 2018 de *Perspectivas*, la revista académica de Hispanic Theological Initiative. Este tomo contiene acercamientos propiamente latinx a la teología y comida, asuntos de inmigración y crisis de niños y niñas inmigrantes en la frontera, y la crisis en Puerto Rico, desde una variedad de perspectivas históricas, teológicas y políticas.

En “Sancochando una antropología teológica: Un ‘sopón’ puertorriqueño como método heurístico,” Héctor Varela-Rios, un candidato al Ph.D. en la Escuela de Divinidad de la Universidad de Chicago, expone sobre una práctica del mundo real en la cocina puertorriqueña, “el sancocho,” como construcción comparativa para hacer una antropología teológica. De esta manera, Varela-Rios argumenta que la teología es una “producción cultural.” Sin lanzar aspersiones de valor a ninguno de los lados de la ecuación—cultura puertorriqueña o teología constructiva—Varela-Rios propone que estos dos “interlocutores”—cultura y teología—son en efecto esenciales para “cocinar” una antropología teológica. Así, en este caso, los elementos de cocinar en el contexto latinx—específicamente, un platillo propio puertorriqueño—se convierten en un modelo para la práctica de teología constructiva, más apropiadamente en el campo de reflexión sobre una teología de la humanidad.

Es precisamente con el fin de construir una teología humana que nuestra segunda autora, Linda Dakin-Grimm, una abogada de inmigración en Los Ángeles, quien acaba de completar un grado de Maestría en Teología, aborda la crisis actual en la frontera de los E.E.U.U. en su ensayo “US Christians Have Only *One* Response to the Suffering Migrant Children at the Border” (Cristianos estadounidenses tienen únicamente *una* respuesta al sufrimiento de niños migrantes en la frontera). Basada en las experiencias reales de niños/as inmigrantes en su trabajo en la frontera, Dakin-Grimm explora las bases teológicas para políticas y prácticas humanas de inmigración. No teniendo tales políticas, los cristianos y personas de fe de todo tipo tienen el reto de practicar una ética de resistencia y disrupción. Dakin-Grimm recurre a las escrituras hebreas, la teología patristica, y teólogos contemporáneos tales como Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino y Jürgen Moltmann, como también el trabajo del latino especialista en ética, Miguel De La Torre. Este ensayo fue completado antes de la crisis fronteriza más reciente con la separación de niños/as de sus familias; así que el artículo es una discusión profética y convincente de una base teológica para la acción, desde la perspectiva de una abogada y activista teológicamente capacitada.

Otro evento actual es fundamental para el siguiente conjunto de ensayos en esta edición, una sección especial reflexionando en la crisis reciente en Puerto Rico. Poco después del desastroso par de huracanes y la respuesta extremadamente lenta por los gobiernos federal e insular, se realizó un foro acerca de la situación en Puerto Rico en la conferencia anual de la Academia estadounidense de Religión y la Sociedad de Literatura Bíblica en noviembre 2017. Varios académicos puertorriqueños de varias perspectivas históricas y teológicas respondieron el llamado a esfuerzos para comprender y explicar cómo esto pudo ocurrirle a Puerto Rico. Tres de esas presentaciones, una por el erudito bíblico Jean-Pierre Ruiz, una por la especialista en ética Melissa Pagán, y una por la teóloga Loida I. Martell están incluidas en este tomo. Cada una, a diferentes niveles de énfasis, identifican asuntos históricos inherentes en la situación colonial de Puerto Rico, describe las secuelas de los letales huracanes y la pobre infraestructura que permitió perturbar a la isla por tanto tiempo, y explora recursos bíblicos, teológicos y éticos para poder explicar y dar energía a respuestas a la situación inmediata de devastación en la región.

Finalmente, entre las reseñas de libros por académicos latinx acerca de teología puertorriqueña, vocación Cristiana, “teología de la carne,” historia de la iglesia latinoamericana y pentecostalismo mexicano, les ofrecemos una mesa redonda de reseñas de libros ampliada de tres reflexiones sobre el importante nuevo libro de Jacqueline Hidalgo acerca del libro del Apocalipsis y la historia y teología latinx: *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* (Apocalipsis en Aztlán: Escrituras, Utopías y el Movimiento Chicano) . La profesora Hidalgo, quien enseña religión y estudios latinx en Williams College, explora cómo es que aprendemos acerca de los fenómenos de “escrituralización”—creando textos autoritativos—desde la historia interpretativa del libro cristiano de Apocalipsis, pero especialmente desde un texto igualmente “apocalíptico” y utópico, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. Las tres reseñas exploran las contribuciones a la empresa más grande de estudios bíblicos y religiosos del libro de Hidalgo, así como la comprensión del papel de la religión y los textos religiosos en las culturas latinx y chicanx.

Esperamos que disfrute estas contribuciones importantes a nuestro trabajo continuo en los estudios religiosos y teológicos latinx, y felicitamos a nuestros colaboradores por su excelente trabajo.

Efrain Agosto
Editor en jefe

***Sancochando* Theological Anthropology: One Puerto Rican
Heavy Soup as Heuristic¹**

Héctor Varela-Rios

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Abstract

Affirming that theology is cultural has been well-established since its inception as both scholarly and cotidiano practices. Seeing culture as inherently theological, however, has been less studied. By exploring the ambiguous relationship between theology and culture from the point of view of cultural studies and academic theology, and using the metaphor of ‘heavy’ soup known as *sancocho* as heuristic, I will claim that theological anthropology (i.e., ‘being human’) is always an act of *sancochando*, both stewed and stewing its co-mingled contexts (i.e., ingredients) and contesting processes (i.e. cooking steps), making and not-making our savory personal and communal “being” and “human”.

• VEA LA PÁGINA 23 PARA LEER ESTE ARTÍCULO EN ESPAÑOL •

Introduction

As a student of theology in a United States university known for a scientific approach to religious studies in general, I constantly feel the need to self-assess my own precarious position as an older, Christian, middle-class, whitish², cisgendered, heterosexual Puerto Rican man trying for a second career. My own being-human has always been unavoidably dynamic. One consequence is that it becomes impossible to

¹ This title is borrowed, in part, from Dwight Hopkins. His chapter “Theological Method and Cultural Studies: Slave Religious Culture as a Heuristic” in *Changing* (pp. 163-180), provided the impetus for the present research: is it possible to garner theological insights from everyday cultural, and not-necessarily-religious, practices? My answer, I hope with this paper, is clearly yes.

² Whitish is my translation of *blanquix*, a pejorative I grew up with. In Puerto Rico, I would be considered a *blanquito*, a man born of privilege, phenotypically white for the island, living in an alternate world that most Puerto Ricans do not participate in or care for. Ironically, in Chicago, I am whitish for another reason: I’m part of an ethnic minority, a Latino. A full discussion of the ambiguities and complexities of race go beyond the scope here, but with “whitish” instead of “white” (or, worse, “whitey”) I want to make explicit my precarious racial location.

separate cultural traits from religious or theological traits within my-self, even as I try to evaluate both individually. As such, this ambiguous connection between culture and theology is mingled within my personal worldview.

This essay is an exploration of that ambiguity. One should be able to see unique aspects of one's being-human through varied ways of being in lived experience, because it is through concrete practices that our being is expressed. In addition, our being-theological cannot be circumscribed to a religious sphere, because that could make religion a phenomenon detached from these same practices.³ Thus, I begin by describing the relationship between culture and theology, engaging scholars from both cultural and theological studies. Then I explore a generalizable cultural material practice,⁴ cooking soup, in particular, the heavy soup known in Puerto Rico as *sancocho*. The *sancocho* is a savory combination of meats and root vegetables of different nationalities and histories. It is very prevalent in the Caribbean; perhaps similar to the *gumbo* of the U.S. south. I wish to explore the making of *sancocho* in order to derive a particular heuristic for theological anthropology. I will end this essay with brief comments on building a theological-anthropological imperative around that heuristic: namely that the theological discourse of being human needs to be *sancochada* to be relevant to general theological reflection.

I should point out that the purpose here is not to present a theology of practice(s), what Don Browning, John Swinton, and many others in the European context have called *practical theology*. This discipline is “practical” in at least two ways: one, it focuses on the mundane, everyday experience (or “practices”) of believers, and two, on the pragmatic, the less-theoretical concerns (as in the Aristotelian *phronesis*) of those same believers.⁵ As cooking is both deeply mundane and pragmatic, practical theology seems to fit the present subject matter methodologically, especially due its basis in empirical research (e.g., ethnography). But practical theology, as it is enacted in academia, is mostly concerned with congregational/confessional practices in church communities, such as missiology, liturgy, and prayer – in fact, practical theology is almost synonymous with those aspects of ecclesiology.⁶ Yet, even if it is not used, I recognize the resonances with my inductive approach, and, perhaps more importantly,

³ This essay owes a great deal, both in inspiration and method, to Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya's *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*, especially Chapter 1, “The Making of Mexican *Molli* and Alimentary Theology in the Making”. Thank you to Prof. Mayra Rivera for pointing it out. One short relevant quote from this book: “Nurturing embodies *caritas* for everybody” (43).

⁴ Anthropologists have studied cooking (and eating) for decades (perhaps since the inception of the discipline), as part of the anthropology of consumption. The literature is vast. I chose to steer clear of this approach and focus on the theological by way of a heuristic. I also will not delve deeper into what constitutes a practice, a subject matter tackled by recognized scholars such as Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, and Foucault (cf. Schatzki, et.al., eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, 2001). With Schatzki, I affirm that “a practice is a set of doings and sayings organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules, and a teleoaffective [i.e., that it matters toward achieving a goal] structure” (Schatzki, 53). Simply put, a practice is what people do, as related to what they are, need, and want.

⁵ For a discussion of this, see Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, 1996, pp. 5-7. This is a crucial text for practical theologians.

⁶ There is an Ecclesial Practices unit in the AAR dedicated to practical theology. Other good academic resources for practical theology are the journals *Practical Matters* (www.practicalmattersjournal.org) and *Ecclesial Practices* (www.brill.com/products/journal/ecclesial-practices).

with its constant worry, which I share, with the hermeneutical circle: “is what *appears* to be going on within this situation what is *actually* going on?”⁷ Any resonances and worry will remain to be further explored at another time.

It also should be clear that there is no definitive way to conclude this essay; a theological anthropology cannot, ironically enough, reach its own *telos*. In other words, to “be human” one is always “becoming human.” But, as will be seen, the *sancocho* provides one peculiar snapshot to a better understanding of being human: through the lens of one *cotidiano* cultural practice.

Culture and Theology

To speak of culture and theology certain presuppositions have to be made from the start. First, the speaker is situated in a particular context among (contest between?) self, selves, and other. For example, referring to Stuart Hall’s orientation in cultural studies, Grossberg writes: “For Hall, all human practices...are struggles to ‘make history but in conditions not of our own making’.”⁸ Hall, with all communicators of culture (and, as I argue here, of theology), “thinks and does” scholarship from a particular and unshakeable perspective: “made-and-not-made” by him. This self-evident truth is the starting point of any conversation about theology and culture.

Second, terms need to be defined, in a more general sense, from these particular struggles, self-made and conditioned by others. The definitions, for example, can be produced through Hall’s concept of articulation, “the complex set of historical practices by which we struggle to produce identity or structural unity out of, on top of, complexity, difference, [and] contradiction.”⁹ To articulate culture and theology is to be thrown into their own sites of contestation, and, eventually and inevitably, choose a space through which to create boundaries that remain porous and dynamic. Regarding concepts, then, precision must be balanced with promiscuity. One way of displaying this awareness is to adopt a postmodern worldview. For instance, by questioning the “effectivity, conditions of possibility, and overdetermination” of those tensed presuppositions constantly in play.¹⁰ In this sense, articulation becomes a matter of positionality, which, circling back, just confirms the need for “promiscuous while precise” concepts: concepts that can be spoken “to”, but not “of”.

Even so, scholarship must focus on its object of study, and the theories that will be used to study it.¹¹ In this essay, this would initially have to include the concepts of culture and theology. With Davaney, I define culture as “the process by which meaning is produced, contended for, and continually renegotiated, and the context in which individual and communal identities are mediated and brought into being.”¹² So,

⁷ Swinton and Mowat, xi.

⁸ *Stuart*, 153.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹¹ Hall writes: “The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency.” For instance, whether one can even assume a “postmodern” worldview is debatable. This tension with theoretical constructs will go unexplored here, but it remains crucial in scholarship.

¹² *Converging*, 5.

Davaney describes culture as both a process and a context: the former seems to correspond well with articulation and the latter with positionality. What is crucial for this essay, though, is the fact that culture is a site of meaning production and identity creation; not merely an effect but a cause. A cause of what? According to Davaney, of the many ways of being human among/between self (or selves) and other.

As for theology, Taylor defines it as “discourse (*logos*) relating to what a people holds to be sacred (*theos*).”¹³ My interest here is not the false dichotomy between the profane and the sacred,¹⁴ but theology’s discursive nature: it is also done in articulation, as culture is. In addition, as theology is held by *people*, not a person or an individual; it is of communal nature.¹⁵ One could certainly correspond this communality also with its need for multi-contextuality and for correlation (in the sense of Tillich): no theology is an island. In other words, the theological understanding of being human, better known as theological anthropology, has to co-exist with the ways of being human in culture, the province of cultural studies in general; some examples of these ways are the political and economic (in terms of power dynamics), the aesthetical, and even the spiritual.¹⁶

Culture and theology as stand-alone conceptual constructions certainly are polyvalent, spatially and temporally contingent, not “free-floating”¹⁷ but rooted in varying and complex ways. For example, they are “multi-traditioned.”¹⁸ Being so, their conceptual boundaries interact with one another, and with all other aspects of human lived experience (such as politics, economics, art, and literature). According to Davaney, this interaction is not reductive to either, but rather leads to “distinctly different ways of being human,” to an interwoven reality of cultures and theologies that obscures its own “made-and-not-made” origin and *telos*.¹⁹ Evidently, the negotiation between culture and theology becomes clearer if one fixes both within a particular space-time and sees theology as one more cultural production. As a result, a particular theology is contingent on a particular cultural moment...theology becomes “contextualized.” One common example in Christian tradition would be the Incarnation, the emptying of the divine into one human culture in particular and/or, conversely and ultimately, into everyday human culture in general.²⁰

In what way can culture be a theological production? Or put more specifically, how can a self-described cultural practice be theological? One recent scholarly work that has explored this relationship, among others, is Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya’s *The*

¹³ Ibid., 177.

¹⁴ This modern construct has been critiqued thoroughly in postmodern thought. I will not delve deeply here.

¹⁵ According to Latinx theologians José David Rodríguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero, there is no theology but *teología en conjunto*, theology-by-ensemble, -in-community. Cf. *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

¹⁶ Cf. Hopkins, *Being*.

¹⁷ *Changing*, 14.

¹⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

²⁰ Another way to see the Incarnation event, with McClain Taylor (now Mark Lewis Taylor), could be “theology as cultural critique” (ibid., 125), but this goes beyond this essay’s method.

Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist.²¹ As such, one is tempted to extrapolate toward the universal and think of culture in general as theologically influenced in part or wholly. Yet, this influence is more obscure than its opposite (that is, theology as culturally influenced), which is far more difficult to recognize or, worse, adjudicate. In other words, one is more apt to see cultural intrusions into theology, and theological anthropology specifically, because what is considered one's own cultural conditions seem to be closer to oneself than one's theological presuppositions.²² Therefore, it seems that the self-conception of one's humanness hinges more on the cultural and less on the theological. This is misleading because, as already stated, being human is undoubtedly also a thoroughly theological imperative. Even so, is the potential to see culture as essentially theological, as can be seen in what follows.

Cooking Soup: A Heuristic

I have chosen cooking soup, specifically *sancocho*, as one cultural practice through which to articulate a theological anthropology. It is an appropriate site to study cultural influence on theology, if one takes Hopkins seriously: "If religious reflection [i.e., theology] arises from material culture, then such reflection must be rooted in practice."²³ In this sense, the cultural practice of cooking could offer a heuristic, following Hopkins, for a method of theological anthropology. It is important to note that I am not claiming that cooking is a theological endeavor. What cooking as practice offers is the possibility of a model (i.e. a heuristic) that can be borrowed for theological practice. Hopkins delineates two fundamental conditions for this possibility; both culture and theology *involve* and *engage* people.²⁴ Specifically, cooking and theological anthropology are both centered around and heavily invested in humanity, in their well-being and well-*becoming*. Therefore, thinking of Davaney's definition of culture, if cooking soup is a cultural material practice, it should be both a process for meaning production and a context for identity creation by, and for, *people*. Furthermore, Davaney writes: "humans produce and construct meaning not only linguistically and textually, but also in non-linguistic and even non-discursive ways."²⁵ In other words, if theological anthropology is the *discourse* around what it means to be human theologically, it follows that it could be sourced from a "non-linguistic"²⁶ yet discursive context as another *locus* through which being human is constructed, if only for a heuristic. In sum, cooking soup in a specific cultural context could provide a model towards a contextualized theological anthropology. Moreover, this theological method could very well display generalizable characteristics, as we will see.

²¹ Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

²² Refer back to my self-descriptors in the Introduction. For example, when one is asked to describe oneself to an assembly, one usually starts with one's name and country of origin. Both of these are evidently tied much more to one's culture than to one's theology. Fair enough, after those two, in many contexts one's third "self-describer" could be religious commitment or orientation. But, even then, it is usually culturally contingent, as in "Latinx Christian" or "Black Theologian." Culture is easier to make a part of one-self than theology.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 163; emphasis mine.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁶ "Linguistic" is being limited here to the verbal or oral.

However, one immediate danger must be addressed. This cross-over of a cultural material practice to theological anthropology runs the risk of particularizing to the point of reducing differences to inconsequence. For example, the latter could happen if the crossover is construed as one more example of a “marginalized” culture and theology against a “central” culture and theology.²⁷ The power asymmetries between margin and center in the history of humankind are obvious and well-known, and delving deeply here goes beyond the scope of this essay. But, by not focusing on the asymmetries, one must not “throw the baby out with the bath water,” and discard grassroots material practices as irrelevant to meaning making. With Tanner, I value the “creative agency” of people in general, but especially non-elites.²⁸ In any case, I also recognize the unhelpful exercise of separating “marginalized” from “center” when analyzing culture. Culture, as a “total way of life,”²⁹ in constant change,³⁰ includes both. I am looking for a possible roadmap for theology using one cultural marker, a specific material practice. I do this not for one group’s cultural influences into their own, or another’s, theology, but rather for the contrarian move of seeing culture through a theological lens.

Cooking up a Theology...

Why shouldn’t one use a quotidian material cultural practice to explore academically (in this case, theologically)? If theology can be contextualized according to constructed cultural forms such as race or gender, why not cooking? For example, cooking and eating, and their socio-cultural implications, have been studied extensively in anthropology. My methodological choice owes much to anthropologist Stephan Palmié. In *The Cooking of History*, Palmié recounts that Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz describes his own culture as an *ajiaco*, a “stew most typical and most complex, made from various species of legumes, which we here call “viandas”, and of pieces of diverse meats; all of which are cooked with water at boiling point until it produces a very thick and succulent potage which is seasoned with the most Cuban *ají*, from which it derives its name.”³¹ The metaphor of the *ajiaco* corresponds with Davaney’s definition of culture: a process of production, contention and negotiation, and a context of mediation and creation. An *ajiaco* is both a process (“cooked”, “boiling”) and a context (“stew”, “potage”), composed of presuppositions (ingredients, such as “viandas,” meats, and

²⁷ It should be obvious to many readers that I have referred to culture in very general terms. For example, my focus is very particular when looking at the source (the *sancocho*) but not entirely when writing about its culture, the Caribbean, to this point. This is, in fact, purposely done in an effort to present a generalizable heuristic. I am not aiming for a heuristic for a Latino theological anthropology, which is a worthy endeavor and possible future project as a seemingly natural next step. In addition, I am not aiming for a Latino heuristic for a theological anthropology either, though this element is undoubtedly present because of the source used. As heuristic as such, it necessitates fluidity and adaptability. I have also referred to theology in broad terms as well. Since the aim of the essay is to present a heuristic, this aspect is underdeveloped by design. My intent is to lay out a template, so to speak, in which to construct a theological anthropology, “promiscuous yet precise”. That way, whatever contexts and processes the theologian brings will determine which theology is constructed. These methodological choices have determined my use of bibliographical sources and theories, and as such waits to be expanded (and corrected) by the rich sources stemming from Latinx/Latin American/Hispanic scholars, among others.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁰ *Theories*, 52.

³¹ *Cooking*, 97.

seasonings) and resulting in a “typical and complex,” “thick,” and “succulent” product that derives its name from itself. Basically, Palmié sees in Ortiz’s metaphor two key components: first, “indigenization,” i.e., how the ingredients are incorporated into the pot, transformed in mutual co-mingling, and contributed to the stew’s overall composition. And second, he sees “difference,” a recognition of ever-present temporal and spatial contingencies that preclude any fixity of theories, methods, identities or authenticities, all present in the pot at different levels of engagement (that is, based on how deep one “dips the spoon” during the cooking process).³² Issues of indigeneity and difference will also be evident when exploring *sancocho*. Therefore, in my case of looking for the theological in a cultural material practice, “[i]t depends on the spoonful we select for metacultural inspection and on the rules of recognition we apply to it.”³³ This spoonful doesn’t necessarily serve up one particular raced or gendered theology, but a “cooking” theology: “cooking” as both contextual and processual (i.e., not fully cooked), always “caught-in-the-act” (since it is even cooking in the spoon itself).³⁴

***Sancocho* and a Recipe**

To better coincide with my own positionality, I shift now from the *ajiaco* to the *sancocho*, a heavy soup of strikingly similar confection, which is typical of Puerto Rico and other Caribbean areas. The *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* defines *sancocho* (not including regional synonyms) as:

1. *alimento a medio cocer* (a half-cooked food);
2. *olla compuesta de carne, yuca, plátano y otros ingredientes, y que se toma en el almuerzo* (a pot composed of meat, yuca, plantain, and other ingredients, that is taken [i.e. eaten] during lunchtime);
3. *comida cocinada con agua, sal, y algún otro condimento* (meal cooked with water, salt, and any other condiment).³⁵

First, it is telling that the *sancocho* evokes feelings of in-betweenness; it is always liminal, on-the-way. In this sense, it could also be pejorative, since a half-cooked food is no food at all, in the same sense of the colloquial phrase half-baked idea.³⁶ Second, it is a cultural artifact, not a natural element existing-on-its-own. In other words, it is created by human beings through a combination of natural (and, later, synthetic) ingredients: an artifact. Third, it has only two fixed ingredients: water and salt (in fact, I read elsewhere that it could also be called *salcocho*, a word compounded from *sal*, or salt, and *cocho*, from *cocer*, or cook).³⁷ All other ingredients are variable. So, the *sancocho* is, in general, an in-between culinary artifact with somewhat opaque components and

³² Ibid., 99.

³³ Ibid., 100.

³⁴ Not that race and gender are not present in the *sancocho* (e.g., they are in the politics of its production and consumption) or that any theology embedded in these contexts or processes is not already raced or gendered (I strongly believe that a non-contextualized theology is impossible). But these ambiguities have to be explored elsewhere; I chose to leave that door open for future research or elaboration.

³⁵ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (Madrid: Espasa, 2001).

³⁶ It could be interesting to research if this pejorative arose from the *sancocho*’s evidently more humble origins within empire’s cuisine.

³⁷ See <http://riskescuelaculinaria.com/cual-es-la-forma-correcta-sancocho-o-salcocho/>. See also *Eating*, 122.

composition. Such a definition is too broad to be useful as heuristic for a theological anthropology; one needs to look at one contextualized, particular *sancocho* formulation: a recipe.

Cookbooks are one source for recipes. Among the myriad cookbooks that could be consulted for a *sancocho* recipe, one comes immediately to mind. Originally published in 1954, *Cocina Criolla* by Carmen Aboy Valldejuli is one of the most famous Puerto Rican cookbooks. A copy of this book is sure to grace many a Caribbean, even *Latino*/Latin-American/Hispanic, culinary library. In my family we own the forty-eighth (!) edition, from 1990. Its table of contents includes lists of cooking implements and instruments, measurement units, relevant cooking terminology, and “useful advice.”³⁸ It has the recipes arranged by both meal type (e.g. soup, cakes) and food type (e.g. beef, poultry). It must be added that even the most recent editions also aim to serve as a kind of homemaker user’s manual. For example, one can read about the proper way to entertain an unexpected guest. Usually the gender roles are very much fixed in this endeavor: “[W]hile the husband gives the guest a cocktail or highball, we [in Spanish, the gendered *nosotras*; meaning, I assume, “wives”] skillfully...will prepare a simple and attractive menu.”³⁹ The gendered language is not surprising for 1954 but unavoidably irrelevant for 1990. But this cultural-temporal stagnation⁴⁰ remains, which could turn poisonous for a contemporary theological anthropology. Relatedly, my family’s copy was a wedding gift, and this is the handwritten dedication, from one of my mother’s friends:

Dear Mercedes [my wife’s name], I wish that this book solves all your problems in your life as homemaker. This department is one of the most difficult, but with this competent book you already have an ally. God bless your home, and give you rich blessings. Matilde, July 1991 (translation mine).

It is salient that the book is described as a panacea, and an active one. It is an “ally,” a friendly agent to accompany one through life’s travails. In a certain sense, the inscription borders on the theological: *Cocina Criolla* as a written source of culture, as process and context, describes a Puerto Rican way of being human through text. If *Cocina Criolla* is such a source, it is therefore reasonable to build a theological anthropology using a recipe as heuristic. In this essay, the theological recipe is a *sancocho*.⁴¹ Below I include the recipe of *sancocho* as found in *Cocina Criolla* (my translation):

³⁸ E.g. “if the recipe calls for oven use, turn it on 10 minutes before starting to broil or bake” - *Cocina*, 19, translation mine.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21; translation mine.

⁴⁰ Why this is the case goes beyond the scope here, but I am left to wonder if Puerto Rico’s colonial status is to blame.

⁴¹ While I did not cover this, I found a source stating that the *sancocho* is a Spanish dish from the Canary Islands. Not entirely relevant to this essay but leaves the possibility of further research open.

Ingredients (for 8 servings)

- A. 1 lb chuck or bottom round roast, ½ lb pork meat, bone-in; no fat or skin
- B. 3 lts water, 1 tbsp salt
- C. 1 onion, 2 tomatoes, 1 green pepper (no seeds), 1 sweet pepper (*ají dulce*, no seeds), 3 culantro (*recao*) leaves, 2 corn cobs
- D. ½ lb of white tannier (*yautía*), ½ lb of pumpkin, ½ lb of yellow tannier (*yautía*), ½ lb of potatoes, ½ lb of yam (*ñame*), ½ lb of sweet potato (*batata*), 1 green plantain, 1 yellow (ripe) plantain
- E. 1 tbsp salt, ½ cup of tomato sauce
- F. 4 garlic cloves

Procedure

1. Cut beef and pork to pieces, and wash including bone (ingredients 'A').
2. In a 12-qt. pot, combine water and salt (ingredients 'B'), and bring to a boil.
3. Wash and cut ingredients 'C', and add them to pot, along with meat and bone.
4. Cook uncovered on high heat until it boils again. Then lower to medium, cover and cook for one hour.
5. Peel, cut to pieces, and wash the root vegetables (ingredients 'D'), then add to pot.
6. Add ingredients 'E' to pot. Mix well and bring to a boil again. Then, lower the heat to medium, cover, and cook for 45 minutes.
7. Uncover and let boil for ten more minutes. Take the green plantains out of the pot, and mash them along with the four garlic cloves (ingredient 'F'). Mold by hand the paste into small spheres and put them back in the soup.

Recipe as Heuristic: Context and Process

There is plenty to discuss here, if one means to develop the recipe as heuristic. First, as in many recipes, one must purvey ingredients. These ingredients vary according to one's economic means, as not everybody has access to the same quality and quantity. The *sancocho* in *Cocina Criolla* is an expensive proposition, one that includes both beef and pork, sixteen different vegetables in differing quantities and conditions (i.e., one is "sauced"), a fair amount of salt, and it also assumes that water is readily available. But that does not mean every *sancocho* is like this: another recipe I found has only six ingredients (besides water): fish, potatoes, sweet potatoes, olive oil, parsley, and salt.⁴² And, of course, the *Cocina Criolla* recipe could be tailored to fit each individual situation. For example, chicken or fish could be used by more healthy-minded consumers, and/or fewer vegetables or meat for the more frugal. It also could vary by

⁴² See http://www.grancanaria.com/patronato_turismo/4806.o.html

geographic space, since not all ingredients could be present in all locations. Some are native, others locally found, and still others foreign but still available. For example, some of the vegetables are indigenous to the region, such as tannier (*yautía* is probably a *Taíno* word) and sweet potato (*batata* in Spanish). Others were brought by colonizers from Spain or their colonized lands, like the plantain, originally from the Canary Islands,⁴³ or the yam, originally from West Africa.⁴⁴ The term in Spanish *vianda* (English, viand) for most of these root vegetables (ingredients “D” in the recipe) has another peculiar life story. The word has French roots and means “food,” not just root vegetable. So, *viandas* can constitute the whole meal, and in many places and times it probably did⁴⁵ and still does, as it is more readily available geographically and economically.⁴⁶ But in this *sancocho*, the *vianda* is one more ingredient: the carbohydrate to complement the protein from meat.

As previously stated, the meat component in *Cocina Criolla*'s *sancocho* could place it squarely within the upper economic echelons of society, and a meatless *sancocho* is very common. By the time of *Cocina Criolla*'s publication in the 1950's, Puerto Rico had been declared a commonwealth by the U.S., and was in the throes of a transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, with the corresponding monetary windfalls for the original *Cocina Criolla* readers. Nationwide, these were the post-WWII boom years. Also, historically speaking, cattle and pigs seem to have been introduced by the Spanish colonizers (as food and, in the case of cattle, as farming help), since neither species is native to the island.⁴⁷ One must also recognize that the presence of both beef and pork in the recipe has certain significance, as pigs are usually associated with the more mountainous region of Puerto Rico, and cattle with the coastal areas, where grazing is easier and milking in a larger scale is more convenient.⁴⁸ Even so, pork is mostly seen as “country” or rural food, and beef as “town” or urban food. One must also highlight that pork bone is included in the recipe.⁴⁹ In fact, if bones are not used in certain recipes, they are usually saved for future occasions (assuming, of course, that refrigeration is available). Besides its own nutritional value (i.e., the bone marrow), bone brings a scaffolding element for the meat to remain cohesive during the actual cooking part. Furthermore, there is a certain pleasure in dealing with the bone within a meal (e.g., it makes one use hands instead of cutlery, allowing more contact with the food itself). So, the presence of bone in the recipe cannot be overemphasized.

This *Cocina Criolla* recipe also presumes a communal meal, as the final product is quite large, although larger families used to be the norm in pre-industrial times. For instance, it is well known that, in rural areas, health services are more difficult to come by and infant mortality is high. In addition, help for farming and other work was sorely needed, so larger families helped in that regard. Hence, the need for large quantities of food in recipes, like this *sancocho*. Recipe quantities can also be easily adjusted, but that

⁴³ This according to *Eating*, 138.

⁴⁴ This according to *Eating*, 137.

⁴⁵ Abad y Lasierra wrote: “their viand [meal] is reduced to a pot of rice or sweet potato, yams, pumpkin, or everything together” (*Historia*, 499; translation mine).

