

PERSPECTIVAS

HISPANIC THEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE

TWENTY-SECOND ISSUE – 2025

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

TWENTY-SECOND ISSUE, 2025

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

TWENTY-SECOND ISSUE | 2025

Editorial [ENGLISH VERSION]

As I looked at the papers in this 2025 issue of *Perspectivas*, it became evident that we—Latinas/os/xs—have made our mark on all levels of theological education. Whether from the positions of Presidents, Chief Executive Officers, or Chief Academic Officers/Deans, these scholars showcase the growing number of Latina/o/x voices shaping the future of theological education. Latinas/os/xs now boast of several organizations supporting theological and religious education, including the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI), the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH), the Hispanic Scholars Program (HSP, formerly known as the Hispanic Summer Program), the Academy of Catholic Theologians in the US (ACTHUS), and La Comunidad of Hispanic Scholars of Religion. These organizations often work together to support new generations of Latina/o/x scholars.

The papers also demonstrate how much further we must go. In a time of shrinking resources and closing theological educational institutions, these scholars in leadership represented in this issue of *Perspectivas* help us envision a more solid future for our communities. The challenges ahead are great, and increasing the number of Latina/o/x scholars of religion and theology will be a monumental task. Yet, the authors in this issue model the possibilities of aspiring to the highest levels of governance in academic institutions without compromising their commitment to our communities or abandoning their own sense of vocation to serve. Some of these authors also demonstrate that for Latinas/os/xs, the academy is an extension of our struggles at the grassroots. Entering high levels of leadership does not mean reproducing the prestige of the idyllic ivory tower disconnected from the reality of Latina/o/x communities. Instead, it means remaining connected with the broader communities of Latinas/os/xs who continue to experience discrimination, persecution, and marginalization.

It took some time to collect all the papers, and now I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the three guest editors: Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez, Joanne Rodríguez, and David Vásquez-Levy. All the addresses are provided in the language in which they were first delivered. Since the speeches by Doris García and Juan Ramón Mejías Ortiz were originally delivered in Spanish, they have been translated into English. This collection of articles invites us to raise the proverbial glass and make a toast for the collective and individual achievements of these Latina/o/x scholars. I am deeply proud of what our peers can, and have, accomplished despite the social and political pressures that wish to keep us in positions of social servitude.

Néstor Medina, Senior Editor, and the Editorial team.

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

NÚMERO VEINTIDOS | 2025

Editorial [SPANISH VERSION]

Cuando revisé los artículos de este volumen 2025 de *Perspectivas*, se me hizo evidente que nosotras/os/es—latinas/os/es—hemos dejado nuestra marca en todos los niveles de educación teológica. Desde las posiciones de Presidentes, Directores ejecutivos, o Decanos, estas/os/es eruditas/os/es muestran el creciente número de voces Latinas dando forma al futuro de la teología teológica. Latinas/os/es ahora gozan de varias organizaciones que apoyan educación teológica y religiosa, incluyendo the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI), La Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH), the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP, antes conocida como Hispanic Summer Program), the Academy of Catholic Theologians in the US (ACTHUS), y La Comunidad of Hispanic Scholar of Religion. Estas organizaciones a menudo colaboran juntas para apoyar a nuevas generaciones de estudiosas/os de la religión.

Los artículos también demuestran cuanto más nos queda por hacer. En este tiempo de recursos reducidos y de instituciones teológicas cerrando sus puertas, estos eruditos en espacios de liderazgo académico representados en este número de *Perspectivas* nos ayudan a imaginar un futuro más sólido para nuestras comunidades. Los desafíos por delante son grandes, y la tarea de aumentar el número de estudiosos de la religión latinas/os/es será monumental. Sin embargo, las/os autoras/es en este volumen modelan para nosotras/os/es las posibilidades para aspirar a los niveles más altos de gobierno en instituciones académicas, sin minimizar su compromiso a nuestras comunidades o abandonar su propio sentido de vocación a servir. Algunas/os de las/os autoras/es también muestran que para latinas/os/es, la academia es una extensión de sus luchas en las bases. De hecho, acceder a los altos niveles de liderazgo académico no significa reproducir el llamado prestigio de la torre de marfil, desconectada de la realidad de los pueblos y comunidades latinas. Sino que significa permanecer conectadas/os con las más amplias comunidades de latinas/os/es que continúan experimentando discriminación, persecución, y marginación.

Tomo un poco de tiempo para juntar todos los artículos. De manera que quiero agradecer a las/os tres editoras/es invitados que hicieron posible este volumen: Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez, Joanne Rodríguez, y David Vásquez-Levy. Todos los discursos han sido incluidos en el lenguaje original en el que fueron presentados. Como los discursos escritos por Doris García y Juan Ramón Mejías Ortiz fueron originalmente presentados en español, los hemos traducido al inglés. Este conjunto de artículos nos invita a levantar la copa y brindar por los alcances individuales y colectivos de estas/os académicas/os latinas/os/es. Me siento profundamente orgulloso de lo que nuestras/os/es colegas pueden alcanzar y ya han alcanzado a pesar de las presiones sociales que buscan mantenernos en posiciones de servidumbre.

Néstor Medina, Editor principal, y el equipo Editorial

PERSPECTIVAS • 2025

PREFACE

• VEA LA PÁGINA 9 PARA LEER ESTE PREFACIO EN ESPAÑOL •

This special edition of *Perspectivas* memorializes and celebrates the recent growth of Hispanic-Latine presidential officers in Protestant, Catholic, and Evangelical schools affiliated with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).¹ We invited these leaders to share their inaugural speeches or early statements to their academic communities. The purpose of this exercise is to document three things: first, their professional and personal achievements; second, a later phase in the development of the Hispanic-Latine movement in theological education; and, finally, the transformative work that the Hispanic-Latine movement and members of others minoritized groups, have conducted within the establishment of graduate theological education in ATS schools.

To capture the historical moment of each inauguration, the editorial team requested these leaders to present the original version of the texts with only limited edits when needed for clarity. We are aware that, in hindsight, they may have said things differently, but our aim was historical, not apologetical. Probably, many of these leaders still maintain most of their early perspectives or, perhaps, they have changed some of them. We ask readers to appreciate the diversities of visions, topics, and rhetoric that these leaders employed in addressing the institutional and social contexts at the time, and not to assume their speeches necessarily reflect their current positions or thinking.

This material is organized chronologically. This format allows readers to be aware of the long time it took for the emergence of Hispanic-Latine presidents in ATS schools. Despite the significant growth of the Hispanic-Latine community in the United States as well as decades of participation as students and faculty in theological schools, there were no Hispanic-Latine presidential leaders in ATS schools (except in Puerto Rico) until 2005 when Rev. Dr. David Maldonado served briefly as President at Illiff School of Theology. Most likely, readers will have a lot of questions to ask about this fact. Why did it take so long? What were the impediments? What conditions have now led to this emergence of Hispanic-Latine leaders? How contested was this process? What made the difference in each case? The speeches and the editorial team do not address these questions but leave them on the table for further critical dialogue and research. On the other hand, the introductory essay written by Dr. Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez gives a few insights into the historical process.

¹ All the presidents and deans included in this publication were “presidential leaders” in their schools. The deans we included, contrary to other academic or faculty deans, had the responsibilities and roles of “president.” This function was the criterion for including their speeches in this collection.

This publication constitutes a primary source informing the history and contributions of Hispanic-Latine leaders in the ATS system of theological education in the USA. The material illustrates the diversities, similarities, and convergence that different Hispanic-Latine leaders exhibit in their identities, vocations, visions, religious affiliations, and ideals for theological education. The introductory essay by Rev. Dr. David Vázquez-Levy reflects on this tapestry of perspectives and their rich contributions to the critical task of reimagining theological education amid great changes.

Rev. Dr. Joanne Rodriguez's introductory essay captures the excitement surrounding the new era of recently appointed presidents and deans, as well as the challenging hope for what lies ahead as they continue to grow in their roles. An important reality we acknowledge in this project is the continuous exclusion of Latinas scholars and administrators from presidential positions. The only Latina president at an ATS seminary was the Rev. Dr. Doris Garcia Rivera, who served at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico from 2014-2019.

The idea for this project emerged as a group of Hispanic-Latine presidents and deans attended the installation ceremony of Rev. Dr. José Irizarry at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary on March 31, 2023. The three editors and other colleagues agreed that it would be important to capture the insights that these emerging leaders were sharing in their inaugural speeches and to document the trend of electing of Hispanic-Latine presidents in ATS schools. They agreed to work on this project *en conjunto* (as a team) with the rest of the Hispanic-Latine presidents, and with the editor of *Perspectivas*, Rev. Dr. Néstor Medina.

This collection reflects the challenges and opportunities being faced by leaders and their institutions in a time marked by significant upheaval. The editorial team is deeply grateful to the contributors and is hopeful this rich set of presentations may serve not only as a repository of an important moment in history but a testimony of the rich gifts the Hispanic-Latine community is bringing to the critical task of theological education.

The editorial team for this project was integrated by three Hispanic-Latine leaders in theological education. Dr. Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez is a retired scholar who was professor of theology in three ATS schools: the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico (1986-1995), McCormick Theological Seminary (1995-2013), and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (2014-2019). He was the first Latino Vice-President and Academic Dean in the last two schools. Rev. Dr. Joanne Rodríguez has a long-standing career of service to theological education through her leadership roles in the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI); first, as its associate director and then, as its executive director since 2002. She is the first Latina to be awarded the ATS Women in Leadership Trailblazer (2024), and she received an honorary doctorate from Iliff School of Theology (2024) for the creation of comprehensive mentoring and fellowship programs to create Latine scholars and leaders for the larger landscape of theological and religious education. Rev. Dr. David Vazquez-Levy has been the president of the Pacific School of Religion since 2015. His career has been at the intersection of educational institutions, religious communities, and social change. He was a co-founder of La Colectiva, the ATS Hispanic-Latine affinity group of presidents and deans, established in 2015.

PREFACIO

• SEE PAGE 7 TO READ THIS PREFACE IN ENGLISH •

Esta edición especial de *Perspectivas* conmemora y celebra el crecimiento en tiempos recientes de líderes presidenciales hispano-latín en las escuelas protestantes, católicas y evangélicas afiliadas a la Asociación de Escuelas Teológicas (ATS).² Invitamos a estos líderes a compartir sus discursos inaugurales o sus primeras declaraciones a sus comunidades académicas. El propósito de este ejercicio es documentar tres cosas: primero, sus logros profesionales y personales; en segundo lugar, una fase posterior en el desarrollo del movimiento hispano-latín en la educación teológica; y, finalmente, el trabajo transformador que el movimiento hispano-latín, y miembros de otros grupos minoritarios, han llevado a cabo dentro del establecimiento de la educación teológica de posgrado en las escuelas de la ATS.

Para capturar el momento histórico de cada toma de posesión, el equipo editorial solicitó a estos líderes que presentaran la versión original de los textos solo con pequeños cambios editoriales cuando fuera necesario para mayor claridad. Somos conscientes de que, en retrospectiva, pueden haber dicho las cosas de otra manera, pero nuestro objetivo era histórico, no apologético. Probablemente, muchos de estos líderes aún mantienen la mayoría de sus perspectivas iniciales o, tal vez, han cambiado algunas de ellas. Pedimos a los lectores que aprecien la diversidad de visiones, temas y retórica que estos líderes emplearon para abordar los contextos institucionales y sociales de la época, y que no asuman que sus discursos reflejan necesariamente sus posiciones o pensamientos actuales.

Este material está organizado cronológicamente. Este formato permite a los lectores ser conscientes del largo tiempo que tomó el surgimiento de presidentes hispano-latín en las escuelas de la ATS. A pesar del crecimiento significativo de la comunidad hispano-latín en los Estados Unidos, así como de décadas de participación como estudiantes y profesores en las escuelas teológicas, no hubo líderes presidenciales hispano-latín en las escuelas de la ATS (excepto en Puerto Rico) hasta el 2005, cuando el Rev. Dr. David Maldonado sirvió brevemente como Presidente de la Escuela de Teología Illif. Lo más probable es que los lectores tengan muchas preguntas que hacer sobre este hecho. ¿Por qué tardó tanto? ¿Cuáles fueron los impedimentos? ¿Qué condiciones han llevado a este surgimiento de líderes hispano-latín? ¿Qué tan controvertido fue este proceso? ¿Qué marcó la diferencia en cada caso? Los discursos y

² Todos los presidentes y decanos incluidos en esta publicación eran “líderes presidenciales” en sus escuelas. Los decanos que incluimos, a diferencia de otros decanos académicos o de facultad, tenían las responsabilidades y funciones de “presidente.” Esta función fue el criterio para incluir sus discursos en esta colección.

el equipo editorial no abordan estas preguntas, sino que las dejan sobre la mesa para un mayor diálogo crítico e investigación. Por otro lado, el ensayo introductorio escrito por el Dr. Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez ofrece algunas ideas sobre el proceso histórico.

Esta publicación constituye una fuente primaria que informa la historia y las contribuciones de los líderes hispano-latíné en el sistema de educación teológica ATS en los EE. UU. El material ilustra las diversidades, similitudes y convergencias que diferentes líderes hispano-latíné exhiben en sus identidades, vocaciones, visiones, afiliaciones religiosas e ideales para la educación teológica. El ensayo introductorio del Rvdo. Dr. David Vázquez-Levy reflexiona sobre este tapiz de perspectivas y sus ricas contribuciones a la tarea crítica de imaginar la educación teológica en medio de grandes cambios.

El ensayo introductorio de la Rvda. Dra. Joanne Rodríguez captura la emoción que rodea la nueva era de presidentes y decanos recientemente nombrados, así como la desafiante esperanza de lo que se avecina a medida que continúan creciendo en sus funciones. Una realidad importante que reconocemos en este proyecto es la continua exclusión de las académicas y administradoras latinas de los puestos presidenciales. La única presidenta latina en un seminario de la ATS fue la Rvda. Dra. Doris García Rivera, quien sirvió en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico de 2014 a 2019.

La idea de este proyecto surgió cuando un grupo de presidentes y decanos hispano-latíné asistieron a la ceremonia de instalación del Rvdo. Dr. José Irizarry en el Seminario Teológico Presbiteriano de Austin el 31 de marzo de 2023. Los tres editores y otros colegas coincidieron en que sería importante capturar las ideas que estos líderes emergentes estaban compartiendo en sus discursos inaugurales y documentar la tendencia de elegir presidentes hispano-latíné en las escuelas de la ATS. Acordaron trabajar *en este proyecto en conjunto* (en equipo) con el resto de los presidentes hispano-latíné, y con el editor de *Perspectivas*, Rvdo. Dr. Néstor Medina.

Esta colección refleja los desafíos y oportunidades a los que se enfrentan los líderes y sus instituciones en una época marcada por una importante agitación. El equipo editorial está profundamente agradecido a los contribuyentes y tiene la esperanza de que este rico conjunto de presentaciones pueda servir no solo como un repositorio de un momento importante en la historia, sino también como un testimonio de los ricos dones que la comunidad hispano-latíné está aportando a la tarea crítica de la educación teológica.

El equipo editorial de este proyecto estuvo integrado por tres líderes hispano-latíné en educación teológica. El Dr. Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez es un erudito jubilado que fue profesor de teología en tres escuelas ATS: el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico (1986-1995), el Seminario Teológico McCormick (1995-2013) y el Seminario Teológico Evangélico Garrett (2014-2019). Fue el primer vicepresidente y decano académico latino en las dos últimas escuelas. La Rda. Dra. Joanne Rodríguez tiene una larga carrera de servicio a la educación teológica a través de sus roles de liderazgo en la Iniciativa Teológica Hispana (HTI); primero, como su Directora Asociada y luego, como su Directora Ejecutiva desde 2002. Es la primera latina en recibir el premio ATS Women in Leadership Trailblazer (2024), y recibió un doctorado honorario de la Escuela de

Teología Iliff (2024) por la creación de programas integrales de mentoría y becas para crear académicos y líderes latine para el terreno más amplio de la educación teológica y religiosa. El Rvdo. Dr. David Vázquez-Levy ha sido el presidente de la Escuela de Religión del Pacífico desde 2015. Su carrera se ha desarrollado en la intersección de las instituciones educativas, las comunidades religiosas y el cambio social. Fue cofundador de La Colectiva, el grupo de afinidad hispano-latine de presidentes y decanos en la ATS, establecido en 2015.

Introductory Essay: Heirs, Agents, and Leaders of a Movement

Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez, Th.D.

• VEA LA PÁGINA 15 PARA LEER ESTE ENSAYO EN ESPAÑOL •

The ecumenical group of Hispanic-Latine presidential leaders in ATS schools (presidents and a few executive deans) included in this publication constitutes collectively one of the main outcomes of a process and a movement that started almost 60 years ago. These individuals stand on the shoulder and struggles of previous generations that challenged the exclusionary and marginalizing practices towards Hispanic-Latine and other minority groups in the predominantly White and Anglo-European theological establishment in ATS schools. The emergence period of the contemporary Hispanic-Latine theological movement in ATS schools can be traced between the mid-1960s until the end of the 1970s.¹

During the mid-1960s, the emerging Chicano and Puerto Rican social justice and civil rights movements challenged the moderate politics of the post II World War generations of Hispanic community leaders who worked for economic justice, labor rights, school integration, equal citizenship, greater political representation, social integration, and culturally affirmative agendas.² In contrast, the new generation of leaders worked with a “liberationist” perspective, a self-determination agenda, progressive politics, and a multicultural approach to cultural identities.³ These two competing approaches in the struggle for social justice among Hispanic-Latine communities and politics impacted and inspired leaders in Hispanic-Latine communities, politics, and religious groups.⁴

¹ The author of this essay will argue for this chronology in an upcoming book on the history and legacy of Protestant Latine theology in the USA.

² Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *In The Midst of Radicalism. Mexican American Moderates during the Chicano Movement, 1960-1978* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022); Anthony Quiroz, editor, *Leaders of the Mexican American Generation. Biographical Essays* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2015).

³ F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano. The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, second revised edition, (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1997); Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement. Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor. Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁴ Anthony M. Stevens Arroyo, *Prophets Denied Honor. An Anthology of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980). Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing The Latino Resurgence in U. S. Religion. The Emmaus Paradigm* (Boulder, CO: Westview

There were other national and international sources that nurtured the activist perspectives and praxes among Hispanic-Latine religious leaders and groups during the 1960s and 1970s. We can highlight the politics and reflections of religious movements connected to other forms of liberative social movements of the times. For example: decolonizing and revolutionary movements in Latin American, Africa, and Asia (Indigenizing theologies, liberation theologies, Third World theologies); Black civil rights movement in the USA (Black Theology); socialist movements (Christian-Marxist dialogue in Europe, Christians for Socialism in Latin America); anti-war and moratorium movements (peace, anti-nuclear, and pacifist theologies); and the diverse feminist movement (white feminist, womanist, *mujerista* theologies).⁵ Inspired by these movements and theological perspectives, Hispanic-Latine religious persons and groups developed new reformist organizations within their denominations to incorporate and carry a wider social justice agenda in society and within the church.

The late 1960s and the early 1970s witnessed the emergence of Hispanic-Latine caucuses in mainline Protestant denominations, and similar groups also emerged among Hispanic-Latine Catholic lay and clergy populations.⁶ These leaders established regional groups and national ecumenical networks to sustain solidarity and collaboration. Eventually, sectors among these activist religious groups targeted predominantly white seminaries as places in which they wanted to have greater access, a contextualized theological education, and resources for financial support and academic success. The collective action of these groups, with the support of non-Hispanic-Latine allies, made them successful in pressing and negotiating with seminaries to open a variety of academic programs to serve Hispanic-Latine clergy and lay leaders. At least, thirteen Protestant and Evangelical seminaries opened “Hispanic ministries programs” during the 1970s.⁷

The small but steady growth of the Hispanic-Latine student population in ATS seminaries since the 1960s and the emergence of Hispanic ministries programs in ATS schools during the 1970s paved the way for the formation and growth of new generations of Hispanic-Latine theological educators and scholars in seminaries and universities. One key organization that supported the formation of these academic

Press, 1998); Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, editors, *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵ Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, editors, *New Theology No. 6. On Revolution and non-Revolution, Violence and Non-Violence, Peace and Power* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969); Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, editors, *Mission Trends No. 4. Liberation Theologies in North America and Europe* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); Miguel A. De La Torre, Editor, *Introducing Liberative Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

⁶ Felipe Hinojosa, Maggie Elmore, and Sergio M. González, editors, *Faith and Power. Latino Religious Politics Since 1945* (New York: New York University Press, 2022).

⁷These are the schools for which the author has found data, thus far : Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (1966); Perkins School of Theology (1970 & 1974), New York Theological Seminary (1971), McCormick Theological Seminary (1973), Fuller Theological Seminary (1974), Wartburg Theological Seminary (1975), New Brunswick Theological Seminary (1975), Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (1976), Lutheran School of Theology (1978), American Baptist Seminary of the West (1978), Eastern Baptist Seminary (1979), Northern Baptist Seminary (1979), and Goshen College (1979).

cohorts was the Fund for Theological Education (FTE, now the Forum for Theological Exploration). The FTE offered scholarship programs for ministerial and doctoral Hispanic-Latine students from 1976-1995. During the late 1980s and mid-1990s, other organizations fostered new generations of Hispanic-Latine leaders and garnered resources to serve those pursuing vocations of teaching and research in theological and religious studies: the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP 1988), the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States (ACHTUS 1988), La Comunidad of Hispanic Scholars of Religion (1989), the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH 1992), and the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI 1996).

Starting in the 1980s, there was a relatively small but growing, diverse, and intergenerational group of Hispanic-Latine leaders teaching in ATS seminaries and divinity schools. As these leaders developed their teaching careers, they advanced in faculty ranks, leadership positions, and in administrative roles in schools and in professional associations. Some of these leaders became executive ministers in their denominations, members of boards of directors and editorial committees, directors of Hispanic ministry programs, directors of academic departments, associate deans, and deans of faculty in seminaries. This “leadership capital” helped some of these qualified candidates to aspire or respond to the invitation to serve as presidents when invited by predominantly white administration, faculties, and Board of Directors. During the second decade of the XXI century, a small number of presidents and executive deans would emerge out of a pool of credentialed, knowledgeable, and trusted Hispanic-Latine leaders in ATS theological schools, universities, or denominational settings.