⁴⁶ *Eating*, 122-123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁹ I am reminded of a Puerto Rican saying: “*en el hueso está el sabor*” – “flavor is in the bone”.

the *sancocho* is a “big” meal is unavoidable. Finally, seasonings are key components in any *sancocho*. Salt, for one, is locally available because Puerto Rico, as an island, is surrounded by seawater. In fact, one municipality is called Salinas, which is salt-bed in Spanish. Salt has been used to preserve food since time immemorial. Most probably, it became a seasoning due to being ever-present in meats and other perishable foods. Thus, salt transformed the palate so that from an afterthought it became a prime ingredient. A similar movement was explored by Sidney Mintz in “Time, Sugar, and Sweetness,” regarding the changing tastes of Europeans and uses of sugar (as food, medicine, sweetener, preservative, and flavor-enhancer, for example) through the dynamics of colonialism, the invention of “new worlds” and worldviews. Another seasoning in the recipe is *culantro*, better known on the island as *recao*. *Recao* is an herb, and a key component in *sofrito*, a Puerto Rican cooking base present in many staples, such as stewed beans. Note that *recao* is not cilantro. *Recao* is very difficult to find in the U.S., as it is a tropical plant. The presence of *recao* in this recipe will immediately identify it as most probably Caribbean in nature.⁵⁰ But one issue is certain: the constant presence of seasonings, be they flavor-enhancers or preservatives, betrays their ambivalent status as protagonists or background players. Theological anthropology is laden with these actors: they are many times considered cultural (such as self-conceptions of race, ethnicity, class, or gender), other times particularly religious (such as createdness or fallenness). Their relationship augments or masks them as needed, as will be seen with the process section, below.

To conclude this first section, I aver that the ingredients that must be purveyed vacillate between necessary and contingent, based on mingling seemingly contrary concepts. For example, the extravagant and the frugal, the individual and shared, the native and the foreign, the local and the global, the quotidian and the not-so-much, and the urban and the rural. The ingredients, then, are *contexts*, the conditions of possibility of the final product, which arises from their interaction but also is much more than that. In other words, contexts mix and create their own mingled context, all its own apart from its different components.

Second, the ingredients must be combined in a procedure that produces a final product: the cooking steps of the recipe. In this *sancocho*, they are very structured and specific. To start, there is an assumption that kitchen tools are present: pots, pans, knives, bowls, etc. These are not even mentioned in the recipe. The author also assumes the cook knows which kitchen tool to use when he/she needs to cut or boil. Thus, there is a toolbox that the cook brings with him/her, and he/she must be able to choose from this toolbox to complete the specific task at hand. Of course, related to this, the author also assumes that the cook can handle the tools needed; the cook must know and be able to cut, to pour water, peel, etc. So, there are certain skills and implements that are assumed already present in this endeavor: basic requisite tools, and, at the very least, amateurish, relevant knowledge, ability and performance skills. These are *givens*.

⁵⁰ According to Wikipedia, *culantro* is also used in non-Caribbean cuisine; for example, in several Central American and South American countries, and even in several Southeast Asian countries – not surprising, giving climactic similarities. Going deeper into this is beyond the scope. I must say: I claim *recao* as inherently Puerto Rican.

Following this, one can see structure in the author's grouping of the ingredients (i.e., "A", "B", et.al.), presumably so that the cook cannot get confused but rather follow the cooking steps easily. Then, as with any recipe, there is also preparatory work. For example, washing some of the ingredients, or cutting vegetables into small pieces. So, one's first steps in *doing* the recipe is preparing the ingredients to do work for us; in a systematic manner, groundwork must be laid out. Once this foundation is in place, then the work begins in earnest: boiling, combining ingredients according to a certain order (as some ingredients take longer to cook than others), and stewing over different degrees of heat (as groups of ingredients need more or less time to fully mingle in the heat-induced interaction; there is always the danger of undercooking or overcooking). There is also continuous monitoring at all stages of the recipe, exemplified by constant mixing and tasting the *sancocho* with a spoon to ascertain proper progress and if final corrections are needed with ingredients or seasonings. The *sancocho* is not "left alone" to stew by itself; it is periodically measured against itself and others of its kind and corrected if needed. Furthermore, one ingredient (the plantain) is removed close to the meal's completion, reworked outside the pot (hard to do when it was boiling moments before!) and mixed with another ingredient, and then put back into the pot prior to serving the *sancocho*. This odd instruction cannot be anything but a "flourish" on the part of *Cocina Criolla*, the author's personal touch, as it adds nothing to taste or any other characteristic of the *sancocho*. One final fact that must be highlighted is this stage's active nature: from washing to stewing, this is the dynamic portion of the recipe, and the one with the most at stake. To add to its centrality, this portion must be completed beginning to end, non-stop, if one is to get an adequate final product. Contingencies that were not covered at the start or that arise mid-process must be unavoidably dealt with and diffused, such as the surprise addition of "more mouths to feed" with the same recipe. That would mean a re-calibration of ingredients and cooking steps to accommodate them, one that would probably go unnoticed (unless the food ran out).

To conclude this second section, I aver that the cooking steps are the structure that frames the product, the *process* through which the result arises. Its nature is dynamic. Any practice speaks louder than its components: the ingredients and the givens. The process is contexts-in- action, ingredients communicating with one another. It begins from certain assumptions and specific groundwork, i.e., the setup of the field of action. After all these tangibles are in place, then the process starts in full force. But, ironically, its presence is to be absent, as process is not tangible in itself. Process is the name for the transition from one context to another, be they individual or combined. Some of these transitions require human agency; some do not. Others require varying degrees of intervention by non-human agents (such as heat). There are moments in which periodic guidance is needed, and there is always a need for constant monitoring to ensure *telos* has not been compromised. There is even space for pure pleasure, that which brings spontaneity and playfulness in another sense, such as when an off-recipe ingredient is introduced, or a step is added as a "flourish." For a theological anthropology, the process of being human presupposes a certain procedure, an interaction of meaningful actors that many times mingle purposefully, but sometimes in unintended ways. As stated above, the actors (i.e., the contexts) can arise, for example,

from culture in general or religion in particular. But it is their mingling, their relationship, that now becomes as crucial as the contexts themselves.

***Sancocho* and Its Recipe: A Heuristic for Theological Anthropology**

A recipe as a heuristic for a theological anthropology should seem more reasonable by now. But let me offer an additional rationale for the association. While the interpretative realms or frameworks for theology differ from those of cooking (a cultural practice), the experiential referent is still the same: human life. In other words, both are inextricably linked in and through lived experience; both are needed to experience living. In fact, with McClintock Fulkerson, I argue that there can be no disconnection between them: “I...contest the idea that theological and normative Christian identity requires discursive practice that is “pure” from accommodation with the languages and practices of non-biblical or non-theological realms of experience.”⁵¹ In addition, I am sure Isasi-Díaz and others would agree that theological anthropology is “cooked” culturally and culture is “cooked” theologically. Both aspects of life are lived *en la lucha*, in the struggle.⁵² Even further, Hopkins writes, “Ultimate concerns reside in the flesh of everyday life.”⁵³ Simply stated, humanness is *sancochada*, struggling in the messiness of the pot (i.e., life), where ultimate concern dwells every day.⁵⁴

But what specifically can be garnered from the *sancocho* for theological anthropology? Notice the title of this essay: it is not exclusively that theological anthropology must be recognized as a *sancocho*, or that the culinary (i.e. cultural) practice of *sancocho* represents what theological anthropology must be. The aim here is to model, to present a heuristic: to become aware that theological anthropology must be *sancochada*, both stewed and stewing, and that the contexts and the process of *sancocho* (again, using Davaney’s definition of culture) can be illuminating to theological anthropology as a lived experience. First, *sancocho* teaches us that to understand situated identity as fixed is tenuous at best. Ingredients and presuppositions, or contexts, sit in sites of historical-cultural contention. No doubt, certain aspects of a being human can be grasped, such as space (e.g., origin, current emplacement) and time (e.g. life story). But, as Hall reminded us, these are all articulated in complex, different, and contradictory ways. In my specific case: What is being Puerto Rican? Is *recao* Puerto Rican, even though it is globally present, or is *yautía* Puerto Rican because it was there in pre-Columbian times? Is yam Puerto Rican in Puerto Rico because it is locally called *ñame*, or vice versa (i.e., is *ñame* just U.S. yam)? Does Puerto Rican include colonial imports? By the same token, is my humanness native, indigenous, imported, colonized, or all of the above? All this gestures

⁵¹ *Converging*, 146.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*, 136.

⁵³ *Changing*, 167.

⁵⁴ There is a related common colloquial phrase in Puerto Rico that comes to mind: “Nadie sabe lo que hay en la olla más que la cuchara que la menea” – “nobody knows what is in the pot except the spoon that stirs it.” While this phrase ostensibly refers to the dangers of gossip, its metaphorical proximity to the everydayness and fleshly struggles of the articulations of culture and theology toward a “cooking” theological anthropology make it relevant.

beyond a postmodern awareness toward the post-critical, a “promiscuous while precise” pose. Clearly, thinking through being Puerto Rican is no easy chore.

Second, *sancocho* teaches us that identity is borne out of relatedness, from discourse, and this is fundamental to theo-logical anthropo-logy. Human are communal by, made *en conjunto* and mingled with *cotidiano* practices and beliefs, both sacred and profane, whatever those might be. This relatedness is always *sancochando*, half-cooking, constantly becoming, which means that it is never the same as it was or will be. Even so, the ingredients of *sancocho* are mixed and, in combination, become something new entirely, a co-mingled substance begotten through hospitality: some dissolve, others remain, a few add flavor.⁵⁵ As Palmié recognized with Ortiz’s metaphor of *ajiaco*, the *sancocho* is a cultural marker that speaks well beyond the obvious and into our ways of being; being human means being present and also being absent, as one can never fully encompass the totality of humanness in a given space and time. For a *sancochando* theological anthropology, one could borrow Ortiz’s word “succulent,” meaning juicy or rich. It is challenging to construct a succulent theological anthropology, and one that is always cooking, being as well as becoming. And a succulent theological anthropology is always unique and authentic, autochthonous, one could say: its-own-thing, free and not hegemonic, always alone but not lonely. Because it is relational, such a theological anthropology is first and foremost an ally, just like Doña Matilde wrote in her dedication in my family’s *Cocina Criolla*.

Finally, *sancocho* teaches us about *sazón*, seasoning, the “spice of life.” A theological anthropology needs tailoring; that is why it is always “A” and never “The.” Even so, this fluidity requires updating and feedback, tweaking. Being human is always precarious, a matter of positionality. But this does not mean unoriginality or, even worse, irrelevance. *My* theological anthropology just means it has been tweaked to be *mine*, but that also means it exists alongside, maybe even because of, those that are *other*. One way to ensure this solidarity is the seasoning, the “back-and-forth tasting,” an agreement within the tension between self and selves, and self/selves and others.⁵⁶ I suggest this could offset the theoretical messiness that was present earlier with Hall and others: “the theory one must fight against.” *Sazón* is how we all come together at the end. *My* theological anthropology reaches its *telos* when it sits in harmony with *yours* and *theirs*, when it becomes *ours*. And the result is one amazing *sancochada* theology that is constantly *sancochando*.

Perhaps it is fitting to end with this quote by Hopkins: “Culture is where the sacred reveals itself.”⁵⁷ I hope this essay provides some evidence in that respect.

⁵⁵ *Being*, 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

**Sancochando una antropología teológica:
Un “sopón” puertorriqueño como método heurístico.¹**

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Resumen

El afirmar que la teología es cultural ha sido bien establecido desde su inyección como prácticas académicas y cotidianas. Sin embargo, ver cultura como una práctica propiamente teológica ha sido menos estudiado. Al explorar la relación ambigua entre teología y cultura desde el punto de vista de estudios culturales y teología académica, y usando la noción de sopa “espesa” conocida como sancocho como método heurístico, propondré que antropología teológica (es decir, del ser humano) es siempre un acto de sancochar, de estofado y estofar sus contextos mezclados (es decir sus ingredientes) y procesos de contestación (es decir sus pasos de cocimiento), de hacer y no hacer nuestro sabroso “ser” “humano” personal y comunal.

• SEE PAGE 9 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

Introducción

Como un estudiante de teología en una universidad estadounidense conocida generalmente por el uso del método científico al estudio de la religión, constantemente siento la necesidad de auto-examinar mi posición precaria como un hombre puertorriqueño, maduro, cristiano, de la clase media, blanquito,² cisgénero,

¹ Parte del título fue tomado prestado del artículo de Dwight Hopkins titulado “Theological Method and Cultural Studies: Slave Religious Culture as a Heuristic” in *Changing* (pp. 163-180), el cual ocasionó el ímpetu para la presente investigación respondiendo a la siguiente pregunta: ¿es posible obtener conocimientos teológicos de las prácticas culturales cotidianas, pero no necesariamente religiosas? Mi respuesta, la cual contiene este artículo, es evidentemente, sí.

² Whitish es mi traducción de *blanquix*, un término peyorativo con el que yo crecí. En Puerto rico yo sería considerado *blanquito*, un hombre nacido privilegio, fenotípicamente blanco para la isla, viviendo en un mundo alterno del que la mayoría de puertorriqueños no participan ni les interesa. Irónicamente, en Chicago, soy blanquito por otra razón: soy parte de una minoría étnica, un Latino. Una discusión completa de las ambigüedades y complejidades de raza va más allá de mi alcance aquí, pero con *blanquito*

heterosexual, probando seguir una segunda carrera. Inevitablemente, mi propia manera de ser humano ha sido siempre dinámica. Una consecuencia es que se me ha hecho imposible separar aspectos culturales de aspectos religiosos y teológicos dentro de mí mismo, incluso cuando intento evaluar a ambos por separado. Como tal, esta conexión ambigua entre cultura y teología se mezcla dentro de mi propia cosmovisión.

Este ensayo es una exploración de esa ambigüedad. Uno debería poder ver aspectos únicos de su manera de ser humano por medio de varias maneras de ser en su experiencia vivida, porque es a través de prácticas concretas que nuestro ser es expresado. Además, nuestro ser teológico no puede ser circunscrito a la esfera religiosa porque eso pudiese convertir la religión en un fenómeno separado de esas mismas prácticas.³ Siendo así, comienzo describiendo la relación entre la cultura y la teología, conversando con académicos de estudios culturales y teológicos. Seguidamente, exploro una práctica de material cultural generalizada,⁴ de cocinar sopa, en particular el sopón puertorriqueño conocido como sancocho. El sancocho es una sabrosa combinación de carnes y viandas (tubérculos) de diferentes nacionalidades e historias. Es muy prevalente en el Caribe, similar en forma al *gumbo* en el sur de los E.E.U.U. Quiero explorar el proceso de hacer sancocho con el fin de derivar una heurística particular para la antropología teológica. Concluiré este ensayo con unos breves comentarios acerca de cómo desarrollar una teología antropológica que se hace imperativa alrededor de esa heurística: es decir, que el discurso teológico acerca del ser humano necesita estar *sancochada* para ser relevante a la reflexión teológica en general.

Debo notar que el propósito aquí no es de presentar una teología de la(s) práctica(s), lo que Don Browning, John Swinton, y muchos otros en el contexto europeo han llamado *teología práctica*. Esta disciplina es “práctica” en al menos dos formas: uno, se enfoca en lo mundano, la experiencia diaria (o “prácticas”) de creyentes; y dos, se enfoca en lo pragmática, los aspectos menos teóricos (como en el *phronesis* aristotélico) de esos mismos creyentes.⁵ Como cocinar es tanto mundano como pragmático, la teología práctica parece encajar mejor el tema que nos preocupa metodológicamente, especialmente por su base en la investigación empírica (por ejemplo, la etnografía). Pero la teología práctica como es ejercitada en los centros

(“whitish”) en lugar de “blanco” (“white” o peor “whitey”) yo quiero hacer explícita la precariedad de mi localidad racial.

³ Éste ensayo debe mucho, en inspiración y método a trabajo de Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*, especialmente el capítulo 1, “The Making of Mexican Mollis and Alimentary Theology in the Making”. Agradezco a la Profesora Mayra Rivera por señalármelo. Una corta pero relevante cita de este libro: “Nutrir encarna caritas para cada persona” (43).

⁴ Antropólogos han estudiado cocinar (y comer) por décadas (quizás desde que el comienzo de la disciplina), como parte de una antropología de consumo. La literatura es vasta. Elijo alejarme de este acercamiento y enfoque en lo teológico a través de una heurística. Tampoco voy a profundizar en lo que constituye una práctica, un asunto abordado por estudiosos reconocidos como Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, y Foucault (Revisar Schatzki, et.al., eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, 2001). Con Schatzki, afirmo que “una práctica es un conjunto de hechos y dichos organizados por un grupo de entendimiento, un conjunto de reglas, y una estructura teleoaffectiva [es decir, que importa alcanzar una meta]” (Schatzki, 53). En pocas palabras, una práctica es lo que las personas hacen, en relación a lo que son, necesitan y quieren.

⁵ Para una discusión de esto, ver Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, 1996, pp. 5-7. Este es un texto clave para teólogos prácticos.

académicos se preocupa principalmente con las prácticas congregacionales/confesionales de comunidades de iglesias, tal como la misiología, liturgia, y la oración. De hecho, la teología práctica es casi sinónima con esos aspectos de la eclesiología.⁶ Sin embargo, aun cuando no la uso, sí reconozco su resonancia con mi acercamiento inductivo, y quizás más importantemente, con su constante preocupación, que yo comparto, con el círculo hermenéutico. Es decir, “¿es lo que *parece* estar ocurriendo en esta situación lo que está *actualmente* ocurriendo?”⁷ Cualquier resonancia y preocupación tendrá que ser explorada más a fondo en otro momento.

Debo de aclarar que no hay manera definitiva de concluir este ensayo; irónicamente, una teología antropológica no puede alcanzar su propio *telos*. En otras palabras, para “ser humano” uno siempre está “haciéndose humano.” Pero como se verá, el sancocho provee un vistazo a un mejor entendimiento de ser humano, a través de los lentes de una práctica cultural cotidiana.

Cultura y Teología

Para hablar de teología y cultura se tienen que hacer ciertas presuposiciones desde el comienzo. Primero, quien habla está situado en un contexto (o debate) particular entre unx mismx, unxs (esto es, lxs múltiples “unx”) y lo otro. Por ejemplo, refiriéndose a la orientación de Stuart Hall en los estudios culturales, Grossberg escribe: “para Hall, todas las prácticas humanas...son esfuerzos ‘para hacer historia, pero en condiciones no creadas por nosotros’.”⁸ Hall, con todos los comunicadores de la cultura (y, como yo argumento aquí, de la teología), piensa y estudia la cultura desde una perspectiva particular e inquebrantable: “hecho-y-no-hecho” por él. Esta verdad autoevidente es el punto de partida de cualquier conversación acerca de teología y cultura.

Segundo, los términos necesitan ser definidos, en un sentido más general, a partir de estos esfuerzos particulares, hechos a sí mismos y condicionados por otros. Por ejemplo, las definiciones pueden ser producidas usando el concepto de articulación de Hall, “el conjunto complejo de prácticas históricas por las que luchamos para producir identidad o unidad estructural afuera de y por encima de complejidad, complejidad, diferencia, [y] contradicción.”⁹ Articular cultura y teología es ser lanzado dentro de sus propios espacios de contención, y escoger eventual e inevitablemente un espacio a través del cual crear fronteras que permanezcan porosas y dinámicas. Al respecto de conceptos, entonces, la precisión deberá ser balanceada con promiscuidad. Una manera de demostrar esta conciencia es de adoptar una visión posmoderna. Por ejemplo, cuestionando la “efectividad, condiciones de posibilidad, y sobre-determinación” de aquellas presuposiciones tensas constantemente en juego.¹⁰ En este sentido, la

⁶ Hay una unidad de Prácticas Eclesiásticas en la AAR (en Español: Academia de Religión Estadounidense) dedicada a la teología práctica. Otros buenos recursos académicos para la teología práctica son las revistas *Practical Matters* (www.practicalmattersjournal.org) y *Ecclesial Practices* (www.brill.com/products/journal/ecclesial-practices).

⁷ Swinton and Mowat, xi.

⁸ *Stuart*, 153.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

articulación se convierte en un asunto de posicionalidad, la cual, de manera circular, confirma la necesidad de conceptos “promiscuos, aunque precisos” - conceptos de “a” los que “se les puede” hablar, pero no “de” los que “no se puede hablar.”

Aun así, el campo académico deberá enfocarse en su objeto de estudio y las teorías que serán utilizadas para estudiarlo.¹¹ En este ensayo, esto tendría que incluir los conceptos de cultura y teología. Junto con Davaney, defino cultura como “el **proceso** por el cual significado es producido, disputado, y continuamente renegociado, y es el **contexto** en el cual identidades individuales y comunitarias son mediadas y traídas a su existencia.”¹² Así que Davaney describe cultura ambos como un proceso y como un contexto: el primero parece corresponder bien con articulación y el segundo con posicionalidad. Lo que es crucial en este ensayo, sin embargo, es el hecho de que cultura es un sitio de producción de significado y de creación identitaria; no un efecto meramente, sino una causa. ¿Causa de qué? De acuerdo a Davaney, causa de las muchas maneras de ser humanos entre unx mismx (o lxs unxs) y lo otrx.

En lo que respecta a la teología, Taylor la define como “discurso (*logos*) relacionado a lo que la gente considera ser sagrado (*theos*).”¹³ Mi interés aquí no es la falsa dicotomía entre lo profano y lo sagrado,¹⁴ sino la naturaleza discursiva de la teología: la misma es también hecha como articulación, justo como la cultura. Además, la teología es sostenida por personas, no una persona o individux; es por naturaleza comunitaria.¹⁵ Ciertamente uno podría corresponder también esta comunitariedad con su necesidad por multi-contextualidad y por la correlación (en el sentido de Tillich): ninguna teología es una isla. En otras palabras, el entendimiento teológico de ser humano, conocido mejor como antropología teológica, tiene que co-existir con las formas de ser humano en la cultura, que es la provincial de los estudios culturales en general; algunos ejemplos de estas maneras son lo político y lo económico (en términos de dinámicas de poder), lo estético, e incluso lo espiritual.¹⁶

Cultura y teología como construcciones conceptuales independientes ciertamente son polivalentes, espacial y temporalmente contingentes, no “flotando-libremente”¹⁷ sino arraigadas de maneras diferentes y complejas. Por ejemplo, ellas son “multi-tradicionalizadas.”¹⁸ Siendo así, sus límites conceptuales interactúan el uno con el otro, y con todos los otros aspectos de la experiencia humana vivida (tales como política, economía, las artes y literatura). De acuerdo a Davaney, esta interacción no se reduce a

¹¹ Escribe Halls: “La única teoría que vale la pena tener es aquella por la uno por la que uno tiene que luchar, no aquella de la que uno habla con profunda fluidez.” Por ejemplo, si uno puede siquiera asumir una perspectiva “posmoderna” es debatible. Esta tensión con construcciones teóricas no será explorada aquí, pero permanece crucial para los estudiosos/as.

¹² *Converging*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁴ Esta construcción moderna ha sido criticada fuertemente por el pensamiento posmoderno. No profundizaré aquí al respecto.

¹⁵ De acuerdo a los teólogos Latinx José David Rodríguez y Loida I. Martell-Otero, no hay teología sino *teología en conjunto*, en comunidad. Ver. *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

¹⁶ Ver. Hopkins, *Being*.

¹⁷ *Changing*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

ninguna de las dos, más bien conlleva a “maneras diferentes de ser humano,” a una realidad entrelazada de culturas y teologías que oscurece su propio origen y *telos* “hecho-y-no-hecho.”¹⁹ Evidentemente la negociación entre cultura y teología se hace más clara si uno las fija dentro de un espacio-tiempo particular y ve la teología como una producción cultural más. Como resultado, una teología particular es contingente a un momento cultural particular; la teología se torna “contextualizada.” Un ejemplo común en la tradición cristiana sería la encarnación, el vaciamiento de lo divino en una cultura humana particular y/o, a la inversa y últimamente, en la cultura humana diaria en general.²⁰

¿De qué manera puede ser la teología una producción cultural? ¿O más específicamente, cómo puede una práctica auto-descrita como cultural ser teológica? Un trabajo académico reciente que ha explorado esta relación, entre otras, es Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya en su *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*.²¹ Como tal uno es tentado a extrapolar hacia lo universal y pensar de la cultura en general como siendo influenciada teológicamente en parte o completamente. Sin embargo, esta influencia es más oscura que su opuesto (es decir, la teología como siendo influenciada culturalmente), lo cual es mucho más difícil de reconocer o, peor, de juzgar. En otras palabras, uno es más apto a ver las intrusiones culturales dentro de la teología y la antropología teológica específicamente, porque lo que se considera como las condiciones culturales propias parecen estar más cerca que las propias presuposiciones teológicas.²² Por lo mismo, parece que la autoconcepción de la humanidad de unx mismx depende más de lo cultural y menos de lo teológico. Esto es engañoso porque, como ya lo mencioné, ser humano es indudablemente también y a fondo un imperativo teológico. Incluso es el potencial de ver la cultura como esencialmente teológica, como se puede notar en lo que sigue.

Cocinando la sopa: Una heurística

He escogido el acto de cocinar sopa, específicamente sancocho, como una práctica cultural por medio de la cual articular una antropología teológica. Es un sitio apropiado para estudiar la influencia cultural en la teología, si uno toma a Hopkins seriamente: “Si la reflexión religiosa [es decir, teología] surge de la cultura material, entonces tal reflexión debe estar arraigada en la práctica.”²³ En este sentido, la práctica cultural de cocinar pudiese ofrecer una heurística, siguiendo a Hopkins, para un método de antropología teológica. Es importante notar que no estoy diciendo que cocinar es un esfuerzo teológico. Lo que cocinar ofrece como práctica es la posibilidad de un modelo

¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

²⁰ Ibid., 125. Otra manera de ver el evento de la Encarnación podría ser, junto con McClain Taylor (ahora Mark Lewis Taylor), “teología como crítica cultural”, pero esto va más allá del método de este ensayo.

²¹ Ángel F. Méndez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

²² Referirse a mis auto-descriptores al principio. Por ejemplo, cuando a uno se le pide que se describa así mismo en frente de una asamblea, uno generalmente comienza con su nombre y país de origen. Ambos están evidentemente mucho más ligados a la propia cultura que a la propia teología. Pero después de esos dos, en muchos contextos un tercero “auto-descriptor” podría ser compromiso religioso u orientación. Pero incluso, suele ser culturalmente contingente, como entre “cristianos Latinx” o “teólogos negros”. La cultura es más fácil de hacerla parte de uno mismo que la teología.

²³ Ibid., 9.

(es decir, una heurística) que puede ser tomada prestada para la práctica teológica. Hopkins delinea dos condiciones fundamentales para esta posibilidad; ambas la cultura y la teología *envuelven e involucran* a la gente.²⁴ Específicamente, ambas cocinar y la antropología teológica giran alrededor de y están fuertemente invertidas en la humanidad, en su bien-estar y si bien *llegar-a-venir*. De manera que, considerando la definición de cultura por Devaney, si cocinar una sopa es una práctica material cultural, debería ser tanto un proceso de producción de significado y un contexto para la creación de identidad por y para la *gente*. En adición, Devaney escribe, “los humanos producen y construyen significado no solamente lingüística y textualmente, sino también en formas no-lingüísticas y no-discursivas.”²⁵ En otras palabras, si la antropología teológica es el *discurso* en torno a lo que significa ser humano teológicamente, se sigue que pudiese ser originado desde un contexto “no-lingüístico”²⁶ aunque discursivo, como otro *locus* por medio del cual el ser humano es construido, aún si solamente para una heurística. En resumen, cocinar sopa en un contexto cultural específico pudiese proveer un modelo hacia una antropología teológica contextualizada. Más aún, este método teológico pudiese mostrar muy bien características generalizables, como lo veremos.

Sin embargo, un peligro inmediato debe ser abordado. Este cruce de una práctica de material cultural a la antropología teológica corre el riesgo de particularizar, al grado de reducir la diferencia a inconsecuencia. Por ejemplo, lo último pudiese ocurrir si el cruce es construido como un ejemplo más de una cultura y teología “marginada” en contra de una cultura y teología “central.”²⁷ Las asimetrías de poder entre margen y centro en la historia de la humanidad son obvias y bien conocidas, profundizar en ellas aquí va más allá del alcance de este ensayo. Pero al no enfocarse en las asimetrías, uno debe de no “tirar el niño con el agua de la tina,” y descartar prácticas materiales de base como irrelevantes al proceso de hacer significado. Con Tanner, valoro la “intervención creativa” de las personas en general, pero especialmente de la no-élite.²⁸ En cualquier caso, también reconozco el inútil ejercicio de separar lo “marginado” del “centro” cuando uno analiza la cultura. Cultura, como una “forma de vida total,”²⁹ en constante cambio,³⁰ incluye a ambos. Busco por una posible ruta para la teología usando un

²⁴ Ibid., 163; énfasis mío.

²⁵ Ibid., 256.

²⁶ “Lingüístico” se limita aquí a lo verbal u oral.

²⁷ Para muchos/as lectores/as, debería ser obvio que me he referido a cultura en términos muy generales. Por ejemplo, mi enfoque es muy particular cuando veo a la fuente (sancocho) pero no del todo cuando escribo acerca de su cultura, la caribeña, hasta este punto. Por cierto, esto es hecho a propósito en un esfuerzo de presentar una heurística generalizable. No pretendo una heurística para una antropología teológica Latina, que es un esfuerzo digno y posible proyecto futuro como un aparente y natural próximo paso. Además, no pretendo heurística Latina para una antropología teológica, aunque este elemento esta indudablemente presente debido a la fuente que estoy usando. Una heurística como tal, necesita fluidez y adaptabilidad. También me he referido a la teología en términos amplios. Como el objetivo del ensayo es presentar una heurística, este aspecto es poco desarrollado por diseño. Mi intención es diseñar un patrón, por así decirlo, con el cual construir una antropología teológica, “promiscua, pero precisa”. De esa manera, cualesquiera que sean los contextos y procesos que traiga el/la teólogo/a, determinará qué teología es la que se construye. Estas elecciones metodológicas han determinado mi uso de fuentes bibliográficas y teorías, y como tal esperan ser expandidas (y corregidas) por las ricas fuentes derivadas de académicos Latinx/latinoamericanos/hispanos, entre otros.

²⁸ Ibid., 104.

²⁹ Ibid., 164.

³⁰ *Theories*, 52.

marcador cultural, una práctica material específica. Hago esto no para la influencia cultural de un grupo para su propia teología, o la teología de otros, sino por el movimiento contrario de ver la cultura a través de un lente teológico.

Cocinando una teología

¿Por qué no usar una práctica cultural material cotidiana para explorar académicamente (en este caso, teológicamente)? ¿Si la teología puede ser contextualizada de acuerdo a formas culturales construidas tales como raza o género, por qué no cocinar? Por ejemplo, cocinar, comer, y sus implicaciones socio-culturales han sido estudiadas extensivamente en la antropología. Mi opción metodológica le debe mucho al antropólogo Stephan Palmié. En *The Cooking of History*, Palmié recuenta como el estudioso cubano Fernando Ortiz describía su propia cultura como un ajiaco, un “estofado muy típico y complejo, hecho de varias especies de legumbres, los cuales llamamos ‘viandas’, y de diferentes clases de carnes; todas las cuales son cocinadas con agua hervida hasta que produce un espeso y succulento potaje condimentado con ají cubano, de donde deriva su nombre.”³¹ La metáfora del *ajiaco* corresponde con la definición de la cultura por Devaney: un proceso de producción, contención y negociación, y un contexto de mediación y creación. Un *ajiaco* es tanto un proceso (“cocinado”, “hervido”) como un contexto (“estofado”, “potaje”), compuesto de presuposiciones (ingredientes tales como “viandas”, carnes, y condimentos), y que resulta en un “típico y complejo,” “espeso” y “succulento” producto que deriva su nombre de sí mismo. Básicamente, Palmié mira en la metáfora de Ortiz dos componentes claves: primero, “indigenización,” es decir, como los ingredientes son incorporados en la olla, transformados en una entremezcla mutua, y contribuyen a la composición entera del estofado. Y segundo, el observa “diferencia,” el reconocimiento de siempre presentes contingencias temporales y espaciales que precluyen cualquier fijación de teorías, métodos, identidades o autenticidades, todas presentes en la olla en diferentes niveles de involucramiento (es decir, basado en cuan profundo uno “mete la cuchara” durante el proceso de cocción).³² Asuntos de indigeneidad y diferencia se harán evidentes también al explorar el sancocho. Por lo mismo, en mi caso de buscar por lo teológico en la práctica material cultural, “depende de la cucharada que seleccionamos para inspección metacultural y en las reglas de reconocimiento que apliquemos.”³³ Esta cucharada no necesariamente sirve a una teología racializada o de género, sino una teología “en plena cocción”: “cocinar como contexto y proceso (es decir, no completamente cocinado), siempre “atrapado-en-el-acto” (porque se está cocinando incluso en la cuchara misma).³⁴

³¹ *Cooking*, 97.