The collection of presidential speeches in this volume is a testament to several interlaced macro, meso, and micro histories during the last six decades. First, the transformative force that minoritized groups have exercised since the 1960s on the predominantly Anglo-European and white graduate theological establishment. Second, the different strategies of the graduate theological establishment to respond, accommodate, support, and coopt the presence and agenda of minoritized groups in the academy. Third, the legacy, impact, and institutionalization of the Hispanic-Latine theological movement in ATS schools and system. Finally, the resilient struggle, creative work, spiritual vitality, networking, and courageous leadership of Hispanic-Latine theological educators and scholars who have discerned a vocation for presidential leadership in the contested field of graduate theological education in ATS schools.

Ensayo de introducción: Herederos, Agentes, y Líderes de un Movimiento

Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez, Th.D.

• SEE PAGE 12 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

El grupo ecuménico de líderes presidenciales hispano-latín de las escuelas de la ATS (presidentes y algunos decanos ejecutivos) incluidos en esta publicación, constituye colectivamente uno de los principales resultados de un proceso y un movimiento que comenzó hace casi 60 años. Estos individuos se apoyan en las luchas de generaciones anteriores que desafiaron las prácticas excluyentes y de marginación hacia grupos hispano-latín y otros grupos minoritarios en el “establishment” teológico predominantemente blanco y anglo-europeo en las escuelas de la ATS. El período de surgimiento del movimiento teológico hispano-latín contemporáneo en las escuelas de la ATS se puede rastrear desde mediados de los años sesenta hasta finales de los setenta.¹

A mediados de la década de 1960, los emergentes movimientos chicanos y puertorriqueños por la justicia social y los derechos civiles desafiaron la política moderada de las generaciones de líderes comunitarios hispanos que posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial trabajaron por la justicia económica, los derechos laborales, la integración escolar, la igualdad ciudadana, una mayor representación política, la integración social y agendas culturalmente afirmativas.² En contraste, la nueva generación de líderes trabajó con una perspectiva “liberacionista”, una agenda de autodeterminación, políticas progresistas y un enfoque multicultural de las identidades culturales.³ Estos dos enfoques opuestos en la lucha por la justicia social en las

¹ El autor de este ensayo defenderá esta cronología en su próximo libro sobre la historia y el legado de la teología protestante latín en los EE.UU.

² Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *In The Midst of Radicalism. Mexican American Moderates during the Chicano Movement, 1960-1978* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022); Anthony Quiroz, editor, *Leaders of the Mexican American Generation. Biographical Essays* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2015).

³ F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano. The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, second revised edition, (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1997); Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement. Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor. Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

comunidades y la política hispano-latín impactaron e inspiraron a los líderes de las comunidades, la política y los grupos religiosos hispano-latín.⁴

Hubo otras fuentes nacionales e internacionales que alimentaron las perspectivas y prácticas activistas entre los líderes y grupos religiosos hispano-latín durante las décadas de 1960 y 1970. Podemos resaltar las políticas y reflexiones de los movimientos religiosos conectados con otras formas de movimientos sociales liberadores de la época. Por ejemplo: movimientos descolonizadores y revolucionarios en América Latina, África y Asia (teologías indigenistas, teologías de la liberación, teologías del Tercer Mundo); Movimiento de derechos civiles de los negros en Estados Unidos (Teología Negra); movimientos socialistas (diálogo cristiano-marxista en Europa, Cristianos por el socialismo en América Latina); movimientos contra la guerra o de moratoria (teologías de paz, antinucleares y pacifistas); y el diverso movimiento feminista (teologías feministas blancas, “womanist” y mujeristas).⁵ Inspirados por estos movimientos y perspectivas teológicas, personas y grupos religiosos hispano-latín desarrollaron nuevas organizaciones reformistas dentro de sus denominaciones para incorporar y llevar una agenda de justicia social más amplia en la sociedad y dentro de la iglesia.

A finales de la década de 1960 y principios de la de 1970 se produjo el surgimiento de grupos de abogacía hispano-latín en las principales denominaciones protestantes, y también surgieron grupos similares entre las poblaciones laicas y clérigos católicos hispano-latín.⁶ Estos líderes establecieron grupos regionales y redes ecuménicas nacionales para sostener la solidaridad y la colaboración. Con el tiempo, sectores entre estos grupos religiosos activistas apuntaron a los seminarios predominantemente blancos como lugares en los que querían tener mayor acceso, una educación teológica contextualizada y recursos para apoyo financiero y éxito académico. La acción colectiva de estos grupos, con el apoyo de aliados que no eran hispano-latín, les permitió presionar y negociar con los seminarios para abrir una variedad de programas académicos para servir a líderes del clero y laicado hispano-latín. Al menos trece seminarios protestantes y evangélicos abrieron “programas de ministerios hispanos” durante la década de 1970.⁷

⁴ Anthony M. Stevens Arroyo, *Prophets Denied Honor. An Anthology of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980). Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing The Latino Resurgence in U. S. Religion. The Emmaus Paradigm* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998); Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, editors, *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵ Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, editors, *New Theology No. 6. On Revolution and non-Revolution, Violence and Non-Violence, Peace and Power* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969); Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, editors, *Mission Trends No. 4. Liberation Theologies in North America and Europe* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); Miguel A. De La Torre, Editor, *Introducing Liberative Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

⁶ Felipe Hinojosa, Maggie Elmore, and Sergio M. González, editors, *Faith and Power. Latino Religious Politics Since 1945* (New York: New York University Press, 2022).

⁷ Estas son las escuelas protestantes para las cuáles el autor ha encontrado data hasta el momento: Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (1966); Perkins School of Theology (1970 & 1974), New York Theological Seminary (1971), McCormick Theological Seminary (1973), Fuller Theological Seminary (1974), Wartburg Theological Seminary (1975), New Brunswick Theological Seminary (1975), Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (1976), Lutheran School of Theology (1978), American Baptist Seminary of

El crecimiento pequeño pero constante de la población estudiantil hispano-latín en los seminarios de la ATS desde la década de 1960 y el surgimiento de programas de ministerios hispanos en las escuelas ATS durante la década de 1970 allanaron el camino para la formación y el crecimiento de nuevas generaciones de educadores y académicos teológicos hispano-latín en seminarios y universidades. Una organización clave que apoyó la formación de estos grupos académicos fue el Fondo para la Educación Teológica (FTE, ahora Foro para la Exploración Teológica). El FTE ofreció programas de becas para estudiantes hispano-latín ministeriales y de doctorado entre 1976 y 1995. A finales de los años 1980 y mediados de los años 1990, otras organizaciones fomentaron nuevas generaciones de líderes hispano-latín y obtuvieron recursos para servir a quienes seguían vocaciones de enseñanza e investigación en estudios teológicos y religiosos: el Programa de Verano Hispano (HSP 1988), la Academia de Teólogos Hispanos Católicos en los Estados Unidos (ACHTUS 1988), La Comunidad de Académicos Hispanos de la Religión (1989), la Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH, 1992) y la Iniciativa Teológica Hispana (HTI 1996).

A partir de la década de 1980, había un grupo relativamente pequeño pero creciente, diverso e intergeneracional de líderes hispano-latín que enseñaban en seminarios y escuelas de teología de la ATS. A medida que estos líderes desarrollaron sus carreras docentes, fueron avanzando en rangos de facultad, posiciones de liderazgo y roles administrativos en escuelas y asociaciones profesionales. Algunos de estos líderes llegaron a ser ministros ejecutivos en sus denominaciones, miembros de juntas directivas y comités editoriales, directores de programas ministeriales hispanos, directores de departamentos académicos, decanos asociados y decanos de facultades en seminarios. Este “capital de liderazgo” ayudó a algunos de estos candidatos calificados a aspirar o responder a la invitación a servir como presidentes cuando fueron invitados por una administración, facultades y juntas directivas predominantemente blancas. Durante la segunda década del siglo XXI, un pequeño número de presidentes y decanos ejecutivos surgiría de un grupo de líderes hispano-latín acreditados, informados y confiables en escuelas teológicas, universidades o entornos denominacionales de la ATS.

La colección de discursos presidenciales contenida en este volumen es un testimonio de varias historias macro, meso y micro entrelazadas durante las últimas seis décadas. En primer lugar, la fuerza transformadora que los grupos minoritarios han ejercido desde la década de 1960 sobre el “establishment” teológico de posgrado predominantemente anglo-europeo y blanco. En segundo lugar, las diferentes estrategias del “establishment” teológico de posgrado para responder, acomodar, apoyar y cooptar la presencia y agenda de grupos minoritarios en la academia. En tercer lugar, el legado, impacto e institucionalización del movimiento teológico hispano-latín en las escuelas y el sistema de la ATS. Finalmente, la lucha resiliente, el trabajo creativo, la vitalidad espiritual, la creación de redes y el liderazgo valiente de los educadores y académicos teológicos hispano-latín que han discernido una vocación para el liderazgo

the West (1978), Eastern Baptist Seminary (1979), Northern Baptist Seminary (1979), and Goshen College (1979).

presidencial en el disputado campo de la educación teológica de posgrado en las escuelas de la ATS.

Introductory Essay: A modest past, a vibrant future

Rev. Dr. Joanne Rodríguez

Hispanic Theological Initiative

• VEA LA PÁGINA 21 PARA LEER ESTE ENSAYO EN ESPAÑOL •

This special issue in *Perspectivas* is challenging and exciting. It's invigorating to see the culmination of over 60 years of dedication from various organizations and individuals leading to a significant representation of Latine presidents in the theological and religious education field. The emergence of the first Latino president almost two decades ago was believed to mark a turning point, but it wasn't until 2013 that a notable increase began.

The shift towards diverse representation and growth among Latine leaders is commendable, breaking away from stagnant practices that yield no new results. Despite financial challenges, organizations like the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH) and the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP) persisted at the grassroots level, nurturing potential leaders and fostering educational pathways for Latine students. The establishment of the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI) in 1996, initially supported by Pew Charitable Trust, Inc., aimed to address the dearth representation of Latine faculty in theological education. However, the discontinuation of Pew's funding for HTI in 2007, coinciding with economic downturns, posed significant obstacles requiring adaptability and resilience from these institutions. As theological institutions continued to grapple with declining enrollment and other internal challenges, the importance of visionary leadership, diversity, and adaptability in educational programs became and is still increasingly evident.

The current landscape underscores the necessity for theological institutions to innovate and tailor their educational offerings to the evolving needs of students and communities they will serve, especially amidst the ongoing pandemic. Programs like *Latinas in Leadership*, initiated by HTI with a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., exemplify proactive steps towards preparing Latina leaders for executive roles in theological education because since 2019 when President Doris Garcia vacated her presidency at the Evangelical Seminary in Puerto Rico, there are no Latina presidents in theological education. Despite the progress made, it's essential to acknowledge that the full impact of these efforts is still unfolding, given that many of these presidents have not held their positions for an extended period.

Looking ahead, there is optimism in the growing initiatives aimed at cultivating diverse leadership within theological education. The commitment and innovation

displayed by the Latine community over the past six decades have paved the way for more inclusive and transformative leadership in theological and religious education. As the Latine presidents and deans represented in this special issue continue to chart new paths and articulate bold visions for their institutions, and hopefully supported by their board members, faculty, and administrators, we anticipate a future of vibrant and impactful theological education that resonates globally.

Ensayo de introducción: Un pasado modesto, un futuro vibrante

Rev. Dr. Joanne Rodríguez

Hispanic Theological Initiative

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Este número especial de Perspectivas es desafiante y emocionante. Es estimulante ver la culminación de más de 60 años de dedicación de varias organizaciones e individuos que dieron lugar a una representación significativa de presidentes latín en el campo de la educación teológica y religiosa. Se creía que el surgimiento del primer presidente latino hace casi dos décadas marcaba un punto de inflexión, pero no fue hasta 2013 que comenzó un aumento notable.

El cambio hacia una representación diversa y un crecimiento entre los líderes latín es encomiable, rompiendo con prácticas estancadas que no producen nuevos resultados. A pesar de los desafíos financieros, organizaciones como la Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH) y el Programa Hispano de Verano (HSP) persistieron a nivel de base, formando líderes potenciales y fomentando vías educativas para los estudiantes latín. El establecimiento de la Iniciativa Teológica Hispana (HTI) en 1996, inicialmente apoyada por Pew Charitable Trust, Inc., tuvo como objetivo abordar la escasez de representación de profesores latín en la educación teológica. Sin embargo, la interrupción del financiamiento de Pew para HTI en 2007, coincidiendo con crisis económicas, planteó obstáculos importantes que exigieron adaptabilidad y resiliencia por parte de estas instituciones. A medida que las instituciones teológicas continuaron lidiando con la disminución de la matrícula y otros desafíos internos, la importancia del liderazgo visionario, la diversidad y la adaptabilidad en los programas educativos se hizo y sigue siendo cada vez más evidente.

El panorama actual subraya la necesidad de que las instituciones teológicas innoven y adapten sus ofertas educativas a las necesidades cambiantes de los estudiantes y las comunidades a las que servirán, especialmente en medio de la continua pandemia. Programas como Latinas in Leadership, iniciado por HTI con una subvención de Lilly Endowment, Inc., ejemplifican pasos proactivos hacia la preparación de líderes latinas para roles ejecutivos en educación teológica porque desde 2019, cuando la presidenta Doris García dejó vacante su presidencia en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, no hay presidentas latinas en educación teológica. A pesar de los avances logrados, es esencial reconocer que el impacto total de estos esfuerzos aún se está manifestando, dado que muchos de estos presidentes no han ocupado sus cargos durante un período prolongado.

De cara al futuro, hay optimismo en las crecientes iniciativas destinadas a cultivar un liderazgo diverso dentro de la educación teológica. El compromiso y la innovación mostrados por la comunidad latina durante las últimas seis décadas han allanado el camino para un liderazgo más inclusivo y transformador en la educación teológica y religiosa. A medida que los presidentes y decanos latinos representados en este número especial continúan trazando nuevos caminos y articulando visiones audaces para sus instituciones y, con suerte, apoyados por los miembros de sus juntas directivas, profesores y administradores, anticipamos un futuro de educación teológica vibrante e impactante que resuena a nivel mundial.

Introductory Essay: For Such a Time as This

Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy

• VEA LA PÁGINA 25 PARA LEER ESTE ENSAYO EN ESPAÑOL •

The addresses featured in this issue are a microcosm of the growing diversity in theological education. They provide a window into the rich conversation the featured presidents and chief executives are privileged to have as part of La Colectiva—the Hispanic-Latine affinity group of executive leaders of ATS schools in which we participate. Founded in 2015, our group gathers regularly for mutual support and resourcing, collective advocacy for our communities, and coordination of efforts to advance the broader work of theological education. We are brought together under the solidarity of a community whose identity is as dynamic as the diversity of its members. Like many of my colleagues whose inaugural addresses are featured in this issue, I have checked a different box in each of the four US Census in which I have participated. The options provided in each of the four censuses have changed as the identity of the Hispanic-Latine community has evolved and resisted categorization. It is precisely this complexity, hybridity, and fluidity that makes the reflections from this group of leaders so valuable for a time in theological education that is also complex, hybrid, and fluid.

Still, because of a shared Hispanic-Latine identity, we come together across a broader spectrum of theological perspectives than has historically been the case for many of our peers in predominantly White communities. We come from the three “families” in ATS schools as Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals. For some of us the path to leadership has been through traditional academic journeys while for others it has been through less traditional professional pathways. Many of us are first generation college graduates, immigrants, and non-native English speakers. Our diversity is also reflected in the divergent styles selected by each of the authors to address our communities as we began our work as executive leaders—from sermons to strategic discourses. While many of us—or our families—come from various Latin American countries, two thirds of the authors have Puerto Rican roots. This is a testament to the importance placed on education by Puerto Rican faith communities, colonial histories, and the impact of immigration status on educational attainment and career opportunities.

Within the broad diversity of perspectives and approaches, several patterns can be discerned. We all recognize that we are coming into leadership at a time of great disruption in higher education and within religious life in the United States. Michelle K. Ryan and Alexander Haslam in their article, “The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions,” name the fact that women often

come into executive leadership at a point when corporations are in deep crisis.¹ That is certainly the case for many of us who are coming to leadership at this moment, certainly within smaller, more fragile institutions, but even within those that are stronger and more resourced. The added complication is that other than our colleague Doris Garcia who served at the Seminario Evangélico in Puerto Rico, Latina women have not yet been tapped to serve in executive leadership at ATS seminaries. Yet we each draw on Scriptures, tradition, and the legacies of our institutions to articulate our sense of call to lead for “such a time as this.”

Most of the speeches do not narrowly focus on our Hispanic-Latine identity or communities, but rather choose to speak broadly to our commitment for the need to reimagine theological education to create more access for historically marginalized communities. Many of us see this as part of a larger commitment to theological education as a matter of justice. We bring a deep love for the life of the church. Given that most of us whose addresses make up this volume have been shaped within emerging—often immigrant—congregations and church experiences, we bring a more hopeful view of the church than what many of those we are called to lead in theological education at this time. Similarly, the fact that many of us come from less resourced backgrounds means that we are able to see our institutions both with clarity about the limits and challenges they face, but also with a sense of abundance for the legacy and resources we are called to steward.

Most of the addresses recognize the broad range of stakeholders that make up theological education, including the promise of its approach to leadership formation for the church as well as for broader social movements. We also speak with intention to the importance of pairing academic preparation with spiritual formation and practical training so that leaders can be resilient, imaginative, and effective.

When I was in college, I majored in Computer Science even though I knew that my calling was to become a pastor. The reason was that I—like my college roommate who was also an immigrant—needed to make sure that I took seriously the financial implications of my education for myself and my family. This pragmatic approach is evident in a number of the speeches that call on the faculty, staff, and boards of the various schools to seriously consider the financial implications of the education they provide and explore new models and approaches.

The tapestry of traditions, perspectives, and journeys that are captured in this collection of speeches provide not only a significant snapshot into a historical moment in theological education, but also a vision of its promise for the future. We hope that as you read these various speeches, sermons, and addresses you may hear the urgency with which we speak about the challenges we are facing, but also with joy and hope about the possibilities of what God is calling us to in this critical moment for the church, higher education, and the world.

¹ Ryan, Michelle K., and S. Alexander Haslam (9 February 2005). "The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions" *British Journal of Management* 16 (2): 81–90.

Ensayo de introducción: Para un tiempo como éste

Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy

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Los discursos presentados en este número son un microcosmos de la creciente diversidad en la educación teológica. Proporcionan una ventana a la rica conversación que los presidentes y directores ejecutivos representados tienen el privilegio de tener como parte de La Colectiva, el grupo de afinidad hispano-latine de líderes ejecutivos de las escuelas ATS en el que participamos. Fundado en 2015, nuestro grupo se reúne periódicamente para ofrecer apoyo mutuo y recursos, defensa colectiva de nuestras comunidades y coordinación de esfuerzos para avanzar en el trabajo más amplio de la educación teológica. Estamos unidos bajo la solidaridad de una comunidad cuya identidad es tan dinámica como la diversidad de sus miembros. Como muchos de mis colegas cuyos discursos inaugurales aparecen en esta edición, marqué una casilla diferente en cada uno de los cuatro censos de EE. UU. en los que he participado. Las opciones proporcionadas en cada uno de los cuatro censos han cambiado a medida que la identidad de la comunidad hispana-latine ha evolucionado y se ha resistido a la categorización. Es precisamente esta complejidad, hibridación y fluidez lo que hace que las reflexiones de este grupo de líderes sean tan valiosas para un tiempo en la educación teológica que también es complejo, híbrido y fluido.

Aún así, debido a una identidad hispana-latine compartida, nos unimos a través de un espectro de perspectivas teológicas más amplio que el que históricamente ha sido el caso de muchos de nuestros pares en comunidades predominantemente blancas. Venimos de las tres “familias” de las escuelas en la ATS: católicas, protestantes y evangélicas. Para algunos de nosotros, el camino hacia el liderazgo ha pasado por caminos académicos tradicionales, mientras que para otros ha pasado por caminos profesionales menos tradicionales. Muchos de nosotros somos graduados universitarios de primera generación, inmigrantes y parlantes cuyo primer idioma no es inglés. Nuestra diversidad también se refleja en los estilos divergentes seleccionados por cada uno de los autores para dirigirse a nuestras comunidades cuando comenzamos nuestro trabajo como líderes ejecutivos, desde sermones hasta discursos estratégicos. Si bien muchos de nosotros—o nuestras familias—venimos de varios países latinoamericanos, dos tercios de los autores tienen raíces puertorriqueñas. Este es un testimonio de la importancia que las comunidades religiosas puertorriqueñas otorgan a la educación, las historias coloniales y el impacto del estatus migratorio en los logros educativos y las oportunidades profesionales.

Dentro de la amplia diversidad de perspectivas y enfoques, se pueden discernir varios patrones. Todos reconocemos que estamos asumiendo el liderazgo en un momento de gran perturbación en la educación superior y en la vida religiosa en los Estados Unidos. Michelle K. Ryan y Alexander Haslam en su artículo, "The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions," mencionan el hecho de que las mujeres a menudo llegan al liderazgo ejecutivo en un momento en que las corporaciones están en profunda crisis.¹ Ese es sin duda el caso de muchos de nosotros que estamos llegando al liderazgo en este momento, ciertamente dentro de instituciones más pequeñas y frágiles, pero incluso dentro de aquellas que son más fuertes y tienen más recursos. La complicación añadida es que, aparte de nuestra colega Doris García, que trabajó en el Seminario Evangélico en Puerto Rico, las mujeres latinas aún no han sido elegidas para servir en el liderazgo ejecutivo de los seminarios ATS. Sin embargo, cada uno de nosotros nos basamos en las Escrituras, la tradición y los legados de nuestras instituciones para articular nuestro sentido de llamado a liderar en "un momento como este".