³² *Ibid.*, 99.

³³ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁴ No que raza y género no están presentes en el sancocho (por ejemplo, estos están en la política de producción y consumo) o que cualquier teología incrustada en estos contextos y procesos no es ya racializada o no tiene género (creo fuertemente que una teología no contextualizada es imposible). Pero estas ambigüedades tendrán que ser exploradas en otro momento; escogí dejar esa puerta abierta para futuras investigación o elaboración.

Sancocho y una receta

Para coincidir mejor con mi propia posicionalidad, cambio ahora de ajiaco a sancocho, un sopón de confección muy similar, que es típico de Puerto Rico y de otras regiones caribeñas. El *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* define sancocho (sin incluir sinónimos regionales) como:

1. alimento a medio cocer;
2. olla compuesta de carne, yuca, plátano y otros ingredientes, y que se toma en el almuerzo;
3. comida cocinada con agua, sal, y algún otro condimento.³⁵

Primero, nos dice que sancocho evoca sentimientos de intersección, es siempre liminal, en-el-camino. En este sentido, también puede ser peyorativo, porque una comida “a medio cocer” no es comida en lo absoluto, en el mismo sentido de la frase coloquial: “una idea medio cocinada.”³⁶ Segundo, el sancocho es un artefacto cultural, no un elemento natural que existe-en-sí-mismo. En otras palabras, es creado por seres humanos por medio de la combinación de ingredientes naturales (y después sintéticos): un artefacto. Tercero, tiene solamente dos ingredientes fijos: agua y sal (de hecho, en otro lugar leí que también puede ser llamado sancocho, una palabra compuesta de sal y cocho, de *cocer*).³⁷ Todos los otros ingredientes varían. De manera que sancocho es, por lo general, un artefacto culinario interseccional con unos componentes y una composición opaca. Tal definición es muy amplia para ser útil como heurística para una antropología teológica. Uno necesita poner atención a una formulación particular y contextualizada de sancocho: una receta.

Libros de cocina son una fuente de recetas. Entre los muchos libros de cocina que se pueden consultar para una receta de sancocho, uno viene inmediatamente a la mente. Originalmente publicado en 1954, *Cocina Criolla* por Carmen Aboy Valldejuli es uno de los libros de cocina puertorriqueña más famosos. Una copia de este libro seguramente agradecería muchas bibliotecas culinarias caribeñas, incluso Latinx/hispanas y Latinoamericanas. En mi familia nosotros tenemos la edición cuarenta y ocho del 1990. Su tabla de contenidos incluye listas de implementos e instrumentos de cocina, unidades de medida, terminología de cocina relevante, y “consejos útiles.”³⁸ Tiene las recetas ordenadas de acuerdo a la clase de platillos (por ejemplo, sopas, pasteles) y clases de comida (por ejemplo, res, pollo). Debo añadir que las ediciones más recientes aspiran servir como una especie de manual para “amas de casa.” Por ejemplo, uno puede leer acerca de la manera apropiada de entretener una visita inesperada. Usualmente los roles de género son fijos en este esfuerzo: “mientras el esposo le da al/la invitado/a un cóctel o highball (una bebida alcohólica), *nosotras* [por lo que yo asumo se refiere a las

³⁵ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (Madrid: Espasa, 2001).

³⁶ Sería interesante investigar si este peyorativo surgió de los orígenes evidentemente más humildes del sancocho dentro de la culinaria del imperio.

³⁷ Ver <http://riskescuelaculinaria.com/cual-es-la-forma-correcta-sancocho-o-salcocho/>. Ver también *Eating*, 122.

³⁸ Por ejemplo, “si la receta requiere el uso de un horno, préndalo 10 minutos antes de comenzar a asar u hornear” *Cocina*, 19.

“esposas”] hábilmente...prepararemos un menú simple y atractivo.”³⁹ El lenguaje de género no es sorprendente para 1954 pero inevitablemente irrelevante para 1990. Pero este estancamiento temporal-cultural⁴⁰ permanece, el cual se pudiera tornar venenoso para una antropología teológica contemporánea. Relacionado, la copia de mi familia fue un regalo de matrimonio, y la dedicación escrita a mano de una de las amigas de mi madre dice:

Querida Mercedes [el nombre de mi esposa], deseo que este libro resuelva todos tus problemas en tu vida como ama de casa. Este departamento es uno de los más difíciles, pero con este libro muy competente tú ya tienes un gran aliado. Que Dios bendiga tu hogar y te conceda ricas bendiciones. Matilde, Julio 1991.

Sobresale que el libro es descrito como una panacea, y activa. Es un “aliado”, un agente amigable que lo acompaña a uno en sus dificultades de vida. En cierto sentido, la inscripción se aproxima a ser teológica: *Cocina Criolla* como una fuente cultural escrita, como proceso y contexto, describe una manera puertorriqueña de ser humano por medio de texto. Si *Cocina Criolla* es tal fuente, es, por lo mismo, razonable construir una antropología teológica usando una receta como heurística. En este ensayo, la receta teológica es un sancocho.⁴¹ Abajo incluyo la receta de sancocho como se encuentra en *Cocina Criolla*:

Ingredientes (para 8 personas)

- A. 1 lb de carne de masa de res, 1/2 lb de carne de cerdo con hueso, pesadas sin grasa ni piel (pellejo)
- B. 3 litros de agua, 1 cucharada de sal
- C. 1 cebolla, 2 tomates, 1 pimiento verde (fresco, sin semillas), 1 pimiento dulce (o ají dulce, sin semillas), 3 hojas de culantro, 2 mazorcas de maíz tierno
- D. 1/2 lb de yautía blanca, 1/2 lb de calabaza, 1/2 lb de yautía amarilla, 1/2 lb de papas, 1/2 lb de ñame, 1/2 lb de batata, 1 plátano verde, 1 plátano maduro (o amarillo)
- E. 1 cucharada de sal, 1/2 copa (taza) de salsa de tomate
- F. 4 dientes de ajo

Procedimiento

1. Corte la carne de res y cerdo en pedazos, y lave incluyendo el hueso (ingredientes “A”).
2. En una olla grande (de 12 cuartos o cuartillos) hierva el agua con la sal (ingredientes “B”) y hágala hervir.

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ Porque este es el caso va más allá del alcance aquí, pero me pregunto si la condición colonial de Puerto Rico es la culpable.

⁴¹ Si bien no discutí esto, encontré una fuente que decía que sancocho es un plato español de las Islas Canarias. No es del todo relevante a este ensayo, pero deja abierta la posibilidad de nuevas investigaciones.

3. Lave y corte los ingredientes “C”, y añádalos a la olla junto con la carne y el hueso.
4. Cocine sin tapar a fuego alto hasta que hierva nuevamente. Luego baje a fuego medio, tápelo, y hierva por una hora.
5. Pele, corte en pedazos, y lave las viandas (tubérculos) (ingredientes “D”), y añádalos a la olla.
6. Añada los ingredientes “E” a la olla. Mezcle bien y hágalo hervir nuevamente. Luego, baje a fuego medio, tápelo, y cocine por 45 minutos.
7. Destape y deje hervir por 10 minutos. Saque los plátanos verdes de la olla y tritúrelos con los cuatro dientes de ajo (ingredientes “F”) con la mano. Moldee la pasta en pequeñas esferas y vuelva a echarlas en la sopa.

Receta como heurística: contexto y proceso

Hay mucho que discutir aquí, si uno quiere desarrollar la receta como heurística. Primer, como en muchas recetas, uno debe conseguir los ingredientes. Estos ingredientes varían de acuerdo a los recursos económicos, porque no todas las personas tienen acceso a la misma calidad y cantidad de ingredientes. El sancocho en *Cocina Criolla* es una propuesta cara, una que incluye ambos res y cerdo, diez y seis diferentes clases de vegetales en diversas cantidades y condiciones (es decir, uno es en “salsa”), un buen poco de sal, y también presume que el agua es disponible con facilidad. Pero eso no significa que cada sancocho es igual: otra receta que encontré tiene solamente seis ingredientes (además de agua): pescado, papas, batatas, aceite de oliva, perejil, y sal.⁴² Y, por supuesto, la receta de *Cocina Criolla* se puede adaptar de acuerdo a cada situación individual. Por ejemplo, pollo o pescado puede ser usado por consumidores con una orientación más saludable, y/o menos vegetales o carne pueden ser incluidos para los más ahorrativos. Puede también variar de acuerdo a geografía, porque no todos los ingredientes están disponibles en todos los lugares. Algunos son nativos, otros son encontrados localmente, y otros son extranjeros pero de fácil acceso. Por ejemplo, algunos vegetales son propios de la región, tal como la *yautía* (que es probablemente una palabra *Taíno*) y la *batata*. Otros fueron traídos de España y/o sus colonizadas, como el plátano, que es originalmente de las Islas Canarias,⁴³ o el ñame, que es originalmente de África Occidental.⁴⁴ El término *vianda* usado para la mayoría de estas viandas (tubérculos) (ingredientes “D” en la receta) tiene otra historia de vida particular. La palabra tiene raíces francesas y significa “comida” y no solamente tubérculo. Así que viandas constituyen la comida entera, y en muchos lugares y épocas probablemente significó eso⁴⁵ y todavía lo es, en la medida que sea más disponible económica y geográficamente.⁴⁶ Pero en este sancocho, la vianda es un ingrediente más: el carbohidrato que complementa la proteína de la carne.

⁴² Ver http://www.grancanaria.com/patronato_turismo/4806.o.html

⁴³ De acuerdo a *Eating*, 138.

⁴⁴ De acuerdo a *Eating*, 137.

⁴⁵ Abad y Lasierra escriben: “su comida es reducida a una olla de arroz o ñame, calabaza, o todo junto” (*Historia*, 499).

⁴⁶ *Eating*, 122-123.

Como lo mencioné antes, el componente de carne en la receta de sancocho *en Cocina Criolla* puede fácilmente colocarse dentro de los altos niveles económicos de la sociedad, siendo más común un sancocho sin carne es muy común. Para cuando *Cocina Criolla* fue publicada en la década de 1950-60, Puerto Rico ya había sido declarado parte de la “*commonwealth*” estadounidense, y se encontraba en los dolores de transición de una economía agraria a una industria, con las ganancias monetarias que eso conllevó para los lectores originales de *Cocina Criolla*. A lo ancho de E.E.U.U., estos eran los años del auge posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Además, históricamente hablando, las vacas y los cerdos parecen haber sido introducidos por los colonizadores españoles (como comida, y en el caso de las vacas, como ayuda para la agricultura), puesto que ninguna de las especies es nativa de la isla.⁴⁷ Uno también reconocer que la presencia de ambos la res y el cerdo en la receta tiene cierto significado, porque los cerdos son usualmente asociados con las regiones más montañosas de Puerto Rico, y las vacas con las áreas costeras, donde el pastoreo es más fácil y el ordeño de la vaca a gran escala es más conveniente.⁴⁸ Con todo eso, el cerdo es visto como una comida “del campo” o rural, y la res como una comida de las “ciudades” o urbana. Uno debe resaltar de igual manera que la receta incluye los huesos del cerdo.⁴⁹ De hecho, si los huesos no son usados en ciertas recetas, estos son usualmente guardados para ocasiones futuras (asumiendo, por supuesto que alguna refrigeración es disponible). Además de su propio valor nutricional (es decir, la médula ósea) los huesos contienen un elemento de adhesión que ayuda que la carne no se deshaga, sino que esta permanezca junta durante su mismo proceso de cocción. Además, hay cierto placer cuando la comida es servida con un hueso (por ejemplo, hace que uno use las manos en lugar de cubiertos, permitiendo un mayor contacto con la misma comida). Así que la presencia del hueso en la receta no puede ser sobre-enfatizada.

Esta receta de la *Cocina Criolla* también presume una comida comunitaria, dado al hecho que el producto final es grande, aunque familias numerosas solían ser la norma durante los tiempos pre-industriales. Por ejemplo, es bien conocido que, en áreas rurales cuidado médico es muy difícil de obtener, y que el índice de mortalidad infantil es muy alto. De igual manera, ayuda para la agricultura y otros trabajos era muy necesaria, así que tener una familia numerosa ayudaba en este respecto. De allí, la necesidad de grandes cantidades de comida en las recetas, como en este sancocho. Las cantidades en las recetas pueden también ajustarse, pero que sancocho es una “gran” comida no se puede evitar. Finalmente, los condimentos son componentes claves en cualquier sancocho. Por ejemplo, la sal está disponible fácilmente porque Puerto Rico está rodado de agua de mar; de hecho, una municipalidad en la isla tiene por nombre Salinas, que significa cama de sal. La sal ha sido usada para preservar comidas desde tiempos inmemorables. Lo más probable se convirtió en un condimento por causa de estar siempre presente en las carnes y otros alimentos perecederos. Así que la sal transformó el paladar, siendo una mera ocurrencia que llegó a ser un ingrediente principal. Un giro similar fue explorado por Sidney Mintz en su “Tiempo, azúcar, y dulzura,” concerniente a los sabores cambiantes de los europeos y el uso de azúcar (como comida, medicina, endulzante, preservante, e intensificador de sabores, por

⁴⁷ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁹ Me recuerdo de un dicho puertorriqueño: “*en el hueso está el sabor*”.

ejemplo) a través de las dinámicas del colonialismo, la invención de los “nuevos mundos” y cosmovisiones. Otro de los ingredientes en la receta es culantro, mejor conocido en la isla como recao. Recao es una hierba, y es un componente clave en el sofrito, que es la base de la cocina puertorriqueña en muchos alimentos básicos como los frijoles guisados (o habichuelas guisadas). Noten que recao no es cilantro. Recao es muy difícil de encontrar en los E.E.U.U. porque es una planta tropical. La presencia de recao en esta receta inmediatamente la identificará como más probablemente de origen caribeño.⁵⁰ Pero una cosa es cierta: la constante presencia de condimentos, sean intensificadores de sabor o preservantes, evidencia su estado ambivalente como protagonistas o como actores secundarios. La antropología teológica está cargada con estos actores: muchas veces se consideran culturales (como auto-percepciones de raza, etnicidad, clase, o género), otras veces particularmente religiosas (como la creación o la caída). Su relación los aumenta o enmascara según sea necesario, como se verá en la sección de proceso, más adelante.

Para concluir esta primera sección, debo afirmar que los ingredientes que se deben proporcionar vacilan entre necesarios y contingentes, basado en la mezcla de conceptos aparentemente contradictorios. Por ejemplo, lo extravagante con lo frugal, lo individual con lo compartido, lo nativo con lo extranjero, lo local con lo global, lo cotidiano con lo menos así, y lo urbano con lo rural. Los ingredientes, entonces, son **contextos**, las condiciones de posibilidad del producto final, que surge de su interacción, pero también es mucho más que eso. En otras palabras, los contextos se mezclan y crean su propio contexto mezclado, separado, aparte de sus componentes diferentes.

Segundo, los ingredientes deben ser combinados en un procedimiento que produce un producto final: los pasos de cocción en la receta. En este sancocho, ellos son bien estructurados y específicos. Para comenzar, se asume que se tienen utensilios de cocina: ollas, sartenes, cuchillos, tazones, etc. Estos ni se mencionan en la receta. La autora asume que quien cocina sabe qué utensilios de cocina usar cuando necesita hervir o cortar algo. Por lo tanto, hay una caja de herramientas que quien cocina trae consigo, y él/ella debe poder escoger de esta caja de herramientas para completar las tareas específica en cuestión. Por supuesto, relacionado con esto, la autora asume que quien cocina puede manejar las herramientas necesarias; quien cocina debe saber y ser capaz de cortar, verter agua, pelar, etc. Así que hay ciertas habilidades e implementos que se asume están presentes en el esfuerzo: utensilios básicos requeridos, y, al menos, como aficionadx, conocimiento relevante, capacidad, y habilidades de rendimiento. Estas habilidades e implementos son *dadas*.

Siguiendo esto, se puede ver la estructura en la agrupación de los ingredientes por la autora (es decir, “A”, “B”, et.al.), presumiblemente para que quien cocina no se pueda confundir, sino que siga los pasos de cocinar fácilmente. Entonces, como con cualquier receta, también hay *trabajo preparatorio*. Por ejemplo, lavar algunos de los ingredientes, o cortar vegetales en pedazos pequeños. Entonces, los primeros pasos para

⁵⁰ De acuerdo a *Wikipedia*, culantro es también usado en la culinaria no caribeña; por ejemplo, en varios de los países centroamericanos y suramericanos, e incluso en varios países surasiáticos—lo cual no es sorprendente, dadas las similitudes climáticas. Profundizar acerca de esto va más allá del alcance aquí. Debo decir: reclamo el recao como inherentemente puertorriqueño.

hacer la receta son preparar los ingredientes para hacer el trabajo por nosotros; de una manera sistemática, el trabajo preliminar será establecido. Una vez que estos fundamentos están en su lugar, entonces comienza el trabajo serio: hervir, combinar los ingredientes de acuerdo a cierto orden (porque algunos ingredientes toman más tiempo para cocinarse que otros), y estofar sobre diferentes grados de calor (porque diferentes grupos de ingredientes necesitan más o menos tiempo para mezclarse completamente por la interacción inducida por el calor; siempre hay el peligro de no cocinar suficiente los ingredientes o de sobre-cocinarlos). También está el continuo monitoreo de todas las etapas de la receta, ejemplificado por la mezcla constante y prueba del sancocho con una cuchara, para cerciorarse del progreso adecuado y hacer correcciones finales con ingredientes o condimentos de ser necesarias. El sancocho no puede “dejarse solo” para que se cocine solo; se mide periódicamente contra sí mismo y otros de su clase, y se corrige si es necesario. Además, uno de los ingredientes (el plátano) es removido antes de la finalización de la comida, y se vuelve a trabajar fuera de la olla (¡difícil de hacer cuanto estaba hirviendo momentos antes!) y se mezcla con otro ingrediente, y luego se vuelve a colocar en la olla antes de servir el sancocho. Esta instrucción extraña no puede ser otra cosa que una “floritura” (*flourish*) por parte de *Cocina Criolla*, el toque personal de la autora, porque no añade nada al sabor o cualquier otra característica al sancocho. El último hecho que debe destacarse es la naturaleza activa de esta etapa; desde lavar a estofar, esta es la porción dinámica de la receta, y la que tiene más en juego. Para añadir a su importancia, esta porción debe ser completada desde el principio hasta el fin, sin parar, si uno quiere obtener un producto final adecuado. Las contingencias que no fueron cubiertas al comienzo o que surgen a mitad del proceso deben ser inevitablemente resueltas y minimizadas, como la sorpresa de tener “más bocas para comer” con la misma receta. Eso significaría re-calibrar los ingredientes y los pasos de cocción para acomodarlos, uno que probablemente pasaría desapercibido (a menos que se acabe la comida).

Para concluir esta segunda sección, yo afirmo que los pasos de cocción son la estructura que enmarca el producto, el **proceso** por medio del cual surge el resultado. Su naturaleza es dinámica. Cualquier práctica habla más alto que sus componentes: los ingredientes y los dados. El proceso es contextos-en-acción, ingredientes comunicándose entre sí. Comienza con ciertas suposiciones y específico trabajo preliminar, es decir, la preparación del campo de acción. Después de que todos estos tangibles están en su lugar, el proceso comienza de lleno. Pero irónicamente, su presencia ha de estar ausente, porque el proceso no es tangible por sí mismo. Proceso es el nombre de la transición de un contexto a otro, sea individual o combinado. Algunas de estas transiciones requieren intervención humana; algunas no. Hay momentos en los que guianza periódica es necesaria, y siempre existe la necesidad de una supervisión constante para garantizar que el *telos* no se haya visto comprometido. Incluso hay espacio para el puro placer, lo que trae espontaneidad y diversión en otro sentido, como cuando se introduce un ingrediente fuera de la receta o un paso es añadido para una “floritura”. Para una antropología teológica, el proceso de ser humano presupone cierto procedimiento, una interacción de actores significativos que muchas veces se mezclan a propósito, pero a veces de manera involuntaria. Como se mencionó arriba, los actores (es decir, los contextos) pueden surgir, por ejemplo, de la cultura en general o de la

religión en particular. Pero es su mezcla, su relación, que ahora se vuelve tan crucial como los contextos mismos.

Sancocho y su receta: una heurística para antropología teológica

A estos momentos, una receta como una heurística para una antropología teológica ya debería de parecer más razonable. Pero permítanme ofrecer una justificación adicional para la asociación. Mientras los campos interpretativos o marcos para la teología difieren de aquellos para cocinar (una práctica cultural), el referente experiencial es aún el mismo: la vida humana. En otras palabras, ambos son inextricablemente vinculados en y a través de experiencias vividas: ambas necesitan experimentar el vivir. De hecho, con McClintock Fulkerson, yo argumento que no puede haber desconexión entre ellos: “Yo...contradigo la idea de que identidad cristiana normativa y teológica requiere prácticas discursivas que son “puras” sin acomodarse con los idiomas y prácticas de los campos de experiencia no-bíblicos y no-teológicos.”⁵¹ Por lo mismo, estoy seguro que Isasi-Díaz y otros estarían de acuerdo que la antropología teológica es “cocinada” culturalmente y cultura es “cocinada” teológicamente. Ambos aspectos de la vida son vividos *en la lucha*.⁵² Aún más, escribe Hopkins, “Preocupaciones últimas residen en la carne de la vida diaria.”⁵³ En pocas palabras, la humanidad es *sancochada*, luchando en el desorden de la olla (es decir, vida), donde las preocupaciones últimas habitan todos los días.⁵⁴

¿Pero, qué específicamente puede aprenderse del sancocho para una antropología teológica? Noten el título de este ensayo: no es exclusivamente que la antropología teológica pueda ser reconocida como un sancocho, o que la práctica culinaria (es decir, cultural) de sancocho represente lo que la antropología teológica deba ser. El objetivo aquí es modelar, presentar una heurística: tomar conciencia de que antropología teológica deba ser *sancochada*, tanto estofada como estofando, y que los contextos y el proceso de sancocho (otra vez usando la definición de cultura de Davaney) pueda iluminar la antropología teológica como una experiencia vivida. Primero, sancocho nos enseña que entender la identidad situada como fija es tenue en el mejor de los casos. Ingredientes y presuposiciones, o contextos, se encuentran en sitios de contención histórico-cultural. No hay duda se pueden captar ciertos aspectos de un ser humano, como el espacio (por ejemplo, origen, el emplazamiento actual) y el tiempo (por ejemplo, la historia de vida). Pero como nos recordó Hall, todos están articulados de maneras complejas, diferentes y contradictorias. En mi caso específico: ¿Qué significa ser puertorriqueño? ¿Es recaó puertorriqueño, a pesar de estar presente en todo el mundo, o es *yautía* puertorriqueña porque ya estaba allí en la época pre-colombina? ¿Es el yam puertorriqueño en Puerto Rico porque se le llama localmente *ñame*, o viceversa (es decir, ñame sólo yam estadounidense)? ¿Incluye Puerto Rico las importaciones coloniales? ¿De igual manera, es mi humanidad nativa, indígena,

⁵¹ *Converging*, 146.

⁵² Ver *ibid.*, 136.

⁵³ *Changing*, 167.

⁵⁴ Hay una frase familiar en Puerto Rico que viene a la mente: “Nadie sabe lo que hay en la olla más que la cuchara que la menea.” Mientras esta frase aparentemente tiene que ver con los peligros de los chismes, su proximidad metafórica a la cotidianeidad y las luchas encarnadas de las articulaciones de la cultura y la teología hacia una antropología teológica que se “cocina” la hacen relevante.

importada, colonizada, o todo lo anterior? Todo esto va más allá de una conciencia posmoderna y hacia la poscrítica, una postura “promiscua, aunque precisa.” Claramente, pensar el ser puertorriqueño no es una tarea fácil.

Segundo, sancocho nos enseña que la identidad nace de relacionalidad, y eso es fundamental para la antropo-*logía* teo-*lógica*. Los seres humanos son comunitarios por naturaleza, hechxs *en conjunto*, y mezcladxs con las prácticas y creencias *cotidianas*, tanto sagradas como profanas, cualesquiera que ellas sean. Esta relacionalidad está siempre *sancochando*, medio cocinando, lo que significa nunca será igual a lo que era o a lo que será. Aun así, los ingredientes de sancocho se mezclan y al combinarse se convierten en algo totalmente nuevo, una sustancia entremezclada que nace de hospitalidad: algunos se disuelven, otros permanecen, y unos tantos añaden sabor.⁵⁵ Como Palmié reconoció con la metáfora del ajiaco de Ortíz, el sancocho es un marcador cultural que habla más allá de lo obvio y a nuestras formas de ser; ser humano significa estar presente y también estar ausente, uno nunca puede abarcar la totalidad de “humanidad” dado al espacio y tiempo. Para una antropología teológica que está sancochando, uno pudiera tomar prestado la palabra “suculento” de Ortíz, dando a entender jugoso y rico. Es un reto construir una antropología teológica succulenta, y que está siempre cocinándose como también convirtiéndose. Una antropología teológica siempre es original y auténtica, autóctona, uno pudiese decir: su propia cosa, libre y no hegemónica, siempre sola, pero no solitaria. Porque es relacional, tal antropología teológica es primero que todo una aliada, justo como Doña Matilde escribió en su dedicación en la copia de *Cocina Criolla* de mi familia.

Finalmente, sancocho nos enseña **sazón**, “la especia de vida.” Una antropología teológica necesita adaptación; por eso es que siempre es “**una**” y nunca “**la**”. Aun así, esta fluidez requiere actualización y retroalimentación: ajustes. Ser humano es siempre precario, una cuestión de posicionalidad. Pero esto no significa falta de originalidad, o, peor, irrelevancia. Decir *Mi* Antropología teológica significa solamente que ha sido ajustada para ser *mía*, pero eso también significa que existe junto, tal vez incluso debido a, aquellas que son *otras*. Una manera de garantizar esta solidaridad es la sazón, un acuerdo dentro de la tensión entre el yo y otros, y entre uno mismo, el yo, y otros.⁵⁶ Yo sugiero que esto pudiese compensar el desorden teórico que estaba presente con Hall y otros: “la teoría en contra de la que uno debe luchar.” Sazón es la forma en que nos juntamos al final. *Mi* antropología teológica alcanza su *telos* cuando está en armonía con la *tuya* y la de *ellxs*, cuando se convierte en la *nuestra*. El resultado es una asombrosa sancochada teología que esta siempre *sancochando*.

Tal vez sea apropiado terminar con una cita de Hopkins: “Cultura es donde lo sagrado se revela así mismo.”⁵⁷ Espero yo que este ensayo provea alguna evidencia al respecto.

[This article was translated into Spanish by Néstor Medina]

⁵⁵ *Being*, 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

US Christians Have Only *One* Response to the Suffering Migrant Children at the Border

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss the circumstances that have led tens of thousands of Central American children to come to the U.S.A. border seeking refuge since 2014. I explore the U.S. response to immigrant children during the Obama and Trump eras. Finally, drawing on the works of Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Miguel de la Torre and others, I contend that these children are the face of Jesus and that the only Christian response is to welcome and support them.

Introduction

Andrea is a ten-year-old girl.¹ She and her twelve-year-old half-sister Elizabeth grew up in El Salvador, mostly in the care of their grandmother. When Andrea was three years old, her parents fled the country because Mara 18 gang members were trying to kill them. The gang had killed two of Andrea’s uncles – one shot and one beaten to death. The girls lived with their grandmother in a small house, along with their 18-year-old aunt Wendy and her six-year-old child. Like many girls in their town, Wendy was raped by a gang member when she was 11, grabbed on her way to school.

In January 2016, Andrea witnessed Mara 18 gang members murder her elderly next-door neighbor and then brutally disfigure his face with a knife. Around this time, a nine-year-old neighbor girl was raped by the same gang, and when the girl’s father walked in on the scene, he was killed. Andrea and her sister fled El Salvador together shortly after this. They traveled through El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico, at first with others – on foot and in buses – and eventually on their own. The two girls were found by US Border Patrol in the middle of the night, lost in the Arizona desert in April 2016. After wandering for several days, the ten-year-old Andrea had simply passed out, ill, thirsty, and exhausted. Elisabeth had simply laid down on top of the unresponsive Andrea to keep her warm. The sisters were taken to a children’s shelter and eventually were released into the care of a relative who is living in the US without documents. They

¹ This story is true, but the names have been changed.

were placed in “removal proceedings,” which means the US Department of Homeland Security was trying to have them deported – to El Salvador.²

I am a lawyer. I represent children like Andrea and Elizabeth who come to the US by themselves, mostly from Central America. Tens of thousands of these kids have come to this country every year since 2014. They come escaping abuse, abandonment, and unspeakable violence – including rape and murder. I represent some of them, resisting their deportation and, in some ways, accompanying them in building new lives in Los Angeles. The kids haltingly tell their stories, mostly without awareness of the depth of depravity involved. They seem to have only a sliver of hope for something better, but they express no real expectations. Some of the children have simply been discarded by their families. Some were loved back home by a parent or grandparent who could no longer care for them or protect them. Some of the children’s parents were murdered. Some of the parents left the home countries long ago, themselves escaping violence. All of the children have in one way or another been abandoned by their countries, their families, their friends – at their hour of greatest need. The children cross a desert, and some of them die there. Some are resurrected in this country.

These children are the face of Jesus. God loves and suffers deeply with them in their suffering and despair. Jesus told his followers to do the same. But we “Christians” overlook that God suffers with those who suffer, and we ignore Jesus’s earthly ministry – his practices during his earthly life that led directly to his own suffering and death by crucifixion. I will ponder with theologians like Jurgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Miguel De La Torre, and Cecilia González-Andrieu, God’s presence *to* and suffering *with* all who suffer, and Jesus’s imperative that we do the same. Uniting with those who suffer – like Andrea and Elizabeth – is not optional for Christians. It is the very definition of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The Situation

In 2014, about 67,000 unaccompanied children came to the US southern border, principally from three countries in Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras), asking for help and seeking a chance for life in this country.³ The US response to the crisis in 2014 was not welcoming. Although then-president Obama labeled the situation a “humanitarian crisis,”⁴ his administration created mechanisms to process the children’s cases quickly *so that they could quickly be deported to their home*

² In 2017, Andrea obtained asylum in the US and removal proceedings against her were terminated. Elizabeth has obtained predicate Special Immigrant Juvenile Findings from a California State Court and has been awaiting a decision on her Special Immigrant Juvenile Status from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service for more than a year, notwithstanding that federal law mandates that USCIS adjudicate such requests within 180 days.

³ “A Guide to Children Arriving at the Border: Laws, Policies and Responses,” American Immigration Council (June 26, 2015), accessed April 14, 2016, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/guide-children-arriving-border-laws-policies-and-responses>; Miguel A. De La Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis* (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2016), 59.

⁴ ABC 30 Action News KFSN-TV Fresno, “Obama Calls Flood of Kids into US a 'Humanitarian Crisis',” accessed June 9, 2018, <http://abc30.com/news/obama-calls-flood-of-kids-into-us-a-humanitarian-crisis/143211/>.

countries.⁵ The US pressured Mexico to intercept and turn children back *before* they reached the US border. During the first half of 2015, Mexican authorities apprehended (and turned back) 93,000 Central Americans trying to reach the US.⁶ Notwithstanding this “virtual wall” (called Mexico), 60,000 children reached the US border in 2016 (one third more than 2015).⁷

Under the Trump administration, the situation quickly deteriorated. Five days into his presidency, Trump attempted to ban all immigrants from certain Muslim-majority countries in an executive order that received much attention in the press. It was promptly halted by the courts (eventually, part of a modified version of this order was allowed to be implemented). But Trump also issued executive orders not widely noted in the press that have (1) altered due process protections for the unaccompanied children from Central America possessed during the Obama era, (2) targeted the children’s family members in the US for punishment, and (3) targeted those who would help the children – including family members, lawyers and volunteers.⁸ There has been no outcry about these orders, which are being vigorously enforced today. Trump’s attorney general Jeff Sessions has embarked on a public campaign to portray the unaccompanied children from Central America *as themselves gang members* seeking to infiltrate the United States with violent ways, calling them “wolves in sheep clothing” in speeches to law enforcement.⁹

Theologian and ethics professor Miguel De La Torre observed in his 2016 book, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*, that “no one is asking *why* are Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans coming to the United States? *Why* are tens of thousands of unaccompanied children from these countries showing up on our doorstep?”¹⁰ The answer to this important question lies in a century of US self-serving intervention in Central America that has left countries in shambles. The history of US involvement in Central America dates back to the late 1800s, when Americans discovered a voracious taste for Central American bananas as a result of the invention of the refrigerated steam ship. In the early 1900s, Teddy Roosevelt coined the expressions “gunboat diplomacy” and “speak softly but carry a big stick” to describe US policies to protect American

5 “Letter from the President – Efforts to Address the Humanitarian Situation in the Rio Grande Valley Areas of Our Nation’s Southwest Border,” The White House, Office of Press Secretary, accessed April 17, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/30/letter-president-efforts-address-humanitarian-situation-rio-grande-valle>.