La mayoría de los discursos no se centran estrictamente en nuestra identidad o comunidades hispana-latíné, sino que optan por hablar ampliamente de nuestro compromiso con la necesidad de re-imaginar la educación teológica para crear más acceso para las comunidades históricamente marginadas. Muchos de nosotros vemos esto como parte de un compromiso más amplio con la educación teológica como una cuestión de justicia. Traemos un profundo amor por la vida de la iglesia. Dado que la mayoría de nosotros, cuyos discursos conforman este volumen, hemos sido formados dentro de congregaciones emergentes - a menudo inmigrantes - y experiencias eclesiales, aportamos una visión más esperanzadora de la iglesia que la de muchos de aquellos a quienes estamos llamados a liderar en la educación teológica en este momento. De manera similar, el hecho de que muchos de nosotros provengamos de entornos con menos recursos significa que podemos ver nuestras instituciones con claridad acerca de los límites y desafíos que enfrentan, pero también con un sentido de abundancia por el legado y los recursos que estamos llamados a administrar.

La mayoría de los discursos reconocen la amplia gama de partes interesadas que conforman la educación teológica, incluyendo la promesa de su enfoque para la formación de liderazgo para la iglesia, así como para movimientos sociales más amplios. También hablamos con intención de la importancia de combinar la preparación académica con la formación espiritual y la capacitación práctica para que los líderes puedan ser resilientes, imaginativos y eficaces.

Cuando estaba en la universidad, me especialicé en ciencias de la computación aunque sabía que mi llamado era ser pastor. La razón era que yo, al igual que mi compañero de cuarto de la universidad que también era inmigrante, necesitaba asegurarme de tomar en serio las implicaciones financieras de mi educación para mí y mi familia. Este enfoque pragmático es evidente en varios de los discursos que piden a los profesores, al personal y a las juntas directivas de las distintas escuelas que

¹ Ryan, Michelle K., and S. Alexander Haslam (9 February 2005), "The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions" *British Journal of Management* 16 (2): 81–90.

consideren seriamente las implicaciones financieras de la educación que brindan y exploren nuevos modelos y enfoques.

El tapiz de tradiciones, perspectivas y viajes que se capturan en esta colección de discursos proporciona no sólo una imagen significativa de un momento histórico en la educación teológica, sino también una visión de su promesa para el futuro. Esperamos que al leer estos diversos discursos, sermones y discursos puedan escuchar la urgencia con la que hablamos sobre los desafíos que enfrentamos, pero también con alegría y esperanza sobre las posibilidades de lo que Dios nos está llamando a hacer en este momento crítico para la iglesia, la educación superior y el mundo.

“A Case for Abundant Christian Life.” (Oct. 16, 2014)

Rev. Dr. Javier Viera

(Methodist, UMC)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

The author is concerned with the ability of the Christian life and theological education to face the challenges that religious traditions confront in the contemporary world. Inspired by the work of historian David Hempton on reform Christian movements, such as the Jesuits, Pietists, and Methodists, Viera adopts and promotes a few aims to guide the renewal of theological education today. These are: develop a dynamic spiritual life; engage in mission work that fosters diversity and adapts the Christian message to honor diverse peoples and cultures; work with a transformative agenda for social justice in solidarity with poor and marginalized people; and form well educated religious leaders capable of thinking critically and creatively to address the issues and signs of the times. The fate of Christianity and theological education depends on presenting “a compelling vision of abundant life, of compassionate life to a violent and fragmented world.”

Installation Address

The Reverend Javier A. Viera, Ed.D.
Dean of the Theological School
Professor of Pastoral Theology
Drew University Theological School
16 October 2014

Although preachers are often given to hyperbole, and I confess to having been guilty of this numerous times over the years, I do not think it overly dramatic to say that we are living in extraordinary, unprecedented times. I recognize that this is a precarious statement to make in a room where there are a fair share of historians, all of whom could likely argue that other moments in human history are equally, if not more extraordinary than our own. So, in order to make my point credibly, I turn to a historian to underscore this claim.

In a splendid paper delivered at Oxford not long ago, David Hempton, the dean of Harvard Divinity School and a historian of Wesleyan/Methodist movements, made the claim that the dominance of secularism is growing at unprecedented rates, and it is growing in sophistication.¹ This insight comes as no surprise to anyone here. Hempton went on to say, clearly troubled, that the worldview which is gaining the most traction in our time is the claim that “Religion is an evolutionary phase in human existence that is long past its shelf life.”

If that is so, then we must ask—what we are doing here today? One plausible response is clearly that we do not believe that this is so. But a more truthful response is more complicated than that because many of us, including the religious professionals in the room, believe that much of the way religion functions in our world is indeed long past its shelf life. Moreover, many of us are daily witnesses to how rapidly ways of being religious, of being Christian even, are evolving. This evolution is so dramatic and happening so quickly that it is difficult to understand or make sense of our current religious landscape.

Baylor historian Phillip Jenkins has argued that a seismic shift is taking place in the Christian world. He observes that in all its history, the Christian religion has never grown as quickly and diversely as it is currently. As a result, he contends that the very nature of the church, and the world as a result, is about to change. “The fact is that we are at a moment as epochal as the Reformation itself,” says Jenkins.

Christianity as a whole is both growing and mutating in ways that observers in the West tend not to see. For obvious reasons, news reports today are filled with material about the influence of a resurgent and sometimes angry Islam. But in its variety and vitality, in its global reach, in its association with the world’s fastest growing societies, in its shifting centers of gravity, in the way its values and practices vary from place to place—in these and other ways it is Christianity that will leave the deepest mark on the twenty-first century. The process will not necessarily be a peaceful one, and only the foolish would venture anything beyond the broadest predictions about the religious picture a century or two ahead. But the twenty-first century will almost certainly be regarded by future historians as a century in which religion replaced ideology as the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood, and, of course, conflicts and wars.²

Let me be very clear. I do not believe that our way of being religious is long past its shelf life. As a matter of fact, I believe this is our moment. I believe we are just on the pulse of morning. Yet, I think that Jenkins is right that we are living through a seismic shift in what it means to be religious, what it means to be a Christian, and more

¹ David Hempton. *Matrices of Movements of Christian Transformation*. A paper delivered at the Christianity and the Flourishing of Universities Conference. McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life, Christ Church, University of Oxford. 25 May 2012. Throughout this address, I will make reference to Hempton’s paper, and these subsequent references come directly from this source.

² Philip Jenkins. “Christianity’s New Center” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2002.

importantly for our purposes today, what it means to be an institution that trains future religious leaders and scholars. The ground is shifting beneath our feet, and we have to discover how to navigate the new terrain that is before us. I find the uncertainty of our religious future thrilling, for that uncertainty is forcing a reexamination that our prior cultural dominance could never provoke.

For decades now, religious movements in this country, and Europe before us, have been obsessed with their imminent decline, and yet for all that obsession institutional religious life and practice looks much the same today as it did a generation ago. Theological education, more specifically, roughly resembles what it was almost a century ago. In spite of the evidence before us, in spite of the countless initiatives to try to counter the demise of religious life and institutions, the landscape is essentially unchanged. This is what Lisa Laskow Lahey and Robert Kegan have diagnosed as “Immunity to Change.”³

As a result, at least in our part of the world, the mass response has been either eschewing religious practice or vocation altogether, or constructing individual hybrid religious identities that cannot easily be defined or recognized within existing categories. Thus, it seems that as religious traditions and institutions have proven themselves incapable of reform, the response has been to create a new polarity—rejection of religious life or the invention of personalized spiritualities. Neither of these outcomes seem ultimately satisfactory, because in and of themselves they are not sufficiently compelling responses to the profundity and transformative potential the ancient traditions offer.

By contrast, Hempton points out that the early modern period of Christianity produced three strands of the tradition that did have compelling, profound, transformative visions of the Christian life, and I think it wise for our own future to seriously consider this story from our past. The Jesuits, the Pietists, and the Methodists shared four characteristics or commitments that Hempton suggests could provide a direction and sense of purpose as we navigate the uncertain terrain of religious life at this moment in time. I want to highlight Hempton’s historical analysis, and then comment on the four points he makes.

The Jesuits, Pietists, and Methodists shared:

- *Rigorous spiritual discipline to control self-interest and promote holiness of life and thought.* Rather than simply being a school where the mind is nurtured, I believe we must have a clear commitment to shaping and fostering a dynamic spiritual life for all who come to study with us. It is not enough for us to train students to think well, because when facing the intractable problems life will inevitably present, or when confronting the most confounding questions of life, they will need to drink from a deeper well than that which the mind alone can provide. Character, holiness, worship, and discipline are profoundly theological categories, and they are necessary for authentic encounter with God. The early

³ Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey. *Immunity to Change*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2009).

Jesuits, Pietists and Methodists knew this and fostered it and lived it as central to their identity.

- *A vision of the millennial expansion of Christianity to new cultures and places, including thoughtful cultural adaptation to those new places.* Hempton argues that early Jesuit, Pietist, and Methodist engagements in overseas missions were a far more sophisticated cultural engagement than later became the case when the Roman Catholic hierarchy and evangelical Protestant missionaries arrived on the scene. These earliest expressions of their movements seemed genuinely capable of fostering diversity and adapting the Christian message in ways that honored the people and cultures they encountered. We know, however, that that reality quickly changed. In a matriculation address in which he discussed the first attempt at genuine democratic revolution on the Korean peninsula, our own Dr. Hyo-Dong Lee said,

The arrival of many forms of Anglo-European Christianity was certainly good news to the Korean people, for they not only provided access to the benefits of modern science, medicine, and education, but also harbored within themselves, despite all the baggage of imperialism they carried, the potential to offer a different yet kindred vision of a new world—Jesus’ vision of the reign of God...What needs still to take place, rather, is an honest dialogue between equals, a conversation between present-day Appenzellers (*our own alum who introduced Christianity to the Korean peninsula*) and present-day Haewols (*the spiritual leader of the first democratic revolution in Korea*), both men and women, for they have much to learn from each other. And that ought to be true in every corner of the world today, if Christianity is to become Christianities, not one World Christianity, with battles yet to fight over the question of where to locate its imperial center.⁴

We need to recover the desire to share the faith, not impose it; to welcome others into the community of Jesus, not to demand it; to call others into a deeper experience of God in Christ, not to dictate it. The wisdom of our Jesuit, Pietist, and Methodist forebears in this regard was to a great degree the secret of their success, though it was not a well-kept secret at all, by design. Sophisticated, sensitive spiritual extroversion, they taught us, is exceedingly more loving and effective than imposing an ideology masked as a gift. Our students and faculty hail from all over the world, and that is something of which we are deeply proud at Drew. But with that reality comes a responsibility and great opportunity, to continue to model in generative ways a Christianity that is as culturally sophisticated and sensitive as the earliest expressions of these three movements.

- *A comprehensive social agenda.* The Jesuits, Pietists, and Methodists all sought to work at the margins of their societies; all understood quite clearly that to preach a purely spiritualized gospel meant *nothing* if that same gospel failed to

⁴ Hyo-Dong Lee. *Consecrate the Offerings to Yourselves*. Matriculation Address delivered in Craig Chapel, Drew University, Fall 2011.

transform economic, social, and political realities into authentic expressions of the reign of God. A clear commitment to the poor, the enslaved, the oppressed, the conquered, the addicted, the scorned and marginalized characterized these spiritual movements. That social agenda was at the heart of their evangelical fervor in their nascent years, and in this sense Drew represents the very best of our Christian tradition. Yet, we must be careful not to confuse talking about poverty or talking about oppression or talking about care for the earth with actually doing something to transform these realities. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures are clear in their call to this sort of social transformation, and places responsibility on God's people to bring about this "new creation". We will be at our best when we continue to inspire our students and one another in ways that help enable us to respond faithfully in preaching, in scholarship, and in service to the justice of God in this world. Not only is that biblically central, it must remain currently central to our life and work in this community.

- *A remarkable, extraordinary commitment to education.* I remember a story my former professor Stanley Hauerwas told about attending the closing convocation of the academic year at Duke only to have one of his faculty colleagues tell the graduating class, "they don't care what you know; they need to know you care." A theological non-pacifist, in that moment Hauerwas confessed to being filled with violent thoughts. These students had just spent two, three, and in some cases more years of disciplined, careful study in preparation for their eventual leadership in the church, the academy, or in civil society, and in one careless sentence all of that hard work was categorically devalued. I share Professor Hauerwas' dismay.

Yes, we want to nurture a deep and genuine spiritual life in this community, but we must remember that this theological school and university were founded in direct response to the cry from the pews for an educated clergy. Methodism itself was founded on a university campus. A life of deep learning and study is in our DNA. After having spent twenty-years in congregational ministry, I can tell you that a well-meaning, caring, but poorly formed theological mind is a potentially very dangerous thing. Just read the daily headlines if you doubt that is true.

Moreover, as someone who has spent the vast majority of my career as a pastor, let me tell you—the life of a pastor is hard, intellectually demanding, and mentally taxing. It is not only the academy that requires, even demands, the best minds for the work I have been describing. If the cultural and religious changes I described earlier are accurate, and I think that they are, we need religious leaders who can deftly navigate the complexities of modern life, and especially modern religious life. Short of this, the church will become a mere shell of spiritual platitudes and self-help philosophies incapable of speaking in relevant ways to the modern person, and its clergy will be ill-prepared to lead in the transformation and healing our world so desperately needs. Yes, it is important that our students develop the capacity to care, to respond appropriately to the people they serve, and to have an authentic spiritual engagement of their own. But it is a mistake to assume that that sort of work is not also highly intellectual and requires careful nuance and a deep capacity to think critically. We are here today because generations before us knew that an educated clergy and well-trained scholars

were essential for the flourishing of a healthy Christianity, and for peaceful flourishing of our world.

Surely, Hempton's analysis is limited in that it doesn't account for the ways these movements fell short of their ideals and the ways they compromised their efforts by colonialist practices, agendas, and commitments which led to historic failures and atrocities. I do not mean to gloss over those realities for they are as significant as what Hempton emphasizes. Thankfully, I'm proud that we spend considerable time at Drew understanding and deconstructing these tragedies. Yet, I still contend that the positives he highlights are instructive for us today in considering the future of a school like ours, and I believe we should also spend considerable time understanding and building upon them.

All of this discussion brings me precisely to this place and this moment. I have been asked quite often in the last several months, "What's your vision for Drew?" or, "What's your vision for theological education?" Those are legitimate questions, and I welcome them. I have been trying to articulate a portion of that vision in naming these four characteristics Hempton has identified. At an even more basic level, however, my vision for Drew Theological School is that it will be the most thriving, spiritually dynamic, intellectually inventive, risk-taking theological school in the world. How is that for a simple vision? Yet, at another level, I'm very clear that the vision of this place is not mine to determine. I come from a place and a people where collective wisdom is highly valued and deeply respected. And so in that spirit, I say that the vision for this place is collectively held, or should be, by all of us, and during my leadership of this school I will relentlessly remind us of that. There are too many great minds and faithful lives in this place to not make use of our collective wisdom and investment in the thriving of our school.

More importantly, as Hempton has reminded us, if Christianity, the church, and the wisdom and gifts of our religious traditions are to thrive in our age, it will not be simply because we have made complex metaphysical arguments, or because we do great good in the world. It will be because we continue to present a compelling vision of abundant life, of compassionate life to violent and fragmented world. That is a purpose that is not long past its shelf life. That is a purpose to which I ultimately want to commit myself here, and about which, I think, places like Drew Theological School and other similar institutions should ultimately be. That is our most essential work and highest calling. Let's get on with it.

“With Another Dress, With Another Skin.” (Nov. 8, 2014)

Rev. Dr. Doris J. García Rivera

(Baptist, ABC)

• VEA LA PÁGINA 39 PARA LEER ESTE DISCURSO EN ESPAÑOL •

Abstract

The author retrieves and claims the Christian identity as “followers or disciples of Jesus”, or as “wearing Jesus Christ,” as a countercultural and liberating socio-spiritual identity to be affirmed for the sake of becoming a life-giving and liberating church and theological school amidst identities, systems, and relationships that “dress up people with identities” that produce death and oppressions in today’s world. With Evangelical and metaphorical language, she calls to “take off” the “clothes or identities of social systems that dress us with clothes-identities that are contrary to God’s ways, and to let God “to dress us up with Jesus Christ,” as Godself did in the incarnation. Theological education, at its best, challenges the dehumanizing clothes-identities of social systems and helps us to wear Christ or priestly clothes congruent with God’s reign and its “integral freedom – emotional, physical, social, economic, political, and religious.”



"Selkie," [Public Domain - <https://ericwedwards.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/selkie-11.jpg>]

With Another Dress, With Another Skin

Installation speech as the eleventh president

Rev. Doris J. García Rivera, Ph.D.

President

Professor of Hebrew Bible and Missions

Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico

November 8, 2014

Sermon Text: Exodus 28:1-4, 41.

Greetings and Introduction

Greetings to the board of directors, employees, and teaching faculty of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. Greetings to the ministers, pastors and denominational executive Bishops. Dear friends, colleagues in the way, welcome! Especial greetings to my family on this occasion of great significance, to all those present and to this institution that is already 95 years-old.

I read a story in the book by Clarissa Pinkolas Estés *Women That Run with Wolves*. This story was titled “the return home: their return to itself—skin of a seal, skin of the soul.” This story of the “Selkies” (seal maidens) is told among the cultures of the north, farther north where the seas are seas, among the Inuit people, Siberians, Scottish and Finish.¹

The legend says that in the land of the freezing seas a single man went out to hunt and he found some beautiful women, made from the milk of the moon, who were naked and danced and laughed over the rocks. The man noticed some skins on the ground. Without thinking about it, he jumped and took one of the skins and hid it in his coat. A moment later, one at a time, the women covered themselves with the seal skins and went back to the sea. All of them returned to the sea except the one who was agitated as she looked for her skin everywhere. Then, the man surprised her asking her to stay with him. The man promised her that after seven summers he would give her back the seal skin. Unwillingly, the woman accepted. Sometime later they had a son, to whom the mother would tell the stories about the ice and the sea.

As time went by, the skin of the mother began to dry up. Scales and fissures started to appear. This skin from her eyelids fell off and her eyes went dark. Still the man refused to give her back what he had stolen, accusing the woman of being a bad mother, of wanting to abandon him and her son. One night, the son heard his name in the wind. The voice called out to him to a cliff, where he found a seal skin hidden. With a mix of shame and happiness, the boy went back knowing that he would lose his mother. When he gave back the skin to his mother, a shout of joy and liberation came out from her throat. The woman put on the skin and became a seal, took her son, and went to the sea.

Our garments, similar to “the skin” in the story, are metaphors of identities, belongings, of being and the reflection of that being.² There are many ways to get dressed, and when we dress up we conform to a culture, to some ideological an identity values, be them to simply follow what is fashionable according to the values of the market, to express resistance and go

¹ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, “La vuelta a casa: el regreso a sí misma—Piel de foca, piel del alma” en *Mujeres que corren con los lobos*, (Barcelona, España: Ediciones B.S.A., 2016), 209-241.

² Joanne Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” in *Real Bodies: A Sociological Construction*, eds. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (London: Palgrave, 2002), 133-134.

against the current, or to express exclusion and differentiation in the face of a established referent.

The social world is a world of dressed bodies. We get dressed in different ways for different activities and moments. In those activities we act in different roles. We are teachers, assistants, physicians, lawyers, home administrators, sons and daughters, mothers, police and military officers, and pastors assuming our uniforms, dresses, gowns and various garments according to our identities. These garments are subject to specific rules, structures, conduct, times and rituals. Sometimes “some people want to be one thing”, as the Zapatists would say; they put on what they are not to deceive, steal, mistreat, and destroy. There is a saying that we know in Puerto Rico, “the monkey even when dressed in silk it is still a monkey.” The robes can deceive us. But there are interior garments that are part of the skin and that we cannot hide. They define us in the most essential way, more profound and radical, and they emerge even when we are dressed in other things that we are not.

Content

Exodus 28 describes the priestly robes and details their materials and their design. The text reflects ancient traditions from the period of the first temple during Solomon, around the 10th century BCE. But it combines aspects from the second temple tradition after the exile, when the priesthood was well-established. The priestly robes did not only show the relationship of this person with divinity, but also with the dignity of the priestly role in relation to its calling.

If you do a biblical search for the words “dress/dressed/clothing/dress up-put on, etc., you will find about 326 verses in the Spanish Bible.” Beyond the clothing made from leather, linen, wool, or jute, we also find mention of royalty and luxury attires made with silk and fabrics with gold. We read of military clothing, tunics, capes, and much more. The Bible is rich in adjudicating other senses for the action of dressing up, associated with “being in a certain state or existence”. We find texts in Jeremiah, Job and Isaiah, where “you put on” desolation, righteousness, darkness, skin of worms, and “clothes of shame, fear and affliction”. In the Psalms, the Lord “dresses you” of salvation, and God “wears” glory and splendor.

Clothing as a metaphor for identity also reflects our historical moment.

When we lose someone, we dress in black, but also dress in crying, morning, and pain. We put on courage in the face of injustices by people, governments, and systems. Today, however, we are clothed beautifully and elegantly. We wear celebration in our hearts and rejoice because we have been invited to be present in this party.

Nevertheless, *when people, institutions or the economic-social and political system clothe us “by force”, violence is exerted on us.* When we allow the systems of oppression to clothe us, to put a price on us, and to determine our image, these imposed garments designate a false identity that enslaves us. Sometimes we are not even conscious of the change of garment. The woman in the story lost her freedom because “someone” stole her “true garment - her essential identity” and she was “clothed by force” with another identity. She lost her clear view; her strength and the energy to live.

This issue of identities is complex and fluid. A man can be an excellent pastor, but a terrible father. A woman can be a terrible daughter, but an extraordinary teacher. We possess and construct more than one identity, but some prevail over others. Or better stated, some identities are more deeply stuck to the skin. But the word of life reminds us that being followers of Jesus defines us in our deeper and more real identity.

The passage of Exodus launched me to the image of Jesus Christ as “high priest”. When Paul exhorts us in Rom. 13:14, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and “put on the new humanity...created in the image and likeness of God”, the invitation to put on Jesus Christ refers to finding an identity that gives life and meaning to life. But to put on the new humanity and to respond to the priestly calling and service, anointed and consecrated, we must get undressed.

Paul speaks of ridding ourselves of everything that is not in accordance with the image of our creator.

- To rid ourselves of self-defeating thoughts: I am not able, I don't have, the internal pain, suffering, sin, and sense of guilt. (I take off my cap)
- Paul invites us to rid ourselves of the laziness with which we waste our days, our children, our partners, our lives themselves, our unhealthy emotional attachments and our toxic conducts. (I take off my cape)
- To read ourselves of consumerism, of individualism, of the search for status, of power and useless recognitions for life today and in the here and now of the reign (I take off my toga).

The call to clothe ourselves as priests—in this holy priesthood—is a calling to put on Jesus Christ. To put on profound compassion (Col 3:12), from deep within us, *from the uterus and the bowels*, that is prophetic and moves the deepest fibers of our being.

In Jesus God was incarnated, God put on flesh, God put on humanity.

God changed skin and acquired a new identity. Bible scholars continue to discuss whether God was impacted as Jesus became human. I maintain my wonder at the mystery of the incarnation. Because for me, God in Jesus Christ smells like humanity, a woman, a boy, a grandmother. In this wearing of humanity is that God wanted to come closer to you and me. To be incarnated is then to *put on flesh—to become someone different*. It is to be a people with a history and to make history together with humanity. To dress up with priestly clothing is service, mission, commitment, solidarious action, resistance, and living testimony.

Get rid of what is not of God and put on the glory of God; dress yourself with liberty!

Let us remove those garments that asphyxiate the power of the Holy Spirit, that derail the desire of God of wellbeing and goodness for all of humanity, because we have been called to freedom. Called to a wholistic freedom—emotional, physical, social, economic, political, and religious. Let us undress so that we can build identities according with the reign of God.

This is what the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico offers, a solid theological education that allows students to study the holy word with seriousness, and to explore many interpretations and historical difficulties. We are called to think and to share a theological education, that not only wrestles with the text but strengthens the faith, by allowing us to identify those outfits that dehumanize us. I think that the Seminary builds bridges between the text and the hard reality of academic and pastoral life, when it puts on Jesus Christ. The Seminary must not only work to build a more just world, because justice without love makes us hypocrites, hardened and cynical, but to act with integrity, with transparency and compassion. The pastor, the person, and the people that put on the Lord smell like humanity.

Listen—if you are here with your partner, you smell like your partner—smell them! If you are alone, smell yourself. Hmmm, how nice is that smell of a baby, that shirt of your partner, that perfume of the woman with whom you share your life, that smell of the grandma. But also,

that smell of honest, well-sweated labor, of spices and the simple and attentive kitchen. We are a fragrant smell when we are clothed with Jesus Christ, with human rights, with respect for the earth, and with consideration for those that are different. When we are clothed with peace, rejecting outfits that push us to act with falsity, with fears, with unjust advantages, with malice, with politicking, we smell like Jesus!

The priest reflected the greatness of Adonai. To put on humanity is to clothe ourselves with that with which God is clothed—“clothe yourself with love, which is the perfect bond”. (Col 3:14) But that perfect bond needs another. The priest's vestments were made by “the wise of heart”. Those “artisans” (vv3) with the tools of wisdom, the experience, and the flexible minds would create the design and the priestly vestments. The dexterity, creativity and intelligence of some of the artisans came together to sustain that divine calling.

Brothers and sisters, the business of the reign is not solitary, it is done in community. It is not just systems of oppression that clothe us. *The talents in the abilities of others also clothe us. It takes more than one person “to clothe” a human being with glory and beauty. It takes a community “to clothe” a people with maturity, autonomy, self-determination and future. It takes communities of faith.*

Conclusion:

What dress are you wearing today? That of a captive person or that of a follower and servant of Jesus Christ?

The World Cup has come to an end, and we have to wait four years. In Latin America soccer fans live the games, they clothe themselves, they paint themselves and put on the jerseys of their teams”. They run to buy the jerseys of their teams, get excited, participate, and invest themselves”. They are passionate. They have faith and wish for what's best for their teams. Be passionate about a space of service, prepare for ministry!

At the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, we now celebrate 95 years. I ask you, what kind of identity are we going to develop? What clothes will we help our students to wear? What does it mean to put on the jersey of the Seminary? I have the commitment and the will to give the best of me to this educational endeavor. Because God called me, I put on the jersey to serve this community of faith. Because I see passion for the gospel, educational excellence, and extraordinary spaces of growth, I want to invite you to put on the jersey. Do you not want to put on the jersey of the seminary because you have heard that here people lose their faith and are too liberal? Then put on the jersey of your church.

If there is something that I want to leave in your mind this afternoon is, “*let yourself be clothed by Jesus Christ*”.

You who serve or long to serve the Lord, let God clothe you with another garment. Stand up and give your all to the Lord, your talents, your gifts, your doubts, those dehumanized identities. Surrender the imposed garments that enslave you at the altar of the Lord! Let God clothe you with a different skin!

It is your time. To prepare yourself to serve is worth it!

May God bless you.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2025

“Con Otro Vestido, Con Otra Piel.” (8 de noviembre, 2014)

Rev. Dr. Doris J. García Rivera

(Baptist, ABC)

• SEE PAGE 39 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •



"Selkie," [Public Domain - <https://ericwedwards.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/selkie-11.jpg>]

Con Otro Vestido, Con Otra Piel

Predicación de Instalación como la Undécima Presidenta

Rvda. Doris J. García Rivera, Ph.D.

Presidenta

Profesora de Biblia Hebrea y Misiones

Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico

8 de noviembre de 2014

Texto base: Éxodo 28:1-4, 41.

Saludos e Introducción

Saludos a la Junta Directiva, empleados, empleadas y Facultad Docente del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Saludos a los ministros, ministras, Pastores

Generales y Obispos Ejecutivos de las denominaciones presentes. ¡Amigos y amigas, compañeros y compañeras del camino, bienvenidos! Saludos en especial a mi familia que hoy me acompaña en este acto de tanto significado para todos los presentes y para esta institución de 95 años. ¡Nos vemos bien!

Leí una historia en el libro de Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Mujeres que Corren con Lobos* titulada “La vuelta a casa: el regreso a sí misma—Piel de foca, piel del alma.” La historia de las “Selkies” (doncellas focas) se cuenta entre las culturas del norte más norte con mares helados, entre los pueblos inuit, siberianos, escoceses y finlandeses.¹

La leyenda cuenta que en la tierra de los mares helados un hombre solitario salió a cazar y encontró unas mujeres hermosas, hechas de leche de luna, que desnudas bailaban y reían sobre las rocas. El hombre notó unas pieles en el suelo y sin pensarlo, saltó, tomó una de las pieles y la ocultó en su abrigo. Al rato, una a una, las mujeres se cubrieron con sus pieles de foca y se fueron al mar. Todas se fueron menos una que agitada buscaba la piel por todos lados hasta que el hombre la sorprendió pidiéndole que se quedara con él. El hombre prometió que luego de 7 veranos le devolvería su piel. La mujer sin quererlo accedió. Al tiempo tuvieron un hijo a quién la madre contaba historias del hielo y el mar.

Con el tiempo, la carne de la madre empezó a secarse. Se le formaron escamas y después grietas. La piel de los párpados se le desprendió y sus ojos se apagaron. A pesar de esto, el hombre se negó a devolver lo que había robado acusando a la mujer de ser mala madre, de querer abandonarlo a él y al niño. Una noche, el niño escuchó su nombre en el viento. La voz lo llamó al acantilado donde encontró escondida, una piel de foca. Con una mezcla de pena y alegría, el niño regresó sabiendo que perdería a su mamá. Cuando entregó la piel a su madre, un grito de gozo y liberación brotó de su garganta. La mujer se puso su piel convirtiéndose en foca, cargó a su hijo y se fue al mar.

Los vestidos, similares a “la piel” en el cuento, son metáforas de las identidades, de pertenencia, del ser y del reflejo de ese ser.² Hay muchas maneras de vestirse y cuando nos vestimos nos conformamos a una cultura, a unos valores ideológicos e identitarios, sean estos simplemente estar a la moda siguiendo los valores del mercado, expresar la resistencia en contracorriente, o la exclusión y diferenciación frente a un referente establecido.

El mundo social es un mundo de cuerpos vestidos. Nos vestimos de diferentes maneras para diferentes actividades y momentos. En esas actividades actuamos en diferentes roles. Somos maestras, asistentes, médicos, abogadas, administradoras del hogar, hijos, madres, policías, militares, pastores y pastoras asumiendo con nuestros uniformes, vestidos, togas y vestimenta varias identidades. Estas vestimentas nos sujetan a ciertas reglas, estructuras de pensamiento, conductas, tiempos y rituales. A veces, “algunos que quieren ser una otra cosa,” como dicen los zapatistas; se visten de lo que no son para engañar, robar, maltratar y destruir. Hay un dicho que conocemos en

¹ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, “La vuelta a casa: el regreso a sí misma—Piel de foca, piel del alma” en *Mujeres que corren con los lobos* (Barcelona, España: Ediciones B.S.A., 2016), 209-241.

² Joanne Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” in *Real Bodies: A Sociological Construction*, eds. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (London: Palgrave, 2002), 133-134.

Puerto Rico, “La mona, aunque se vista de seda, mona se queda.” Los ropajes pueden engañar y engañarnos, pero hay ropajes interiores que son parte de la piel y que no podemos ocultar porque nos definen al nivel más esencial, más profundo y radical; y emergen, aunque estemos vestidos de esa otra cosa que no somos.

Contenido

Éxodo 28 narra los componentes de la vestimenta sacerdotal y detalles de los materiales y el diseño de esta. El texto refleja tradiciones antiguas del primer templo en el periodo de Salomón, alrededor del siglo 10 AEC, pero combina también aspectos de la tradición del segundo templo luego del exilio cuando ya estaba muy bien establecido el sacerdocio. La vestimenta sacerdotal no solo mostraba la relación de esta persona con la divinidad, sino también la dignidad del rol sacerdotal en virtud de su llamado.

Si usted lleva a cabo una búsqueda bíblica sobre “vestir/ vestido/ vestimenta/ vestidura/ vestíos, etc., encontrará cerca de 326 versículos.” Aparte de los vestidos hechos de cuero, lino, lana o tela de costal; encontramos mención de vestidos de la realeza y de lujo hechos con seda y tejidos con oro. Leemos de la vestimenta militar, de túnicas, capas y mucho más. La biblia también es bien rica en adjudicar otros sentidos para la acción del verbo “vestir” asociado a “estar en cierto estado o existencia.” Encontramos textos en Jeremías, Job e Isaías donde “te vistes” de desolación, de rectitud, de oscuridad, con piel y carne o de gusanos, con “ropas de vergüenza, miedo y aflicción.” En los Salmos, el Señor “te viste” de salvación, y Dios “se viste” de gloria y esplendor.

El Vestido como metáfora de la identidad, también refleja nuestro momento histórico.

En la pérdida nos vestimos de negro, pero también de llanto, duelo y dolor. Nos vestimos de coraje ante las injusticias de personas, gobiernos y sistemas. Hoy, sin embargo, estamos vestidos hermosos, hermosas, elegantes. Vestimos celebración y nuestros corazones se regocijan porque fuimos invitados a estar presentes en esta fiesta.

Sin embargo, *cuando personas, instituciones o el sistema económico-social, político nos visten “a la fuerza,” se nos ejerce violencia. Cuando se nos viste de injusticia, pobreza, rechazo, menos-valía... el vestido se pega como una segunda piel y actuamos acorde a lo que vestimos, sujetándonos a la violencia y ejerciendo violencia porque estamos vestidos de ella.* Cuando permitimos que los sistemas de opresión nos vistan, nos pongan precio y determinen nuestra imagen; estos vestidos impuestos designan una falsa identidad que nos esclaviza. Y a veces no estamos siquiera conscientes del cambio de vestimenta. La mujer de la historia perdió su libertad, porque “alguien” robó su “verdadero vestido - su identidad esencial” y fue “vestida a la fuerza” con otra identidad. Perdió la mirada clara; las fuerzas y las ganas de vivir.

Esto de las identidades es complejo y fluido. Un hombre puede ser excelente pastor, pero pésimo padre. Una mujer puede ser pésima hija, pero extraordinaria maestra. Poseemos y construimos más de una identidad, pero unas priman sobre otras. O, mejor dicho, unas están más profundamente pegadas a la piel. Pero la palabra de vida

nos recuerda que ser seguidores de Jesús, nos define en esa nuestra identidad más profunda y real.

El texto del éxodo me disparó a la imagen de Jesucristo como “sumo sacerdote.” Cuando Pablo nos exhorta en Rom 13:14, “vestíos del Señor Jesucristo,” y “vestíos del nuevo ser humano... creado a imagen y semejanza de Dios,” la invitación es una donde vestarnos de Jesucristo es encontrar una identidad que da vida y sentido a la vida. Pero para vestarnos del nuevo ser humano y responder al llamado del sacerdocio y del servicio, ungidos y consagrados; debemos desvestarnos...

Pablo habla de desvestarnos de todo lo que no es cónsono con la imagen del Creador.

- Desvestarnos de pensamientos derrotistas: el no puedo, no tengo, del dolor interno, el sufrimiento, el pecado, la culpa. (Me quito el birrete)
- Pablo nos invita a despojarnos de esa flojera con la que perdemos los días, los hijos, la pareja, la vida misma, los apegos emocionales enfermizos y las conductas tóxicas. (Me quito la esclavina)
- Despojarnos del consumismo, del individualismo, de la búsqueda de estatus, de poder y de reconocimientos inútiles para la vida en el hoy y el aquí del Reino (Me quito la toga).

El llamado a vestarnos de sacerdotes – en ese sacerdocio santo – es un llamado a vestarnos de Jesucristo. Es vestarnos de profunda compasión (Col 3:12), desde ese sentimiento íntimo, *desde el útero y las entrañas*, que es profético y que conmueve las fibras más profundas de nuestro ser.

En Jesús, Dios se encarnó, se vistió de carne, se vistió de humanidad.

Dios cambió de piel y adquirió una nueva identidad. Estudiosos de la biblia continúan discutiendo si Dios fue o no fue impactado al Jesús hacerse humano. Yo mantengo mi asombro ante el misterio de la encarnación. Porque para mí, Dios en Jesucristo huele a humano; a mujer, a niño, a abuelita. En ese vestirse de humano, Dios quiso acercarse a ti y a mí. Encarnarse es pues *vestirse de carne – convertirse en un otro diferente*. Es ser pueblo con y hacer historia en conjunto con la humanidad. Vestirse con ropas sacerdotales es servicio, misión, compromiso, acción solidaria, resistencia, y testimonio vivo.

¡Desvístete de lo que no es de Dios y vístete de la gloria de Dios, vístete de libertad!

Quitemos esos vestidos que asfixian el poder del Espíritu Santo, y desvían el querer de Dios de bienestar y bien para la humanidad porque a libertad has sido llamado y llamada. Llamados y llamadas a una libertad integral - emocional, física, social, económica, política y religiosa. Desvístete para que podamos construir identidades cónsonas con el Reino.

El Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, esto es lo que ofrece, una educación teológica sólida, que permite estudiar la palabra santa con seriedad, y explorar sus

muchas interpretaciones y dificultades históricas. Somos llamados a pensar y compartir una educación teológica que no solo lucha con el texto, sino que fortalece la fe permitiéndonos identificar estos vestidos que nos deshumanizan. Pienso que el Seminario construye puentes entre el texto y la realidad dura de la vida académica y pastoral, cuando se viste de Jesucristo. El Seminario no solo debe trabajar para construir un mundo más justo, porque la justicia sin amor nos hace hipócritas, duros y cínicos, sino para actuar con integridad, con transparencia y compasión. El pastor, la pastora, la persona y el pueblo que se dejan vestir por el Señor huelen a humanidad.

¡Oiga – si usted está aquí con su pareja, huela a su pareja – huélala! Si usted está solo o sola, huélase. Hmmm, que rico ese olor de bebé, esa camisa de tu pareja, ese perfume de la mujer de tu vida, ese olor a abuelita... pero también ese olor del trabajo digno bien sudado, de especias y cocina simple y atenta... Somos olor fragante cuando estamos vestidos de Jesucristo, de derechos humanos, de respeto a la tierra, de consideración al que es diferente. ¡Cuando nos vestimos de paz, rechazando vestidos que nos impulsan a actuar con falsedades, con miedos, con ventajas injustas, con malicia, con politiquería, olemos a Jesús!

El sacerdote reflejaba la grandeza de Adonai. Vestirnos de humanidad es vestirnos con aquello con lo cual está vestido nuestro Dios – “vestíos de amor, que es el vínculo perfecto.” (Col 3:14) Pero ese vínculo perfecto necesita de un otro, de una otra. Y es que las vestiduras del sacerdote estaban hechas por los “sabios de corazón.” Estos “artesanos y artesanas” (vs 3) con las herramientas de sabiduría, la experiencia y las mentes reflexivas iban a crear el diseño y las vestiduras del sacerdote. La destreza, creatividad e inteligencia de unos artesanos se juntan para sustentar ese llamado divino.

Hermanos y hermanas, la empresa del reino no es solitaria, se hace en comunidad. No sólo los sistemas de opresión nos visten. *También nos visten los talentos y las habilidades de los demás. Se necesita más de uno para “vestir” a un ser humano de gloria y belleza. Se necesita una comunidad para “vestir” un pueblo con madurez, autonomía, autodeterminación y futuro. Se necesitan comunidades de fe.*

Conclusión:

¿Qué vestido tienes puesto hoy? ¿El de un cautivo o cautiva, o el de un seguidor y servidor de Jesucristo?

Se acabó el mundial... y tenemos que esperar 4 años. ¡En Latinoamérica los fanáticos de balompié viven los juegos, se visten, se pintan, se ponen las camisetas de sus equipos! ¡Ellos y ellas, corren, vuelan a comprar las camisetas de sus equipos, se emocionan, participan, invierten! Tienen pasión. Tienen fe y esperan lo mejor de sus equipos. ¡Apasíonate por un espacio de servicio, prepárate para el ministerio!

Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico ahora que celebras tus 95 años, les pregunto; ¿qué identidad vamos a desarrollar? ¿Qué vestidos ayudaremos a poner a nuestros estudiantes? ¿Qué significa ponerse la camiseta del Seminario? Yo tengo el compromiso y la voluntad de dar lo mejor de mí a esta empresa educativa. Porque Dios me llamó, me pongo la camiseta para servir a esta comunidad de fe. Porque veo pasión por el evangelio, excelencia educativa y espacios extraordinarios de crecimiento; te

invito, ponte la camiseta. ¿No te quieres poner la camiseta del Seminario, porque has escuchado qué ahí se pierde la fe y que somos demasiado liberales? Entonces, ponte la camiseta de tu iglesia.

Si algo quiero dejarte en la memoria en esta tarde es, “*Déjate vestir por Jesucristo.*”

Tú que sirves o que anhelas servir al Señor, deja que Dios te vista con otro vestido. Ponte de pie y entrega tu todo al Señor... tus talentos, tus dones, tus dudas, esas identidades deshumanizadas. ¡Entrega el ropaje impuesto que te esclaviza en el altar del Señor! ¡Deja que Dios te vista con otra piel!

Este es tu tiempo... ¡Prepararse para servir, vale la pena!

Que el Señor les bendiga.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2025

“Investing in the Future. President’s Response.” (Jan. 29, 2015)

Rev. Dr. David Vázquez-Levy

(Lutheran, ELCA)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

Acknowledging the twin crises facing the church and higher education, the author calls for courageous action in theological education. Using Jeremiah’s risky real-estate investment in a plot of land in Anathoth amid crisis, Vasquez-Levy sees the opportunity to leverage the legacy and context of the Pacific School of Religion to invest in those whose very marginality has sharpened their ability to innovate. Making the case that there is an extensive need for spiritually rooted leadership in the world, he reframes the financial and enrollment challenges of schools as being less about resources and more about access. He weaves voices from Scripture, history, academy, and culture to ask “Amid all the uncertainty God will continue to raise leaders that can bring about God’s dream and vision for the world. What role will we play? Where will we invest?”

President’s Response

Inaugural Reflection

The Reverend Dr. David Vázquez Levy, D.Min.

President

Pacific School of Religion

January 29, 2015

Jeremiah 32

I got some ocean front property in Arizona.
From my front porch you can see the sea.
I got some ocean front property in Arizona.
If you'll buy that, I'll throw the Golden Gate in free.
- George Straight’s Ocean Front Property

Thank you for the opportunity to join the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) community. Those of you gathered here today represent the depth and beauty of PSR's rich community and partners.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and venture to say that this is the only time a country song has been used at a PSR presidential inauguration. I can't help it. I've got to show my Texas connections! Plus it mentions the Golden Gate Bridge.

Ocean front property in Arizona... A dubious real estate proposal. The housing bubble of 2008 has made us leery of real estate investments. *Planting Christian Seed in Western Soil*, the book that tells the story of PSR's first 100 years, captures vividly the reality of dubious investments, as it questions the wisdom of starting a seminary among 49ers, gold prospectors streaming in from across the country and around the globe. The beginnings of PSR likely would have sounded like a dubious real estate proposal.

Weren't there plenty of good seminaries out East that could churn out pastors to send out here and tame the masses? Yet there was a conviction that theology at its best must be contextual. That it must be connected to deep academic roots and traditions, but interpreted anew, embodied—taking its cue from the Word made flesh. Ocean front property in Arizona indeed.