6 De La Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, 70-71. The US provided tens of millions of dollars in aid to Mexico for fiscal year 2015 to finance this effort.

7 See, US Customs and Border Protection, *Statement by Secretary Johnson on Southwest Border Security, United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions, Fiscal Year 2016*, accessed February 18, 2016, <https://www.cbp.gov/site-page/southwest-border-unaccompanied-alien-children-statistics-fy-2016>.

8 See, Justice for Immigrants Webinar Update on Executive Orders and DHS Implementation Memos, March 1, 2017, accessed June 7, 2018, <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/webinars/webinar-executive-order-dhs-memoranda/>.

9 See, Josh Saul, “Sessions: Young Immigrants Are ‘Wolves in Sheep Clothing,’” in *Newsweek*, September 22, 2017, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://newsweek.com/ms-13-gangs-sessions-unaccompanied-minors-trump-boston-669494>.

10 De La Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, 65 (Emphasis added.)

corporations with foreign interests.¹¹ Roosevelt placed the US military at the disposal of the US-based United Fruit Company to protect its growing commercial interests in Central America.

During the period between the late 1890s and the 1920s, foreign control of Guatemala's economic resources (principally in the banana and railroad industries) shifted from England and Germany to the United States. At the same time, the US became Guatemala's leading trading partner.¹² By 1930, United Fruit controlled 63% of the banana market and had its "tentacles" in every power structure in Central America. United Fruit was able to set prices, taxes, and employee treatment, free from local government intervention.¹³ By early 1950, US corporations controlled Guatemala's primary electrical utilities, the nation's only railroad, and the banana industry, which provided Guatemala's chief agricultural export.¹⁴

Because US investors were unnerved by Central America's frequent internal wars, military coups, and the rise and fall of "*caudillos*" (strongmen), the US sought to protect its citizens' commercial interests by stabilizing the region.¹⁵ Although a fulsome examination of the US State Department and CIA's involvement in Guatemala is beyond the scope of this paper, the Eisenhower Administration's 1954 overthrow of the elected government of Guatemala in the guise of fighting communism has been well documented by historians.¹⁶ The ten years preceding 1954 saw Guatemalan nationalists seeking to weaken the grip of United Fruit on their country, including efforts reclaim land from United Fruit. These efforts, along with growing "workers' rights" sentiment, were seen as communist. Spearheaded by Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles (Deputy Director of the CIA and US Secretary of State respectively), the US orchestrated a coup to unseat elected president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán. The US installed a puppet dictator, Carlos Castillo Armas who supported US policies. US intervention in the three countries in Central America throughout the twentieth century, consistently protected US *business interests* under the guise of the "fight against communism." Greg Grandin describes Guatemala as having been – even more than Cuba – the "staging ground" for the US's Cold War against communism.¹⁷

Ensuing decades-long civil wars resisting US-supported dictators were fought in all three Central American countries with all sides resorting to extreme violence, terrorizing of civilians, death squads, and recruitment of child soldiers. US tax dollars supported the government forces. The consequences of US intervention in Guatemala

11 *Arizona Journal-Miner*, April 3, 1903, p. 1, "President Roosevelt's Speech on the Monroe Doctrine, Advocates Building and Maintaining a Large and Well-Equipped Navy as the Best Means of Having it Respected, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick,' is the Motto He Used in Illustrating His Point With Good Effect."

12 Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961* (Athens: Ohio Univ., 2000), 8.

13 De La Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, 65.

14 Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, 8-9.

15 *Ibid.*, 9.

16 See, e.g., Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2004) and many others.

17 Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 4.

and other Central American countries was the creation of poverty, lawlessness, and death. In the 1970s and 1980s, waves of Central Americans fled to the US, ironically escaping US-enabled violence at home.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as the perceived threat of Communism waned, the US lost interest in propping up strongmen governments in Central America. The ensuing vacuum in countries with weak governing structures has been filled by “Maras” – gangs *born in the ghettos of Los Angeles* in the 1980s and 1990s. The Maras were initially formed in the inner-city of Los Angeles in the 1980s, as refugees from the civil wars at home acclimated to the gang culture of Los Angeles at the time.¹⁸ In the 1990s, the US deported gang members back to Central America, who took with them the knowledge of gang warfare they had learned on the streets of Los Angeles. The gangs (Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18, or the 18th Street gang) have since evolved into highly sophisticated, ultra-violent crime networks which, as a practical matter, control large swaths of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala which they terrorize with impunity.¹⁹ The children who are escaping Central American violence in the second decade of the 21st Century were born in countries whose leadership was destroyed by decades of US “intervention.” The children arrive in the US seeking simply to live free of gang terror and in relative safety.

Theologian Cecilia González-Andrieu proposes a “3-question examination of conscience” that we all must do on immigration issues. Her first question is “*do I understand who these vulnerable immigrants are and why they are here?*”²⁰ González-Andrieu insists that the present situation of Central American migrants seeking refuge

18 See, Theta Pavis, “Decades of U.S. Intervention in Central America Echo in Present Border Crisis, Huffington Politics (Sept. 21, 2014), accessed April 17, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/theta-pavis/decades-of-us-interventio_b_5610684.html.

19 Tal Kopan and David Shortell, “MS-13 is Trump's Public Enemy No. 1, but Should it Be?,” CNN, Updated April 29, 2017; accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/28/politics/ms13-explained-immigration-sessions/index.html>; Albert De Amicis, “Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and its Violent World,” University of Pittsburgh Graduate School for Public and International Affairs, Oct. 9, 2010, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/239226.pdf>; US Dept. of State, *Guatemala 2017 Crime and Safety Report*, April 10, 2017; accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=21628> Congressional Research Service, Clare Ribando Seelke, *Gangs in Central America* 1, 4 (Feb. 20, 2014); accessed November 10, 2017, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc282303/>; Maureen Taft-Morales, Congressional Research Service, *Guatemala: Political, Security, and Socio-Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations* 2 (Aug. 7, 2014) (“The intimidation of judicial officials, widespread corruption, and the involvement of organized crime in violence and extortion are all widely seen as contributing to high levels of impunity and public mistrust in institutions.”); accessed Oct. 10, 2017, *Freedom in the World—Guatemala*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/guatemala> (“The judiciary is hobbled by corruption, inefficiency, capacity shortages, and the intimidation of judges and prosecutors . . . Police are accused of torture, extortion, kidnapping, extrajudicial killings, and drug-related crimes[.]”).

20 Cecilia González-Andrieu, “A 3-Question Examination of Conscience on Immigration That All Catholics Need to Do,” in *America Magazine*, (October 18, 2017), accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2017/10/18/3-question-examination-conscience-immigration-all-catholics-need-do>. González-Andrieu's additional two questions are “have I resisted the rhetoric that undocumented people are illegal and criminals?,” and have I understood the economics of this issue.”

in the US is rooted in history. She writes that Americans cannot only look forward but must also take responsibility for wrongs our country has done in the past. The US has real culpability for its role in creating the situation and suffering of Central American children.

More than 70% of Americans self-identify as Christian.²¹ Yet the Trump “Muslim ban” was reportedly *supported* by almost half of Americans (suggesting that many American “Christians” favored the ban).²² Moreover, there continues to be significant support (among white Americans) for Trump’s proposed multi-billion-dollar wall across the US- Mexico border, even though few believe Trump’s claim that Mexico will eventually pay for the wall.²³ Do American Christians care about these children? Must they? Does God care about the children’s suffering? Obviously, anyone can *say* they are Christian. But can one actually *be* a Christian – a follower of Jesus Christ – and *ignore* the children’s suffering (or indeed anyone’s suffering)? Can a person truly have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and still “turn his/her head away,” decide “this is someone else’s problem,” or take a “me and my family first” or “my country first” attitude?

Theologians Tell Us That God Suffers with God’s People

The Bible

The idea that God suffers with God’s people is deep in the DNA of the Christian faith. The Hebrew Scriptures are full of stories of God suffering with and because of his people. Elizabeth Johnson cites the book of Exodus in which God cares deeply for people, “reprimanding them, trying one thing and then another to entice them to keep the covenant, getting the divine hands dirty (so to speak) with the troubles of those who suffer.”²⁴ She observes that God tells Moses,

I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know well what they are suffering; therefore I have come down to deliver them. (Ex. 3:7-8)²⁵

21 See, e.g., Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Religion and Public Life (May 12, 2015), accessed February 18, 2017, <http://pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

22 See, Fox News Insider, *Poll: Nearly Half of American Voters Support Trump’s Immigration Order*, cited Quinnipiac University Poll between Jan. 5-9, 2017 on question, “Do you support the refugee ban?” Support: 48%, oppose: 42%, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://insider.foxnews.com/2017/01/29/poll-nearly-half-america-voters-support-trumps-immigration-order>.

23 In the most recent Pew Research study on the issue dated February 24, 2017, 46% of white Americans favor building the wall, and 74% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents support a border wall. 86% of black Americans oppose the wall and 83% of Hispanics oppose it. Only 16% of those surveyed (for or against) believe that Mexico would actually pay for the wall, accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/24/most-americans-continue-to-oppose-u-s-border-wall-doubt-mexico-would-pay-for-it/>.

24 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus, Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 116.

25 Ibid.

Johnson writes that the verb “know” in this text is the same word, conveying the same intimacy, as that used in the book of Genesis when Adam “knows” Eve, his wife. (Gen. 4:17). God *knows* God’s people intimately, and participates in their suffering. Does that mean that God *feels*? Johnson observes that the prophet Hosea depicts God as saying (about sinful people), “My heart turns over within me, my compassion grows warm and tender (Hos. 11:8).” She cites the prophet Isaiah, who quotes God saying in the face of injustice, “For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; but now I cry out like a woman in labor: I gasp and pant (Is. 42:14).”²⁶ Christians, for whom these texts are sacred and foundational, know that God suffers with God’s people.

Church Fathers

The Church fathers, however, lost sight of this essential aspect of the nature of God as they merged their Jewish heritage with notions about God from classical Greek philosophy, particularly the Platonic idea that God is an ideal of immutable perfection. As Johnson writes, for the Greeks “the divine was thought of as an absolute, world-transcending self-subsistent Being; an incomprehensible essence with the attribute of *impassibility* – incapable of suffering.”²⁷ By the time Thomas of Aquinas wrote systematically in the Middle Ages, the doctrine of “the impassibility of God” had become firmly entrenched in the Christian tradition.

But if God is untouched by the suffering of humans and unable to suffer, why the Incarnation? Why did Jesus come, and what was he meant to accomplish? If Jesus was not God’s loving response to humanity in its despair and wrong-headedness, how could Christians explain his incarnation? The Church turned to Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), a Benedictine monk, theologian and early founder of Scholasticism. For centuries, the Church’s explanation for the Incarnation was mired in Anselm’s feudalistic “transactional” thinking, as set forth in his work *Cur Deus Homo* (1098). Anselm posited a “satisfaction/atonement” view to explain the Incarnation, about impossible debts owed to a master, with Jesus’s death accomplishing the otherwise impossible satisfaction of the “debt” to God.²⁸ An alternate explanation for the Incarnation *was available* in the Middle Ages. As Thomas Rausch explains, 12th century theologian Peter Abelard (d. 1142) rejected Anselm’s transactional thinking about Jesus’s death, concluding that “since Man could make no payment to God, and God need make no payment to the Devil, the purpose of the Incarnation could not be that of making any payment at all. It could only be an act of love.”²⁹ Abelard’s law of love was rejected by the Church, leading Catholics and Protestants to continue to profess the impassibility of God for centuries.³⁰

26 Ibid., 117.

27 Ibid., 117-118 Emphasis added).

28 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo: Why God Became Man* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Beloved Publishing, 2014), 75-84; See also, Thomas P. Rausch, *Who is Jesus, An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 176-177.

29 Ibid., 178, quoting Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 211.

30 In his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Martin Luther rejected the concept of the impassibility of God, developing his “theology of the cross” in opposition to the perceived “theology of glory” that was then-prevalent in the Catholic Church. Luther claimed that God is hidden in the suffering and humiliation of

The 20th Century

When the devastating scale of human suffering of the two world wars of the 20th Century brought humanity to its knees, a recognition that God of the Hebrew Bible suffers with his human creatures began to re-emerge in Christian thought. The Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote from his cell in a Nazi prison (where he was eventually executed) that:

Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world; he uses God as a *deus ex machina*. The Bible, however, directs us to the powerlessness and suffering of God; *only a suffering God can help...* for the God of the Bible, who conquers power and space in the world by his weakness... *Humans are challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world...*

To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism... but to be a human being. *It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world...*³¹

Suffering in the depths of human depravity, Bonhoeffer *knew* that God suffers with God's people and that *the only Christian response* is to participate as God does in suffering with them.

In the 1950s in the wake of WWII, the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain observes: "We need to integrate suffering with God, for the idea of an insensitive and apathetic God is revolting to the masses."³² Today, the Christian theologian best remembered for the stance that God suffers with God's people is Jurgen Moltmann. During WWII, Moltmann was a German soldier, who spent time in British prisoner of war camps and emerged to discover the atrocities of his countrymen in concentration camps like Auschwitz. Moltmann began his study of theology in one of these POW camps.³³

In his book *The Crucified God*, first published in 1974, Moltmann flatly rejects the concept that God is impassible.³⁴ Moltmann re-orientes the Christian outlook from the glory of the resurrection to Jesus's suffering and death on the cross. He contends that the death of Jesus on the cross is the "*centre of all Christian theology*," and is, in fact, the context in which all "statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point."³⁵ Moltmann writes:

Christ on the cross and that God shared in this suffering. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 204-205.

³¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Suydam/Reln220/Bonhoefferex.htm> (Emphasis added.).

³² Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 119.

³³ Karin Nurnberg, *Jurgen Moltmann's The Crucified God as a Response to Protest Atheism*, (paper for LMU Dept. of Theology Pro-seminar, Dec. 12, 2014), 3.

³⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God, 40th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 293.

[T]he centre is occupied not by ‘cross and resurrection,’ but by the *resurrection of the crucified Christ*, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and the *cross of the risen Christ*, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead.³⁶

Moltmann writes that God *freely chooses* to be affected by the actions of his creatures. He flatly rejects the assumption of Anselmian logic that ‘a god who suffers would be less than perfect, and therefore not God.’ In a contemporary echo of Peter Abelard, Moltmann concludes that God, who is love, chooses to suffer *out of the fullness of love*. Moltmann essentially turns Anselm’s logic on its head, contending that a god who could not suffer, would be a loveless being, and therefore, *not God*.³⁷

Moltmann’s most significant insight may be that the crucifixion encompasses not only Jesus’s suffering on the cross, but also *God the Father’s suffering as well*. Moltmann recognizes that while Jesus suffered the pain of rejection, the utter abandonment reflected in his cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and the eventual loss of his own life, *the Father too suffered. He suffered the loss of his Son*:

To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son.³⁸

Moltmann sees that the Father and the Son each suffer the devastating loss of the other, but they are deeply united in their loving will to save the world *at any cost*. Their undying love reveals the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son.³⁹ Moltmann sees the suffering of God the Father and God the Son as allowing *all the suffering in the world to be taken into the being of God*. Moltmann means this quite literally, contending that even the unthinkable atrocity of Auschwitz is “in God,” and God is in Auschwitz.

Moltmann, the former German soldier, drew deeply from the work of his contemporary, the Jewish philosopher of religion Abraham Heschel. The Polish-born Heschel lost family in the Holocaust, escaping to London himself just six weeks before the German invasion of Poland. His 1962 work *The Prophets* set forth *his* concept of “divine pathos” – that God participates with people in history, even in their suffering.⁴⁰

36 Ibid., 294.

37 Ibid., 324.

38 Ibid., 359.

39 Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 119-121.

40 John Jaeger, “Abraham Heschel and the Theology of Jurgen Moltmann,” *Journal of the NABPR, Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol. 1 – Spring 1974, 167-179.

Both Heschel and Moltmann wrote *in light of the Holocaust*, wrote of God's suffering, took the Hebrew Bible seriously, used dialectical thinking, rejected Greek philosophical ideas about impassibility and immobility, and promoted social activism on behalf of those who suffer.⁴¹

Moltmann tells Christians that *God suffers with them* in their pain. He claims that the way to understand suffering is through Christ, and the way to understand Christ is *through the Cross*.⁴² In this regard, Moltmann was part of a vanguard of theologians writing in the 1970s who criticized the triumphal approach to Christianity that skipped quickly past the cross to the glory of the resurrection.⁴³

Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff picks up on the suffering of God in his 1977 work, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*.⁴⁴ Boff writes, “[a]s Bonhoeffer says, a God who does not suffer cannot free us.”⁴⁵ Boff is fiercely critical of Moltmann's *Crucified God*, for what he calls its “profound lack of theological rigor.”⁴⁶ He is particularly incensed at Moltmann's “unceremonious discourse” about a “revolt of God against God,” and about Moltmann's conjectures that God's abandonment of Jesus on the cross is a “positive” act by a Father who grows angry with his son and rejects him.⁴⁷ Boff sees no hope in Moltmann's conclusion that all suffering is taken up into God, which he sees as suggesting that God *desires* suffering. Instead, Boff concludes that God's suffering is the straightforward result of God's love for humanity. God suffers at humanity's rejection of God and continues to love humanity in the face of rejection.⁴⁸ To Boff, this recognition leads to “an ethic of the discipleship of this Jesus who is also God.”⁴⁹ In other words, the suffering of God *must* lead us to the question, “how may we follow him so as to come ever nearer to him.”⁵⁰

Boff's answer to what the Christian must learn from the recognition that God suffers with the suffering is that *we must work for the “reign of God” in the present:*

The reign of God has already begun, here on earth, and is being built right now, by the grace of God and the efforts of people. But to build the reign of God, you have to have a minimal amount of the goods of this earth, enough to be able to live with a minimum of human dignity: you have to have sanitation, health services and schools. You had to band together in

41 Jaeger, “Abraham Heschel and the Theology of Jurgen Moltmann,” 168-169.

42 Samuel J. Youngs, “Wounds of the Emptied God: The Role of Kenosis at the Cross in the Christologies of Jurgen Moltmann and Sergius Bulgakov,” *American Theological Inquiry*, (2011) Vol. 4, Issue 2, 45-58, 46.

43 Youngs, “Wounds of the Emptied God,” 45-58.

44 Leonardo Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

45 *Ibid.*, 111.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*, 113.

48 *Ibid.*, 114.

49 *Ibid.*, 113.

50 *Ibid.*

organizations, especially with the humiliated and the wronged. . . .⁵¹

Boff suggests that Christians, recognizing that God suffers with those who suffer without “a minimum of human dignity,” must *band together with them and work for the reign of God in the present time*. Boff does not suggest that the Christian who engages in this mission will be victorious. He tells stories of those engaged in this work in Latin America who were themselves oppressed, tortured, and defeated, but they “start[ed] all over again—with the same enthusiasm, but with greater maturity and with a great deal more determination.”⁵² Boff writes that *this is the work of the Christian*, in which there is:

a joy not of this world, for there is a joy that the world cannot give – the joy of suffering for the people’s cause, of sharing in the passion of the Lord and of having hammered out one more link in the chain of historical liberation being forged by God through the intermediary of human effort for the subversion of every unjust order that stands in the way of the reign of God.⁵³

This advocacy to work for the “reign of God” is similar to that of Boff’s contemporary, Jon Sobrino. In his 1976 book *Christology at the Crossroads*, Sobrino argues that Jesus’s experience of God can be summed up in the “kingdom” or “reign” of God. Sobrino writes that the reign of God “points to real-life, historical love as a way of being” for the Christian. Sobrino concludes that it is precisely in *this praxis of love for neighbor* that the Christian experiences God.⁵⁴

Boff concludes that followers of Christ – all who call themselves Christians – cannot *create* “crosses” for others – which history teaches the United States has done for those who live in Central America today.⁵⁵ Instead, we Christians must commit our energies to a world in which “love, peace, and a community of sisters and brothers, a world where openness and self-surrender to God, will be less difficult.”⁵⁶ To Boff, this means Christians must actively *denounce situations that harm people*. He warns that this kind of commitment will not lead to “victory,” but will result in “crisis, suffering confrontation and the cross.” Boff writes that “[t]o carry the cross as Jesus carried it, then, means taking up a solidarity with the crucified of this world – with those who suffer violence, who are impoverished, who are dehumanized, who are offended in their rights.”⁵⁷

What does the Christian do when oppressive structures that harm people simply cannot be overturned – at least in one’s lifetime? As a first step, Cecilia González-Andrieu advises that we engage in an examination of conscience, asking ourselves if we

51 Ibid., 117.

52 Ibid., 119-120.

53 Ibid., 120.

54 See, e.g., Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990), Ch. 5.

55 Boff, *Passion of Christ*, 129.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 130.

are resisting “the rhetoric that undocumented people are illegals and criminals.”⁵⁸ She suggests that Christians must educate themselves on the shameful history of immigration policy in this country, including the reasons why people migrate, and the treatment shown to people who are not white. Miguel De La Torre writes of “an indecent ethics” to address the situation in which change seems impossible. De La Torre coined the term “ethics *para joder*” (or ethics that screws with), to explain what Christians must do when faced with immovable injustice to their brothers and sisters.⁵⁹ He observes that when oppressive structures, like those faced by the children at the border, simply cannot be overturned, the only *ethical* response is to screw with the structures to create disorder and chaos. This approach was conceived by a group of migration activists in Tucson Arizona led by John Fife, Presbyterian pastor and co-founder of the border organization, No More Death. Fife and the Arizona activists have engaged for decades in what De La Torre calls “ethics *para joder*” in the face of immovable evil. Instead of *losing* hope, the activists *gave up* their hope of winning. Instead, per Fife, “We engage in *jodiendo* as we prepare and wait for the movement of justice to take off. Hopelessness frees us to imagine creative ways to struggle for this justice.”⁶⁰ For Fife, “*jodiendo*” meant creating the organization No More Death, which provides life-sustaining aid to immigrants traveling through the desert in Arizona. In response to this, the US government infiltrated Fife’s group. In 1986, Fife, two Catholic priests, two women religious, and the director of the Tucson Ecumenical Council, were charged with felonies including aiding and abetting furtherance of illegal presence in the US Fife and the others were convicted in federal court and were sentenced to five years of probation, but nevertheless continued their work.⁶¹ For Fife’s long-time colleague Margo Cowan, a lawyer with the Pima County Public Defender’s Office, and the main lawyer for the sanctuary movement, *jodiendo* has meant working within the legal system to find every conceivable defense to charges against migrants.⁶²

The Christian Response to Children at the Border?

What does this theology have to do with the suffering of Central American children at the US border? It tells us that as Christians, we *must* see Jesus carrying his cross in the faces of Andrea and Elizabeth, and every single child who comes to our border, and we must welcome them. Christians do not demonize children or label them evil gangsters. We must help the children to recover from their trauma and find places for them in our homes and in our schools. We must feed them and nourish their spirits. We must fight those in this country who would turn them away. If necessary, we must engage in our own versions of *jodiendo* – when the laws are unjust.

The Hebrew Bible and Jesus of the New Testament show God united in love with those who suffer. This God is on the side of the suffering children. The theological work

58 González-Andrieu, “A 3-Question Examination.”

59 De La Torre, *U.S. Immigration*, 102.

60 *Ibid.*, 103.

61 Amy Goodman, “Rev. John Fife Continues Immigrant Humanitarian Work 25+ Years After Launching Sanctuary Movement,” *Democracy Now*, April 23, 2007, accessed June 7, 2018, https://www.democracynow.org/2007/4/23/rev_john_fife_continues_immigrant_humanitarian.

62 Interview of Margo Cowan by author conducted in Tucson, Ariz. on January 26, 2017.

of Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, Boff, Sobrino, De La Torre, and González-Andrieu teach that the Christian vocation is not about triumph, but is about uniting ourselves with those who, like the children, suffer oppression and injustice. As Sobrino explains, the Christian “must *be* love as God is, and *do* works of love as God does.”⁶³ If we do not engage in *the very same praxis of love* as did Jesus, we will encounter only a “god made after our own image and likeness.” When we experience God in the praxis of love, we can experience God as Jesus did and call God our “Father.”⁶⁴

The Bible itself repeatedly states the moral imperative to welcome the children at the border, who are the stranger: Exodus 22:21 (“You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”); Leviticus 19:33-34 (“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”); Deuteronomy 10:18-19 (“For the Lord your God. . . loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”); Matthew 25: 31-46 (“Then he will say to those on the left hand, ‘depart from me you cursed. . . for I was a stranger and you did not take me in. . .’”); and finally, Jesus’s statement of the two greatest *commandments*: “[a]nd you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31; *see also* Matthew 22:39; Luke 10:27).

Conclusion

What does this mean specifically? What can one person do? Here are some ways to help:

- Meet an immigrant family and get to know their story. Churches, synagogues, and mosques across the country are helping real immigrants. If your own community is not doing this, reach out to one that is and find out how you can encounter real people in their struggles. Only when you encounter real people in their real-life situations, does the “issue of immigration” become concrete.
- Go to the US Border and *see* what people actually suffer, simply to escape violence and to get into the US Experience what people go through as migrants, and weigh whether anyone living in any semblance of safety would choose to endure this life. A trip like this should only be done with expert support, through an agency like the Tucson Samaritans, or the Kino Border Initiative.⁶⁵
- Volunteer to aid an immigrant family in their dealings with the Immigration Court System and the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (“USCIS”). It is not necessary to be a lawyer to be helpful in this very challenging process. Many people support my clients by, among other things: providing

⁶³ Sobrino, *Christology*, 176.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Tucson Samaritans can be found at: www.tucsonamaritans.org; Kino Border Initiative can be found at: www.kinoborderinitiative.org.

transportation to and from court, translating documents into English, helping to arrange counseling, medical and services, donating furniture and clothing, mentoring parents/guardians on how to help their immigrant children thrive in the school system, tutoring kids, and simply being friends.

- Donate funds to agencies that help immigrants, such as Kids in Need of Defense (KIND),⁶⁶ which provides *pro bono* legal services to unaccompanied minors, Tucson Samaritans, Kino Border Initiative, the American Friends Service Committee,⁶⁷ or your own religious community's programs.

To be a Christian is to follow Jesus with his cross. It is to recognize that God cares about the suffering of children. It is to understand that one cannot *be* a Christian – a follower of Jesus – and *ignore* the suffering of the Central American children coming to our border. One cannot *be* a Christian and “turn one’s head away,” decide “this is someone else’s problem,” or take a “me and my family/country first” attitude. It is to follow his command that *we love the children at the border as we love ourselves and our own children*. Because of Jesus’s commandment and the other repeated biblical directives that we love the stranger in our midst, the Catholic Church seeks “to awaken our peoples to the mysterious presence of the crucified and risen Lord in the person of the migrant and to renew in them the values of the Kingdom of God that he proclaimed.”⁶⁸ Every Christian must participate in this mission.

66 Kids in Need of Defense can be found at <https://supportkind.org>.

67 The American Friends Service Committee immigrant ally program can be found at: <https://www.afsc.org/resource/immigrant-ally-resources-quaker-meetings-and-churches>.

68 USCCB and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicana, Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope, January 22, 2003, para. 3; accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm>.

**SPECIAL EDITION: A Forum on the Crisis in Puerto Rico:
Historical and Theological *Perspectivas* / EDICIÓN ESPECIAL:
*Un foro acerca la crisis en Puerto Rico: Perspectivas históricas
y teológicas***

FORUM CONTRIBUTORS / CONTRIBUYENTES AL FORO:

Loida I. Martell; Jean-Pierre Ruiz; Melissa Pagán

Editor's Note:

After the devastating hurricanes on Puerto Rico in September 2017, the Forum, "*Puerto Rico and María: Histories and Vulnerabilities in the Eye of the Storm*" was held at the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature in November 2017. Various Puerto Rican scholars of religion explored historical, political and theological implications in the aftermath of an excruciatingly slow USA government response to the devastation on the Island. In what follows, *Perspectivas* offers three of those reflections, especially prepared for this issue, one from a theologian, one from a biblical scholar and one from an ethicist. Issues of Puerto Rico's colonial status, historical injustices on the Island, and religious and ethical implications moving forward inform these important and helpful essays.

Nota Editorial:

Después de los devastadores huracanes en Puerto Rico en septiembre 2017, un foro titulado *Puerto Rico y María: Historias y vulnerabilidades en el ojo de la tormenta* tomó lugar en la conferencia anual de la Academia Americana de la Religión y la Sociedad de Literatura Bíblica en noviembre 2017. Varios académicos de la religión puertorriqueños exploraron algunas implicaciones históricas, políticas, y teológicas a raíz de la increíblemente lenta respuesta del gobierno de EE.UU. a la devastación en la isla. En lo que sigue, la revista *Perspectivas* ofrece tres de esas reflexiones especialmente preparadas para este tomo por un teólogo, por un estudioso de la Biblia, y por un especialista en ética. Asuntos sobre el estado colonial de Puerto Rico, las injusticias históricas en la isla y las implicaciones religiosas y éticas para seguir adelante informan estos importantes y útiles ensayos.

PUERTO RICO FORUM REFLECTION #1
Puerto Rico as a Concubinic Petrie Dish:
Diagnosing the Viral Attack of U.S. Coloniality

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On September 6, 2017, Puerto Rico was struck a “glancing blow” by category five Hurricane Irma, whose eye passed fifty-five miles north of the island. This powerful storm left in its wake death, structural damage, and the loss of electricity to at least one million people on the small island. Other Caribbean islands, particularly the Leeward Islands were brutally hit and suffered catastrophic destruction. Before the inhabitants of Puerto Rico could adequately recover from Hurricane Irma, or prepare for any new storms, Hurricane Maria, a category four storm, made direct landfall on September 20. It cut a wide swath from east to west, obliterating everything in its path. The death toll was initially reported at 30, a severely underrated count that led Donald Trump to the false comparison that “sixteen [reported deaths in Puerto Rico] versus thousands” that died on the mainland in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina made the latter a “real catastrophe” (with the implication that Maria in Puerto Rico was not).¹ While the official count is still mistakenly underreported as 64, others place a more accurate tally at more than a thousand hurricane-related deaths. Deaths related to the aftermath of the storm, particularly among the vulnerable population that have suffered without adequate medical care, continue to be reported.

Yet, the destruction goes far beyond human fatalities. As of February 2018, over 40 percent of the island has had no power for more than 130 days, and approximately one third of the island remains without power six months after the hurricane made landfall. Many remain with no source of clean potable water. What most of us take for granted as basic necessities for daily life are now items of luxury in Puerto Rico. The response of the federal government has been woefully inadequate. The news reports in the days leading up to the storms and in their aftermath were almost nonexistent: all eyes were on Texas, Florida, and other parts of the United States. Officials in the current US government laid blame for Puerto Rico’s state on Puerto Ricans themselves, and in some instances have taken punitive legislative steps rather than humanitarian ones.

¹ Mark Landler, “Trump Lobs Paper Praise, and Paper Towels, to Puerto Rican Storm Victims,” *New York Times* (October 3, 2007): A18, accessed December 29, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/03/us/puerto-rico-trump-hurricane.html?_r=0. Among the many tragedies during and after the storm was one I heard about a young man whose mother died of a heart attack during the storm, and whose father died the day after because he could not obtain life-saving medical treatment.

Why such an inadequate response on the part of the United States to a population that is purportedly part of its citizenry? In this essay, I provide a historical context to two aspects of this tragedy: to the economic devastation that preceded the onslaught of the storms and continue to hamper the recovery efforts of the island; and to the historical response of the United States to the island in the face of natural disasters that have struck in the past. I argue that the current US federal stance is consistent with the economic history of the presence of the US in Puerto Rico, and to past responses to natural calamities on the island. Indeed, it is consistent with the colonial trajectory that began when the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898. Comprehending this colonial framework is essential for understanding the economic, social, and even health care policies that the United States has developed throughout its historical relationship with Puerto Rico, which I briefly sketch in this essay.

My purpose in presenting this historical sketch is two-fold. First, I want to underscore that the present calamity facing Puerto Rico is a “pernicious continuity” of colonial policies that have an intentional goal, with genocidal consequences for economic ends; that in fact, this is not new.² Second, I want to emphasize that the response of the Church, if it is to be one of true justice, compassion, and love cannot be to extricate a people from their lands, and thus add to the population of the global homeless that roam our planet. The response of the Church should be to expose the sin of coloniality and white supremacy as it is expressed in Puerto Rico, and thus call for economic and social justice; to stand with the people of Puerto Rico as they seek to reconstruct their homes and communities; and to ensure that they and the rest of the people of the Caribbean do not disappear in the invisibilization process that is such a part of the globalization project. That is to say, the Church must ensure that part of the anticolonial project is to decolonize the personhood of all colonized peoples—indeed, even the very notion of humanity—from that which is currently constructed through the lens of white supremacy. So far, others have argued that these things must be done because Puerto Ricans are US citizens. I argue that this must be done because Puerto Ricans, like others, are children of the Living God.

“It went viral”: The Pernicious Colonization of Puerto Rico

In contemplating the colonial history of Puerto Rico in its relations with the United States (and its place in the world), I begin by discussing the notion of a virus. A virus is an organism that takes over another. One of the things that successful viruses do is that they rearrange or in some way impact the RNA or DNA of the host cell. Thus they affect its futurity. A successful virus invades, uses, replicates, absorbs, manipulates, distorts, and even drains; *but* it does not kill outright the host. A virus weakens its host enough to leave it powerless to fight back, while allowing its victim to survive in order to provide the viral agent a means or conduit within which it can replicate and disseminate.

Successful colonization is similar to a virus. It invades, and it seeks to alter or destroy the basic DNA and RNA of the people invaded: it destroys the cultural values of

² Nishant Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities: Un/settling Violence, Race and Colonialism,” *Sikh Formations* 9, no. 2 (2013): 264.

the colonized, their language, their history, their religious beliefs, their social fabric, and their economic pillars. When possible, the colonizer affects or destroys the reproductive future of the colonized either through rape, intimidation, mass sterilization, or, ironically, through intermarriage. Colonization diminishes populations either through attrition or other means. However, the colonizers typically do not destroy an invaded population entirely; for whether they are Romans, British, Spanish, or the USA, the colonizer can further its own economic and political designs by subjugating (and often enslaving) the host population. Colonizers introduce foreign elements that despoliate but keep the colonized functioning. Like a virus, any empire that outright kills its colonies does not survive in the long run.

Puerto Rico's long history has been one of infection by the colonizing virus. This history did not begin with the United States but rather with the invasion, genocide, and destruction of the native peoples and lands of the Americas by Spanish and Portuguese *conquistadores*. This background is relevant to the current discussion. I am fully aware of Nishant Upadhyay's observation that there is a continuous link between the five hundred years of colonialism of Americas, the colonial violences and legacies incurred against South Asia, the ongoing colonization of Americas, and the continued racist violence perpetrated against communities of color in the United States—what she refers to as “pernicious continuities.”³ Therefore, while I do not engage a full discussion of this history of conquest and colonization, I also do not diminish it nor do I want to erase the important theological and political discussions that led to the infantilization, forced indentured servitude and outright slavery, and genocide of indigenous and African people. Puerto Rico was infected by the virus of colonization long before the United States invaded. Nevertheless, a wave of nationalist sentiment and pro-independent push in the Caribbean created an environment that permitted Puerto Rico to reach a political status of autonomy from Spanish rule, with the dream of becoming an independent nation-state in its own right. It had taken steps to loosen the grip of its colonizing invaders. Then the Spanish-American War broke out. This war was begun under an intentional imperial policy of Manifest Destiny that sought to obtain further territorial hegemony in the Caribbean and Latin America, principally by wresting lands and power from Spain. Thus the war was initiated under the flimsiest of excuses—the claim that Spain allegedly had been involved in the bombing of the U.S.S. Maine while docked in a Havana, Cuba.⁴

The hostilities gave cause for Rear Admiral William Sampson to encroach upon San Juan with seven warships and bombard the city without explicit orders from Washington. It seems that “being an island surrounded by water” did not stop an armed invasion of a peaceful people, although currently that geographic fact seems to have become a major obstacle for humanitarian aid from the US. One of the mistaken notions about Spanish-American war, and its effects on Puerto Rico was that it was, in some way, a nonviolent ceding of territory. This is far from the truth: the US Navy's attack on San Juan's civilian population, as well as the invasion of other island towns by US

³ Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities,” 264.

⁴ Fernando Pico, *Historia General de Puerto Rico*, 9th ed. (San Juan, PR: Ediciones Huracán, 2004), 224.

forces, led to material and human losses.⁵ The imagery often projected of the United States entering the island as saviors welcomed with open arms by a peaceful population is purely propaganda that ignores actual historical events.

At the conclusion of the war, and with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, key territories were ceded to the United States as war booty. The Treaty of Paris disregarded the prior treaty between Spain and Puerto Rico that had granted the latter political autonomy.⁶ The Treaty of Paris enabled the United States to gain the strategic foothold in the Caribbean it had long desired, and in gaining Puerto Rico it specifically gained a key military location, as well as land rich in natural and human resources it could exploit for monetary gain.⁷

“It’s the Economy, Stupid”

No one is ever prepared for a natural disaster, but a natural disaster within an economy crippled by colonialism, an odious debt, and a weak infrastructure is beyond disastrous.⁸

Vulnerability is not simply a product of natural conditions; it is a political state and a colonial condition.⁹

Cyclones are natural, but disasters are political.¹⁰

The United States’ goal to exploit Puerto Rico for monetary gain was quickly asserted through a series of economic policies and legal maneuvers. Prior to the US invasion, and its intervention in Puerto Rico’s agricultural industry, agriculture was diversified, with many small landholders raising coffee, sugar, and about a third dedicated to subsistence farming. The Foraker Act (1900) was part of the overall strategy to steer Puerto Rican agribusiness to growing sugar, and thus to US-owned or multinational corporations and the global market, and away from subsistence farming and local food needs. The passage of the Foraker Act imposed a 15 percent levy on all imports and exports. It created a “body politic” of the “people of Puerto Rico” with limited rights, and it maintained a military governor appointed by the President of the

⁵ For more on the US invasion of Puerto Rico, see Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History* (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1983), 129.

⁶ The Treaty of Paris was signed on December 10, 1898. It is significant that there was *no representation* from Puerto Rico, and that its language is such that it never allowed for the possibility for Puerto Rico to gain independence, though such clauses were present for Cuba and the Philippines. Personal communication, Dr. Carmelo Rosario Natal (Professor, University of Puerto Rico).

⁷ Even Theodore Roosevelt, who did not think very highly of Puerto Rico or its inhabitants, publicly noted its strategic military value to the US. See Roosevelt, “Puerto Rico: Our Link with Latin America,” *Foreign Affairs* 12, no. 2 (January 1934): 271–280.

⁸ Yasmín Hernández, “De-debt/Decolonize: Open Letter by YH,” in *Hyperallergic*, October 12, 2017, accessed Oct. 17, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/405995/yasmin-hernandez-puerto-rico-occupy-museums/>.

⁹ Yarimar Bonilla as cited by Yasmín Hernández, “In Solidarity with Puerto Rico: Cancel Colonial Debts Now!” in *Hyperallergic*, October 14, 2017, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/405995/yasmin-hernandez-puerto-rico-occupy-museums/>.

¹⁰ Posting on Facebook, 2017.

United States.¹¹ This law, coupled with the devaluation of currency and devastating storms, primarily affected the coffee industry, which included a diverse number of small landowners (including poorer Puerto Ricans of color). While the Foraker Act prevented US corporations from owning more than 500 acres of land, the more restrictive Olmstead Bill of 1910 succeeded in overturning this restriction. Puerto Rico's economy, that had largely been agrarian and whose focus was on subsistence, was shifting to a peonage system: landless and now poor Puerto Ricans working the land for rich land barons, depending on the US for economic aid and economic employment stimulus. The Jones Act (1917) provided citizenship as part of an overall defense strategy of the United States—despite the US' misgivings that providing citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico would only taint the national DNA because it would incorporate “the mixture of black and white in Porto Rico [that] threatens to create a race of mongrels of no use to anyone, a race of Spanish American talkers.”¹² While the Jones Act provided citizenship, it did not overturn the primary elements of the Foraker Act (including the import/export tariffs). The cumulative legislative decisions together with the military, and later civilian, governments imposed on the island swiftly and drastically changed the island's economic RNA, as other laws in education, health, and those impacting the social life of Puerto Ricans slowly began to impact its DNA. Moreover, they revealed US long-term political and economic plans: that the US had no plans to let go of its Caribbean concubine, and that, on the contrary, its policies would ensure both economic exploitation through appropriation of the primary means of production on the one hand, and on the other the creation of economic dependency by stifling any industry that was owned by Puerto Ricans, stifling of trade with any other nation other than the U.S., and by the eventual depletion of island resources. By 1920, the US controlled 85 per cent of total export trade with Puerto Rico. By 1935, the profits acquired from tariff protections had risen to \$35 million dollars, benefiting primarily “absentee producers” rather than Puerto Rican consumers who bore the brunt of the costs in the form of higher consumer prices.¹³ Within fifty years of the invasion, 80 percent of land ownership had transferred from Puerto Ricans to US and multinational corporate interests.¹⁴

In short, Puerto Rico's agricultural industry had shifted from a diversified one to one almost solely dependent on sugar, and from being primarily for local subsistence to one focused on export for external gain. The slow introduction of industrialization and the collapse of the coffee industry forced the population to migrate from inland to coastal cities. A consequence of this growing number of landless workers (*agregados*) was that between 1899 and 1929 the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico more than doubled from 17 to 36 percent. During times of war, Puerto Ricans not only gave their lives, but also provided a significant portion of earnings to the US. Despite all this, the US was slow to respond to the real needs of the people. During World War II, the then US-appointed governor to Puerto Rico (1941–1946), Rexford Tugwell, documented how the island's material and civil defense needs were met with “indifference and cynicism”

¹¹ Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 156–57.

¹² US District Court Judge Peter J. Hamilton (1913), as cited in Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 186.

¹³ History Task Force, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 121–122.

¹⁴ Pérez, *Puerto Rico*, 7.

at “every level of government.”¹⁵ Slowly but surely, the island was being sacked of its most precious resources, both human and material. By this period of time, unemployment remained in the double digits, without counting the underemployed. By the time of recession in the 1970s, its real unemployment (taking into consideration those no longer looking for employment and the underemployed) was probably closer to a staggering 60 percent and has since probably hovered between 25 to 30 percentile range.¹⁶

Natural disasters contributed to this economic reconfiguration that US legislative and political decisions had begun. The first was Hurricane *San Ciriaco*—a massive category five storm that struck the island in 1899, destroying what remained of the coffee crop, thus accelerating a process that had begun with US economic policies that were aimed intentionally at destroying the coffee industry.¹⁷ Over 3000 people died as a result of that storm. Subsequent hurricanes such as *San Felipe*—another category five storm that hit the island in 1928—also caused damage, and even then there was reportedly little response or aid from the US to help islanders to recover from these storms. The economic impact of US policies, together with that of these hurricanes, had lasting consequences still being felt today, which is the key point of this historical overview.

“Above all, do no harm”: The Politics of Eugenics and Medical Experimentation

Nevertheless, official and public reports have never accrued the economic woes of Puerto Rico to US policies or even to “the hand of God” (due to the hurricanes). Rather, the island’s impoverished state was allegedly of its own making. Thus, according to the popular narrative propagated and “scholarly analysis,” the island’s poverty was due to a problem of “overpopulation”—this in spite of the fact that the census in 1899 held the population count at one million inhabitants.¹⁸ The larger framework that birthed this propaganda was the consideration that “on a world scale, the entire Puerto Rican labor force served as a reserve army of labor for the metropolitan countries; within the regional economy of Puerto Rico, there was primarily floating overpopulation, as rural subsistence and coffee-growing farmers drifted toward sugar and urban areas.”¹⁹ In other words, as the coffee and other agriculture industries were dismantled, the people who depended on such industries migrated to, and thus overpopulated, the newly developing urban sectors and areas where sugar was the primary agricultural crop. This narrative of “overpopulation” led to policies of “attrition” of the general population.

¹⁵ History Task Force, *Labor Migration*, 124.

¹⁶ César Ayala and Rafael Bernabé, “Transformation and Relocation: Puerto Rico’s Operation Bootstrap,” in *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 193.

¹⁷ For more on the economic impact of US policies on the coffee industry, see History Task Force, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience*, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 95, 106.

¹⁸ See for example, Lawrence R. Chenault’s, “The Population Problem of Puerto Rico and its Forebodings of Malthusianism,” *Social Forces* 19, no. 3 (March 1941): 327–336. Theodore Roosevelt anticipated such arguments; see his “Puerto Rico,” 273.

¹⁹ History Task Force, *Labor Migration*, 108.

One of those policies of attrition was a side benefit of the Jones Act. The Jones Act had been in debate for a number of years because, while it restricted trade and imposed tariffs that benefited the United States financially, it also included a clause for granting Puerto Ricans citizenship. While there was some concern about this particular aspect of the Jones Act, it was finally passed by Congress in 1917 because the United States was about to enter the Great War against Germany. By imposing citizenship upon Puerto Ricans the US now had a disposable regiment of bodies for its military machinery, while also easing the alleged “population problem” on the island.

By the 1940s and '50s, the response to the “problem of overpopulation” was to encourage people to migrate from Puerto Rico to the US mainland, touted as the “Promised Land, the land of milk and honey,” the place of plentiful jobs and financial opportunity. This led to a key event in the history of Puerto Rico, “the Great Migration,” which we might be seeing again in the post-Hurricane Maria era. Almost 40 per cent of the island’s population, some half-million people, moved from the island between the 1940s and 1960s. My parents were part of that migration. This exodus, described by some as the “dismemberment of the Puerto Rican nation,” on the one hand provided a source of cheap labor for the mainland.²⁰ On the other hand, it also diluted the island of a valuable resource: many of the people who had knowledge of its history, especially the unwritten kind – the stories passed on from generation to generation through oral transmission and other means.²¹

In addition to attrition through migration as a means to solve the problem of “overpopulation,” a systematic policy of sterilization was implemented that began in the 1930s and allegedly ended in the 1970s when Helen Rodríguez Trías exposed the unethical practice among (mostly poor) women of color in the United States and among Puerto Rican women specifically.²² Up to 35 percent of Puerto Rican women between the ages of 14 and 49 were sterilized; 92 percent were under the age of 35. By 1968, Puerto Rico had the dubious distinction of having the highest sterilization rate in the world. Women who needed Caesarian sections emerged from surgery to be informed of “complications” that led to a hysterectomy, or those who went to the doctors to inquire about birth control were informed about a “reversible” procedure of “tying their tubes.” Women were being sterilized either without consent or through misinformation. The sterilization of women was related to the industrialization and therefore exploitation of

²⁰ History Task Force, *Labor Migration*, 15. See also, Ayala and Bernabé, “Transformation and Relocation,” 194–197.

²¹ In addition, there were significant number of *independentistas*, those advocating for Puerto Rico’s independence, who were arrested or killed during this period. There was even a time in which such persons were also expelled from *iglesias evangélicas* for being “subversive” and “communistic.”

²² See Helen Rodríguez, “Population Control: The U.S. and Puerto Rico,” in *Theology in the Americas*, Detroit II Conference Papers, ed. Cornel West, Carded Guide, and Margaret Coakley (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 34–39. Also, Harriet B. Presser, “The Role of Sterilization in Controlling Puerto Rican Fertility,” *Population Studies*, 23, no. 3 (November 1969): 343–361. For a larger discussion on sterilization abuse of women of color, including Puerto Rico where it was simply called “*la operación*”, see Marian McDonald, “Anti-Sterilization Abuse Organizing: A Retrospective,” *The International Quarterly of Community Health Organization* 9, no.2 (111–124), and Victoria Ortíz, “Population Control: Free Choice or Coercion,” *Church and Society* 71, no. 4 (March–April 1981): 78–80.

the workforce. Rodríguez notes the large number of women employed but for whom childcare services were not provided. Industries did, however, provide, and encouraged, sterilization as an “effective means” of birth control. Such legislation was permissible given the larger context of eugenics that led to laws that permitted the coerced sterilization of certain population groups such as the poor, those deemed other-abled or with cognitive deficiencies, criminals, or those otherwise dependent on the state.²³

The lie of “overpopulation” was revealed when the United States began to encourage the importation of migrants from Latin America to work in newly developing industries on the island, particularly under the aegis of “Operation Bootstrap.” These migrant workers were hired to work for even lower wages than their island-raised counterparts. Puerto Rican migrants, on the other hand, provided low-wage labor for mainland industries, and women were recruited for the burgeoning needlework industry.²⁴

Operation Bootstrap (*Operación Manos a la Obra*) was a program that was instituted in the late 1940s, ostensibly to help the island develop economically. In truth, it was a tax haven for corporations, a “rehearsal” if you will for many of the globalizing practices we see worldwide today. Operation Bootstrap allowed corporate businesses to establish their industries in Puerto Rico, tax-free for ten years. More often than not, after ten years, businesses left Puerto Rico (at times for Latin America or other tax-free havens). The purpose of Operation Bootstrap was to provide incentives for industry to develop in Puerto Rico, and thus provide sources of employment for Puerto Rico that would allow it to develop economically (thus, “pull itself up by its bootstraps”).²⁵ In reality, many of these industries exploited the population by paying minimal salaries (e.g., my mother, who was a college-trained executive assistant, but earned a salary of about \$250/month until eventually it was raised to only \$400/month). Few companies remained in Puerto Rico after the period of tax incentives ended, and this contributed to the volatility of the job market. In their wake, they left only a damaged environment, while pillaging the island’s natural and human resources for their own profit.

An example of the exploitative nature of the system is the presence of pharmaceutical companies. Through the intricacies of law (including the still active Jones Act), the island did not benefit from having pharmaceutical companies on the island but rather saw the very medicines they helped manufacture shipped to the United States, and then *shipped back* to Puerto Rico for resale at up to ten times the price for resale. Puerto Rico not only failed to benefit from the presence of these companies on the island, islanders were directly injured when at times they became unknowing

²³ Rodríguez, “Population Control,” 36.

²⁴ “Conditions in the Puerto Rican Needlework Industry.” *Monthly Labor Review* 51, no. 6 (1940): 1328–334. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41816222>. My mother and aunts were employed in New York City to do this labor-intensive work. They were paid 10 cents for each completed garment.

²⁵ In Pérez, *Puerto Rico*, 17, we learn that in 1950 there were 82 factories in Puerto Rico; by 1970, there were close to 2000. For more information on Operation Bootstrap, see also Ayala and Bernabé, “Transformation and Relocation,” 187–194.

participants in pharmaceutical studies for certain medications, especially contraceptives for women.²⁶

Whose Histories? Hidden Stories

Puerto Ricans, then, are a population that has been dispersed, regrouped, and hammered into new configurations by the changing requirements of production and profit, and by the inability of its working sectors, in present circumstances, to survive disconnected from the contemporary process of U.S. capitalist expansion.²⁷

This history of economic exploitation, resulting in the slow, destruction of our native industries and resources, in conjunction with the population being expelled in diasporic exile, created the economic, social, and political dependencies that frame Puerto Rico's current status. The terrible consequences of Hurricane Maria, both natural and political, must be understood within this larger historical and colonial framework.

The colonial history of Puerto Rico should give us pause when we hear the continued US propaganda that is propagated as "historical narrative." Such a narrative tells a story of a benevolent nation that "saved an impoverished people," and brought the gospel to them (ignoring Puerto Rico's already established Christian roots). The narrative speaks of hospitals built but not of forced sterilizations or the use of an unwitting population as medical guinea pigs. This colonial history speaks of schools but not of the move to eliminate Spanish or of how it continues to ignore a rich native cultural history of literary giants, poets, musicians, philosophers, scientists, educators, and so forth. It is a narrative that does not admit that there are historians whose works are not published because they write in a "different tongue" and provide different narratives. The US narratives speak of liberty but not about the bombing of San Juan (1898), the massacre of Ponce (1937), the murders of young people at Cerro Maravilla (1978), the systematic repression of *independentistas*, or the infiltration of nationalist movements by federal agents.²⁸

We must be wary of narratives. As a colony, misinformation is rampant. We are being blamed for the financial woes that beset the island before Maria, and to a degree we do bear some responsibility for them. But if the larger history of exploitation, destruction of resources, murder of political leadership, extraction of mineral resources,

²⁶ See Ada María Díaz-Stevens, "A Case for Puerto Ricans, the Forgotten People," [Union Seminary Quarterly Review](#) 56, no. 1 - 2, (2002): 78–186; Ortíz, "Population Control," 78.

²⁷ History Task Force, *Labor Migration*, 133.

²⁸ After the Mayor of Ponce gave the Nationalist Party permission to march on Palm Sunday, March 21, 1937, the police (influenced by Governor Winship) rescinded the permit just as the march began. They surrounded an unarmed civilian population who were protesting peacefully. No one knows who fired the first shot, but when it was over, 19 people—including 2 police officers—were dead, and 150 to 200 critically wounded in what came to be known as "the Ponce Massacre." Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 238; Pérez, *Puerto Rico*, 11–12. See also [Ponce Massacre YouTube clip](#) (note that there are disturbing graphic scenes).

enrichment of US industrial interests at our expense, the speculative investments of hedge fund owners that led to the collapse of our economy, and now the “generous offer” of those same fund owners to “loan us” billions of dollars to rebuild is not made clear, then the perspective of writers like Don Feder, who once described Puerto Rico as a “Caribbean Dogpatch,” will prevail.²⁹ According to the *New York Times*, a new breed of “venture capitalists” is sweeping into the vacuum left by the forced migration that is the consequence of Irma and María. These so called “Puertopians” are nothing other than new “foreign speculators” who seek to enrich themselves upon the backs of a wounded and broken people. Like vultures, they will suck the current land and population dry of what they can, destroy without attention to consequence, and leave when there is nothing else from which they can profit.³⁰ As for the people of Puerto Rico, whether residing on the island or in diaspora in the United States, we will continue to be treated as mongrels, *satxs*, *sobrajas*, with no worth, *dignos* only to be swept aside with the trash.

I have witnessed the slow genocide of our people through financial, cultural, and biological strangulation. Hurricane Maria was actually a convenient way to speed up what was the ultimate goal of a colonizing virus: to rid the island of a people who continue to cling to a knowledge of its history and maintain nationalist ideals that obstruct the US from its “national interests”—to exploit the resources and maintain strategic military outposts at little cost to themselves.

Good News of Salvation: Spiritualized Vacuousness or True Gospel

This essay has sought to provide a historical framework for the humanitarian, political and economic crises facing Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and María. However, as a theologian I want to conclude with what I believe should be the response of people of faith, especially the Christian Church, to the current situation in Puerto Rico. How can we be *evangélicxs*, a people of “good news” to those who are undergoing unimaginable suffering? How can we legitimately claim to be a people who proclaim the hope of the Reign, that we are in fact a people of the light in a world gone dark with despair?

As an *evangélica* theologian, I lay claim to the belief that God is the God of life, the Creator who is the ground source of all that we are and will be through the blowing of the Holy Spirit. As Triune, God is perichoretic—Three Persons in intimate, interpenetrating *vínculos* (intimate ties that bind) or *enlaces* (relations), God-in-Communion, Diversity-in-Community. God reminds us that we are created to be *en vínculos de amor* (loving intimate ties), what Scripture refers to as *koinonia*. To live in this way is to be “perfect” (Ephesians 4); that is to say that we are called to be whole. It is no coincidence that the biblical terms for salvation are the ones for healing (*sōter*, *salus*).

²⁹ Don Feder, “No Statehood for Caribbean Dogpatch,” *Boston Herald* (30 November 1998): Op-Ed, 27.

³⁰ Nellie Bowles, “Making a Crypto Utopia in Puerto Rico,” *The New York Times* BU1 (February 4, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html>. Accessed February 3, 2018.

As creation fashioned by God, we are made in the *imago Dei*. This is a soteriological statement and an anticolonial project: it reminds us that we are called to be a community that is to be in comm-union, and to seek *katartismos* – healing – wherever there is a rupture as we aspire to wholeness. *Imago Dei* therefore redefines not only what it means to be human, but more so a creation of God. What define our relationships to each other and the earth are not profits nor concepts fueled by the false science of eugenics, which implies that some created beings are worthier than others. The Church must be the voice of good news that reminds the world that we are invaluable because we are given life and brought into loving relations by the One who sustains all of creation with a loving Breath of Life, with the divine *ruach*, Holy Spirit. Rabbinic teaching further reminds us that this loving, Triune God created us for *tikkun olam*, to partner with God for the mending of creation and to bring it to wholeness.

When Scripture refers to the *basileia* of God it refers precisely to this divine vision for wholeness, and to God’s purpose for all of creation: that we are called to be the holistic diverse community in communion that God created us to be. This is not a utopian ideal for which we passively wait, looking vacuously into the clouds for an undetermined future. This is an eschatological reality that began in creation. Its in-breaking into history is embodied figuratively and literally with the advent of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. It is the good news that we proclaim both in word and in living witness.

This *basileia* is the realization that God’s foundational nature is not only *perichoretic* and relational love (*hesed*), but that such a love is based on God’s vision for justice. God’s *basileia* is extended first and foremost to “the least,” the poor, the forgotten, the oppressed, the marginalized, the outcast, the landless stranger, and those without familial ties. We often cite the fact that God is love (I John 4:8), but we forget that “love” in the Bible is meaningless if not understood as an expression of a God who is also justice (*sēdāqāh* or *mišpat* in Hebrew, or *dikaiosynē* in the Greek).³¹ It is best expressed by the prophet Micah who challenges those who would proclaim themselves to true worshippers of God: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8 NRSV). The Church is called to preach a gospel, *un evangelio*, that provides hope for justice.

In this sense, the gospel is the ultimate “vaccine” against the virulent attack of colonialism and the destruction of peoples in the face of greed, exploitation, and even “benign neglect.” Wherever there is suffering, hunger, want, oppression, despair, or the encroachment of death, the Church is to be a conduit of God’s good news: we are bearers of God’s Spirit. Where there is hunger, we feed; where there is loss, we comfort; where our brothers and sisters are imprisoned or detained, we visit them and seek that the “captives [be] set free” (Luke 4:18). To a dehumanized and dehumanizing social system, we proclaim a new vision of humanity and a reminder that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), that God became enfleshed and “pitched a tent” in the midst of us. To be a Christian is not to be an armchair theoretician, but rather to be a servant of God who

³¹ For more on biblical notions of justice, see Cynthia Long Westfall and Bryan R. Dyer, ed., *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church’s Urgent Call*, McMaster Testament Studies (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

embodies “good news” in the multiple and sundry ways that a suffering and broken world requires. We are to remind the world constantly about those the world would prefer to forget and ignore.

As conduits of God’s breath, we are called at this *kairos* time to be prophetic: to call a nation, a Church, and a world to accountability. Thus, as a theologian I call the Church to accountability for its historical amnesia and complicity in the colonization of lands; it justified United States’ hegemonic claims with the false call to Manifest Destiny. As a theologian, I also call the world to accountability for those whom the medical profession has failed through the abusive acts of eugenics, forced sterilization, and other genocidal abuses. Puerto Rico’s “storm” transcends the present hurricanes, because the “storm” of colonization has ravaged the island’s economy, culture, faith, and people for over a hundred years.

More so, we are also called to be conduits of God’s life and love, and therefore to seek God’s justice and mercy. To counter the virus of coloniality that usurps and kills all in its path, we must become sowers of seed: the seed of hope, comfort, material aid, and spiritual and emotional support. In face of the destruction of a people, it is the Church that is empowered to act prophetically and resist genocidal forces. We should not be complicit with the abandonment of the island by aiding in the mass migration of its people, thus leaving Puerto Rico open to rapacious developers who continue to steal a people’s homeland from them. Rather, in the spirit of *tikkun olam*, we should be at the ready to join our multiple gifts and help a people reconstruct their homes. We should ensure that economic justice through native industry and business can be rebuilt along with homes, schools, and churches. The people of Puerto Rico, and indeed, those ravaged throughout the Caribbean, should know that the world stands by them and with them, not for economic gain, but out of a theological imperative. God, who is life, has given us life so that we may share life and life abundant with the world.

PUERTO RICO FORUM REFLECTION #2

Puerto Rico and Maria: A View from the Diaspora¹

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“Diaspora” is an ancient word. It is a word used in the Septuagint to refer to the Judean community that was deported to Babylon in 587 BCE when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar II conquered Jerusalem. The word acquired fresh and equally painful currency in 70 CE, when Roman legions under the command of Titus brought the so-called First Jewish Revolt to an end by taking Jerusalem and destroying the second Temple. Thus did Rome come to be called “Babylon” by those who survived the siege and fled to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

Yet the circumstances that led the psalmist to wonder aloud how anyone among the exiles by the waters of Babylon could sing one of Zion's songs in a foreign land (Psalm 137) also provided the conditions for the possibility of shaping a sense of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish identity that were neither necessary nor possible before 587 BCE. In a not dissimilar way, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE provided the conditions for the development of rabbinic Judaism and a reaffirmation of Jewish identity over against the *imperium* of Rome. The First Letter of Peter addresses late first-century CE followers of Jesus in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (in present-day Turkey) as “exiles of the diaspora” (1 Peter 1:1). The addressees of 1 Peter are invited to reimagine themselves as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9), a designation that reappropriates the language of Exodus 19:6 to claim for them an alternate identity that pushes back against their minoritization.

This is the remote but relevant historical backdrop against which I suggest we might be able to understand the significance of diaspora as it describes the Puerto Rican community on the U.S. mainland in the 120 years since the U.S. violently occupied Borikén. As we gather to think hard about the impact of Hurricane María in the light of Puerto Rico's history as the world's oldest colony, a strange irony arises from recognizing that it was in August 1899 that an earlier hurricane, San Ciriaco, gave rise to the first large-scale migration of Puerto Ricans, when unemployed men were recruited as laborers by the owners of sugarcane plantations and were transported to Hawai'i

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to Robert J. Rivera, to MT Dávila, and to all those who worked to plan and to organize the panel at which this essay was first presented.

under conditions that were so awful that many sought to escape when the ships that carried them docked at intermediate ports along the way.²

The Diaspora has long provided a generative space for the construction and negotiation of Puerto Rican identity. It was in New York in the 1890s, for example, that the Puerto Rican flag was designed. That flag that was so closely connected to the affirmation of an anti-colonial Puerto Rican nationalist identity that from Puerto Rico's annexation in 1898 until 1952, displaying the flag in public was punishable as a felony. Besides providing a space in which Puerto Rican political nationalism was nourished and advanced, the Diasporic community on the U.S. mainland, and especially in the New York metropolitan area, provided a standpoint from which cultural remittances nourished a cultural nationalism that subverted the lack of Puerto Rican political self-determination.³

Let's talk about numbers. The current population of Puerto Rico, that is, the number of Puerto Ricans living on the island itself, is approximately 3.4 million. According to the 2010 U.S. census, the number of Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland, that is, the Puerto Rican Diaspora, was 4.6 million. That means that Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora currently account for 57.5% of all self-identified Puerto Ricans.

In an article entitled, "A Great Migration from Puerto Rico is Set to Transform Orlando," the *New York Times* reported that "More than 168,000 people have flown or sailed out of Puerto Rico since the hurricane, landing at airports in Orlando, Miami and Tampa, and the port in Fort Lauderdale...an additional 100,000 are booked on flights to Orlando through Dec. 31."⁴ The title of the article very deliberately invokes the so-called "Great Migration" of Puerto Ricans to New York City in the 1950s, the wave of economic migration in which my own parents participated.