There is some funny real estate business going on in the reading we heard earlier from Jeremiah. Listen to it again:

At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

The word of God comes to Jeremiah and suggest he buys the equivalent of some ocean front property in Arizona. He is instructed to buy land in a city that is besieged.

As my family and I make the transition here to California, we are getting a more in-depth, first-hand education in Real Estate. We have a front seat to the ways that real estate embodies value, reveals divisions, and is tied to *opportunity*.

You noticed where Jeremiah is, when he gets the proposal, right? Jeremiah is receiving this advice while he is in jail. The official story is that he is in jail for treason to the nation. But in reality he is in jail because unlike the king and those in power, he doesn't have the luxury of pretending that the sky isn't falling. He called out the inequality, injustice, and reliance on the excessive forms of power. Oh my, some things never change...!

Jeremiah has the right of purchase on this choice piece of land in Anathoth, and God is telling him he ought to buy it—no promises of throwing in the Golden Gate in free, though.

We can all think of places where even if given the choice and the resources we probably would not invest. Places torn by uncertainty, transition, violence. Some could argue that given today's realities higher education and the church are two such real estate propositions. Put the two together, and you have seminaries: Church + Higher Ed = Seminary.

Higher education is in the news more than ever before—from Saturday Night Live to the State of the Union Address. Headlines about student debt, unequal access, the failure of education hoped to be the great equalizer and instead is adding to a growing inequality; the challenges brought about by technological change and global competition. Ocean front property indeed!

Since the late 50's and 60's when the majority of mainline denominations formed their current permutations, they have shrunk to about half the size. Yet the number of church buildings has not reduced nearly to the same level. We are, Diana Butler Bass, states in *Christianity after Religion*, in a post-Christendom world. We are in the years following what she terms "the horrible decade":

- Started with the events of 9/11 (2001) and connected religion with extremism (both in the attacks and in many of the responses)
- It was followed by an inability to engage conversation about human sexuality and confront sexual abuse

I've got some ocean front property, indeed...!

Yet, the word of God comes to Jeremiah:

"Buy my field that is at Anathoth,"

And he buys the field!

I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.

Somebody say: stop! Having just bought a house and signed a mountain of papers in the last three weeks, I know exactly what the reading is going on about.

Jeremiah is no blind optimist. In fact, he is mostly known for his Jeremiads, which dominate most of the book that takes his name. Yet there is a shift in his tone just a few chapters before in chapter 29:

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

Indeed, Jeremiah is no idealist... he is keenly aware of the reality. He has been cataloguing it for almost 30 chapters. Yet he also knows a different story. Jeremiah, the master of the prophetic act, the early pioneer in the power of image to communicate, embodies his hope in *real estate* terms:

"For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

He buys the field in Anathoth. He invests in a future he cannot yet see but fully believes in. He acts out of hope just like the Prophet Ezekiel, when asked to assess the investment situation in a desolate valley:

“Mortal, can these bones live?”
Jeremiah and Ezekiel both respond:
“O Sovereign one, you know.”

Sitting at the intersection of faith communities, higher education, and the world, PSR is called to invest in the future. In the midst of all the uncertainty, God will continue to raise leaders that can bring about God’s dream and vision for the world. What role will we play? Where will we invest?

What we do at PSR—at this intersection of higher education and the church—is more needed today than ever. A recent Lumina Foundation study stated that out of 60% of the population who need higher education, only 14% have access. That’s a shocking statistic for many of us who have had access to education and may have even believed it was a given or our right. But it is, in the words of Jonathan Kozol, marked by “savage inequalities.” The need for the kind of education we provide is real.

In contrast to the sense of decline in mainline Christianity, religion continues to be the leading animating force throughout the global south and in emerging communities here in the United States. We need leadership that helps connect the church across its divides, bringing together resources of established communities with the energy and promise of emerging ones. We have incredible capacity. Leaders who view the church differently, through the eyes of the immigrant, the marginalized, for whom the resources and opportunities we have are unimaginable.

As the community of Pacific School of Religion, we have put everything on the table. Being realists as Jeremiah was, we have also dared to name our field in Anathoth.

A vision of theological education for the 21st century: to prepare spiritually-formed, theologically-rooted leaders for social transformation. We have elected to pair our theological depth with spiritual resiliency and decided not just to admire the problem, but transform it!

Michael Crow at his inauguration set the path for Arizona State University saying it would become, “not a place for a few but a force for many.” Refusing to equate “exclusion” with “excellence,” we too must challenge a system often focused on educating only those most resourced and considered the brightest.

We will build our work around three pillars:

- One: Providing strong academic training for leaders of existing and emerging faith communities
- Two: Preparing spiritually rooted leaders to respond to the call for social transformation
- Three: Being a seminary on the move, responding to recent alumna Gale Tompkins-Bischel’s call to “get off holy hill” as the disciples who experienced God on the mountain top

Why PSR? Because in real estate, it is all about location, location, location. We are a place of intersections: literally. Our campus sits on the corner of Scenic, LeConde, and Ridge Road. A complex and beautiful intersection that embodies the Graduate Theological Union and its broadening vision of ecumenism and interfaith engagement. With both historical and promising possibilities with one of the leading public universities in the country. For 150 years, we have had a tradition of boldness. We have experience investing in *daring real estate*. We led the way in preparation of women for

ministry and a broad diversity of leaders in emerging communities. We held early commitment to leadership in ecumenical and interfaith work. We have lived out our commitments through scholarship and activism in response to the Japanese internment camps, the civil rights movement, full inclusion for LGBTQ people, and many others.

We have real, *very real*, estate. In a place that is 20 years ahead of where the country is heading in terms of economy, energy, and demographics, we will engage in a campus transformation: keeping this location while freeing up resources, being better environmental stewards, and creating the kind of community we envision.

Here we can embody the kind of community Alice Walker hinted at in *The Color Purple*, when Baby Shug (played in the movie by Margaret Avery) asks Celie (the main character, played by Whoopi Goldberg):

...Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? [Cause] I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God.

Here we come to share God.

Where is your field in Anathoth? The place where we will choose to invest even as we acknowledge the challenging realities of our world? These are challenging times, but they are not the first, neither will they be the last. This past Tuesday was the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In the context of the atrocities of the Holocaust, Dietrich Bonhoeffer—reflecting on Jeremiah's unlikely real estate investment—wrote:

“There remains for us only the very narrow way, often extremely difficult to find, of living every day as if it were our last, and yet living in faith and responsibility as though there were to be a great future. It is not easy to be brave and keep that spirit alive, but it is imperative.”

Amen.

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology: Your Seminary.” (Aug. 19, 2019)

Rev. Dr. Raúl Gómez-Ruiz, SDS

(Roman Catholic)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

The author reflects on a long-standing experience of leadership service to the school for over 24 years and presents himself as a “dreamer” with a dream of Sacred Heart as a place “full of prestige that enjoys national and international fame for its superb theological, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation, and as a holy place, where the world meets to encounter and extend the reign of God.” The embodiment of this dream will require several efforts: first, the reaffirmation of its “SCJ charism and Dehonian spirituality” in its life and purpose”; second, the clarity to name the expected core ways of being and working of those graduates connected to the spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and human formation aims; third, administrative practices that are collaborative and based on the principle of subsidiarity; fourth, the creation of new administrative structures and educational programs.

Presidential Statement on the Rector’s Day
As the 6th President-Rector
Very Reverend Raúl Gómez-Ruiz, SDS, Ph.D.
President-Rector
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
August 19, 2019

It is a pleasure for me to be here with you today as we engage in our first Rector’s Day together. Before beginning my term on the first of July, I shadowed Fr. Tom in May and June as well as participated in various events and meetings in an attempt to get as detailed a picture as possible of the seminary. As part of this, I have also had individual meetings with most of you. It has all been very good.

As most of you know, I have a long history with Sacred Heart. I was hired in 1988 to establish the Hispanic Studies Program, one of the first of its kind in a seminary. Over the course of 24 years I had the privilege of working with various SCJ rectors, including Fr. Jim Brackin, whom I consider a type of mentor. I also served as a professor of systematic theology, Vice Rector and then Vice President for Academic Affairs before leaving in 2012 to take a job with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). It was short-lived, however, since I was elected Vicar General of my community, the Salvatorians, and went to Rome where I served for a six-year term, ending this past December. At that time, Fr. Ed Kilianski, the SCJ Provincial, invited me to interview for the position of President-Rector.

Actually, the first time I interviewed for this position was 8 years ago, in the fall of 2011. I said then that I was convinced that Sacred Heart was moving toward greatness. Since returning, it's obvious that Sacred Heart is not the same seminary I left in 2012...nor am I the same person. Upon returning, I see just how far Sacred Heart has advanced and is truly on the verge of greatness. I believe this is due not only to the dedication, hard work, and unwavering interest of the administrators, staff, faculty, and board of directors who have endured some difficult times recently, but especially to the new dynamism brought to Sacred Heart by Fr. Tom Knoebel and the improved relationship to the SCJ Provincial, his council, and the Province.

Fr. Tom has inspired the Seminary community with his vision linked to Jeremiah 29:11-12, namely: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm to give you a future with hope..." "A future with hope." I sense this hope coursing through the life of the seminary, especially as many of you wonder who I am and what my leadership will be like.

Well, while Fr. Tom has been a visionary, I am a dreamer. At a gathering of youth in North Macedonia earlier this year, Pope Francis decried the lack of dreaming among the youth of today. So, he admonished them to dream and to dream big! I take my inspiration from his words as well as from the prophet Joel 3:1: "it shall come to pass I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

I am now in my mid-60s, an old man to some, but certainly with big dreams. When I began teaching at Sacred Heart, I was in my mid-30s. Even then I envisioned a bright and glorious future for Sacred Heart. Today, I dream of Sacred Heart as a place of excellent priestly, religious, and ministry formation. It will be a full house of diocesan and religious seminarians and with programs full of students, where bishops and religious superiors will *want* to send their seminarians. And where men and women, lay and religious, will *want* to study. That is because I dream it will be a place full of prestige that enjoys national and international fame for its superb theological, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation and as a holy place where the world meets to encounter and extend the reign of God.

Yes, I am a dreamer, but I also have my feet on the ground. And dreams can only be achieved if we take care of those things that will help us move forward to attain them.

Clearly, one of those things is the continued support and dedication of the SCJs to the future of the seminary. A sign of this is the investment they are making in renovating the building. I thank them for their generosity and vision.

Sacred Heart *is* their seminary. It is an important apostolate of the US Province as well as of their world-wide community as one of only three major Dehonian seminaries in the world. Along with their other apostolates, it adds to the prestige of their presence and charism in the US, making it visible here and around the world. Because of this it is imperative that the SCJ charism and Dehonian spirituality be an integral part of the life and purpose of Sacred Heart.

In fact, it is my ardent hope that I will be succeeded by an SCJ. And this requires a large investment including the right attitude, commitment, preparation, and knowledge of what is required of a major seminary to function and succeed in the US. Also, it is important that Sacred Heart have a connection to the other two SCJ major seminaries so that the Dehonian spirit grows at Sacred Heart.

At the same time, it is very important that SCJs recognize that we, the administration, staff, faculty and board of directors of Sacred Heart are their partners: the spirit of Fr. Dehon and his charism are at work here. Like all charisms, it was a gift to Fr. Dehon, and so through him to the world, as an instrument of God's life and salvation at the service of Church and society. Consequently, I believe because of that Sacred Heart, with its administration, staff, faculty, and board of directors add to the richness of the expression of his charism in the US and beyond.

You and I offer the SCJs our dedication and collaboration in this regard. What I have seen and heard in these last few weeks, particularly in our one-on-one meetings, is just how much you are truly invested in Sacred Heart. You see yourselves as partners in this enterprise. Furthermore, as a result of my six years in Rome, it has become very clear to me that the future of religious congregations involves greater collaboration and sharing of resources in order to move into the future and bring our unique perspective to bear on the life of the Church. I see my appointment as a sign of this. Therefore, Sacred Heart is *not* only an SCJ seminary but it is also my and your seminary. Yes, Sacred Heart is *your* seminary.

So, given this, what do I envision for Sacred Heart?

I see a place where God's reign, God's kingdom, is flourishing. This is linked to the Dehonian value expressed in the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, "may your kingdom come." It's already taken root at Sacred Heart; now it is our duty to contribute to its growth and development. This is done by all involved, not by one person alone.

Therefore, I envision that *everyone* associated with Sacred Heart is responsible for its success in accomplishing what Christ is asking of the seminary and what the Holy Spirit is guiding it to be. I certainly do *not* have all the answers, nor is my vision perfectly clear. Therefore, if I am to make any difference at all it's because I am able to

cooperate with God's work in me and in you: I am incomplete without you... and you are incomplete without me. And together we are incomplete without God.

So, I have a strong sense of what God wants for Sacred Heart regarding our life in the heart of Christ as seen in the four dimensions of formation, in terms of the life of the seminary and in terms of relations with the SCJs and other sponsors, both diocesan and religious. I have a strong sense also of what God wants of Sacred Heart in terms of service to the Church and to the world, and in terms of why I have been chosen to be rector at this time.

Basically, I envision Sacred Heart offering a new model of seminary and theological study that will help the Church move toward a future with fewer priests and more collaborative ministry among diocesans, religious, and laity. For that reason, Sacred Heart is more than an SCJ seminary: it belongs to something larger. It belongs to God's purpose.

With this in mind, the starting point is Spiritual Formation: our relationship with Christ has to be the center of everything to which we aspire, everything we do, and for everything which we hope. There has to be a dialogue, a connection, between what we study in the classroom or what we do in our offices, and what we pray in the chapel. I see this captured in the SCJ expression *In Corde Jesu*, "in the heart of Christ."

One of the ways we can grow in this relationship is to give evidence that we are a prayerful community. Therefore, every class day I ask the entire community present on campus, administrators, faculty and staff, to assemble in the main chapel between 11:45 and 11:50 in preparation for the praying of the Angelus, a very simple but meaningful prayer. After a short period of silence, we will pray this together when the bell strikes at 12:00 and then go to the dining room for lunch. Thank you for your cooperation since it will mean adjusting your work and schedules a bit. I am truly convinced that our praying together will lead to great results.

So, then how do I envision the results of the formation/education of those who come to study or to work or to participate in the programs offered by Sacred Heart?

I see those who study, work, and graduate at Sacred Heart as persons imbued with grace who are becoming more and more Christ-like, so that when they leave Sacred Heart they have come to know Jesus Christ in a deeper way (i.e., intimately). They have come to love Him more intensely so as to follow Him more closely, and, therefore, are capable of making Him known, loved and served better in the context to which they are called to serve. I see them as instruments of Christ's love and salvation, preparing the way for Him in all that we are and do; this requires attention to spirituality in its many forms.

In terms of intellectual formation, Sacred Heart has always been very strong in this area despite criticism that it was watered down for the older vocation. But especially after working for ATS, I see just how demanding our program has been and is, in comparison to so many other Roman Catholic seminaries in particular. Many of our graduates and participants in our programs, have gone on to take on important service

within their dioceses or religious congregations, for example as bishops, chancellors, moderators of the curia, vicars general, major superiors, and formators. We need to make this better known.

Consequently, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as persons who are well-educated to understand the Church's teaching in all of its forms. I envision them as persons capable of applying the Church's teaching using their intelligence born of a deep relationship with Christ. That is, as persons capable of using appropriate critical thinking and deep reflection on what they have learned, including openness to what Christ is revealing to us through, not only the Church, but also the world and the experiences of the people around us. The recent science and religion initiative is an important tool in this regard.

Therefore, I envision our graduates as persons committed to developing their knowledge and understanding with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I see them as persons who have acquired or built on the needed skills in order to be more effective in their service. I see them as persons who are able to dialogue because they know their knowledge is incomplete. I see them as persons who desire to be all that Christ has called them to be. I see them as persons, whose desire to continue learning after they leave Sacred Heart, has been given impetus by what they have learned and experienced at Sacred Heart.

In terms of pastoral formation, experiences have to be well chosen but also the purpose of these experiences has to be clear to those who engage in them. The selection of appropriate guides has to continue to be a priority but also the continuing formation of these guides needs to be offered to the extent possible.

I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people of service, who put the needs of others ahead of their own, who are available to serve and go where the Lord is leading them. I would like them to be people who know that it is all about Jesus and not about themselves or their personal commitments and interests. And therefore, I envision them as persons who care about others and who permit their hearts to be touched by others.

And, in terms of human formation: this is the weakest of the four dimensions, not only at Sacred Heart but in all houses of formation. Sacred Heart has the potential of developing a groundbreaking human formation program. The presence of the SCJ formation program at Sacred Heart is a great step forward in this regard and can help to provide the development of an overall program.

I envision a program that attends not only to celibacy formation but also to such basic things like manners, and to more demanding things like communication skills, conflict resolution, ability to listen and dialogue, community living, valuing the common good and balancing it against individual needs, identification of and respect for appropriate boundaries, fostering humility and goodness, appreciation for and celebration of differences, how to build bridges and tear down walls, fostering healthy relationships and self-esteem, etc. Sacred Heart already has a good foundation for this

in terms of our reputation for hospitality, which is often taken for granted. Hospitality is the ability to put others first rather than oneself.

Therefore, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people who are in touch with their humanity, in a healthy way, who are capable of understanding and responding to the human condition with compassion and with the heart of Christ. I see them as persons who are able to love others because they themselves have been loved. I see them as persons who are able to treat others as they wish to be treated. I see them as persons who are able to create unity in diversity as expressed in the SCJ motto *Cor Unum*, “of one heart.”

In sum, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs, as persons who have received the appropriate type of formation whether they are diocesan, religious or lay so that they can live, move and have their being in Christ (see Acts 17:28).

So, what do I envision for our administration?

Our administrators are very hard working and talented. You have helped Sacred Heart improve its programming and offerings with clear goals, procedures, and desired outcomes for the most part. The Strategic Plan is a good example of this. Yet I also see that communication sometimes falters and so I challenge us all to work on improving that. To help us, I see us working more as a team, modeling good, shared decision-making and putting into practice, as well as possible, the principle of subsidiarity so that decisions are made at the right level in the organization. Even so, though I am not a micromanager, I do like being informed of what is taking place and of the decisions being made. Often what are perceived to be small decisions have the biggest impact.

In addition, in order to facilitate the management needs of the seminary, I envision that the two main internal administrative structures, the Rector’s Cabinet and the President’s Council, will remain in place, but with a little twist.

I have expanded the Rector’s Cabinet membership to include the directors of the Lux Center, IT Services, and the new Marketing Director as well as the chair of the Faculty Council and the new assistant to the rector for sponsor relations. We’ll meet once a week for an hour and a half to help us be more efficient, timely and on point. As we go forward, we will assess how it is going. I also intend to publish the minutes of the Rector’s Cabinet so that all are informed of what we are doing.

And while the Rector’s Cabinet will deal with the concerns of the various departments and programs that comprise the seminary, the President’s Council will have the duty of looking more at the bigger picture. I see the Vice Presidents as those who will help me see the broader issues and by whom and when they should be addressed. I see them as helping me focus on moving the seminary toward greatness, with hope, and remembering that it is all about Jesus and His kingdom among us.

So, what do I envision for our staff?

I see you as partners in all that is Sacred Heart. St. Benedict says that when consulting the community, such as in chapter, we are also to consult the youngest members since they often have insights lost on those with more experience. Often, staff are treated as if they were like the young and had little to contribute other than fulfilling their duties well. But you have wisdom and knowledge that needs to be consulted periodically. I see you as persons who want Sacred Heart to continue to be a vibrant, pleasant, and exciting school with which you are associated, because *you* are also Sacred Heart. So, to foster your contribution, I will organize a general staff meeting every quarter to provide an opportunity for dialogue and better communication among us. Also, as many of you are aware, I have consulted with staff and their supervisors regarding how best to distribute workload equitably. Consequently, some job duties have been reorganized and job titles changed to help respond to our administrative needs as well as for the interests of the persons involved. Thank you for your patience as we continue to tweak this as we go forward.

Then, what do I envision for our faculty?

In general, we have always had a very dedicated and gifted faculty. Even so, I envision you growing as persons of faith who have entered into a deep dialogue between faith and reason. I see you not only as teaching theology well in its various forms, but also as those who *do* theology, contributing to its development. That is, I see you as persons who are reflecting on what you are teaching, open to what is taking place around you in the Church and society, and who share your insights not only in the classroom but beyond, through talks, articles, and books. I'll come back to this in a bit.

In terms of programs, what do I envision?

I have noted a great bubbling up of ideas and initiatives that have developed at Sacred Heart while I was away. This ferment is wonderful, and I hope that it will continue. At the same time, we need to always assess what Sacred Heart is *truly* capable of doing at a given time due to real limits and the need to be well focused on what Christ is asking of us at this time in order to move toward the future.

For Sacred Heart to be able to respond to the changing needs of the Church and the people around us, I envision Sacred Heart continuing to develop the excellent MDiv and academic programs offered here while upholding appropriate academic standards. But also, Sacred Heart needs to continue incorporating various ways of learning and teaching (conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, cohorts, mentoring, study tours, etc.). It should also be creative in this regard. Furthermore, we need to continue seeing priestly formation, whether diocesan or religious, as situated at the heart of the purpose of Sacred Heart.

Because of this, Sacred Heart needs to devise a formation program appropriate for diocesan *and* religious candidates for priestly ministry. Too often both diocesan and religious formation programs do more to infantilize those who go through them than to help them become fully what they are being called to be as priests and/or religious. Our

experience with older vocations should give us insights into how to overcome this, as well as to minimize the tendency towards clericalism. This may mean developing parallel programs, or one in which certain pieces are shared while what is specifically needed for one group or the other, is done in an appropriate manner.