The aftermath of Hurricane María is significantly exacerbating what has been an ongoing trend, with Puerto Rico experiencing a net loss of nearly 450,000 people between 2005 and 2015, the majority for job-related reasons, a consequence of the island's ongoing economic crisis. The Diaspora is growing larger, while the island's population is in alarming decline. Interviewed by the *New York Times*, Mr. Edwin Aponte, from the hard-hit south-central town of Coamo, wondered out loud "if the sluggish and inadequate emergency response was not by design." Land, he said, was now less expensive, and outside investors had been circling even before the hurricane. "For me, Mother Nature just helped the gringos move forward to where we will be a minority in our own land." He goes on to express his concern that Puerto Rico "will

² See Carmen Teresa Whalen, "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vásquez-Hernández (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), pp. 7-9; also see Iris López, "Borinkis and Chop Suey: Puerto Rican Identity in Hawai'i, 1900 to 2000," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora*, eds. Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández, pp. 43-67.

³ See Juan Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴ Lizette Alvarez, "A Great Migration from Puerto Rico is Set to Transform Orlando," *New York Times*, November 18, 2017.

become Hawaii, an overpriced place controlled by white people while bomba dancers do demonstrations for tourists.”⁵

What, then, is the responsibility of those of us who belong to the Puerto Rican diaspora? Participation in disaster relief efforts is only the beginning. Recovery, rebuilding and reconstruction are longer-range objectives, with a rethinking and a reconfiguration of U.S. policies towards and the U.S. relationship with Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican self-determination as the foundational issue that must be addressed. The political clout of the Puerto Rican Diaspora needs to be mobilized. Consider Florida, for example, which Trump won in the 2016 presidential race by only 112,000 votes out of a total of 9.6 million votes. What difference will the hundreds of thousands of newly-arrived Puerto Ricans in Florida make in 2020, since those of us who live in the mainland U.S. *are* eligible to vote in the presidential elections?

As scholars of religion, we are by no means exempt from participating actively in that political process. Yet I would also insist that Puerto Rican scholars of religion on the island and in the Diaspora share a responsibility that is specifically our own at this crucial moment. Just as activist thinkers in earlier decades lent their voices to shaping and mobilizing a distinctively Puerto Rican identity that resisted the colonization of Puerto Rican bodies and minds and souls, our own times call for teaching and writing that focus without flinching on the situation at hand. Because we are scholars of religion, it is not up to us to merely chronicle the present crisis as it unfolds, but instead to participate through what we write and what we teach in the dismantling of the underpinnings of coloniality, to challenge a status quo that is killing the bodies and the souls of our people, to call to deep accountability the powers of church and state, and to dare to imagine—together with our poets, our artists and our musicians—a different and life-giving way of being.

⁵ David González, “On the Mainland, a Duty to Help Puerto Rico,” *New York Times*, October 29, 2017.

PUERTO RICO FORUM REFLECTION #3
Cultivating a Hermeneutics of “El Grito” in the Eye of the Storm

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Mount Saint Mary’s University

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico. Just a few weeks before this, many Puerto Ricans had breathed a sigh of relief because, while Hurricane Irma delivered rain and flooding, cut off power from much of the grid, and took several lives, its eye had missed *La Isla*. But María’s scale was massive and no part of the island was spared the darkness, destruction, despair, and death that ravaged and settled on the island that day.

We Puerto Ricans in diaspora wept for our *Isla*. But with virtually no communication channels open, initially we did not even know the fate of our family members there, nor could we do anything to help them. Day and night we waited for news from Puerto Rico. When finally the first few images and news stories appeared, we were in a state of disbelief: this cannot be our island! This cannot be happening!, we thought. More shocking and painful was listening to the cries from our fellow Puerto Ricans on the island, and the recognition that, again, the US had neglected our people—as it would continue to do for the next months. Indeed, the structures of “US citizenship” makes little or no difference when the US considers the particular citizens in question not to be fully human. In short, we saw a graphic retelling and amplification of our history.

The conference panel through which these reflections were first presented¹ was organized so we could be truth tellers to this history, to raise awareness about the past and present context of Puerto Rico, and to construct pathways forward. In part, my task on the panel was to think about theological and ethical frameworks that could structure a decolonial future for Puerto Rico. This was an arduous task. It is doubly taxing to perceive and grasp the radical, decolonized hope necessary to envision a better, liberated, future when one is overcome with grief. However, this was our task. All of us on the panel were Puerto Ricans, either living in Puerto Rico or in diaspora. We are also all in some way associated either with the Academy as scholars of religion and/or theology or with organizations working on the ground in Puerto Rico. So, naturally, we began to think about the ways our own work could function toward bringing about this better future. I came to this task humbled, not certain I was the best person for it, but ablaze with a loving rage as I watch my fellow Boricuas struggle to survive, to be heard,

¹ This essay is based on my panel presentation in the Forum entitled, “Puerto Rico and María: Histories and Vulnerabilities in the Eye of the Storm,” at the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Boston on November 19, 2017.

to see in the darkness, to find adequate food, water, shelter, to be considered human, to have their cries addressed.

Nuyorican artist, Caridad De La Luz, also known as La Bruja, poetically put into words what many of us are experiencing because, in the wake of María, “it seems as if it is 1492 all over again.”² Indeed, it does seem that it is 1492 as much as it is 1898 (the year of the US invasion of Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War) and, yet, it was 2017 when that hurricane hit. Though the eye of María left Puerto Rico in darkness, it sharpened our vision and focus. We could see and tell how what followed this meteorological ravaging of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans was only the most recent manifestation of colonial logics and practices. These most recent iterations of forced dependency, the repeated transfer of Puerto Ricans and their affairs from colonizer to colonizer with no regard for human lives, the imposed debts where requested repayment functions as blood dowries,³ all enable the continuation of an unbalanced and abusive relationship. La Bruja rightly characterizes the continuous “whoring of our people,” the unbridled “rape culture” of our land, our resources, and of the people and dignity of Borinquen as masquerading as paternalistic care. Such “care” is needed, our colonizers have suggested, because we suffer from an intractable laziness.⁴ They say we are incorrigible, and our only worth as persons is instrumental. Puerto Ricans are those made to sustain violence and death by fighting in US wars. We suffer under the plight of global coloniality. Yet we are deemed not worthy of agency, voice, and representation. These same colonizers mockingly throw paper towels at us,⁵ as if to suggest this ought to be sufficient for us to mop up the tears and to soak up the incessant rains of oppression that have befallen Puerto Ricans for centuries. The eye of the storms – whether of Spain, of the United States, or of hurricanes like María – has laid bare the logics of coloniality in the United States’ relationship to Puerto Rico. We must not look away.

In our original panel in November 2017, we heard the cries of seemingly unending grief that haunts Boricuas both on the island and in diaspora.⁶ I suggest that such grief stems from what decolonial theorist, Nelson Maldonado-Torres terms the “sub-ontological or ontological colonial difference.”⁷ He claims that this space is characterized by interminable violence (epistemic, physical, and sexual). “Ontological

² Caridad De La Luz, “Poor to Rico,” performed at the “Poets for Oscar Marathon” at La Marqueta in New York City on May 28, 2016.

³ In a series of tweets sent out on September 26, 2017, Donald Trump, reflecting on the total destruction of Puerto Rico and its need for federal aid, seemed to suggest that such aid should only come after Puerto Rico has paid its “debts.” He claimed that Puerto Rico has “billions of dollars owed to Wall Street and the banks, which, sadly must be dealt with.”

⁴ In a series of tweets sent out on September 30, 2017, Donald Trump critiqued San Juan Mayor, Carmen Yulín Cruz, and others in Puerto Rico for their “poor leadership ability...who are not able to get their workers to help.” He also claimed that Puerto Ricans “want everything done for them....”

⁵ During his brief visit to Puerto Rico on October 3, 2017, Donald Trump was filmed throwing paper towels, along with other supplies, at a chosen group of Puerto Ricans. Some of these supplies he absurdly declared as no longer necessary (e.g., flashlights).

⁶ This comment makes direct reference to the content presented by panelists prior to my speaking, especially the introductory remarks by Dr. Maria Teresa Davila, the powerful reflection by Yara Gonzalez on the instances of desperation and suicides in Puerto Rico since the hurricane, and the historical background of colonial logics in Puerto Rico, offered by Dr. Jean-Pierre Ruiz and Dr. Loida Martell-Otero.

⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” in *Cultural Studies* 21:2–3 (2007): 254.

colonial difference” is the “difference between Being and what lies below Being or that which is negatively marked as dispensable as well as a target of rape and murder.”⁸ This colonial difference was created, legitimized, and has been maintained via concurrent processes that construct and then relegate persons to a subhuman/subontological status by virtue of their race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. With these constructs, ontological colonial difference creates and sustains bodies as subhuman in order to justify the unending enactment of violence upon them.⁹ Maldonado-Torres’s theorizing of the ontological colonial difference must, of necessity, be coupled with his analysis of what he terms the “phenomenology of the cry.”¹⁰ This “cry” he understands as “the first marker of an enslaved and suffering subjectivity...a sound uttered as a call for attention, as a demand for immediate action or remedy, or as an expression of pain that points to an injustice committed or something that is lacking.”¹¹ Maldonado-Torres indicates that the cries of those at the colonial difference are rooted in the grief of knowing that we are not recognized as human, at least not in the same way as others are. It is a *lament* imbued with love and rage, which beseeches the Other to recognize our humanity.¹² This space and the cries that emerge from it have characterized our existence as colonial subjects and as colonial migrants. Since María, these wounds have been put on full display before the world. They are a bitter reminder of our disposability, of how we do not matter.

When I think about the fact that we are still deemed not to matter, I think about a particular Twitter hashtag linked with the Black Lives Matter movement called #LastWords.¹³ #LastWords record the last utterances of Black persons prior to being killed by police officers. They include the cries of Eric Garner, “I can’t breathe,” of Michael Brown, “I don’t have a gun, stop shooting,” and of Kimani Gray, “Please don’t let me die.”¹⁴ The list goes on and on, and grows each day. Along with them, let’s recall how the mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulín Cruz, displayed the cries for our people on her tee shirts as she conducted interviews and press conferences. These included the cries of “Help us, we are dying,” cries that still have not been answered. I think, too, of her comments indicating that the inaction of the US in the aftermath of Maria was “close to genocide,” and her tearful pleas to the Trump administration at a press conference:

We are dying here...I cannot fathom the thought that the greatest nation in the world cannot figure out the logistics for a small island of 100 miles by 35 miles. So, mayday, we are in trouble...So, Mr. Trump, I am begging

⁸ Maldonado-Torres (2007): 254.

⁹ In fact, Maldonado-Torres notes that the colonial difference normalizes the extraordinary violence against persons that is typically experienced in war. See especially his *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Maldonado-Torres (2008), 133.

¹¹ Maldonado-Torres (2008), 133.

¹² See Maldonado-Torres (2008), 123–32.

¹³ While #LastWords trends with the last words of Black persons, the hashtag has also been used by a variety of other entities since it initially began trending. For a snapshot of the #LastWords that I reference here, see <https://mic.com/articles/123973/15-drawings-capture-the-last-words-spoken-by-black-victims-of-state-violence#.XeUuHhdgD>.

¹⁴ I note that among the #LastWords, the last words of Black women killed at the hands of police officers are significantly underrepresented. This speaks to a broader problem of the invisibility of violence against women of color.

*you to take charge and save lives. After all, that is one of the founding principles of the United States of America. If not, the world will see how we are treated not as second-class citizens but as animals that can be disposed of. Enough is enough.*¹⁵

Puerto Ricans continue shouting from the place of colonial difference, and the lack of response to them is no accident. When I consider the cries and the laments stemming from this colonial difference—actually, this colonial *indifference*— as an ethicist I find myself feeling that we must amplify these voices, we must amplify the cries stemming from such indifference. How to do that?

Clearly, our current theo-ethical frameworks are insufficient. As I pondered to which set of frameworks and theories I could turn to provide us with such an theo-ethical framework, it became apparent that we cannot rely upon categories that *were never created with persons like us in mind*.¹⁶ These frameworks were not created with any critical awareness of global coloniality, and yet are indebted to it. By this I mean that our theological and ethical frameworks are rooted in the very logics that perpetually replay history, whether of 1492, 1898, or now of 2017, and our particular subservient place in it. So, I ask you: What do our anthropologies and epistemologies look like? And how do they contribute to the neo-liberal logics of coloniality? For we will be hard-pressed to deny that this is the case.

Yet, there is work to do, and we are the only ones who will put our shoulders to the task. So how can we move forward? How can we imagine a decolonial future for Puerto Rico, and indeed for all of us? How can we refuse to be indifferent about the colonial difference? We can start, of course, by addressing the immediate material needs of Puerto Ricans, as affected by María. We can make donations to those organizations that we know will actually route that money to vulnerable persons. We can continue to work towards the restoration of power on the island and resist disaster capitalists who seek to profit from our despair, who seek to create a “Puerto Rico without Puerto Ricans.” We can also continue to be in touch with our congresspersons, we can march, and we can advocate for a repeal of the Jones Act. We should advocate for independence for Puerto Rico, but we cannot pretend that this alone will amount to real freedom or liberation. It is a point, but not the end point. There is more work that we need to do –

¹⁵ Amanda Holpuch and Lauren Gambino. “ ‘Close to Genocide’: San Juan Mayor’s Dire Appeal to US for Puerto Rico Relief,” in *The Guardian* (September 29, 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/29/san-juan-mayor-criticizes-us-officials-for-calling-puerto-rico-relief-effort-good-news>.

¹⁶ I am grateful and indebted to my colleague, Dr. Teresa Delgado, for this insight. In a conversation on November 17, 2017, just a few days prior to the “Histories and Vulnerabilities in the Eye of the Storm,” panel, Teresa and I, who were both responsible for imagining a decolonial future for Puerto Rico, were discussing just how we might be able to accomplish such a monumental task. I explained that my initial impulse was to turn to norms of solidarity and love in a decolonial vein, that I also felt it necessary to speak of hope, but I was struggling deeply to make this turn. We discussed that our own sense of feeling incapacitated is related to the fact that our thought categories are not sufficient and must be dismantled. This conversation moved me towards embracing the overarching claim that our theo-ethical categories themselves must be destroyed and only then can they be rebuilt and shaped by decolonial feminist commitments.

epistemological work and anthropological work—and everyone is responsible for doing it.

One of the first steps that we can take as theologians and ethicists is to privilege a *hermeneutics of el grito*.¹⁷ This privileging builds upon the work of María Pilar Aquino and Maricel Mena-López, who name the importance of a “hermeneutics of lament” that can function as an “epistemological break with kyriarchal epistemologies,” but only when individuals consider a “whole history, not just a moment of suffering.”¹⁸ It is necessary that we begin to break through colonial ways of knowing that ground so much of our thinking about the human person in relation to one another and in relation to God. In the context of the indifference to suffering and violence produced at the colonial difference/indifference, as evidenced by the phenomenology of the cry, the past and present sufferings of our people must become the locus of our work as theologians, ethicists, and educators. Naming the importance of a *hermeneutics of el grito* reminds us of the history of the processes of global coloniality that continue to relegate subjects to a subhuman status. It challenges us to listen and recognize how our current categories inhibit rather than facilitate liberative possibilities. It reminds us of our long history of struggle against colonial powers and invites us to imagine the ways that “*El Grito de Lares*” can be repeated. “*El Grito de Lares*” (“The Cry of Lares,” a mountain town in central-western Puerto Rico) names the 1868 uprising against Spanish colonial rule, motivated by the desire of Boricuas to be free for self-determination, agency, and personhood. A *hermeneutics of el grito* is one way that we can recall the history of our struggle to survive and resist the logics of coloniality. To revive *El Grito de Lares* resonates with the advice of Lola Rodríguez de Tío, who wrote a revolutionary version of the Puerto Rican national anthem *La Borinqueña*, including the line, “*El Grito de Lares se ha de repetir, y entonces sabremos vencer o morir*” (“The Cry of Lares shall be repeated, and then we will know victory or death”). Such a hermeneutics compels us to consider how we can bring to our classrooms cries of freedom that stem from this colonial difference, and how we can incorporate them into our pedagogies and into our ways of being in the world.

A hermeneutics of *el grito* demands that we critique the theological categories that perpetuate neo-liberal, global coloniality. Such a critique requires not a simple reimagining of our theological categories but a complete obliteration of them. Only once we have done that can we rebuild.¹⁹ I admit that I do not fully know what this might look like, but that is all right. Such an admission is in line with Otto Maduro’s reminder that when we do not exercise epistemological humility, we tend to perpetuate violence against persons and deny their humanity “without wanting, without knowing, without wanting to know.”²⁰ We may not know precisely what the future looks like for Puerto

¹⁷ A *hermeneutics of el grito* builds upon the call to incorporate a hermeneutics of lament.

¹⁸ María Pilar Aquino and Maricel Mena-López, “Feminist Intercultural Theology: Religion, Culture, Feminism, and Power,” in María Pilar Aquino and Maria Rosado-Nunes, eds., *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), xxii.

¹⁹ After my presentation of this piece, Dr. Loida Martell-Otero brought to my attention that the work of obliterating our current theological categories only to rebuild them mirrors the conditions of Puerto Rico post-María.

²⁰ Otto Maduro, “Once Again Liberating Theology? Towards a Latin American Liberation Theological Self-Criticism” in Marcella Althaus-Reid, ed., *Liberating Theology and Sexuality*, 2nd Edition, (London & New

Rico, but we will not be without wanting, or without wanting to know. The type of hubris that knows it all already is one we must avoid in order to attend to the *gritos* in our midst. That is the work that lies ahead of us.

York: Routledge, 2009). On “epistemological humility,” see Maduro, “An(other) Invitation to Epistemological Humility: Notes Toward a Self-Critical Approach to Counter Knowledges,” in Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2018

***Perspectivas on a Book: Roundtable Review Essays of Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* by Jacqueline M. Hidalgo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2016) /**

***Perspectivas sobre un libro: Mesa redonda, ensayo-reseñas de Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* by Jacqueline M. Hidalgo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2016)**

ROUNDTABLE CONTRIBUTORS /
CONTRIBUYENTES A LA MESA REDONDA:

Jean-Pierre Ruiz; Lynn R. Huber; Roberto Mata

Editor's Note:

The following review essays engage Jacqueline M. Hidalgo's 2016 volume, *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and The Chicano Movement*. They were first presented at a book review session of the Latino/a and Latin American Biblical Interpretation Group at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Boston in November 2017. Three of the five presentations, as well as a response from the author, Professor Hidalgo, were revised and submitted to *Perspectivas* for this book review "roundtable." The three reviewers, Professors Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Lynn R. Huber and Roberto Mata, each took a different perspective on Professor Hidalgo's study on the complexities of reading scriptures as "homing devices" for communities in stress. Hidalgo's book focuses on the community that produced the early Christian text, the Apocalypse of John, in dialogue with Chicano communities of the 1960s and 70s, who "scripturalized" their own apocalyptic text, *El Plan de Aztlán*. We invite you to engage each of these review essays along with Jacqueline Hidalgo's response to them.

Nota Editorial:

Los siguientes ensayos-reseña conversan con el libro de Jacqueline M. Hidalgo (2016), *Revelation in Aztlan: Scriptures, Utopias, and The Chicano Movement*. Estos fueron presentados primero en una sesión reseña patrocinado por el grupo *Interpretación Bíblica* Latina y Latinoamericana (Latina/o and Latin American Biblical Interpretation) durante la conferencia anual de la Sociedad de Literatura Bíblica (Society of Biblical Literature) en Boston, en noviembre 2017. Tres de las presentaciones, como también la respuesta de la autora, profesora Hidalgo, fueron revisadas y presentadas a la revista *Perspectivas* para esta “mesa redonda” de ensayos-reseña. Cada uno de los autores de los tres ensayos-reseñas, Profesores Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Lynn R. Huber and Roberto Mata, tomó una perspectiva diferente del estudio de la profesora Hidalgo sobre las complejidades de leer las Escrituras como “dispositivos de orientación” para las comunidades en situaciones de estrés. El libro de Hidalgo se enfoca en la comunidad que produjo el primer texto cristiano del Apocalipsis de Juan en diálogo con las comunidades chicanx de los 1960s y 1970s, las cuales “escrituralizaron” su propio texto apocalíptico, *El Plan de Aztlán*. Les invitamos a dialogar con cada uno de estos ensayos-reseñas junto con la respuesta que les da Jacqueline Hidalgo.

**Roundtable Review Essay #1:
“Talkin’ About Somethin’”: No More Business-as-Usual in Aztlán**

Jean-Pierre Ruiz

St. John’s University, New York

On December 29, 1953, S. Vernon McCasland began his Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Presidential Address with the following words:

Once each year with undisguised premeditation the members of this Society subject themselves to an address of unpredictable length and quality by one of their own colleagues, and in advance they cast the mantle of charity about whatever may be brought forth. This annual venture of faith is nothing less than a demonstration of the impregnable optimism of the professional species to which we belong.¹

In his quasiquicentennial review of SBL presidential addresses, Patrick Gray notes, “In most years, the audience for the presidential address is larger than the audience for any other scholarly address devoted to the Bible anywhere in the world.”² After its presentation by the outgoing president as the last official act of the yearlong term of office (an act described by Fernando Segovia in his own 2014 presidential address as the “main function” of that charge), the presidential address receives a position of honor in the opening pages of the first issue of the following year’s volume of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (*JBL*).³

For all intents and purposes, it would appear that for the SBL, the ritual practices associated with the presidential address fall in line with the ritualization of the three dimensions of scripture outlined by James W. Watts, and as explained by Professor Jacqueline Hidalgo. These are the “semantic dimension,” that is, “the practices of interpretation that attend to ‘the meaning of what is written’;” the “performative dimension,” that dimension “wherein aspects of the words and/or the content/larger

¹ S. Vernon McCasland, “The Unity of the Scriptures,” *JBL* 73, no. 1 (1954), 1.

² Patrick Gray, “Presidential Addresses of the Society of Biblical Literature: A Quasiquicentennial Review,” *JBL* 125, no. 1 (2006): 167–77. Quasiquicentennial refers to a period of one hundred and twenty-five years.

³ Fernando F. Segovia, “Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task,” *JBL* 134, no. 1 (2015): 6. In addition, a selection of twenty-three presidential addresses were published by the SBL in a volume that appeared in 2006, edited by Harold Attridge and James Vanderkam. Arranged chronologically, the volume begins with J. Henry Thayer’s 1895 presidential address and concludes with the presidential address delivered in 2005 by Carolyn Osiek. See Harold Attridge and James Vanderkam, eds., *Presidential Voices: The Society of Biblical Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

ideas of a scripture are performed;” and an “iconic dimension,” namely, “visual and artistic representations of scriptures, especially visualizations that ‘distinguish [scriptures] from other books’.”⁴

By attending to “Revelation in Aztlán” in her study of Chicana use of scriptures during the civil rights era (focusing especially on *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and *El Plan de Santa Barbara*), Professor Hidalgo is eminently successful in grappling with the question of why people scripturalize. She describes her work as a matter of “thinking about Chicana engagement of ‘scriptures’ as concept and practice, while also contextualizing those engagements within the legacies of biblical imaginations of the Americas by concentrating on the book of Revelation.”⁵ In so doing, I would—somewhat playfully but quite seriously—suggest that Professor Hidalgo is carefully attending to, engaging with, and successfully advancing critical practices set before us in *El Plan de Vincent Wimbush*, by which I mean Vincent Wimbush’s 2010 SBL presidential address, entitled, “Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate.”⁶ Wimbush urged the SBL to be about the business of “talkin’ about somethin’” and pointedly asks:

How can we be students of Scriptures in this century at this moment without making our agenda a radically humanistic science or art, excavating human politics, discourse, performances, power relations, the mimetic systems of knowing we may call scripturalization? How can we remain a Society only of Biblical Literature and not of comparative Scriptures? How can we in this big international tent in this century of globalization not include as our focus the problematics of “Scriptures” of all the other major social-cultural systems of the world as well the older dynamic systems of scripturalizing of the so-called smaller societies? How exciting and compelling and renegade would be a Society of interpreters that excavates all representations of Scriptures in terms of discourse and power!⁷

In her book, Professor Hidalgo takes up Wimbush’s challenge and very impactfully talks “about somethin’”. *Revelation in Aztlán* is not by any means business-as-usual for biblical studies! The business-as-usual of the guild is vividly sketched by Wimbush in the following terms:

⁴ James W. Watts, “The Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” *Postscripts*: 2, nos. 2-3 (2006), 135, 141-142, as cited in Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 229. Watts cautions, “My thesis is that scriptures are produced by ritualizing their three dimensions—semantic, performative and iconic—but these three dimensions are not unique to scriptures. All books and other texts participate in them. The use of any written document invokes the three dimensions at an incipient level. Most users of ordinary books, however, ignore the three dimensions of these writings as trivial” (Watts, “The Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” 9. <https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1082&context=rel>)

⁵ Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán*, 17.

⁶ Vincent L. Wimbush, “Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate,” *JBL* 130, no. 1 (2011): 5–24.

⁷ Wimbush, “Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate,” 22-23.

With its fetishization of the rituals and games involving books and THE BOOK, its politics of feigning apolitical ideology, it's still all too simple historicist agenda (masking in too many instances unacknowledged theological-apologetic interests), its commitment to “sticking to the text,” its orientation in reality has always contributed to and reflected a participation in “sticking it” to the gendered and racialized Others.⁸

What does “talkin’ about somethin’” involve? Wimbush insists: “plainly put: there can be no critical interpretation worthy of the name, without coming to terms with the first contact—between the West and the rest, the West and the Others—and its perduring toxic and blinding effects and consequences.”⁹ *Revelation in Aztlán* succeeds in doing just that, examining not only the ways in which readings of Revelation—that is, John’s Apocalypse—powerfully shaped the colonization of the Americas beginning in 1492, but also the perduring effects and consequences of that first contact on the Chicax movement centuries later, on its people and on their scripturalizing practices. By attending to *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, as well as Cherrie Moraga’s “Codex Xeri,” among other textual formations, Professor Hidalgo is mindful of the critique that Wimbush levels against the guild: “How can the ever more sophisticated methods and approaches of the operations of its diverse members focused on a single text tradition or, at most, two complexly related text traditions, avoid functioning as apologetics—for the nation or empire and satellite orders?”¹⁰ As a fellow member of the rather small circle of Latinx critics who attend to apocalypse, I would also give a shout-out to David Sánchez, who also succeeds in “talkin’ about somethin’” in *From Patmos to the Barrio*, another incisive example of business-NOT-as usual in biblical studies.¹¹

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS: EXCAVATING FIRST CONTACT IN OU/EUTOPIA

Permit me to continue these reflections in conversation with Professor Hidalgo’s important—and, I would venture to suggest, even game-changing—book by inviting us to be conveyed by these pages *en pneumati* to a place that is betwixt-and-between, an island that is now an *ou-topia* (an uninhabited no-place) that was once an *eu-topia* (a good place). Located thirty-eight miles from the east coast of the island that the Taínos called Haytí and forty-one miles from the west coast of the island that the Taínos called Borikén, we travel to an island that the Taínos called Amona, a name that means “what is in the middle,” a name that is entirely appropriate for the purpose of our brief visit.

⁸ Wimbush, “Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate,” 7.

⁹ Wimbush, “Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate,” 9. Wimbush goes on to ask a vital question: What might it mean to address in explicit terms the nature and consequences of first contact for the unstable and fragile big tent that is our Society? What might it suggest for the ongoing widely differently prioritized and oriented work we do in our widely different settings and contexts with our nonetheless still widely shared absolutist and elitist claims and presumptions about such work? It would make it imperative that we talk about discourse and power, slavery and freedom, life and death.”

¹⁰ Wimbush, “Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate,” 20.

¹¹ David A. Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

Situated between the Dominican Republic to the west and Puerto Rico to the east, this small island that covers only twenty-two square miles has no native inhabitants, and it is now designated as the Reserva Natural Isla de Mona, the Mona Island Nature Reserve. Sometimes called the Galapagos of the Caribbean, Mona's only regular occupants are employees of Puerto Rico's Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales, DRNA), including biologists and other scientists who go there to conduct research on the island's rich and rare flora and fauna, together with the police and rangers who attend to the campers and other visitors, with no more than one hundred visitors at a time permitted on the island.

We are not the first non-indigenous visitors to make our way to this island-in-the-middle because of John's Apocalypse. Christopher Columbus preceded us by more than five centuries, having made his way to Mona in 1494 during his second journey to the Americas, the second of four such transatlantic journeys that were motivated—he claimed—by an urgent sense of eschatological mission. In a letter to Doña Juana de Torres, nurse to the late Prince Juan, son of Fernando and Isabela, probably written in 1500 when Columbus was being returned to Spain in chains, he insisted, “God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth of which he spoke through Saint John in the Apocalypse, after having spoken of it through Isaiah, and he showed me to that location.”¹² Yet what has brought us *en pneumatí* to the island of Mona is not Columbus' biblically scripted concern with “the islands of the sea.”¹³ Neither have we journeyed here in an *Endzeit als Urzeit* return-to-Eden move, escaping for a little while to Mona's unspoiled beaches in a wishful flight from all everything that so profoundly disturbs us in the days after 11/8/2016. What we have come for is to explore—perhaps even to excavate—the implications of an encounter that has left its centuries-old marks well below the surface of this place-in-the-middle. I have brought us here especially inspired by chapter six of Professor Hidalgo's book, and by Figure 1.1 in chapter one.¹⁴

As archaeologist Jago Cooper and his co-authors have noted, “Isla de Mona is one of the most cavernous regions, per square kilometer, in the world. Limestone cliffs predominate, providing access to the island's 200 Pliocene-era cave systems in the geological interface between the hard, lower Isla de Mona Dolomite and the porous upper Lirio limestone.”¹⁵ Thus far, some seventy of these extensive cave systems have

¹² As quoted in Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 112. Also see *Letter of Columbus to the Nurse of Prince John*, Document AJ-067 (American Journeys Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Library and Archives, 2003), 371.

¹³ See Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 130: “It is curious to note ...given the apocalyptic urgency of Columbus's argument, that [his] *Book of Prophecies* cites the Apocalypse of John only three times, referring to Revelation 1:9; 6:14; and 16:20 in a list of biblical texts ‘about the islands of the sea’.” See Robert Rusconi, ed., *The Book of Prophecies Edited by Christopher Columbus*, translated by Blair Sullivan (Repertorium Columbianum 3; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) §§ 272-274.

¹⁴ Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán*, 2 and 213-260.

¹⁵ Jago Cooper, Alice V.M. Sampson, Miguel A. Nieves, Michael J. Lace, Josué Caamaño-Dones, Caroline Cartwright, Patricia N. Kambesis, and Laura del Olmo Frese, “‘The Mona Chronicle’: The Archaeology of Early Religious Encounter in the New World,” *Antiquity* 90 (2016), 1057-1058. On the archaeology of

been explored, and some thirty of these show evidence of use by the indigenous population. What is most remarkable is the discovery that these caves contain thousands of examples of Taíno cave art—the largest assemblage of such art anywhere in the Caribbean—with archaeologists recently announcing the results of radiocarbon uranium-thorium analysis to conclude that these images date to the late pre-Columbian period (13th to 15th centuries CE).¹⁶ The images, some drawn with charcoal, others with wet paints, and most created by scraping the soft surface of the cave walls either with fingers or with finger-sized tool, include “figurative-geometric motifs, facial iconography, and animal/human bodies.”¹⁷

Most of the images are found in dark zones of the caves, that is, areas where no natural light is available, and they are “closely related to water sources, whether seasonal drip pools, or underwater lakes.”¹⁸ As Cooper and his colleagues explain:

There is a clear association between underground sources of fresh water and concentrations of indigenous mark-making. The role of the caves as a source of life-giving water is referenced in the iconography. The markings on the cave walls and extraordinary acoustic, olfactory and haptic properties of the environment offer a powerful experience of alterity, enhanced by the lack of usual sensory stimulation, disorientating and heightening awareness, and morphing perceptions of spaces and time. Hundreds of metres underground, torch or lamplight flickering across representations of *cemies* on walls and ceilings, some reflected in pools of water, would have made a powerful impression on all visitors to the caves.¹⁹

As archaeologist Alice V.M. Samson explains, the European colonizers quickly enough became aware of the symbolic significance of these sites to the indigenous Taínos: “In a treatise on indigenous religion written at the time of Columbus’ first voyages to the Americas, Fray Ramón Pané named specific caves in Hispaniola from where indigenous peoples believed the first humans emerged, and where the sun and the moon originated.”²⁰ She also notes that it was Fray Pané who was the first European to refer to rock art in the Americas, “describing a painted cave (‘toda pintada a su modo’), much revered, called *Iguaboína*, where objects with ancestral agency (*zemies*) resided.”²¹ Associated with indigenous cosmogonies and with life-nourishing water, these

Mona, see Ovidio Dávila, *Arqueología de la Isla de Mona* (San Juan, PR: Editorial Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2003).

¹⁶ Alice V.M. Samson et al, “Artists before Columbus: A Multi-Method Characterization of the Materials and Practices of Caribbean Cave Art,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* (2017), 9-10.

¹⁷ Samson, “Artists before Columbus,” 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1059.

²⁰ Samson, “Artists before Columbus,” 2. See Ramon Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: A New Edition with an Introductory Study, Notes and Appendixes by José Juan Arrom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

²¹ Samson, “Artists before Columbus,” 2.

caves were *eutopian* spaces, places apart from the daily life that took place in the villages up above them.

For the purposes of the present discussion, we will have to make our way to cave 18. To do so, even if only *en pneumati*, we can only reach it “by traversing the foot of a cliff, climbing a vertiginous cliff face and scrambling through a human-sized entrance. Chambers and tunnels run for more than 1 km...Tunnels emerge into a series of low rooms, high vaulted chambers and areas of water pools and flowstone. After around 50m of walking, in darkness,” we encounter “the material record of indigenous, followed by historic mark-making.”²² Some two hundred and fifty indigenous images cover “the walls, ceilings and alcoves in 10 chambers and interconnecting tunnels over some 6500m²,” and these images can be dated to the 14th and 15th centuries CE, that is, to the late pre-Columbian period.²³

What sets cave 18 apart from the many others where indigenous images have been found is that this cave also contains more than thirty inscriptions made by Europeans early in the sixteenth century, among them “phrases in Latin and Spanish, names, dates and Christian symbols...all within the area of indigenous iconography.”²⁴ Archaeologists have determined that the technique used for these images and inscriptions was different from the indigenous finger-fluted techniques, the single-lined strokes indicating instead the use of edged tools. In contrast to the indigenous iconography, the Christian marks are “predominantly at or above (European) head height, occupying flat, vertical wall surfaces and visible while walking upright through the space.”²⁵ Evidence in support of the conclusion that the Christian marks and inscriptions are later than the indigenous images is provided by the finding that “there are no indigenous marks overlaying written inscriptions or Christian symbols.”²⁶

Among the thirty or so Christian inscriptions, there are seventeen crosses, some of them more elaborate than others. With respect to their location, Jacobs et al. explain that the “Crosses are placed in visually dominant positions on cave entrances or on high walls, most being set vertically above indigenous iconography rather than superimposed.” These archeologists go on to observe that “This vertical ordering is a clear and cross-culturally understood visual convention of hierarchical relations, and seen elsewhere in rock art sites across the Americas.”²⁷ In addition to the crosses there are several christograms (*IHS*), incised in the walls of cave 18. If the Christian inscriptions in Mona’s cave 18 amounted to no more than crosses and christograms, we could easily enough conclude that this practice amounted to no more than a somewhat subtler variant of the Spanish practice of burning the indigenous Mesoamerican codices, to which Professor Hidalgo refers in chapter six of her book.²⁸ The positioning of the crosses above the indigenous images, and the use of edged tools to inscribe them are

²² Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1060.

²³ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1060-1061.

²⁴ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1061.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1064.

²⁸ Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán*, 218-219.

unmistakable expressions of colonial dominance and of the symbolic conquest, subjugation and subordination of indigenous scripts. Yet it is curious that the colonizers appear to have made no effort whatsoever to erase or to deface the Taíno glyphs, nor did they superimpose Christian symbols over them.

The negotiations between indigenous Taíno and Spanish colonizer signs and symbols are further complicated by the three inscriptions—one in Spanish and two in Latin—found in cave 18, all of which date to the sixteenth century. Perhaps these inscriptions shed indirect light on the non-erasure of the Taíno glyphs. The Spanish inscription reads, “Dios te perdone,” (*May God forgive you*) while the Latin inscriptions read “plura fecit Deus” (*God made many things*), and “Verbum caro factum est” (*the Word was made flesh*).²⁹ In an interview published in *The Guardian* shortly after the publication of the archaeological research team that explored cave 18, Alice Samson the team’s co-leader noted, “We have this idea of when the first Europeans came to the New World of them imposing a very rigid Christianity. We know a lot about the inquisition in Mexico and Peru and the burning of libraries and the persecution of indigenous religions,” and then explaining, if somewhat breathlessly, “What we are seeing in this Caribbean cave is something different. This is not zealous missionaries coming with their burning crosses, they are people engaging with a new spiritual realm and we get individual responses in the cave and it is not automatically erasure, it is engagement.”³⁰

Stepping back to consider each of the three inscriptions individually, I would suggest much more modestly that each offers a specific and very local take at a moment of first contact “between the West and the rest, the West and the Others” in the early decades of the Spanish colonial project in the Americas. We know very little about the individual or individuals who were responsible for the inscriptions. Even though the Spanish inscriptions in cave 18 include the names of several individuals and dates (1550 and 1554), there is no indication that they were responsible either for the crosses or for any of the inscriptions. Yet, according to Cooper et al., another visitor added his name—Bernardo—to the inscription “Verbum caro factum est,” indicating that he was responsible for the inscription. This Bernardo, according to the archaeologists, was an ecclesiastical official, a canon.³¹ Why did these individuals, Miguel Rypoll (1550), Alonso Pérez Roldán el Mozo (1550), and August and Alonso de Contreras (1554) inscribe their names and the year of their visit to cave 18? Was there any more to this than the sort of practice that persists to this day whereby tourists make their mark on a place to signify that they have been there?

With regard to “Dios te perdone,” Cooper and his colleagues suggest that this “common Christian petition” “implies a separation between the author and the subjects, or acts that require forgiveness, and the intercessional role of the author.” “Another

²⁹ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1062.

³⁰ N.A., “Evidence of New World religious dialogue found in Caribbean cave,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/jul/19/evidence-religious-dialogue-europeans-native-americans-caribbean-cave-mona>.

³¹ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1065. Alice Samson, Jago Cooper, and Josué Caamaño-Dones, “European Visitors in Native Spaces: Using Paleography to Investigate Early Religious Dynamics in the New World,” *Latin American Antiquity* 27, no. 4, (2016) 443-461.

implication,” they suggest, “is that the attendant practices, now invisible to us, require forgiveness as well as the images themselves.”³² Whatever else the author of the inscription may have thought, the inscription suggests that the individual or the individuals who were responsible for the Taíno images had committed an offense against the Christian deity. Of the three inscriptions, this first contact reaction to the unfamiliar scripture is the most resistant to the Taíno “text.” Whether or not the Spanish commentator actually understood significance of the glyphs to the Taínos, “Dios te perdone” implies that the Taíno glyphs are evidence that a sin of idolatry has been committed.

A second inscription, “plura fecit Deus,” (*God made many things*) suggests a substantially different position vis-à-vis this instance of first contact between someone from the West and the rest. Samson, Cooper, and Caamaño-Dones note that similar phrases appear in the widely circulated *Speculum Maius*, an encyclopedia authored by Dominican friar Vincent of Beauvais. If so, they suggest, “the words are an expression of wonderment at the indigenous ceremonial space.” Yet, if “the phrase is a spontaneous reaction, its very brevity and inarticulateness, may be a genuine expression of awe.”³³ “Plura fecit Deus” indicates at the very least a sense of wonderment at the assemblage of Taíno iconography in such a spectacular and inaccessible space, “homing” the indigenous texts in a Christian worldview by attributing these texts to the work of the Christian deity among whose manifold works they belong.

For the purposes of these reflections, “Verbum caro factum est” is the most compelling of the three inscriptions. A quotation from the Vulgate translation of John 1:14, the inscription frames this encounter between a Spaniard and the Taíno glyphs very explicitly as an encounter between texts. The Christian text served Bernardo, the sixteenth century Spanish visitor to cave 18 who inscribed it there, as a prism through which the Taíno texts could be understood and contextualized within a European Christian frame of reference. It might be possible to interpret this inscription as a matter of pushback against the cave’s indigenous iconography, taking “Verbum caro factum est” as an affirmation of the primacy of text (verbum) over image. Yet the importance of images in sixteenth century Iberian Catholicism suggests another direction in reading this expression as we find it in the soft limestone of a cave deep below the surface of the place-in-the-middle that is Mona.

Cooper and his colleagues write, “This well-known chapter of the Bible would have been familiar to even to Christians without formal Latin education.”³⁴ Yet the phrase and its deployment in this instance of first contact between the West and the rest should be understood against the background of what was taking place in Spain just as these encounters between indigenous peoples and Spanish colonizers were taking place an ocean away. From 1572 to 1576, Fray Luis de León was imprisoned by the Inquisition at Valladolid because he was alleged to have critiqued the Vulgate, and because he had

³² Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1062.

³³ Samson, Cooper, and Caamaño-Dones, “European Visitors in Native Spaces,” 457.

³⁴ Cooper, “The Mona Chronicle,” 1062.

translated the Song of Songs from Hebrew into Spanish.³⁵ A renowned poet, theologian, and translator, Fray Luis advanced an important theology of the vernacular, a framework that he put into practice in his own work at a time in the history of the Catholic Church when translations of biblical books were regarded with deep suspicion. At the Council of Trent, for example, the Spanish cardinals Pacheco and Alfonso de Castro considered such translations “mothers of heresy,” insisting on tight control over texts and their diffusion.”³⁶

What, then, might the otherwise unknown cleric Bernardo possibly have meant by inscribing “*Verbum caro factum est*” in the sacred space of cave 18? While we can only speculate, might it possibly be that Bernardo regarded the Taíno iconography he encountered there as scripture, as sacred texts in a sacred place in the Taíno vernacular, whether or not he had the slightest inkling of what it signified? Could it be that the particularity of which John 1:14 speaks, that is, the enfleshment of the *logos* in a particular body, in a particular place, at a particular moment did not and does not exclude other incarnations in other particular vernaculars? John 1:14 ends with “*et vidimus gloriam eius*” (*we have seen his glory*). Could it be that Bernardo was suggesting that he caught a glimpse of that glory in the Taíno iconographic vernacular of cave 18? If that was the case—and we can only speculate—then might we possibly find ourselves with an instance of first contact where the Christian scripture was not brought to bear on the Other in order to efface or to erase?

There is much that remains unknown about what happened in cave 18 and the hundreds of other cave complexes on the island-in-the-middle, and much remains to be excavated and explored by archaeologists and other researchers. While the thirty or so sixteenth century Christian inscriptions give us some clues about what the Spanish colonizers made of the indigenous petroglyphs, the Taíno side of the conversation is no longer available to us. We do know that there was a church on the surface of the island, and that Taínos on the island at the time of the Spanish colonization were baptized and catechized, but there is no record of what they may or may not have said to the newly-arrived Europeans about the caves or about the symbolism of the iconography that they and their ancestors created.

Furthermore, the story does not have a happy ending. By the end of the sixteenth century, there were no longer any Taínos living on Amona, and so the place that for centuries had been an *eutopia* became an *outopia*, not because the place where they lived had disappeared but because they had been *displaced*. As for cave 18, the sad irony is that the lasting testimony it bears—carved in stone—to this instance of first contact between the indigenous scriptures of the Taínos and the Christian Bible of the Spanish

³⁵ See Colin P. Thompson, *The Strife of Tongues: Fray Luis de León and the Golden Age of Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Also see José Luis González Novalín, “Inquisición y censura de Biblias en el Siglo de Oro. La *Biblia de Vatablo* y el proceso de fray Luis de León,” in *Fray Luis de León: Historia, Humanismo y Letras*, ed. Víctor García de la Concha and Javier San José Lera (Acta Salmanticensia Estudios Filológicos 263; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad Salamanca, 1996), 125-144. Also see Angélica Alcalá, *Proceso inquisitorial de Fray Luis de León, Segunda edición paleográfica, anotada y crítica* (Junta de Castilla y León: Consejería de Cultura y Turismo, 2009).

³⁶ Thompson, *The Strife of Tongues*, 62.

colonizers, were read by we know not whom until 2013 when archaeologists Cooper and Samson and their colleagues began to explore the *eu/outopia* beneath the island's surface.³⁷ We have no idea of whether or not insights like theirs may have informed the debates at Valladolid in 1550 between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepulveda.³⁸

AMONA AND AZTLÁN

What, if anything, has Amona to do with Aztlán? While I want to resist a correlational move, I would offer that in the middle of the sixteenth century, far from their native Spain, in a cave below the surface of the place-in-the-middle, Christian colonizers found themselves in a place full of signifiers not of their own making, entirely different from the Christian scriptures with which they were familiar. They were neither masters of the sacred space in which they found themselves, nor were they masters of the texts that surrounded themselves there. In the dark spaces of cave 18 they inscribed their first impressions of the scripturalizing of the Taínos who inhabited that island for many centuries before their arrival. Ranging from “Dios te perdone” to “Plura fecit Deus” to “Verbum caro factum est,” the inscriptions offer lasting—and still perplexing—testimony to moments when the colonizers found themselves overwhelmed by the abundant texts that surrounded them, an experience that would never have been theirs on the familiar soil of their own homeland. For the first time, in that liminal space below the surface of the place-in-the-middle, they had to reckon with very different scriptures that unsettled and even de-centered their own.

I would submit that *Revelation in Aztlán* demonstrates a complex and nuanced broadening of the category “scriptures” in its analysis of Chicana processes of scripturalization. Even in that regard, the book does not engage in biblical studies business-as-usual by simply transferring the reading practices and strategies that the guild applies to ancient texts to the Chicana texts under consideration.³⁹ Those who approach *Revelation in Aztlán* expecting a line-by-line exegesis of the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* will come away disappointed, and I am glad about that.⁴⁰ So too will those who expect that the book will begin with John's Apocalypse and then move in straightforward linear fashion to discuss the appropriation of the biblical book in Chicana texts. In so doing, the biblical text is de-centered and granted no privilege aside

³⁷ Cooper and his colleagues conclude their discussion as follows: “The historical legacy of 1492 fixates upon and fetishises the incompatibility of native and European worldviews, leading to a one-sided picture of the spiritual conquest of the Americas, exacerbated by native ‘extinction’ in the Caribbean. Moreover, the sheer continental scale of colonisation means that grand narratives dominate our image of encounter. The individual narrative of the people who actually made these encounters operate at a temporal resolution of minutes, hours and days as revealed within this cave” (“The Mona Chronicle,” 1067). Yet we are left to wonder whether cave 18 testifies to an exception that merely serves to prove the rule.

³⁸ See Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepulveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

³⁹ See Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán*, 21.

⁴⁰ “Whether reading *Revelation* or *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* I am not particularly interested in figuring out their precise meanings or authorial intentions” (Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán*, 21).

from the entirely appropriate acknowledgment of the breadth and the depth of its influence as Christian scripture.⁴¹

In his contribution to *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, Vincent Wimbush offers this disclaimer:

I am not recommending that texts not be engaged. What I am suggesting is that we question taking up the master discursive intellectual project developed by masters in relation to the master text. I want to challenge us to think differently about and orient ourselves differently around interpretation, about what to interpret, where and how to begin, how to proceed, with what approaches, and with what agenda.⁴²

Revelation in Aztlán prods and provokes us to think differently. In so doing, this provocative book advances in important ways the reconfiguration and reorientation of academic biblical studies as charted in the *Plan de Wimbush*. The open-ended question with which I conclude these considerations is of how the reading strategies so well-deployed in *Revelation in Aztlán* also equip critics to wrestle with the strategies outlined in the *Plan de Fernando Segovia*, the agenda set forth in his 2014 SBL Presidential Address, “Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task.” Reflecting on past presidential addresses, Segovia concludes that “in critical times presidents have kept the world of criticism and the world of politics quite apart from each other.”⁴³ Segovia challenges us to imagine an interpretive project for our times, an approach that he provisionally calls “global-systemic,” and which has as its aim “to bring the field to bear upon the major crises of our post-Cold War Times.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ See Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán*, 22.

⁴² Vincent L. Wimbush, “We Will Make Our Own Future Text’: An Alternate Interpretation to Interpretation,” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 44.

⁴³ Segovia, “Criticism in Critical Times,” 13.

⁴⁴ Segovia, “Criticism in Critical Times,” 26. Segovia goes on to admit that, with respect to the project he proposes “The scope is expansive: the world of production (composition, dissemination, interchange) as well as the world of consumption (reception, circulation, discussion). It would thus encompass the following foci of attention: (1) the texts and contexts of antiquity; (2) the interpretation of these texts and contexts, and the contexts of such interpretations, in the various traditions of reading the Bible, with a focus on modernity and postmodernity; and (3) the interpreters behind such interpretations, and their corresponding contexts” (“Criticism in Critical Times,” 26).

**Roundtable Review Essay #2:
Review of Jacqueline M. Hidalgo,
Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano
Movement**

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Jacqueline M. Hidalgo's *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* makes a significant contribution to the study of how texts become and function as scripture and to our understanding of Revelation's continuing social and political influence. By offering an in-depth exploration of how the texts of the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 70s evoke and intersect with the concluding book of the Christian canon, Hidalgo illustrates the complex ways that scripture is deployed to imagine homes and create communities. In so doing, she reminds us that canons never close and conclusions are always beginnings. She accomplishes this while allowing the voices of her Chicano conversation partners to be heard clearly, rather than letting John the Seer, a known "loud-talker," dominate. Given the multiple concerns of these partners, *Revelation in Aztlán* is a rich tome to which I imagine myself returning over the years.

At first glance, *Revelation in Aztlán* might be seen as part of a trend toward examining how specific individuals and communities interact with and deploy Revelation's texts and images. Brian Blount's *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (2005) and David Sánchez's *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths* (2008) mark the beginning of this trend.¹ However, like the late Lynne St. Clair Darden, Hidalgo extends Vincent Wimbush's methodological insights regarding "scripturalization" and addresses how individuals and communities employ and create scripture.² Offering close readings of texts such as *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (1969) and *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (1969) alongside of the Book of Revelation, *Revelation in Aztlán* explores how communities create scripture, rather than examining how interpreters read or "receive" sacred text, which is how the relationship between Revelation and later textual traditions is often described. By reading the ancient text alongside of the writings of the Chicano civil rights era, Hidalgo's work *reveals* how marginalized communities scripturalize as a means of

¹ Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 2005); David A. Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

² Lynne St Clair Darden, *Scripturalizing Revelation: An African American Postcolonial Reading of Empire* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

imagining homes, conceptual places where identities and power relationships are constructed and negotiated, when they have no-place (18).³

Specifically, Hidalgo discusses the patterns and processes of thinking which result in the “‘resonant’ imaginaries” of Aztlán, the imagined past and future Chicana homeland, and the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city imagined in the final chapters of Revelation (16). Drawing upon the work of José Esteban Muñoz, among other futurist thinkers, Hidalgo characterizes utopias, such as Aztlán and new Jerusalem, as polytemporal, remembering the past and envisioning the future in response to the present, and polyspatial, simultaneously evoking existing spaces and imagining possible places. Utopias are sites of possibility, experienced by audiences “as they squint at the hints of an-other world invoked for them in a text of sacred power” (41).⁴ Utopias, especially as imagined within minoritized communities, stand in stark contrast to the present, providing a place of identity formation for those who are considered peripheral. Aztlán, in particular, contributes to the construction of Chicana identity among individuals of “diverse socioeconomic, religious, and ideological differences who might otherwise remain separate” (56). For those identifying as Chicana, primarily those displaced through the creation of arbitrary national borders in 1848, Aztlán provides a centering device, a vision of a possible home. Revelation, likely written after the destruction of the Jewish temple and definitely during a turbulent time between Jerusalem and Rome, similarly reflects a community’s need for a “‘center’ for diasporic life” (83). By focusing on scripturalization within Chicana texts, Hidalgo emphasizes these texts as first and foremost sites of identity formation, rather than sites of critique: “The study of Chicana movement texts underscores that the rhetorics of minoritized texts are often more concerned with creating and contesting the target minoritized population, with a figurative representation of dominating power being rhetorically important but not the focus” (84). In some sense, just as *El Plan* is about Aztlán and not the colonial and imperial forces that created the need for Aztlán, Revelation is ultimately about new Jerusalem, including the community it constructs, and not about Rome.

Among the facets of Aztlán that resonate with Revelation’s vision of new Jerusalem is the tendency to envision utopia in feminine and heteronormative terms. Hidalgo observes, “In both Revelation and movement-era imaginations of Aztlán, a complex slippage occurs between land and women’s bodies, especially as bodies that must be protected and policed” (194). This shared circumscribed vision erases a range of gender and familial configurations in favor of patriarchal and heteronormative hierarchies. In this way, these visions mimic imperial and colonial familial rhetorics, an idea that Christopher A. Frilingos and others explore in relation to Revelation (176).⁵ In light of this, Hidalgo explores why and how feminist and queer interpreters of Chicana scripture and Revelation, interpreters whose authority is often challenged by other interpreters, continue to engage visions of Aztlán and new Jerusalem. Anticipating

³ The idea here resonates strongly with the understanding of religion described in Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁵ Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Shanell T. Smith's recent book, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire* (2014), in which Smith articulates a hermeneutics of "ambivalence," Hidalgo notes that feminist and queer interpreters employ the methods of ambivalence and struggle as tools for "circumventing practices of domination" (174).⁶ Among the methods explored by Hidalgo is Chicana historian Maylei Blackwell's idea of "retrofitted memory," in which the tensions of the past are negotiated to meet the needs of the present and future (197). Similarly, Hidalgo engages my reading of Revelation's 144,000 male virgins as an example of how feminist and queer readers offer alternatives to traditional ways of reading exclusionary visions of utopia.⁷ Hidalgo's discussion of how interpreters of Aztlán and new Jerusalem engage the gendered assumptions of utopia is more than simply cataloging these approaches, as she maintains that these interpreters continue the process of scripturalization. That is, feminist and queer readers create communal identity and envision home as they, or we, tear apart, reassemble, and reimagine these texts. Thus, Hidalgo calls interpreters to reflect upon how we ascribe power to these texts and pushes us to think about how we understand "bible" or "scripture." Ultimately, Hidalgo challenges interpreters of scripture to reject the "mid-twentieth-century Protestant prototype" that presents scripture in terms of parameters, as textual traditions that are closed and non-negotiable (227). As scripture, Revelation, Hidalgo observes, might best be understood as a revelation of Jesus Christ, rather than *the* revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1; Hidalgo 234).

Even though Hidalgo relativizes the historical approach that dominates Revelation studies (16-17), the parallels she draws between Chicana scripturalization and Revelation shed light on the context of the ancient text. For example, underscoring the complex ways that identities emerge within hegemonic contexts, Hidalgo writes, "... a community purified of Roman-ness would not have been possible. Rather than anxiously emphasizing the distinctions between Revelation and Rome, or even simply pointing out that its attempt at critiquing Rome falls into replication, we must recognize that Revelation is an alter-imperial text written with the possibilities of the Roman Empire and not always strictly opposed to them" (84).⁸ I selfishly would like to hear more about how Hidalgo envisions the Revelation's initial rhetorical context, especially since one of the continuing conversations in Revelation studies concerns how the text's early audiences related to the Roman Empire. Hidalgo alludes to this when she writes that the idea of a "Roman state-sanctioned 'persecution' almost certainly does not account for the social situation in which this text was written and initially circulated" (82). Instead, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE might be a more significant rhetorical moment for John and his audience. Still, Hidalgo describes Revelation's utopian vision as reflecting the "critical epistemology of a minoritized and subjugated group" (15). I wonder, however, about solely characterizing Revelation's

⁶ Shanell T. Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2014).

⁷ Lynn R. Huber "Sexually Explicit? Re-Reading Revelation's 144,000 Virgins as a Response to Roman Discourses," *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 2, no. 1 (2008): 3-28.

⁸ The language of "alter-imperial" echoes that of Margaret P. Aymer, in "Empire, Alter-Empire, and the Twenty-First Century," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59, no. 3-4 (2005): 140-46.

original context in terms of marginalization, since it is possible to understand John as trying to convince his audience, which may be implicated in and profit from empire, that it is subjugated or oppressed.⁹ Moreover, does imagining the audience of Revelation as reflecting a number of different rhetorical situations, as suggested in the text's messages to the seven churches (Rev 2-3), change how we read the text's vision of the bridal city?

Overall, *Revelation in Aztlán* is a book about revelation and Revelation. By bringing the ancient text into conversation with Chicana/x visions of a utopic Aztlán, Hidalgo allows Revelation scholars to see the polyspatial and polytemporal facets of the new Jerusalem, as well as shedding light on how the text might have emerged within a context of marginalization and displacement. Moreover, through *Revelation in Aztlán*, Hidalgo reveals how biblical scholars, like Chicana/x artists and activists, contribute to the continuing emergence of scriptural meanings. Hidalgo herself contributes to this expansion of Revelation's meaning, furthermore, by carefully uncovering the ancient text's relationship to the utopic visions of Aztlán. This book, an important contribution to Revelation studies, is a must read for any scholar interested in the ways communities use scripture to envision their present identities and future hopes.

⁹ Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

**Roundtable Review Essay #3:
A Review of Revelation in Aztlan:
Revelation, Utopia's and The Chicano Movement**

Roberto Mata

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In her work, *Revelation and Aztlan: Scriptures, Utopias, and The Chicano Movement*, Jackie Hidalgo places the Book of Revelation in conversation with various texts from the Chicano movement. Hidalgo draws from Vincent L. Wimbush's notion of scripturalizations as a "semiosphere, within which a structure of reality is created that produces and legitimates and maintains media of knowing and discourse and the corresponding power relations."¹ Hidalgo sees scriptures as a locus for the "making and remaking of social power," where people may imagine, create, and contest themselves (Hidalgo, 5). From this transgressive methodology that crosses the boundaries of genres and historical contexts, Hidalgo proceeds to make the case that scriptures may function as utopian homing devices for peoples with historical memories of displacement and oppression (Hidalgo, 5). Indeed, *Revelation in Aztlan* is not interested in mining what the texts mean or meant, but rather how they are used as tools for social power. Hence, throughout her engaging and theoretically sophisticated work Hidalgo seeks to demonstrate "how scriptures, as human endeavors, are utopian practices bound up with social dreaming and the making of people in place and the making of place for people" (Hidalgo, 5).

While each of the six chapters of *Revelation in Aztlan* neatly aligns to persuade the reader, I am particularly enthused with chapter three, where Hidalgo uses "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan" to explore the Book of Revelation's representation of the New Jerusalem. Situating Revelation circa 95 C.E. and in the context of Jewish Diaspora communities in Asia Minor, decades after the destruction of Jerusalem and its sacred temple, Hidalgo surmises that John of Patmos scripturalized the New Jerusalem to construct a utopia of sorts that functions as a homing device. According to Hidalgo, this scripturalization of the New Jerusalem enables Jewish diaspora communities to reorient themselves not in reference to a particular geographical space, now destroyed, but in fact to a textualized and mobile center. In this manner, the sacred city is neither here

¹ Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlan: Scriptures, Utopias, and The Chicano Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5, citing Vincent L. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

nor there but now dwells within the community or, as Hidalgo intimates, may even be seen as representing the community of conquering ones that John of Patmos envisions.

Problematizing the ways in which John's dualistic view divides the people of the world in terms of conquering ones and idolatrous human beings, Hidalgo notes that, "Revelation seems to set up dualism that put Rome on the wrong side of God, and reversals that lift up those seemingly peripheralized at present, dualisms that seem to even turn on others within Revelation's shared periphery when these others do not turn away from the imperial 'center' sufficiently" (Hidalgo, 96). In this manner, *Revelation in Aztlan* queues us to search for the silenced voices within the Book of Revelation.

Thus, in my view, one the most significant contributions of *Revelation in Aztlan* emerges in the questions it generates about the rhetorical situation of the New Testament Book of Revelation, and the ways it adumbrates the link between the New Jerusalem and the messages to the Seven assemblies. If, as Hidalgo proposes, the scripturalizing of the New Jerusalem functions not only as a homing but also as an unhoming device, how would we imagine these scripturalizations not through the lenses of John and those who agree with him (e.g. the conquering ones), but rather through the lenses of the dissident voices, that is of those who are left out of the New Jerusalem, and whom John frames as idolatrous, immoral, and cowardly? I propose that mapping John's rhetorical construction of the New Jerusalem as a walled city or exclusive utopian space that is accessible only to those "who conquer" may be an interesting way of addressing these questions and raising questions for the role of the New Jerusalem as utopia. Before doing so, I turn to some brief remarks on the important contribution of *Revelation in Aztlan* to the rhetorical situation of the Book of Revelation.

The Rhetorical Situation

One important contribution of *Revelation in Aztlan* is the way its argument adumbrates the rhetorical situation of Revelation that is 'revealed' in the messages to the seven assemblies. Indeed, Hidalgo observes that "When Revelation 21-22 is read in relationship to the letters of Revelation 2-3, letters that challenge those who are deemed inadequate, or improper in their faith, it seems as if the excluded may actually be among those whom the vision is addressed" (Hidalgo, 101). By rhetorical situation, I refer to the problem or set of exigencies that elicit and frame John's response. From the various issues he describes in these passages, the main exigency seems to be the presence of teachers and prophets who are promoting what the author refers to as food sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλόθυτα, *eidōlothuta*) and fornication (πορνεία, *porneia*), or the so-called teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:14, 20). As Hidalgo observes, the audience's positioning in reference to these issues determines their access to or exclusion from the New Jerusalem. On the one hand, John praises those who abstain and maintain his idea of proper moral and ritual boundaries using terms such as conquering ones or faithful witnesses, and promises them unrestricted access to the health and wealth of sacred *polis*. On the other hand, John interpolates the teachers/prophets in Pergamum and Thyatira, whom he charges with promoting εἰδωλόθυτα (*eidōlothuta*) and πορνεία (*porneia*), using names of ignominious figures in the history of Israel. Whereas he accuses those in Pergamum of having the teaching of Balaam, the immoral and corrupt prophet described in Numbers 22-25, he addresses the prophetess of Thyatira as

Jezebel, the idolatrous and foreign wife of King Ahab mentioned in 1 Kings. Clearly, John makes abstinence from εἰδωλόθυτα (*eidōlothuta*) and πορνεία (*porneia*) key boundaries for defining the community's identity as people of God, as conquering ones who are set to enter the New Jerusalem. For Hidalgo, the usage of the verb "to conquer" (*nikao*) invokes a mythic past that not only evokes memories of suffering under previous empires, but also "can provide a sense of power over history by writing a version of history that has been denied by a dominating power" (Hidalgo, 91). This supports her argument that Revelation's representation of the New Jerusalem as a polytemporal and polyspatial utopia functions as a homing device, as a borderland imaginary, "as a city whose coming down from heaven" (21:2), means it is always caught in between heaven and earth, an "elsewhere" blurring the boundaries and existing within an *entretiempo*, a between space/time that cannot be "straightened." (Hidalgo, 91). Could the ambivalence of Revelation's borderland nature be also used to destabilize John's apparently fixed boundaries between insiders and outsiders?