In terms of academics, I envision the continued development of the *Cor Unum* MA program, with its well-rounded cohort model of learning beyond the purely academic. I especially applaud its goal of graduates prepared to heal a fractured world. And Sacred Heart should continue to offer and develop the *Lumen Cordis* MA in theology for those who want or need something slightly different. Also, the new distance-learning *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* MA program with SCJ seminarians from India provides Sacred Heart another avenue for serving the world-wide Church and establishes it in a unique position among seminaries. Hopefully this can be expanded to other SCJ units or other religious communities as well.

Furthermore, I envision the offering of Ecclesiastical Degrees, not only for seminarians who wish to pursue them, but also for clergy, religious, and lay people both within the US and outside of the country. This will also contribute to a higher profile for Sacred Heart and help it be more at the service of the world-wide Church.

I also see the development of a DMin program that responds to actual pastoral and intellectual needs beyond a purely academic setting. Even so, it must be something that is different enough from other programs so that its viable and makes a needed contribution to the ministry of the Church.

In addition to continuing the two Dehon Lectures and the yearly Lux Lecture, I see Sacred Heart needs to offer periodic symposia on timely topics, such as the recent one on Pope Francis. We also have to make sure to open these events to the general public so that Sacred Heart is of greater service to the wider community and Church. This includes opening Sacred Heart to outside religious groups to use spaces for their particular needs as appropriate. We also need to continue offering sabbatical programs, retreats, and speakers.

And as part of this, I see the publication of a journal (either on-line or in print) on a yearly basis, that captures the theological thought and prowess of our faculty so that the greatness of Sacred Heart can be made known to a wider public. It should also address all four dimensions of the formation process taking place at Sacred Heart.

I applaud the great initiative of expanding the ESL program from more than just learning English into the new English and Cultural Studies (ECS) Program. And I want to see the bridge program which is part of this initiative promoted and developed more. Together with the BA/MDIV program with Cardinal Stritch University it offers an appealing alternative to the traditional way of progressing through the educational system still in force.

And of course, I see that the Hispanic Studies program needs to continue and also adapt to the changing reality of the Hispanic presence in the US Church and

beyond. In this program we truly have the possibility of fostering bridges of understanding and mutual respect for those who are often excluded from the power structures within the Church and society. The Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue is also an important element in this effort. In both of these programs the SCJ value of promoting social justice is most evident and they are a good launching pad for this value to have greater influence within Sacred Heart. For that reason, I have established the new Intercultural Preparation for Ministry Department to raise the profile of these three programs.

Finally, I see that Sacred Heart can be a space where the concerns of the Church and society can meet and thus contribute to the furtherance of the reign of God in the world. Indeed, Sacred Heart, under the leadership of Fr. Tom Knoebel, has claimed a future with hope. I see my role as helping Sacred Heart to fulfill this hope and be more and more a place where everyone will see the face of God in us and his life, vibrant and strong—coursing through all those associated with Sacred Heart.

I am convinced that it is He who is moving among us, gently, leading, drawing us on into all that is new...and good...and lovely. For I believe that all He has in mind for us is *good*, that He desires *life* and *not death* for Sacred Heart. The signs of this are already evident. Sacred Heart is truly capable of helping conform the world to the heart of Christ. May we be apt instruments of His life and His salvation. And may Sacred Heart continue to make you proud to be a part of it, for Sacred Heart is *your* seminary.

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“Presidential Priorities” (Oct. 26, 2019)

Dr. Elías Ortega-Aponte

(Unitarian Universalist)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

Grounding his reflections on Meadville Lombard’s faith tradition and legacy, the author speaks to the distinctive contribution of the school in a time of uncertainty. He states that over the 175-year history of the school, “in times of challenge, [Meadville Lombard Theological School] has anchored its hope in future possibilities.” He calls on the community to rise to the challenges and seize the opportunities of this moment. He highlights the intentional connection between theory and practice that marks the school’s curriculum, which gives rise to the core leadership skills which “theological education contributes to our civic lives equipping religious communities, lay members, and religious leaders with a moral vision necessary to justice-making work in the world and lives of service in the public sphere.”

Presidential Priorities

Inaugural Statement

Dr. Elías Ortega-Aponte, Ph.D.

President

Professor of Religion, Ethics, and Leadership

Meadville Lombard Theological School

October 26, 2019

Theological education matters in our lives. The impact of theological education goes beyond the vocational and academic preparation of religious professionals for congregational leadership. Theological education contributes to our civic lives, equipping religious communities, lay members, and religious leaders with a moral vision necessary for justice-making work in the world and lives of service in the public sphere.

It is my honor to serve as President of Meadville Lombard Theological School, a school that dares to chart a visionary path for the future of theological education, re-imagining how we provide an academically rigorous and spiritually grounded education through low residence contextual learning model that better serves the lives of future religious and lay leaders. Our mission grounds our work in the liberal religious values of Unitarian Universalism, and because of this faith tradition, our school continues to be a catalyst for the growth of Unitarian Universalism and beyond. Theological education today has a role to play, to ignite our imaginations with passion for the work that makes the Beloved Community a reality.

Our Mission and what we value commit us and our Unitarian Universalist grounded theological education to openness and to multiple faith belongings. It positions us uniquely to become leaders in theological education in the 21st century, in a pluralistic society that seeks to make meaning of the world in new, creative, and accountable ways. A Theological Education grounded in liberal religious values is most effective when it lives prophetically into what our Unitarian Universalist Movement can offer to the world: to help reshape a broken world through the power of justice, equity, and compassion, in our ways of being faithful to our sacred faith and with responsibility for one another

Who We Are

Meadville Lombard Theological School has a history of preparing leaders to become inspiring change agents. Among our alumni, we have congregational ministers, non-profit leaders, and community organizers advocating for issues like voting rights, gender equity, and justice-system reforms. We have prepared chaplains to serve in multiple contexts like the healthcare industry and the US Armed Forces. Our alumni have drawn from the benefits of an academically rigorous and spiritually grounded education to make a difference in professional settings beyond congregational ministry. Your life, or that of someone you know, may have been touched by a Meadville Lombard Theological School alum and their commitment to lives of integrity, justice, and compassion.

In the current political and social climate of increased vulnerability and risk for the LGBTQI community, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrants, in a time when financial instability, food and housing insecurities are a constant threat, and in the midst of a crisis of care of the body, the mind, and the spirit, Meadville Lombard Theological School's education speaks out with the depth and richness of its justice-seeking tradition. In this moment, as a school, we bring together theory—to assist us in understanding the challenges religious leaders face in the world—and practical tools—to offer a response that puts words and deeds into action for the care of the needy in our communities, whether within and without the boundaries of our worshipping community.

Our Why

We are committed to being partners in the work of fostering Effective Religious Leadership in the 21st Century.

Learning Community: We are deliberate in fostering intentional learning communities for social change and shared leadership. Our low-residency contextual model of education takes the complex lives of adult learners seriously. It also honors the context where religious leaders serve, striving to prepare them with the requisite tools for success in all aspects of congregational life, from pastoral needs to congregational administration. Moreover, it models adaptability to multiple demands of future religious professionals, like employment, caring responsibilities, and ministry. In so doing, the Contextual Model of Education is an alternative that removes barriers that may hinder the pursuit of theological education, embracing a path that nurtures creativity, innovation, and new models of faithful servant leadership in changing times.

Embracing cultural shifts: cultural competency skills and religious literacy is essential for religious leadership in the 21st century. Every graduate of Meadville Lombard develops cultural competency proficiency through our curriculum that centers anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multi-cultural pedagogies. Whether we are working to overcome the polarization of politics in the nation, the emboldening of white supremacist individuals in the public sphere, or coming to terms with realities of demographic changes in which people of color will be the significant majority of the population, our educational model prepares leaders to respond to the fracturing of our society.

Interreligious and ecumenical: connecting, encountering, being in fellowship, and learning from and with our siblings in other faith traditions are key to public shared ministry. They are also key to the ongoing relevance of liberal religion in the public sphere. Meadville Lombard plays a role in revitalizing the place of theological thinking as central to informing our public sphere, as well as thinking partners in addressing pressing issues within our movement. To make this possible, we lean into our mission and work side-by-side with learners from multiple faith traditions and those who claim multi-faith belongings within Unitarian Universalism.

Technological fluency for ministry in a digital world: technology has accelerated the pace of communication and opens opportunities for engagement in our global, multicultural, and multi-religious world. Effective religious leadership today requires technological fluency, and the capacity to adapt to, make critical use of, and educate others in the reflective use of communication technologies as an essential component of religious leadership. At Meadville Lombard, we provide opportunities for our community of learning to explore learning with the use of digital technologies. We also provide opportunities for understanding how technological competency is a key tool for ministry, that facilitates communication, community building, and enriches the religious life of the community.

Hospitality: We understand that our education is not only an academic endeavor but also a spiritual one. Our practices of hospitality within our community of learning and community partners create space for healing and transformation. The

possibility to be transformed and be of service can be sustained with a message that inspires one to hope.

Meadville Lombard Theological School has a long and rich history. For 175 years, this school has mustered the courage required to take risks to live into its mission, in ways that foster excellence in ministerial education as a response to changing times. In times of challenges, it has anchored its hope in future possibilities, drawing the best from its past. It moves forward inspired by the living tradition that is Unitarian Universalism. When the paths may not have been the clearest and uncertainty loomed large over the horizon, we have taken comfort in the promise that when we light a chalice—the symbol of our covenantal faith, the Spirit of Life will guide us forth, beckoning us to live with a greater commitment to build a beloved community shaped by justice, compassion, and equity.

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“FIAT: Not Just the Pope’s Car!” (Sept. 9, 2020)

V. Rev. Dr. Alfredo I. Hernández

(Roman Catholic)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

Reflecting personally on his own vocation story, the author highlights the centrality of God’s invitation and our response to be part of the healing of the world. He connects individual vocation to the vocation of the seminary and the church by exploring the rich use of the phrase “let it be” or “let it be done”—Fiat in Latin—in the New Testament. The gathered community, and through them the broader church, are challenged to be willing, like Mary, to bear Christ to the world, to mirror Jesus’ willingness to embrace the grief of the world, and to pray each day as Jesus taught us, “thy will be done.” Acknowledging the particularly challenging moment marked by pandemic and crisis, a faithful vision emerges “not because we’re so impressive in our faithfulness but because we know God will always be faithful to us.”

FIAT: Not Just the Pope’s Car

Address presented at the Rector’s Conference

Very Reverend Alfredo I. Hernández, Ph.D.

President-Rector

Professor of Systematic Theology

St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary

September 9, 2020

Fiat cars have gotten a lot of coverage in Church media since Pope Francis became Bishop of Rome in 2013. I would like to suggest that the *Fiat* is of supreme importance to all who are seeking to respond to a vocation in the Church and, indeed, to all Christians. This is not only because we are called to live simply — that will be another conference — but because *Fiat* is one of the most important words in our tradition. *Fiat*, “let it be” or “let it be done,” appears thirty-some times in the Neo-Vulgate New Testament, but there are three instances on which I will focus in this Rector’s Conference: all three relate to prayer and all three translate a form of the same Greek

word, *γίνομαι*. We could make this conference about *γίνομαι* but let us stick with the Latin and use *Fiat*.

The first *Fiat*, as you might have guessed, is Mary's, in Luke 1:38: "*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*"¹ ("Let it be done to me according to your word"). This is the key moment of humanity's yes to God and God's yes to us. This is the moment when God depended on one of us to accomplish our salvation. This is the moment of the Word becoming flesh—as we reflected on so much last year.

For many of us, this passage has played some role in our vocation story. I can tell you that for me it was central. After graduate school at the University of Florida, I moved to Easton, Pennsylvania, and was working at Lafayette College as the Assistant Dean for Fraternities and Sororities. A woman I was dating knew I was thinking about the priesthood. She asked me how I was going to figure it out. Was I waiting for a bolt of lightning?

Indeed, I was. My prayer up to that point had been something like: "God, you don't really want me to be a priest, do you?" After that conversation, I pulled out the rosary from my nightstand and tried to pray with an open heart. It was a Thursday, when the Joyful Mysteries used to be assigned. Just like that, as I started to reflect on the Annunciation, it hit me: I needed to say yes with Mary. It was clear as day. And I can tell you that I have been sure since that night that God made the invitation, and I had to respond, "*Fiat*".

But there may be days when the invitation to respond "*Fiat*" with Mary doesn't seem so clear. We might have moments of doubt. Let me suggest that, whether you are just beginning and sometimes struggling to recall exactly how you ended up at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary or if you have already said a definitive *Fiat* in ordination or religious profession, remembering *how* we got here and *who* invited us is important. Remembering this unites us with Mary, who teaches us to keep all these things in our heart [cf. Luke 2:19, 51]) and, with her, to respond *Fiat* not only once for all but also every day.

One more point on this first *Fiat*, Mary's *Fiat*: I remember being at peace with my yes (even into the first couple years of seminary) but really having an attitude that basically said, "if this teenaged girl in Judea can say yes to God's will, how can I not?" It was almost a matter of grinning and bearing it because I *had* to do God's will. Not until III Theology did I realize what Mary did days after the Annunciation: arriving at the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah, she sang the *Magnificat*. Her yes is not a somber yes. Rather, she's singing praise for the great things that God has done for her. Do we?

For those who were here last year, think of Msgr. John Cippel's homily for his 60th Jubilee Mass. He could have very easily thanked God for helping him to be faithful to his promises at ordination. Yet instead, his whole focus was on *God's* faithfulness to

¹ Latin citations from *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio*, Editio Typica Altera (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

him for 60 years. Remember that the first *fiat* in the Bible is in the creation story: “*Fiat lux*,” “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). From the moment of creation, God is giving life to us and is faithful to us. Our yes can be and needs to be a joyful and firm yes (like Mary’s), not because we are so impressive in our faithfulness, but because we know God will always be faithful to us.

The second *Fiat* is much more somber. We hear slightly different versions in Matthew 26:42 (“*Pater mi, si non potest hoc transire, nisi bibam illud, fiat voluntas tua*,” “My Father, if it is not possible that this [cup] pass without my drinking it, your will be done”) and Luke 22:42 (“*Pater, si vis, transfer calicem istum a me; verumtamen non mea voluntas sed tua fiat*,” “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.”) For Jesus, to do his Father’s will was not to do what would make him happy in the short term but to trust enough to say *fiat voluntas tua* or *non mea voluntas sed tua fiat*. To be willing to want not our own will but the Father’s — that is asking a lot!

Think about the last few months. Is it possible that any one of us would not, if we could, will away COVID-19 and all of its devastation? Would we not rather ask the Father to take away “this chalice” and allow us to be with our families or our friends or spending ourselves in ministry rather than seemingly being separated from the world? I remember how many times my predecessor, now-Bishop David Toups, said last spring, “in obedience, peace.” Can we be obedient with Jesus? Can his *Fiat* be our *Fiat*?

Catholic theological anthropology says that we share fully in the life of Christ and that each Christian is “another Christ.” Furthermore, the priest himself acts “in the person of Christ”, in the Church’s liturgical life.² But we as Christians cannot be other Christs—and we as priests cannot credibly act in the person of Christ the Head of the Body—if we are unwilling to share the cross with him.

Of course, we need to remember that Jesus’s divine will was eternally united with the Father’s. But that doesn’t make his yes in Gethsemane and his yes at Calvary any easier. We are not Monotheletists; we don’t believe that Jesus’s human will does not really count. (OK, I just used an unnecessarily big word, but I don’t get to teach Christology this year; you’ll learn more about this heresy there.) That Jesus’ human will was perfectly obedient to his Father’s did not make that obedience easy or simple for him. In his perfect humanity, he is the model for us in accepting and responding to his Father’s will; his *Fiat* is the model for ours.

Remember this: Jesus *Fiat* was the fruit of his experience of the Father’s love for him. The union of wills between Father and Son is a union in love, the love of the Father and the Son, expressed in Jesus’s self-giving love for humanity (cf. John 10:17–18). When we unite our *Fiat* to Jesus’, trusting that what God asks us is the fruit of his infinite love for us, then loving his people becomes for us not a burden but a gift. This awareness will give so much depth to the moments when following the Father’s will is

² Cf. Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #33, accessed October 25, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_1963i204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

challenging, as we can place our mission in the context of God's eternal plan, united to the redeeming action of Christ.

It was not easy for Jesus, and it can be very tough for us. But the *Fiat* of Gethsemane makes clear for us that our sharing in the cross of Christ is not something that we should treat like masochists who really like taking the discipline: "let me put a few more knots on the whip so it'll hurt more." Before the Father, we must be as honest as Jesus. We need to be honest enough to admit that in certain situations our first instinct may be to say that we would rather not: we would rather not go home alone to the rectory when we see husbands leaving the evening Mass with their wives and children, or we would rather not obey our bishop when he moves us from the parish where we are incredibly happy, or we would rather not pray the Liturgy of the Hours on days when we are tired or feel we have done more than enough for God.

Yet we know that, in some mysterious way, accepting this chalice with Jesus is going to allow us to be a part of his work of salvation. Even the image of the chalice speaks to us of the present moment. For us in this house and for Catholics around the world, the pandemic has impacted all of us in the way we currently relate to the Chalice at Mass. We priests are receiving by intinction to keep our brothers safe. The faithful—and even most deacons outside of this house—cannot receive the Precious Blood. To accept this draught of the Chalice of Christ with love and trust unites us with him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

There is one more *Fiat* I would like to mention—one we say at least three times a day whenever we attend Mass, Morning Prayer, and Evening Prayer: "*Fiat voluntas tua*;" "Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). Every day, the Our Father invites us to unite ourselves to Mary and Jesus by making their yeses our own: "Thy will be done."

St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote this about the Our Father: "After this we add: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"; we pray not that God should do his will, but that we may carry out his will.³ How could anyone prevent the Lord from doing what he wills? But in our prayer we ask that God's will be done in us, because the devil throws up obstacles to prevent our mind and our conduct from obeying God in all things. So if his will is to be done in us we have need of his will, that is, his help and protection. No one can be strong by his own strength or secure save by God's mercy and forgiveness."⁴

In looking at evil in the world, whether in the form of naturally caused ills or sorrows that can easily be attributed to sin, we can fall into the temptation of seeing God's will as the explanation for evil. At a moment when the question of theodicy (why God permits evil to occur) is very much present, we need to avoid easy answers. God

³ Cyprian of Carthage, "Treatise 4: On the Lord's Prayer", # 13. Translated by Robert Ernest Wallis. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050704.htm>>.

⁴ From the Office of Readings for Wednesday of the Eleventh Week of Ordinary Time. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume III. (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 367–368.

never wills evil; rather, God's will is the answer to evil. Allowing God's will to work in us is the answer to evil.

In addition to the evil *out there*, evil is something that we also experience *in here*. We know that we each live out our *Fiat* imperfectly. Where we have failed in this yes ("deliver us from evil"), we can always open ourselves even more to God's will expressed in mercy and above all in the mercy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As Saint John Paul II loved to stress, as priests we can only offer God's mercy to others *credibly* if we have received and rejoice in his merciful love ourselves.

In preparing this first Rector's Conference, I can tell you that I have gone back to themes that have been central to my vocation. In a particular way, though, this theme applies to all in formation and to all Christians. If we are to be ministers of Christ and bring his saving love to the world, then—like the Blessed Mother—we need to respond *faithfully* and *joyfully* to the invitation to be (as the statue of the pregnant Mary by the lake says) "also bearers of [her] Son." If we are to be ministers of redemption to a world so much in need of Christ's salvation, then Christ's *Fiat* of Gethsemane must be ours. Together with him may we say, "Thy will be done!"

“New Beginnings; Old Challenges.” (Aug. 28, 2021)

Rev. Dr. Juan R. Mejías Ortiz

(Disciple of Christ, CC)

• VEA LA PÁGINA 76 PARA LEER ESTE DISCURSO EN ESPAÑOL •

Abstract

This pastoral reflection is about an interim president who, after serving for two years, is now inaugurated as acting president. He declares his identity and trajectory as a pastoral leader serving the church and the Seminary. He narrates the ways things have changed to address the institutional and financial crisis during the COVID era. The author reaffirms the history, role, and mission of the seminary as a school for and of the church for the formation of ministers and ministry committed to the liberating power of the Gospel, and as a forum for open dialogue and research. He calls for unity between the Seminary and the Church, and as well as between Christians of different orientations. He discusses the renewal of academic programs, educational technology, and the aspiration for a research center. Finally, the author expresses humbly his collaborative leadership style and requests support in fulfilling a call to become a president-pastor for the Seminary.

New Beginnings; Old Challenges

Words of Acceptance of the Presidency

Reverend Juan Ramón Mejías Ortiz, Ed.D.

Twelfth President

Associate Professor of Practical Theology

Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico

August 28, 2021

Words of Thanks

May the peace and grace of our Father and Mother and of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all today and forever. Thank you for being here at this very important moment for the community of the Evangelical Seminary of Theology, for the sponsoring denominations, and for my family. I thank you very much and remain indebted.

I am also grateful for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Espinosa, and their pastor Rv. Dr. Víctor A. Graulau Müenchow for receiving us this afternoon with such great hospitality. My wife Esmeralda and I are very happy that this activity is occurring in this beautiful place. Almost two decades ago, I had the privilege of serving as interim pastor in this beloved congregation. In fact, you are not only my mother church but were also the first church where I pastored. Today, from the distance of time, I assure you that I pastored you with all my heart and energy. From you I carry in my ministerial knapsack many fond memories. At that time, I was very young. I am sure I had many successes and many failures. The former, please, treasure them as part of the seed that I sowed in this precious garden. The latter, consider forgetting them, out of love. Thank you for being our family and for taking care of my mom during all that time.

Words of Acceptance to the Presidency

Brothers and sisters of the board of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, I accept with great joy and hope this laudable designation. I must confess that I never thought that I would have such a great honor; even less aspired to it. After two years as interim president, I humbly receive this high reward in obedience to the Lord and in happiness and respect for the church in Puerto Rico. I remember that on one occasion, as the Lord ministered to our lives, we received a prophetic Word that I would assume a position at the national level. I never thought that this Word would be fulfilled with the position of Executive President of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. I remember what the Lord required of me at that moment of being ministered: “stay humble”. I confess that I have tried and lived by this word every day, with all possible strength, showing myself before you, my brothers and sisters, as one who serves and not as one who pretends to be served. Today I present myself to you as I am. I think that my affability is my greatest virtue, but at the same time my greatest vulnerability, so at times I get hurt.