While the sustained use of Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands throughout *Revelation in Aztlan* certainly helps to show how John disrupts the Rome-centered narrative of the world and empowers marginalized diaspora communities by using the New Jerusalem as a homing device, it could prove even more powerful if, as I have proposed, it was used to read the rhetorical situation of Revelation as a borderlands situation itself. For Anzaldúa, a border is not only a "dividing line" that serves to delineate safe and unsafe spaces, or to distinguish "us" versus "them." Rather, it may be seen as "a vague and undetermined space created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary."² This insight could help problematize and destabilize John's use of εἰδωλόθυτα (*eidōlothuta*) and πορνεία (*porneia*) as fixed identity and access boundaries. Most importantly, a borderland reading may in fact challenge us to view the representation of the New Jerusalem not only from the point of view of the inscribed author, but also from the point of view of his "others," that is Jezebel, Balaamites, and even the so-called synagogue of Satan. Reflecting not only on the fixity and fluidity of the US-Mexico border, but also on the imperial violence that created it, Anzaldúa proceeds to define a borderland as "an herida abierta" (an open wound), as a place where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds."³ It is this grating that creates a third culture, a borderlands culture. This insight then pushes us to further analyze how the grating between the doomed center (Rome), and the new rising center (the New Jerusalem), impinge on the inscribed communities of Revelation and the fixed boundaries John seeks to enforce. Indeed, a borderland reading shifts the view of participation in what John terms food sacrifice to idols (εἰδωλόθυτα, *eidōlothuta*) from an immoral crossing of identity and ritual purity boundaries that exclude others, to a form of negotiating the borderlands created by the grating between the New Jerusalem and Babylon (Rome). Most important, reading the rhetorical situation as a borderlands situation helps us come full circle to interrogate the function of the New Jerusalem as homing device, particularly when it is represented as a city with walls that, while exceedingly glamorous, seems to exclude John's "Others."

² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Second Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 3.

³ Anzaldúa, 3.

The New Jerusalem

One major argument of *Revelation in Aztlan* in chapter 3 is that the New Jerusalem functions as a homing device that becomes a textualized or mobile center for the community of conquering ones in Revelation. Given the strategic role of the sacred *polis* as a utopian center not so dissimilar from *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan*, an apocalyptic and utopian text embraced by the Chicano movement, Hidalgo is very attentive to John's rhetorical representation of the city in Revelation. In Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem emerges as a "bride adorned for her husband" (v.3) and as the "home of God among mortals." Among potential incentives to seek "citizenship" in it, one finds the eradication of death, suffering, and the old-world order, as well as access to the health and wealth that the city embodies (v.4). However, as Hidalgo observes, the benefits of the golden city are hardly universal; rather, they are reserved for those who conquer, that is those who keep the moral and purity boundaries John expects. While these find a home, the rest are insulted and threatened with punishments: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place is the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, that is the second death" (21:8). In her assessment of John's description of the sacred *polis*, Hidalgo is also to be commended for being attentive to the textuality of Revelation and its use of material from the Hebrew Bible, particularly John's use of Ezekiel and its vision of the measurement of the temple (Hidalgo, 88). Nevertheless, one interesting point to consider is the ways in which the representation of the New Jerusalem as walled space turns John's ritual boundaries into physical and heavily guarded borders.

The Walls of the New Jerusalem

The representations of the New Jerusalem as an overly wealthy and healthy city may obfuscate the fact it is surrounded by walls that exclude John's "Others." Indeed, the idea of a city made of pure gold may be so overwhelming that one could easily bypass exploring the function of its walls. That these are made of jasper only contributes to overlooking their exclusionary function. So as to keep readers in awe of such magnificent place, John makes sure to give us the measurements of both the wall and the city. A perfect cube, the city's length, breadth, and height are equal, each measuring something over 1200 miles, a dimension exceeding all human imagination.⁴ On the other hand, the height of the walls, as Jürgen Roloff notes, is 144 cubits, or about 200 feet. The description of the New Jerusalem as a city with walls creates a particular conundrum for scholars eager to identify the City as an ideal place. In his well-known commentary on the Book of Revelation, Robert H. Mounce states that the reference to a wall, does not suggest the need for security precautions, nor does it imply that Christians are a separated people. In order to calm the already skeptic reader, Mounce states, "The wall is simply part of the description of an ideal city, just as it was conceived by people in antiquity who were used to the strong protection that external walls provided."⁵ On the other hand, in his exposition on the New Jerusalem in the *Comentario Bíblico Latinoamericano*, Ricardo Foulkes points out that the gates of the

⁴ Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 243.

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 391.

city area always opened, and thereby moves to underscore the inclusivity, ethnic diversity, and great wealth of the city.⁶

Walls as Borders

From the outset, Hidalgo rightly establishes a link between those outside the walls of the city with those referenced earlier in the messages to the seven assemblies. One is justified then in mapping the relationship between the ritual and moral borders in the messages to the seven assemblies and the function of the walls of the New Jerusalem. In short, one may ask, how does the presence of physical boundaries around the New Jerusalem reinforce the moral and purity boundaries that John sets up around participation of εἰδωλόθυτα (*eidolothuta*)? In my view, these serve to (1) exclude the so-called dissident voices, (2) coerce the inscribed audience to embrace John's vision of the world; (3) and ultimately to legitimate the marginalization of the Others. Although scholars have obfuscated the exclusionary role of walls of the New Jerusalem, in part because they unwittingly embrace John's view, his separation of believers into conquering ones and cowardly, idolatrous ones makes this evident. While the former is set to inherit and inhabit the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:7), the latter are not only outside the walls, but also set to burn in the lake of fire, which the author frames as a second death (Rev. 21:8). Although some scholars seek to uphold the inclusive nature of city by pointing out the city walls have gates that never close, one can hardly miss that each of the twelve gates is heavily guarded by an Angel, a way in which John anticipates border patrolling the city. This leads to a few questions on the function of the New Jerusalem as utopia; namely, how would it change if we were to see it from the view of those John excludes? Perhaps, given the dualistic nature of apocalyptic utopias such as the New Jerusalem, it is part of their nature to be exclusive spaces in order to remain an ideal for a select few? If one answers positively to this question, however, that would ultimately blur the distinction between the New Jerusalem and Babylon.

Secondly, the walls of the New Jerusalem and the exclusion they signify may constitute an attempt at persuading or coercing John's "Others" to self-exclude from the structures of the Roman Empire, or the socio-economic and political participation in it that *eidōlothuta* and *porneia* signify. To achieve his goals, John deploys shaming and fear as rhetorical strategies of persuasion. However, shaming his opponent's idolatrous figures in the history of Israel (e.g. Jezebel and Balaam), or as cowardly and faithless beings outside the walls of the New Jerusalem, is only a first step and premonition of worst things to come. Indeed, John resorts to threats of exclusion from the wealth, health and status that access to the New Jerusalem signified, on the one hand, and to threats of punishments that range from perishing in the eschatological war between the hosts of heaven and the beast, to sharing the fate of Satan and the false prophet in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). The author presents the New Jerusalem, with its concomitant blessings and curses, as an imminent reality and asks the assemblies to act upon it. To exclude oneself from the structures of empire seems to become a *de facto* way of entering the New Jerusalem and avoiding the threats of punishment, while becoming

⁶ Ricardo Foulkes, "Apocalipsis," in *Comentario Bíblico Latinoamericano: Nuevo Testamento*, ed. Armando J. Levoratti, Elsa Tamez and Pablo Richard (Estella (Navarra), Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2003), 1214.

entitled to its benefits. Asking already marginalized communities, particularly in Smyrna and Philadelphia, to self-exclude raises questions about the potentially oppressive dimensions of utopias for those that embrace them, and certainly for those that do not see themselves reflected in them or fail to see any appeal in what utopias promise. Most importantly, it would bring to the forefront the ways in which John borrows the imperial imagery and rhetoric of power from Babylon.

Thirdly, the walls of the New Jerusalem serve to reinforce the portrait of others as Other and thereby legitimate their exclusion. As Anzaldúa points out, those in power usually refer to those inhabiting the borderlands as *Atravesados*, that is "Squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, and the half dead: in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal."⁷ This representation, in turn, creates what Albert Memmi refers to as a portrait of wretchedness, that is the representation of the other as lazy, immoral, sick, and primitive. Such a portrait not only serves to legitimate their exclusion as "bad hombres," but also to justify the privileged position of those in power. As Pamela Thimmes notes, by casting the Thyatiran prophetess as "Jezebel," the foreign, promiscuous, and idolatrous wife of King Ahab, John positions himself to play the role of the persecuted prophet Elijah, which in turn enables him to set himself up as a model of faithful witnessing before the community.⁸ If *Los Atravesados* seem to be conformable negotiating the borderlands between Rome and the New Jerusalem, how would this shift our understanding of the latter as representing a type of resistance literature? To assume this view is to embrace John's view and his construction of the rhetorical situation. It appears, instead, that even utopias remain contested spaces and ideals that merit interrogation from multiple angles; including those of the marginalized voices. As one is attentive to how John constructs a desirable center, it becomes evident that the New Jerusalem is set up to replace Babylon's wealth and might, but also to create its own "Others" in order to legitimate its rise as a new power center. This is something that Hidalgo seems to recognize when she notes that, while Revelation casts itself "as a font of alternative knowledge, its titling as 'a revelation,' an 'unveiling' incorporates facets of the power/knowledge structures of Rome" (Hidalgo, 102).

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Revelation in Aztlan* stands to make an important contribution to Revelation studies and, in particular, to our understanding of the rhetorical function of the New Jerusalem and its walls. The idea that a scripturalized New Jerusalem becomes a mobile center for the community that embodies the desires of the community is innovative. Similarly, Hidalgo's application of Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands to illustrate the *entretiempos* situation of the sacred *polis*, caught between heaven and earth, already a reality but only in part, constituted a sophisticated way of framing the polytemoral traits ascribed to the New Jerusalem. Simultaneously, this Anzaldúa borderlands theory raises further questions for the rhetorical function of sacred *polis* as a homing device for the inscribed audience addressed in the messages to the seven

⁷ Anzaldúa, 25.

⁸ Pamela Thimmes, "Beguiling My Servants: Female Imagery in Revelation 2:18-29," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levin (NY: Continuum, 2010), 81.

assemblies. While those who abstain from εἰδωλόθυτα, *eidōlothuta* emerge as faithful and conquering believers, those who partake of it, and the Roman socio-economic and political structures the practice represents, emerge as idolatrous, pagan, and immoral beings. As I have suggested, the walls of the New Jerusalem become the physical representation of the moral and ritual purity boundaries John sets up between insiders and outsiders. I have also endeavored to show that these walls/borders function rhetorically to (1) exclude the so-called dissident voices, (2) coerce the inscribed audience to embrace John's vision of the world; and (3) ultimately to legitimate the marginalization of the Others. Overall, Jacqueline Hidalgo's *Revelation in Aztlan* contributes significantly to imagining new and informed ways of thinking with and about the Book of Revelation as site for the contestation of identities and belonging.

**Roundtable Response Essay:
Place Matters, Or Utopian Orientations and Latina Feminist
Biblical Studies**

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What do you say once a book is out there and part of the world, once it is no longer this monstrous idea brewing ever inside your own head? What do you say especially when you believe authorial intent cannot fix the meaning of a text, even a text you wrote? How am I also a reader now in relationship to this text that I helped produce?¹

Reading from My Place

The panelists who responded to my work—Lynn Huber, Roberto Mata, and Jean-Pierre Ruiz (as well as Carmen Nanko-Fernández and David A. Sánchez)—have been important inspirations and conversation partners over the years because they have modeled ways of being truly wide-ranging and interdisciplinary intellectuals. All these scholars show how interdisciplinary work can be deep and resonant; to work between fields is not to know them less well but to signify on those fields differently because you can see how their borders have been constructed.

Revelation in Aztlán has many flaws, many things I would do differently if I could write it over again. My book concludes by attending to the places from which people dream utopia, and I think it is relevant to note my scholarly place. When I wrote *Revelation in Aztlán*, I was trying to balance different fields and different questions. I

¹ I have many debts of gratitude here (a fuller list of which may be found in the acknowledgments of my book): thanks to Ahida Pilarski and Efrain Agosto for organizing the original Society of Biblical Literature review panel in November 2017, and thank you to the broader array of panelists including Carmen Nanko-Fernández and David A. Sánchez whose provocative comments at that time shaped the remarks here. I also am grateful for the thought-provoking conversations I had with Zaid Adhami, María del Socorro Castañeda-Liles, Jeremy Cruz, Neomi DeAnda, Peter Mena, and Saadia Yacoob during the Society of Biblical Literature Meeting this past November. Of course, I am particularly grateful that Agosto then worked to edit some of these remarks for publication, and that Lynn Huber, Roberto Mata, and Jean-Pierre Ruiz traveled with me, transforming their November remarks for this space. When I wrote this book I scarcely hoped anyone would read it, let alone that these three amazing scholars would grapple so deeply with its arguments. It is an honor to have journeyed with them in the study of Revelation these past several years, and I hope that there remain many apocalyptic—or at least revelatory—conversations in our future.

work as an interdisciplinary scholar teaching in both Latina/o² Studies and Religion at a small New England liberal arts college but trained in critical comparative scriptures with a focus on the New Testament at a school in California. Ruiz's remarks reflect the context of my training, the import of the *Plan de Vincent Wimbush* in shaping the questions I ask; but Ruiz also notes the far-reaching impact of the *Plan de Fernando Segovia*.³ I follow Wimbush's reorientation of biblical studies, trying to move away from enslaving textual practices, games of "mastery" in relationship to a "master text."⁴ At the same time, I also hoped that, by attending to Chicax activists and their legacies, I would cultivate some of what Segovia has called for, a recognition that a critic cannot separate her task from the critical times that surround her.⁵

Of course, I also wrote this book for tenure. In that regard, I was struggling with my own sense of place, where did I belong as an academic? With whom was my work conversing? For whom was I writing? Having an appointment in Latina/o Studies, made me feel the need to be more rigorously versed in Latinx Studies scholars and scholarship. At the same time, I was negotiating future evaluation from biblical scholars who expect me to engage Revelation in ways I can find constraining. Yet I still wanted to be the sort of oblique scriptural critic I was trained to be. Lynn Huber's remarks recognize this balancing act quite well when she notes that I balance biblical studies with the study of Chicax activists and their texts. As she rightfully observes, this book was not about "reception history," but rather I hope my book "addresses how individuals and communities employ and create scripture."⁶ Ruiz also reads the book as "a complex and nuanced broadening of the category 'scriptures' in its analysis of Chicax processes of scripturalization."⁷ I see my book as not focusing on Revelation or the Chicano movement, but I use both sets of texts to study humans who scripturalize by excavating specific peoples and specific textual examples such as John's Apocalypse and *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. As Huber states, I hoped to write "a book about revelation and Revelation."⁸

I had hoped my arguments about scriptures might provide a space from which we could see other scriptures and see other models for relating to scriptures that do not follow the hegemonic models employed in most of the Society of Biblical Literature. *Revelation in Aztlán* examines how people can use texts to make a kind of home when a home in the world has been refused them; by focusing on Chicaxs as well as those who

² I am working playfully with the gendering of the Spanish language throughout this essay. What we Latinxs wish to call ourselves remains a work in progress, and I try to reflect that throughout.

³ See Ruiz, in this roundtable of reviews.

⁴ See Ruiz, this roundtable, as well as Vincent L. Wimbush, "We Will Make Our Own Future Text': An Alternate Interpretation to Interpretation," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 44. For the discourse of masters and enslavement in relationship to the text, also see Vincent L. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Fernando F. Segovia, "Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task," *JBL* 134, no. 1 (2015): 6-29.

⁶ Huber, this roundtable.

⁷ Ruiz, this roundtable.

⁸ Huber, this roundtable.

identified as Jews under Roman rule, I am not looking at people who have my same cushy academic experience of exile. Yet I read from my own exilic space as a diasporic Latina subject living in the U.S.A. I hoped to engage how place shapes scriptures and how scriptures shape place. Place is far too slippery to be neatly pinned to any location on a map. How and why scriptures were a kind of place, a site people related to, a place they made, a place they challenged?

Here, of course, one might hear echoes of Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert's edited volumes from the 1990s, *Reading from This Place*. I took place, the places of readers and the places of texts seriously in *Revelation in Aztlán*. I am indebted to Segovia's sense of "two places and no place," the multilayered and textured worlds some Latinxs negotiate precisely because they know more than one cultural home.⁹ Following the work of Dolores Hayden, to use the word "place" rather than "space" is to register sociality.¹⁰

Place, however, is multiple and has multiplicitous meanings, and thanks to Segovia's inspirational work as well as that of the late queer performance critic José Esteban Muñoz, I came to focus my attention to place onto that existentially ambivalent space of utopia, the place that is both good place and no place. In his remarks for the November 2017 panel about *Revelation in Aztlán*, David Sánchez found my book to be place constrained, and he argued that conspiring and life in-between are the most important spots for utopian dreaming in Chicancx practice. However, I would not circumscribe utopia to only those spaces, in part because, as Ruiz observes, I resist apologetics including apologetics for the Chicancx movement.¹¹ As a scholar, I cannot focus only on the utopianisms I like or relate to best. Chicancxs are a racially, religiously, ability, class, and geographically diverse people of multiple genders and sexual orientations; as such, there is not one Chicancx way to dream utopia. I hope my book showed that even in the narrow realm of Aztlán, which is one limited utopian vision, there are still many different ways to dream utopia.

Latinx/a/o, Feminist, and Queer Biblical Studies and Utopian Orientations

To talk about utopian places is to attend to people, to attend to social imaginations, social dreams, and indeed some Chicancx readings of Aztlán are specifically about utopia among and between people rather than in a literal place. Yet, place in all its messiness matters because we are deeply shaped by the places we can and cannot inhabit. To segregate people from place is to participate in a mind/body dualism that ignores how much our embodied worlds matter. Utopia is not an either/or binary. Utopia is both people and place; utopia is both realized and reserved.¹²

⁹ Fernando F. Segovia, "Two Places and No Place on which to Stand: Mixture and Otherness in Hispanic American Theology," *Listening* 27 (Winter 1992), 26-40. Also see Fernando F. Segovia, "In the World but Not of It: Exile as Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora," *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 203.

¹⁰ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 15-16.

¹¹ Ruiz, this roundtable.

¹² Here I am clarifying my arguments about utopia in relationship to ideas Sánchez raised in his remarks in November 2017.

I define utopia by its existential ambivalence, its simultaneous existence and non-existence, its capacity to refuse to be either/or. So drawing on different ideas found in Muñoz, Wimbush, Segovia, and Sánchez, let me say that I see the utopian as a kind of place that not only mattered for Chicano/as in the 1960s and 1970s but that also shapes us as interpreters, particularly this set of interpreters, writing for this roundtable. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's work, I think of utopia as both an ambivalent place we interpreters read from and an orientation we read toward; in these times we desperately need a better, other world. I wish to situate the rest of my remarks there, where I perceive scholarly work as focused on shifting glimpses of malleable but necessary utopian horizons.¹³

Utopia here is not a fixed or static ideal and perfect place. That approach to utopia has been mobilized specifically to sanction violence, and there are Chicanxs (Chicanos in particular) who mobilize Aztlán in this way. However, feminist and queer critics have focused on another tradition of utopian dreaming, the tradition taken up by those whose state and social power faces significant constraints. Feminist biblical scholar Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre reads utopia as a method. She reminds us that utopia generally registers a critique, an alienation from and dissatisfaction with the world, but utopia is a response born of and entangled with the world.¹⁴

According to Muñoz, queer utopias always exist on the horizon, never to be found in a specific place. His utopias are paradoxical and open systems that can be critiqued and transformed because utopias are both realized and reserved, at the same time. Utopias do not exist per se but are felt and experienced in certain moments. Muñoz sees utopian "hope as a critical methodology [that] can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision."¹⁵ So I extend Johnson-DeBaufre's observations by seeing utopia as method, but I also see utopia as an orientation. Utopian yearning structures how we read; utopia is also the place we read towards, the place we squint at as we read. Biblical scholars in particular take a backward glance at the past in the hopes of bringing to life a future vision of a better, other world.

Ruiz offers us a critical utopian orientation in his response. He takes us to a certain kind of no place that exists, an island whose inhabitants are gone but whose cave registers an interaction between indigenous and Spanish scriptural systems. This place offers us a fleeting taste of another world, but it is also a distinctly critical place we visit in that Ruiz's reading of the cave challenges the present we have inherited. Ruiz takes us on a backward glance that captures a world that might otherwise have been, and I want to know more about the particular Taíno glyphs on view in these caves and how we can dwell better with the conflicting inscriptions and significations in cave 18, how we can

¹³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "Dreaming the Common Good/s: The Kin-dom of God as a Space of Utopian Politics," *Common Goods: Economy, Ecology, and Political Theology*, ed. Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, Catherine Keller, and Elias Ortega-Aponte (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 103-123.

¹⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 4.

refuse fitting this cave into any one reading. In my sixth chapter, I wrote about how the Spanish responded to indigenous Mesoamerican traditions by burning Aztec and Mayan texts as idolatrous. By looking at this cave, Ruiz broadens our sense of how the Spanish grappled diversely with the world that was new to them. Ruiz provides a haunting reminder of the moment when Europeans were not masters or at the center of hemispherically American histories; he offers up a sense that a practice other than mastery in relationship to master texts was possible, even for the colonizers. Ruiz's backward glance enacts a future vision by providing access to a lost utopian horizon from which we might craft a better future in our own scriptural practices.

I likewise place Mata's study of the new Jerusalem's border patrol as a utopian critique. Reading from our present moment with daily news of deportation, detention, and immigration bans, Mata compellingly illuminates the coercive violence of the new Jerusalem's city walls. Mata asks us to read Revelation with the voices of historical *atravesados*, with those members of early Christian (and Jewish-identified) communities who John cast out of the new Jerusalem, at least those he cast out rhetorically. Mata reads Revelation in search of those "Christians" whose words were excised from our biblical canon but whose memory remains.¹⁶ We can challenge any neat assumption that John's visions of conquest and walled cities are utopian, and thereby we can refuse to sacralize the present we have inherited, a present so informed by this walled new Jerusalem (as I discuss in the coda of my book). Reading with historical *atravesados* is a backward glance that challenges our "toxic" present (again, borrowing from Muñoz) by opening up space for the diversity of possibilities that were once silenced.

Mata's reading reminds me of his doctoral advisor, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and her efforts to read "against the grain" of early Christian literature.¹⁷ Mata also reminds me of Joseph A. Marchal's work on Paul's letters. I share with Mata, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Marchal a hope for a biblical studies space where I imagine we might bring different minoritized, feminist, queer, and cultural studies biblical critics together under a hermeneutics of "contingency," as Marchal describes it, drawing on the work of Carolyn Dinshaw.¹⁸ Our interpretations are always "contingent" in that they are limited and limiting, temporary, and particular. Yet, we also read with another utopian orientation; we hope to build a transtemporal and transcultural contingent, as a noun, as a community of allies, however temporary.¹⁹ Reading from our disturbed present, I can sense Mata reading Revelation for just such a contingent.

Particularly since he is interested in looking for the voices marginalized in Revelation as ancient text, Mata focuses on my approach to the new Jerusalem in

¹⁶ See Mata, this roundtable.

¹⁷ Obviously, we can look to Schüssler Fiorenza's work on Revelation, but also her to classic work, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

¹⁸ See, for instance, Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Joseph A. Marchal, "'Making History' Queerly: Touches Across Time Through a Biblical Behind," *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011): 394.

chapter three. In that chapter I sought to frame how the new Jerusalem becomes a utopian artifact, one mobilized for the sake of empire and conquest in future centuries. I would not want readers to take that chapter as my final perspective on Revelation's new Jerusalem. For my part, particularly in chapter five, I also seek a utopian contingency amid the voices of more contemporary flesh-and-blood *atravesadx/as*, feminist and queer critics who are peripheralized as antagonists to normative Christianity in the present. I look to how they struggled with the particularly gendered and heteropatriarchally enforced borders of the new Jerusalem as a walled city but as also as a bedecked bride. Like Mata, I wish to recuperate voices that our own hegemonic Christian traditions have covered over,²⁰ but we may also see that the *atravesada/xs* were never truly cast outside the borders. Instead, they continued to struggle over the walled city; they riff on scriptural borders. The failures of a utopian dream, such as Aztlán or the new Jerusalem, may still be fuel for alternative, less bounded and more pliable utopian visions, such as those articulated by Cherríe L. Moraga in her visions of queer *familia* and queer Aztlán.²¹ These critics offer up another relationship to scriptures.

Here I also sense a consonance between Huber and Mata's critique of my work in that they both wonder about whether people are ever just marginalized. My use of "minoritized" and "marginalized" are part of my own ongoing struggle with the English language, which debilitates my quest for complexity, to escape binaries. Sometimes I sacrificed clarity for complexity in my writing; sometimes I managed neither clarity nor complexity. As with Mata, I see Huber as reading toward utopia in the ways she wishes to complicate the rhetorical location of Revelation's writing and earliest communities of readers. Indeed, she reminds us that Revelation's earliest communities were not simply dominated by the Roman empire; they also participated in it. Revelation may register anxiety over exactly that ambivalent participation, and we may squint at our own utopian horizons by retrieving that historical memory of ambivalence.

As a pale-skinned Latina who also grew up within the U.S.A.'s metropolitan imperial borders, I experience marginalization as also always and already being implicated in imperial domination. This situation of marginalization-as-participation is not the case for all minoritized populations, but I took it to be broadly true of the mostly student based and now mostly middle-class Chicax activists whom I interviewed for this book. Indeed, I think attention to marginalization-as-participation by means of differential inclusion is a critical way of understanding both Chicax and early Jewish and Christian texts. Attention to ambivalent belonging in the space of empire is

²⁰ Here I am drawing on María Pilar Aquino and Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez and their notions of "discovery." See María Pilar Aquino, "The Collective 'Discovery' of Our Own Power: Latin American Feminist Theology," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 240-260; Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez, *Latino/ay Musulmán: The Construction of Latino/a Identity among Latino/a Muslims in the United States* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

²¹ Cherríe L. Moraga, "Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe," in *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).

precisely why I have so much respect for the work of womanist biblical critic Shanell T. Smith.²²

Reading from this ambivalence, how might we understand Alfredo Acosta Figueroa as not only a marginalized Chicano and Native American struggling for justice? What if he is also working to persuade other minoritized subjects to side with his vision of Chicano identity, which he circumscribes as being antagonistic to USA empire? At one point, local Blythe activists, including Figueroa, protested a solar power array that would be built on top of local Native intaglios. As part of this protest, Figueroa critiqued then Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar. Salazar has publicly claimed descent through the Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate, and Figueroa cites this claim as evidence that Salazar is not an ally: “Ken Salazar brags that he is the twelfth descendant of Juan de Oñate. Juan de Oñate is the worst murderer the people from New Mexico had ever met. He’s the one that killed a lot of the Zunis and the Pueblos, and he chopped their feet off when they rebelled. So we’re saying that what Juan de Oñate couldn’t destroy, Ken Salazar is going to try to destroy.”²³ Reading along with Huber, we can see Figueroa and the fictive “John” of Revelation as paranoid readers,²⁴ anxious to keep out those who have compromised with empire because they are also anxious about how they participate in and benefit from imperial injustices.

I would still suggest that these figures are minoritized, they are marginalized; but I agree with Huber, that both John and Figueroa reflect an ambivalent marginalization. They are “trying to convince [their] audience[s], which may be implicated in and profit from empire, that they are] subjugated or oppressed”²⁵ precisely because many ethnic Mexicans or early “Christians” did not see themselves as such, did not perceive the structures of domination in which they lived. Here I follow Harry O. Maier’s insight: “It is to read the Apocalypse as a revelation, not of what is to come but of present structures of domination and tyranny—as a revelation of empire and one’s place within it.”²⁶ As I observe in my book’s fifth chapter, sometimes such revelations are paranoid and coercive; that paranoia manifested precisely in the ways Chicana/x/o feminist and queer subjects were criticized as proximate to whiteness, especially as sexually proximate to

²² See Shanell T. Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2014).

²³ As quoted in “Massacre in the Rocks: Solar Millennium Builds on Native American Sacred Sites,” from Robert Lundahl, *La Cuna de Aztlán Sacred Sites Protection Circle*, online film from *planet r|la*, 2011, <http://planet-rla.com/massacre-in-the-rocks/>, 4:01. Also, see my discussion of this situation, “Competing Land Claims and Conflicting Scriptures: Chemehuevi and Chicano Sacred Sites in Blythe, CA.” In *Refractions of the Scriptural: Critical Orientations as Transgression*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 2016), 107-120.

²⁴ Here I am drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of “paranoid” reading. See *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 130. Also see my arguments in “No Future for Biblical Studies? Or, Still Living with a Contingent Apocalypse as *Biblical Interpretation* Turns 25.” *Present and Future of Biblical Studies: Celebrating 25 Years of Brill’s Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 133-155.

²⁵ Huber, this roundtable.

²⁶ Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 37-38.

whiteness. Heteropatriarchal Chicano rhetoric echo John's own marginalization of figures such as Jezebel (Rev 2-3). We can see how those practices of rhetorical violence against proximate others also reflect self-anxiety. I can imagine at least some of the earliest communities ecstatically performing this text also worried that they communed too much with Rome and its gods already. Performing Revelation and inhaling its utopia became a way of—at least temporarily—staving off the ambivalence of imperial belonging.

Huber distinctly registers how the past must be a font of utopian critique. I agree with her that there are things we know not to be true about the past. As scholars and teachers, we must remind present readers that Revelation did not respond to an actual persecution, that it instead mobilized a rhetoric of persecution in order to shape its readers. We care about correcting this history though because of the violence Christians have done while claiming this memory of persecution. I see that Huber's concern for history is also rooted in a utopian orientation, one that registers a dissatisfaction with the present and glances backwards so as to challenge the relationship some present readers have with Revelation's past.

I am a proponent of complexity; there is never one cause or one meaning to be traced and explicated. Thus I share Wimbush's concern that too much of biblical studies' "fetishization" of an imagined past has enforced an uncritical maintenance of the present.²⁷ I do not class Huber's work among those sorts of biblical critics, because she is clear about her orientations and she has studied how readers have engaged Revelation over the course of millennia.²⁸ However, Muñoz's glance is both my method and orientation. My orientation in glimpsing that past is openly utopian and critical, but it is also a glance, an admission that I could never fully gaze on the past.

I have never needed a utopian alternative more than I do now. I find Moraga's words, "without the dream of a free world, a free world will never be realized," to be saturated with even more meaning now than when I wrote about them for this book.²⁹ People's engagement with scriptures can be a source for understanding some of the worst things we have done to each other as a species, the ways that we have maligned and marginalized each other. Yet our scriptures (broadly construed) also record our strivings to live together and work together, to make meaning out of and give meaning to daily struggles.

I have, however, been struggling since writing this book to better articulate something I was trying to spatially represent in the coda of the book. There I compared the Ronald Wilson Reagan presidential library and museum with Alfredo Acosta Figueroa's notions of Aztlán in Blythe, California. They both signify on scriptures and the new Jerusalem in my estimation, but they do so from two radically different places. Are there flaws and failings in both significations? Of course there are, but I think the

²⁷ Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: Reading Darkness, Reading Scriptures," *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush with the assistance of Rosamond C. Rodman (New York: Continuum, 2000), 10.

²⁸ Lynn R. Huber, *Thinking and Seeing with Women in Revelation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

²⁹ Moraga, 164.

place from which they seek utopia and the orientations with which they pursue utopia differentiates them. Going back to Mata's critique of the new Jerusalem, I wonder, might there sometimes be reasons to exclude? Johnson-DeBaufre has suggested sometimes utopias may need to have borders; they just have to be balanced with permeability and an ability to change.

I am not advocating for Revelation's new Jerusalem with its strong rhetorics of domination and dehumanization with regard to those cast outside its gates (Rev 22:15); I think those rhetorical descriptions of others can only ever perpetuate violence. Yet, the place from which and toward which we do something matters; minoritized critics may take up practices that dominantized groups cannot because of differences in power. Although I agree that a dominantized group can never exclude with good reason, but, when we read with *lxs atravesado/a/xs*, do we sometimes find that they exclude people from certain spaces for good reason? What would such exclusions look like and entail? I do not have a final answer to that question, and given the complexity of my own social location, I am wary of answering it. I do not seek universal codes of ethics that can encapsulate all of human experience, and I have never been bothered by the need to universalize. When discussing the need for utopia I think instead we must also attend to utopian contingency: who dreams utopia, from where do they dream it, how do they dream it, and with whom do they dream it?

I do not think any one of us should ever dream utopia alone. Our utopian ideals and methods must constantly change and shift; they must remain contingent because they must always be worked out contingently. I am indebted to the work of each of you that have engaged me in this roundtable and in previous conversations. I thank you all so much for reading *Revelation in Aztlán* and reading between its lines. I hope to continue to dream utopia beyond the borders of this first book, and I am so pleased and honored that I get to both dream and frustrate utopia together, with you.