You, greatly beloved brothers and sisters of the board, needed a president that would help lead the institution at this darkest hour. You even came to Vega Alta to seek me, and that honors me. I come from a very poor family that forged a way in the Sabana Hoyos neighborhood of Vega Alta. Product of that home, my mom Belén and my uncle Jose “Cheo” are here today, and whom I deeply love. At my mom and dad’s house, my grandparents never taught us how to pray. I do not remember receiving any catechetical instruction, even less doctrine. I also do not recall that they took me to a temple to learn the liberating message of Jesus of Nazareth. God made sure of that through other ways, and through other hands, like sister Migdalia Candelaria, and through my dear Reverend Alejandro Lafontaine, who is here present. Nevertheless, from my dad and mom I learned to root myself with the power of hope that comes from the God of the poor. There, in the neighborhood of Sabana Hoyos, I learned what it means to respect and value the dignity that every human being possesses. They taught me that we are much more than our possessions, titles, and life experiences; even, we are more than our mistakes and wounds. From a poor home, I was led to value what is most sacred in every human being, their dignity. From my childhood, I learned to find the God of life in the faces of the poor, the marginalized, and those who lack justice. Today, I appreciate such

grounding as the deepest gift that I have received in this life. Do not expect that at this stage of my life I will take another path. From this position, I will promulgate respect toward the dignity that every human being possesses as a son and daughter of the most high, without exclusions or vacillations.

The church welcomed me since I was five years old; it loved and educated me. For many years, I was the only one to regularly attend a congregation. Today, I acknowledge that it is difficult for me to see the world through any other lens than the ecclesial one. Through valuable people in the faith like Reverend Esteban González Doble, Pastor Reverend Enid Olivieri, and above all my beloved brother Reverend Justino Pérez Ojeda, the Lord opened the doors so that I could channel my vocation through the pastorate in this beloved denomination. As a pastor here in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Espinosa and then in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Río Arriba Saliente at Manatí—this last one for fifteen years, I walked the halls of life where those with broken hopes dwell. I did pastoral work among the poor. I walked on thorns in order to saw the Word of God. In my much-loved Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Río Arriba Saliente, I did pastoral work among the poor and among the new faces of those who have been socially postponed, without excluding or separating, and even less, labelling or denying God's salvation to the people who see the world from a different perspective as mine. I simply loved and accompanied each person that came to the Church. I did pastoral work for children and youth. Yes, I sang reggaetón with the youth, but they had to sing salsa with me! I was the pastor in the soccer field, the pastor of the pizzas and the movie theatre. Through those activities, I taught the new generations the value of the liberating Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. I pray intensely so that that generation of young people remains in the Lord. Brothers and sisters here present, I share this with you not to bore you with my pastoral trajectory, but to remind you that I have chosen to set aside my academic credentials, which I consider worthless to gain the Gospel, to assume the presidency of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico as a pastor.

Today, I join a long list of men and women who have consecrated their lives to the service of the church, of Puerto Rico, and the world, from the position that I have occupied as interim since June 2019. I am grateful for the contributions made by those who went before me in this work. I value the legacy of Dr. Samuel Pagán, Dr. Sergio Ojeda Cárcamo, and Dr. Doris García Rivera—who was the only woman to occupy this position. To each of them, thank you for your effort and dedication. I also honor the memory of all those presidents who served this honorable institution with fortitude, courage, and sacrifice. The institution that we celebrate today is the product of the seed that was sowed by our past presidents, from Reverend James McAllister—at the turn of the Twentieth century to Reverend Luis Fidel Mercado—at the beginning of the 1990s. I also give thanks to God for them and their ministries, honoring their trajectories and legacies.

New Beginnings; Old Challenges

Therefore, what does this servant have to offer to this institution, with such a rich heritage and such wonderful history, and which is approaching 102 years of fruitful

educational ministry? I will tell you briefly. At the end of the first century, the community of the beloved disciple included the narrative of the disbelief of Thomas among the texts concerning the apparitions of the Resurrected one (See John 20:24-29). This disciple did not believe the news of the appearance of the Master. The text reads “if I do not see in his hands the mark of the nails, and if I do not put my finger in his side, I will never believe it” (John 20:25, RVA 2015). Eight days later, Jesus surprised him. He told him that the resurrection did not erase the marks of the cross, but that it transformed them into life and hope. Although the marks continue as a reminder of the agony and death, the hopelessness and pain of the cross did not prevail; what prevailed is the salvific power of God. This means for all of humanity a new life in Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that the Seminary has its own historical marks and wounds. This afternoon, I come before you with mine. Neither the Seminary nor this servant can erase them or hide them. What we can do is to transform the situations that have produced these marks and wounds into hope. I am convinced that this is a new time of advent. A new time is near when God will revive his work, and the Seminary is a secret place for this to happen. Today, I come with humility so that together with you we can transform the present crisis into new winds of hope.

If you read with attention, you will find that in John 20 there is a wonderful Pentecost different from the one in Acts two. The evangelist writes that Jesus blows over the disciples and tells them “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22 RVA 2015). The followers of Jesus cannot chart new paths discarding the perennial presence of the Spirit of life. In the same way, the Lord today is blowing his sacred Spirit over the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico to give testimony to the resurrected one at a national level. This is not because I came to the position as president, but because of those who have forged the way and have left unerasable prints in this centenarian institution. I am referring to the prophetic voices that have known how to proclaim the Gospel with courage. Among those here present Dr. Ediberto López Rodríguez, Mrs. Lourdes de Jesús Cesáreo, Dr. Guillermo Ramírez Muñoz, and Mrs. Lyda E. Alvarado Cardona, who have already served this institution for 25 years. Together with them are the tens of people who continue to leave prints of love in favor of biblical, theological, and pastoral education that responds assertively to the current challenges and in faithfulness to the word of God. A thousand thank yous!

For almost 102 years, the Seminary has announced, taught, and lived the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and has paid the price for that. Six denominations make up the board of directors: The Baptist Church of Puerto Rico, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Caribbean Synod (ELCA), The United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico, The United Methodist Church of Puerto Rico, and the Presbyterian Synod Borinkén in Puerto Rico (PCUSA). These denominations have entrusted the education of their leaders in the hands of men and women that God has called to this task at the Seminary. Together with these wonderful denominations, seminarians from pentecostal, independent, Roman Catholic, unaffiliated, and from other religious experiences join in to forge a student body. For more than a century we have announced the new life in Jesus Christ. We have marked the route so that our graduands continue to proclaim the gladness of

the Gospel over the entire resplendent greenness of our Antillean lands, the communities in Latin America, and the United States of America. We have given our students the tools for them to announce with vigor the Year of the Lord's Favor, so that they walk along with the poor, the postponed in this world. In the classrooms, we prepare them pastorally and academically so that they can go and preach the good will of God. So that they assume the defense of the victims and make theirs the words of our beloved Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, "The pastor must be where there is suffering, to be a voice for those who do not have voice, to shout that justice may be done to them."

It is for this reason that the Seminary is called "a school of prophets and prophetesses". They are wrong, those who—in the attempt of silencing our voice—accuse us of being a "cemetery for the faith". The slander is disrespectful to this laudable institution and bears little resemblance to the evangelical character. Those who think that way exhibit a spirituality far from the liberating message announced by Jesus of Nazareth.

I will not confront the challenges ahead by myself. I will tell you how I will do it. In the story of Elisha and the Syrian army (See II Kings 6:8-23), when the prophet's servant found himself besieged by the Syrian military forces, he thought he was alone, that there was not going to be a solution to the crisis. The divine response to Elisha's prayer allowed his servant's spiritual eyes to be opened and to see the squadrons of the living God protecting the prophet. I too have a squadron beside me. I invite the faculty to stand. Look at the faculty, they are pastors, some ordained ministers, and others, leaders committed to the cause of the gospel in their respective congregations.

Do you know why you are here in our classrooms? Simply because you have responded to the calling of God and are serving God from the classrooms. Dear faculty, there will always be those who—like Elisha's servant, will cast looks at you to judge you; they will do this without seeing or understanding what God does or wants to do through you. Perhaps the lack of understanding may be the price that one ought to pay for staying in the Gospel with integrity. But I am certain that the Lord will bless you at each moment. There, standing before the church and country, surely you can say with great conviction:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive and sight to the blind, to grant freedom to the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk. 4.18-19, RVA 2015)

Thank you for honoring me today, not as one of your colleagues but as your pastor: "and the Good pastor gives his life for his sheep" even if it is costly (See John 10:11).

Brothers and sisters here present and those who see us through social media, it is true that the Seminary needs the churches, but the churches also need the Seminary. In such a pluralist and complex society, the leadership of the church must be instructed in

the areas of Bible, theology, practical theology, homiletics, education, psychology, sociology, among other disciplines, to develop an effective leadership. God raised the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico in 1919 as a sacred space for this to happen. The Seminary is our fountain from which to drink fresh water and to quench our thirst. The Seminary is of the church and the church is of the Seminary. Church, today with greater strength, the Seminary continues to be Bethel, a “House of God and doorway to heaven!”

We have worked hard to overcome the economic crisis that shook the institution a few years ago. When I arrived as interim president of the Seminary, it was going through a moment when it seemed like the ship was going to capsize. Let me confess to you something publicly. During my first days, I had long nights on which I could not get any sleep, because of the need to find funds to tackle the economic commitment with the employees, and to meet all of the other financial obligations. One of the nights, I prayed desperately to God looking for possible solutions. As an answer, I felt a sweet voice that reminded me with firmness “that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church” (See Mt 16:18). I then was able to sleep. That is how it has been during this period of crisis. God has fulfilled his word. This afternoon, I promise you from the bottom of my heart that I will work with all my strength so that the “gates of Hades do not prevail against this beautiful dream of God”.

In this journey, we have trusted God, and he has been faithful. Finances have been improving thanks to the help of so many people, including the board of directors. Our accreditation with the *Middle States Commission on Higher Education* (MSCHE) has been granted for eight more years. We have reaffirmed our ecclesial credentials with the University Senate of the United Methodist Church and the Committee on Theological Education (COTE) of the Presbyterian Church of the United States. I am grateful for the help that my sister, Dr Palmira Ríos, offered me in this great effort. Even during crisis, we have granted scholarships to students who do not enjoy economic support to cover their studies. Rev. Raúl Santiago, director of finances, will be able to tell you that we have forgiven meritorious debts of some students, and have given offerings to others in personal crisis. We are here to serve the people of God because we are part of the people of God.

We cannot overlook the help offered by the local churches that have blessed us with offerings and contributions. I want to thank, especially, Rev. Ángel Luis Rivera Agosto from Global Ministries (ICDC-UCC) for his continuous accompaniment and collaboration. Today we are on route to stabilize our finances, although I acknowledge that we still need a little more to achieve it. Certainly, God will provide new helps to continue with this educational project.

To accomplish that, we have focused on a curricular re-engineering unique in the history of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. We already have the approval of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada for two postgraduate programs for lay people: A Master of Arts in Biblical and theological studies (39 credits), and a Master of Arts in Christian Formation and Education (40 credits). In addition, we will be presenting to the Board of Postsecondary Institutions of Puerto Rico a master’s degree in Pastoral Counselling in Family, couples and marriage

therapy. This degree will be aligned with the requirements and standards of the Examining Board of Professional Therapists so that, graduands will be able to opt for a license that will certify them as Professional family counsellors. We are hoping to start this program soon. In this project, we want to open a Centre for Counselling and Psychological Support as a service to the community with first-rate professionals. To achieve this, we will be looking for collaborations with sister universities in Puerto Rico.

On the other hand, we have redesigned the Continuing Education Program to include new offerings oriented to church leadership on the island. The program is being enriched with new certifications in the areas of feminist theology (basic and advanced level), church administration and ecclesial programs, inclusion of seniors in communities of faith, and youth ministry, among others. We can add the Certificate in Missions, under the auspices of the Baptist churches. All these in order to offer our pastoral and lay leaders a quality theological education that is responsive to the historic challenges they confront together with the people of God. These degrees join the new sequences of the Master of Arts in Religion and the Doctor of Ministry that begin this semester.

Presently, we finished the first stage of the renovation of the library Juan de Valdés, recognized as the most important library in the Caribbean and one of the most complete in *Our America*. I am working hard to begin building the Centre for Religious Research. This space of investigation will be the new house of the Historical Archives of Protestantism in Puerto Rico, and it will feature the literary production room of Puerto Rican Protestant Theology. We need economic help and support for this Project.

Similarly, we are adapting educational areas with high technology that enables online interactivity and give way to hybrid modality. We are dreaming with the construction of a preaching laboratory and an interactive room for teaching biblical languages. In addition, the incorporation of the platform Populi has allowed us to digitize and integrate all the services in our offices. The submission of documents, including grades on paper, is only a memory. There is more. This summer, three classrooms were fitted with equipment to convert those classrooms into a conference centre, so that students who are at a distance will have the opportunity to continue their studies. These three classrooms are added to the smart classroom already existing. I am grateful for the help of my brother Jesús Rodríguez Cortés in this aspect. Soon we will begin the design of courses to be offered in the modality of distance education.

Unity of the People of God

We are a university, but we are also a Church. Our mission is to educate. It is to discuss social issues contemplating the interdisciplinarity of knowledge. We offer to our students the academic and pastoral tools, so that they succeed in assuming their own theological position in the face of difficulties and challenges confronted by our communities. In the social polarization in which we live, I am often asked to comment on the position of the Seminary about a particular topic. Today, I give you a clear answer the Seminary exists to discuss, study, and investigate themes without excluding any perspective. That is our teaching function. To research and to think the faith are part of

our function as educators. In fact, it is our apostolate. Doctrinal positions or answers about any given issue pertain to each denomination. They will have to assume the position they think their followers must consider.

As I have already mentioned, our board is composed of six denominations that on many occasions converge in their positions, but sometimes they differ. What is important is that whether on one side or the other, we all want to honor the Lord, laboring toward paths of justice, peace, and solidarity. It is for this reason that one of my efforts is directed to promoting, from the Seminary, unity amidst diversity, and respect among the people of God. Stop using the name of God to divide and bias! Today in this space, we are sitting together conservatives, moderates, liberals, and we have greeted each other with great Christian affection. I want to invite you to construct with the Gospel a fraternity of solidarity that counteracts the powers of the culture of indifference. Let us live and practice unity in love and hope. Let us work together and not be separated. The country and our communities of faith demand it.

Final Words

Finally, I present myself to you with my marks, my history, but with my faith and my strength and desire to serve as well. I am sure I will make mistakes. When this happens, give me a hand. On occasions I will take positions different than yours, Jesus did it. When that happens, love me. I will have successes and failures; I will laugh and cry. When this happens, pastor me and pray with me. There will come days when I will want to run and others when I will not want to take even a step. When the latter happens, relieve my burden. Remember, today I come to you because I am convinced that I have heard the Lord saying: “who shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then, an internal fire did not let me resist nor remain quiet. I then responded: “Here I am, send me”. (See Isa. 6:8, RVR 1960). Thus, before you I promise to walk like someone worthy of the calling that I received.

I am grateful for my mother Belén, and for her care to the president of my fan club, my father, who is absent today. I am grateful to my only sister Yasmin, her husband, and my three nephews José, Rafett, and Zabdiel. I love you very much. Together with Esmeralda, you are everything I have. I thank God for you always.

Today, with great honor, I accept the presidency of the main institution of theological education in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Brothers and sisters of the Executive Board, dear faculty, students, and beloved people of God, before the Lord with fear and trembling, I accept to pastor the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico as its new Executive president. May God help me. Amen.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2025

“Nuevos Comienzos, Viejos Desafíos.” (28 de agosto, 2021)

Rev. Dr. Juan R. Mejías Ortíz

(Disciple of Christ, CC)

• SEE PAGE 68 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

Palabras de Aceptación de la Presidencia
Reverendo Juan Ramón Mejías Ortíz, Ed.D.
Décimo Segundo Presidente
Catedrático Asociado en Teología Práctica
Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico
28 de agosto de 2021

Palabras de Agradecimiento

Paz y gracia de Dios Padre y Madre y de nuestro Señor Jesucristo sean con ustedes hoy y por siempre. Gracias por estar aquí en este momento tan importante para la comunidad del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, para las denominaciones auspiciadoras y para mi familia. Les agradezco mucho y quedo en deuda.

También agradezco a la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Espinosa y su pastor Rvdo. Dr. Víctor A. Graulau Müenchow por recibarnos en esta tarde con tanta hospitalidad. Mi esposa Esmeralda y yo estamos muy felices de que esta actividad se esté llevando a cabo en este precioso lugar. Hace casi dos décadas tuve el privilegio de pastorear de manera interina esta amada congregación. De hecho, ustedes no sólo son mi iglesia madre, sino que también fueron la primera congregación que pastoreé. Hoy desde la distancia del tiempo les aseguro que les pastoreé con todo mi corazón y energía. De ustedes llevo guardado en mi mochila ministerial muchos recuerdos gratos. En esa época yo era muy joven. De seguro tuve muchos aciertos y desaciertos. Los primeros, por favor, atesórenlos como parte de la semilla que sembré en este precioso jardín. Los segundos, consideren olvidarlos por amor. Gracias por ser nuestra familia y cuidar de mi mamá durante todo este tiempo.

Palabras de Aceptación de la Presidencia

Hermanas y hermanos de la Junta Directiva del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, acepto con mucha alegría, gozo y esperanza esta loable designación. Les confieso

que nunca pensé que tendría este grandísimo honor y mucho menos aspiré a tenerlo. Después de dos años como presidente interino recibo este alto galardón de forma humilde, en obediencia al Señor y en fidelidad y respeto a la Iglesia en Puerto Rico. Recuerdo que en una ocasión, el Señor ministrando a nuestras vidas nos dio una palabra profética en la que anunciaba que asumiría una posición a nivel nacional. Jamás pensé que esta palabra se cumpliría con la silla del presidente ejecutivo del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Tengo muy presente lo que me pidió el Señor en ese momento de ministración, “¡imantente humilde!”. Les confieso que he intentado cumplir con esta palabra cada día de mi vida con todas las fuerzas posibles, presentándome ante ustedes, mis hermanas y hermanos, como el que sirve y no como el que pretende ser servido. Hoy me presento ante ustedes como soy. Pienso que mi afabilidad es mi mayor virtud, pero a su vez mi fragilidad más visible, y a causa de eso en ocasiones me lastiman.

Ustedes, muy amados hermanos y hermanas de la Junta Directiva necesitaban un presidente o una presidenta que ayudara a dirigir la institución en su noche más oscura. Vinieron hasta Vega Alta para buscarlo y eso me honra. Provengo de una familia pobre que forjó camino desde el barrio Sabana Hoyos en Vega Alta. Producto de ese hogar están hoy aquí mi madre Belén y mi tío José “Cheo”, a quienes amo profundamente. En casa de mamá y papá, mis abuelos, nunca me enseñaron a orar o a rezar. No recuerdo haber recibido alguna enseñanza catequética, mucho menos doctrinal. Tampoco recuerdo que me llevaran a algún templo para aprender del mensaje liberador de Jesús de Nazaret. De eso se encargaría el Señor por otras vías y a través de otras manos como las de la hermana Migdalia Candelaria y a través del muy amado Rvdo. Alejandro Lafontaine, aquí presente. Sin embargo, de papá y mamá aprendí a cimentarme en la fuerza de la esperanza que proviene del Dios de los pobres. Allí en el barrio Sabana Hoyos también aprendí lo que es respetar y valorar la dignidad que posee todo ser humano. Me enseñaron que nosotros y nosotras somos más que nuestras posesiones, titulaciones y experiencias de vida; incluso, somos más que nuestros errores y heridas. Desde un hogar pobre me dirigieron a valorar lo más sagrado que tiene todo ser humano, su dignidad. Desde niño aprendí a encontrarme con el Dios de la vida en los rostros de los pobres, los marginados y los faltos de justicia. Hoy lo aprecié como el regalo más profundo que he recibido en esta vida. No esperen ustedes que a estas alturas de mi vida transite por otra vereda. Desde esta silla promulgaré el respeto hacia la dignidad que posee todo ser humano como hijo e hija del Dios Altísimo, sin exclusiones ni vacilaciones.

La Iglesia me acogió desde los 5 años, me amó y me educó. Por muchos años fui el único en mi casa en asistir con regularidad a una congregación. Hoy reconozco que se me hace difícil mirar el mundo desde otro lente que no sea el eclesial. Por medio de personas valiosas en la fe como el Rvdo. Esteban González Doble, la Pastora Rvda. Enid Olivieri y sobre todo mi amado Rvdo. Justino Pérez Ojeda, el Señor abrió las puertas para que yo pudiera canalizar mi vocación a través del pastado en esta amada denominación. Como pastor aquí en la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Espinosa y luego en la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Río Arriba Saliente en Manatí, esta última por casi 15 años, caminé entre los callejones de la vida en donde se albergan los de las esperanzas rotas. Hice pastoral entre los pobres. Caminé entre

espigas para sembrar la palabra de Dios. En mi muy amada Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Río Arriba Saliente hice una pastoral junto a los pobres y a los nuevos rostros de los postergados, sin exclusión ni separación y muchos menos etiquetando ni negando la salvación de Dios a la gente por mirar el mundo desde un escenario diferente al mío. Simplemente a cada persona que se acercó a la Iglesia le amé y le acompañé. Hice una pastoral de la niñez y la juventud. ¡Sí, canté reggaetón con los jóvenes, pero ellos tuvieron que cantar salsa conmigo! Fui el pastor de la cancha, el pastor de las pizzas y del cine. Entre estas actividades, les enseñé a las nuevas generaciones el valor del Evangelio liberador de Jesús de Nazaret. Oro intensivamente para que esa generación de jóvenes permanezca en el Señor. Hermanos y hermanas aquí presentes, les comparto esto no para aburrirlos con mi trayectoria pastoral sino para recordarles que he preferido guardar mis credenciales académicas, las cuales tengo por nada a fin de ganar al Evangelio, para asumir la presidencia del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico como pastor.

Hoy me uno a una larga lista de hombres y una mujer que han consagrado sus vidas al servicio de la Iglesia, de Puerto Rico y del mundo, desde la silla que ocupo interinamente desde junio de 2019. Agradezco la contribución que hicieron quienes me precedieron en esta labor. Valoro el legado del Dr. Samuel Pagán, el Dr. Sergio Ojeda Cárcamo y la Dra. Doris García Rivera, esta última como la única mujer en ocupar esta posición. ¡A ellos y a ella, gracias por su esfuerzo y dedicación! También honro la memoria de todos aquellos presidentes que sirvieron a esta honorable institución con entereza, valor y sacrificio. La institución que hoy celebramos es producto de la semilla que sembraron nuestros pasados presidentes desde el Rvdo. Dr. James McAllister a principios del siglo XX hasta el Rvdo. Dr. Luis Fidel Mercado a principios de la década de los noventa. También por ellos y sus ministerios doy gracias a Dios honrando sus trayectorias y legados.

Nuevos comienzos; Viejos desafíos

Entonces, ¿qué aporta este servidor a una institución que posee una herencia tan rica y una historia tan hermosa, próxima a cumplir 102 años de ministerio educativo fructífero? Les diré brevemente. A finales del primer siglo la comunidad del Discípulo amado incluyó la narrativa de la incredulidad de Tomás como parte de los textos de apariciones del Resucitado (cf. Jn. 20.24-29). Este discípulo no cree la noticia de la aparición del Maestro. Dice “Si yo no veo en sus manos la marca de los clavos, y si no meto mi dedo en su costado, no creeré jamás” (Jn. 20.25b, RVA2015). Ocho días más tarde Jesús lo sorprende. Le anuncia que la resurrección no borró las marcas de la cruz, sino que las transformó en vida y esperanza. Aunque las marcas siguen como recuerdo de la agonía, y a la muerte, la desesperanza y el dolor de la cruz no reinan; reina el poder salvífico de Dios. Esto significa para toda la humanidad vida nueva en Cristo Jesús.

No hay duda de que el Seminario tiene sus marcas y heridas históricas. En esta tarde yo me presento ante ustedes con las mías. Tanto el Seminario como este servidor no las podemos borrar ni ocultar. Lo que sí podemos hacer es transformar las situaciones que han producido esas marcas y heridas en esperanza. Estoy convencido de que este es un nuevo tiempo de advenimiento. Se aproxima un nuevo tiempo en donde

Dios de seguro avivará su obra y el Seminario es lugar sagrado para que eso ocurra. Hoy vengo en humildad para junto a ustedes transformar la crisis presente en nuevos aires de esperanza.

Si leen con atención encontrarán que en Juan 20 hay un pentecostés hermoso distinto al narrado en Hechos 2. El evangelista escribe que Jesús sopla sobre los discípulos y les dice “reciban el Espíritu Santo” (Jn. 20.22 RVA 2015). Los seguidores de Jesús no pueden trazar nuevas rutas descartando la presencia perenne del espíritu de vida. De igual manera, el señor hoy está soplando su espíritu sagrado sobre el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico para dar testimonio del resucitado en un nuevo escenario nacional. Esto, no debido a que yo haya llegado a la silla de la presidencia, sino por todos aquellos y todas aquellas que han forjado camino y han dejado huellas imborrables en esta institución centenaria. Me refiero a numerosas voces proféticas que han sabido proclamar con valentía el Evangelio. Entre ellos tenemos aquí presentes al Dr. Ediberto López Rodríguez, la Sra. Lourdes De Jesús Cesáreo, al Dr. Guillermo Ramírez Muñoz y a la Sra. Lyda E. Alvarado Cardona quienes llevan sobre 25 años sirviendo a esta institución. Junto a ellos y a ellas, se unen decenas de personas, que siguen marcando huellas de amor en favor de una educación bíblica, teológica y pastoral que responda asertivamente a los desafíos actuales en fidelidad a la palabra de Dios. ¡Mil gracias!

Desde hace casi 102 años el Seminario ha anunciado, enseñado y vivido la verdad del Evangelio de Jesucristo, y ha pagado el precio por ello. Seis denominaciones componen nuestra Junta Directiva: Las Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico, la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Puerto Rico, la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de América Sínodo del Caribe (ELCA), la Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico, la Iglesia Metodista Unida de Puerto Rico y el Sínodo Presbiteriano Borikén en Puerto Rico (PCUSA). Estas denominaciones han confiado la educación de su liderato en manos de hombres y mujeres que Dios ha llamado para esta tarea desde el Seminario. Junto a estas hermosas denominaciones hoy se unen seminaristas pentecostales, independientes, católicos romanos, no afiliados y de otras experiencias religiosas para forjar un solo cuerpo estudiantil. Por más de un siglo hemos anunciado la vida nueva en Cristo Jesús. Hemos marcado la ruta para que nuestros egresados continúen anunciando la alegría del Evangelio por todo el verde resplandor de nuestras tierras antillanas, las comunidades en Latinoamérica y los Estados Unidos de América. Les hemos dado a los estudiantes las herramientas para que anuncien con vigor el año agradable de Dios, para que caminen junto a los pobres y postergados de este mundo. En la sala de clases los preparamos pastoral y académicamente para que vayan y prediquen la buena voluntad de Dios, para que asuman la defensa de las víctimas, y para que hagan suyas las palabras de nuestro querido Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, “El pastor tiene que estar donde está el sufrimiento, para ser voz de los que no tienen voz, para gritar que se haga justicia”.

Es por eso por lo que al Seminario se le llama “escuela de profetas y profetisas”. Se equivocan los que pretendiendo acallar nuestra voz nos acusan de ser “cementerio de la fe”. Esa calumnia es una falta de respeto hacia esta loable institución y poco análogo

con el carácter evangélico. Quienes piensan así desnudan una espiritualidad alejada del mensaje liberador anunciado por Jesús de Nazaret.

Los retos por delante no los enfrentaré solo. Les diré cómo lo haré. En el relato de Eliseo y el ejército sirio (cf. 2 Re. 6.8-23), cuando el criado del profeta se vio sitiado por las fuerzas militares sirias, pensaba que estaba solo, que no habría solución ante la crisis. La respuesta divina a la oración de Eliseo permitió que él abriera sus ojos espirituales para ver los escuadrones del Dios viviente cuidando al profeta. Yo también tengo un escuadrón a mi lado. Invito a la facultad a estar en pie. Miren a nuestra facultad, ellas y ellos son pastoras y pastores, algunos ministros ordenados y otros líderes comprometidos con la causa del Evangelio en sus respectivas congregaciones. ¿Saben por qué están aquí en nuestras aulas? Simplemente porque han respondido al llamado de Dios y están sirviendo a Dios desde las salas de clase. Querida facultad, siempre habrá quienes, como el criado de Eliseo, trazarán mirada para juzgarles; esto sin ver ni entender lo que el Señor hace y quiere hacer por medio de ustedes. Quizás la ausencia de comprensión sea el precio que se debe pagar por mantenerse íntegro al Evangelio. Pero estoy seguro de que el Señor los bendecirá en cada momento. Ahí puestos en pies, y ante la Iglesia y el país, de seguro pueden decir con gran convicción:

El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí, porque me ha ungido para anunciar buenas nuevas a los pobres; me ha enviado para proclamar libertad a los cautivos y vista a los ciegos, para poner en libertad a los oprimidos y para proclamar el año agradable del Señor. (Lc. 4.18-19, RVA 2015)

Gracias por hoy honrarme no como uno de sus colegas sino como su pastor “Y el buen pastor da su vida por sus ovejas” aunque cueste (cf. Jn. 10.11).

Hermanos y hermanas aquí presentes y a quienes nos ven por las redes sociales, es cierto que el Seminario necesita de la Iglesia, pero también lo es que la Iglesia necesita del Seminario. En una sociedad tan pluralista y compleja, el liderato de la Iglesia se tiene que instruir en las áreas de biblia, teología, teología práctica, homilética, educación, psicología, sociología, entre otras disciplinas, para desarrollar un liderazgo efectivo. Dios levantó al Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico en septiembre de 1919 como un lugar sagrado para que esto ocurra. El Seminario es nuestra fuente para beber agua fresca que calma la sed. El Seminario es de la Iglesia y la Iglesia es del Seminario. ¡Iglesia!, hoy con más fuerza el Seminario sigue siendo Betel «Casa de Dios y puerta del Cielo».

Hemos trabajado duro para superar la crisis económica que estremeció a la institución hace unos años. Cuando llegué a la presidencia interina el Seminario estaba viviendo un momento en donde parecía que la nave iba a zozobrar. Déjenme confesarles públicamente algo. En mis primeros días tuve noches largas en las que no podía conciliar el sueño debido a la necesidad de buscar fondos para asumir el compromiso económico con los empleados y cumplir con las demás obligaciones financieras. Una de esas noches oré desesperadamente a Dios en busca de posibles soluciones. Como respuesta sentí una dulce voz que me recordó con firmeza “que las puertas del Hades no prevalecen contra la Iglesia” (cf. Mt 16.18). Entonces, dormí. Así ha sido en este tiempo

de crisis. Dios ha cumplido su palabra. Esta tarde les prometo desde lo más profundo de mi corazón que trabajaré con todas mis fuerzas para que “las puertas del Hades no prevalezcan contra este hermoso sueño de Dios”.

En este caminar hemos confiado en Dios y él ha sido fiel. Las finanzas han ido mejorando, gracias a la ayuda de tanta gente incluyendo nuestra Junta Directiva. Nuestra acreditación con la *Middle States Commission on Higher Education* (MSCHE) ha sido otorgada por ocho años más. Hemos reafirmado nuestras credenciales eclesiales con el Senado Universitario de la Iglesia Metodista Unida y el Comité de Educación Teológica de la Iglesia Presbiteriana de los Estados Unidos (COTE en sus siglas en inglés). Agradezco la ayuda que me brindó mi hermana, la Dra. Palmira Ríos en este gran esfuerzo. Aun en la crisis hemos otorgado becas a los estudiantes que no gozan de ayudas económicas para costear sus estudios. El Rvdo. Raúl Santiago, director de finanzas, les podrá decir que hemos condonado deudas meritorias de algunos estudiantes y hemos hecho ofrendas a otros en crisis personales. Estamos para servir al pueblo de Dios, porque somos parte del pueblo de Dios.

No puedo pasar por alto la ayuda brindada por las iglesias locales que nos han bendecido con sus ofrendas y aportaciones. Quiero agradecer en especial al Rvdo. Ángel Luis Rivera Agosto de los Ministerios Globales (ICDC-UCC) por su continuo acompañamiento y colaboración. Hoy estamos en camino para estabilizar las finanzas, aunque reconozco que todavía nos falta un poco más para lograrlo. De seguro, Dios proveerá nuevas ayudas para así continuar con este gran proyecto educativo.

Para esto nos hemos centrado en una reingeniería curricular única en la historia del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Ya tenemos la aprobación de la Asociación de Escuelas Teológicas en los Estados Unidos y Canadá (ATS, por sus siglas en inglés) para dos nuevos programas de postgrados dirigidas a los laicos: Una Maestría en Artes en Estudios Bíblicos y Teológicos (39 créditos) y una Maestría en Artes en Formación y Educación Cristiana (40 créditos). Además, estaremos presentando ante la Junta de Instituciones Postsecundarias de Puerto Rico (JIP) una Maestría en Consejería Pastoral en Familia, Pareja y Matrimonio, alineada con los requisitos y estándares de la Junta Examinadora de Consejeros Profesionales para que los egresados puedan optar por una licencia que los acredite como consejeros profesionales de familia. Esperamos iniciar este programa prontamente. En este proyecto queremos abrir un Centro de Consejería y Apoyo Psicológico como servicio a la comunidad con profesionales de primera orden. Para esto, buscaremos hacer consorcios con universidades hermanas aquí en Puerto Rico.

Por otro lado, hemos rediseñado el Programa de Educación Continua para incluir nuevos ofrecimientos orientados hacia el liderazgo eclesial en la isla. El programa está siendo enriquecido con certificaciones noveles en las áreas de Teología Feminista (Nivel Básico y Avanzado), Administración de Iglesia y Programas Eclesiales, Inclusión del Adulto Mayor a las comunidades de fe, Ministerio con la Juventud, entre otros, que se unen al Certificado de Misiones auspiciado por las Iglesias Bautistas para ofrecerles a nuestros líderes pastorales y laicales una educación teológica de calidad y responsiva a los desafíos históricos que enfrentan junto al pueblo de Dios. Estos grados se unen a los

nuevos secuenciales de la Maestría en Artes en Religión y el Doctorado en Ministerio que inician este semestre.

Actualmente culminamos la primera etapa para la remodelación de la Biblioteca Juan de Valdés, reconocida como la biblioteca teológica más importante del Caribe y una de las más completas de *Nuestra América*. Estoy trabajando con ahínco para comenzar a construir el Centro de Investigación Religioso. Este espacio de investigación será la nueva casa del archivo Histórico del Protestantismo en Puerto Rico y contará con la Sala de la producción literaria de la Teología Protestante Puertorriqueña. Necesitamos su ayuda y respaldo económico para ese proyecto.

Asimismo, estamos adecuando las áreas educativas con alta tecnología que viabilizan la interactividad dando paso a la modalidad híbrida. Soñamos con la construcción de un laboratorio de predicación y un salón interactivo para la enseñanza de los idiomas bíblicos. Por otra parte, la incorporación de la plataforma Populi nos ha permitido digitalizar e integrar todos los servicios de nuestras oficinas. Ya la entrega de documentos, incluyendo las notas en papel, es solo un recuerdo. Hay más. En este verano se arreglaron tres salones con equipos para convertir la sala de clases en un centro de conferencia, así los estudiantes que están a la distancia tendrán la oportunidad de continuar sus estudios. Estos tres salones se unen al salón inteligente ya existente. Agradezco la ayuda de mi hermano Jesús Rodríguez Cortés en este aspecto. Pronto nos moveremos al inicio del diseño de cursos para ser ofrecidos bajo la modalidad de Educación a Distancia.

Unidad del Pueblo de Dios

Somos una universidad, pero también somos iglesia. Nuestra misión es educar. Discutir los asuntos sociales contemplando la interdisciplinariedad del conocimiento. Nosotros les brindamos al estudiante las herramientas académicas y pastorales para que logren asumir su propia postura teológica ante los retos y desafíos que enfrentan nuestras comunidades. En la polarización social que vivimos, en ocasiones me piden que diga cuál es la postura del Seminario sobre un tema en particular. Hoy les doy una respuesta diáfana, el Seminario está para discutir, estudiar, investigar temas sin excluir ningún entendimiento. Esa es nuestra función docente. Investigar y pensar la fe son parte de nuestras funciones. Es más, ese es nuestro apostolado. Las posturas o respuestas doctrinales sobre un asunto determinado es competencia de cada denominación. A ellas les toca asumir las posturas que crean que sus feligreses deben considerar.

Como les he mencionado, nuestra junta está compuesta por seis denominaciones que en muchas ocasiones convergen en posturas pero que en ocasiones difieren. Lo importante es que de un lado o del otro, todos y todas queremos honrar al Señor, labrando caminos de justicia, paz y solidaridad. Es por eso que uno de mis esfuerzos va dirigido a promover desde el Seminario la unidad en medio de la diversidad y el respeto entre el pueblo de Dios. ¡Basta ya de usar el nombre de Dios para dividir y sesgar! Hoy en este espacio estamos sentados juntos conservadores, moderados, liberales, y nos hemos saludado con gran afectividad cristiana. Les invito a construir desde el Evangelio

la fraternidad solidaria que contrarresta los poderes de la cultura de la indiferencia. Vivamos y practiquemos la unidad en el amor y la esperanza. Trabajemos juntos, no nos separemos. El país y nuestras comunidades de fe lo exigen.

Palabras Finales

Finalmente, me presento ante ustedes con mis marcas, con mi historia, pero con mi fe y con mis fuerzas y deseo de servir. De seguro, me equivocaré. Cuando eso ocurra, tiéndanme la mano. En ocasiones asumiré posturas distintas a la suyas, Jesús lo hizo. Cuando eso ocurra, ámenme. Tendré éxitos y fracasos, reír y lloraré. Cuando eso ocurra, pastoreenme y oren conmigo. Vendrán días que querré correr y otros que ni siquiera desearé dar un paso. Cuando esto último tenga lugar, alivien mi carga. Recuerden, hoy vengo ante ustedes porque estoy convencido de que he oído al Señor que decía: “¿A quién enviaré, y quién irá por nosotros?” Entonces un fuego interior no me dejó resistir ni quedarme callado. “Entonces respondí yo: Heme aquí, envíame a mí.” (cf. Is. 6.8, RVR 1960). Así que ante ustedes prometo andar como es digno del llamamiento que recibí.

Agradezco a mi madre Belén sus cuidados, al presidente de mi fan club mi padre hoy ausente, a mi única hermana Yazmin, su esposo y a mis tres sobrinos José, Rafett y Zabdiel. Los amo mucho, junto a Esmeralda son lo único que tengo. Doy gracias a Dios por ustedes siempre.

Hoy con gran honor acepto la presidencia de la principal institución para la enseñanza teológica en Puerto Rico y el Caribe. Hermanos y hermanas de la Junta Directiva, querida facultad, queridos estudiantes, amado Pueblo de Dios ante el Señor acepto con temor y temblor pastorear al Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico como su nuevo presidente ejecutivo. Así me ayude Dios. Amén.

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“A New Pentecost.” (Aug. 31, 2021)

Rev. Dr. Edgardo Colón-Emeric

(Methodist, UMC)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

In this sermon, the author calls Duke Divinity School to be open and ready for a new Pentecost that is “pressing, possible, and promised.” Using the biblical texts of Babel and Pentecost, the author explores imaginatively a contrast between the world according to Babel and according to Pentecost. Ultimately, the author longs “for our academic and vocational formation to be known for cultivating a Pentecost vision of God, the church, and the world.” Can there be a new Pentecost at Duke Divinity School? It is possible if all in the school commit to affirming the Spirit’s winds for a) affirming the goodness of human diversities, b) connecting learning and scholarship to the lives and struggles of people in the many peripheries and margins in the world, and c) raising our students high as the “sails” where the Spirit blows during this age of COVID pandemic.

Installation Sermon as the
16th Dean of Duke Divinity School
The Reverend Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric, Ph.D.
Dean of Duke Divinity School and
Irene and William McCutchen Professor of Reconciliation and Theology
Duke Divinity School
August 31, 2021

Veni creator Spiritus, ven Espíritu creador, come creator Spirit... As we gather for this 95th Divinity School Convocation, I must begin with words of gratitude. To President Price and Provost Kornbluth for entrusting me with the direction of this school. To Bill and Renie McCutchen for supporting my work with the Center for Reconciliation. To my colleagues in the Divinity School administration, faculty, and staff; you make working in this place a means of grace. To our students, thank you for

answering God's call and coming here. You are signs of hope to the school, the church, and me. I am particularly appreciative for those who are participating in this convocation service from a distance, for our students in the hybrid programs, y de mis estudiantes, hermanos y hermanas en América Latina. Cristo vive. De verdad, vive. To my family and friends, thank you for making the journey and being here. Finally, I give God thanks for my wife, Cathleen. It is because of her that I joined the Methodist Church, heard the call to ministry, and came to Duke University.

We begin a new academic year at a very dense moment in history. The masks tell a part of our tale. We are still in the age of pandemic, in the seemingly unending time between pre-COVID and post-COVID. How much has changed since we last met in this chapel for an opening convocation—births and deaths, weddings and divorces, arrivals and departures! Yesterday, I was in this chapel for a memorial service for one of our recent grads, Miriam Cho. Dr. Jerusha Neal delivered a sermon based on a message preached by Miriam from a text by the prophet Joel, a portion of the text preached by Peter in Acts on the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is a day of locusts and green shoots. What an apt description for our day. A day of endings and beginnings, a day when the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan ends, leaving behind broken bodies, hearts, and dreams. In particular, I carry in my heart today the veterans among us who are wondering what it was all for and the Afghan people wondering what comes next.

It is the density of these historical realities that I will seek to illumine with the words of scripture. This morning, I want us to consider this basic fact: our service of convocation and installation—our academic year—are happening in the season after Pentecost, but the Holy Spirit is not finished with us. A new Pentecost is pressing, possible, and promised.

Today's liturgical colors are red because, without Pentecost, there would be no convocation. We would not be able to sing, "Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit, into every troubled breast"¹ and acknowledge the burdens we bring with us. We would not be able to pray "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit,"² and thus we would be unable to magnify God's holy name. Without Pentecost, we would not be able to profess that we "believe in Jesus Christ...our Lord,"³ because no one can say Jesus Christ is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Without Pentecost, we would leave this place without the blessing of the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Without Pentecost, we would only know the world according to Babel. Many have noted the similarities between the story of Babel and the day of Pentecost. The stories share common elements: a great diversity of nations, a multiplicity of languages. Often Pentecost is described as the reversal of Babel, but this identification is not quite on

¹ Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), hymn 384.

² Or "by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." From "A Service of Word and Table I," in *The Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 33.

³ As found in the Apostles' Creed, e.g., in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 34, and *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 881-882.

point. The Holy Spirit does not erase linguistic diversity. The Holy Spirit brought understanding into a confused world.

In the world according to Babel, language is a tool of empire and domination. Examples abound. This is the world where Franco attempted to consolidate his power over Spain by mandating that only one language be spoken, “Spanish,” and making the speaking of Catalán, Galician, or Basque a criminal offense. Micah understood the world according to Babel. It is a world where words are weaponized; a world where ideas are sharpened to cut people down. We know this world. To our misfortune, it is a world familiar to those who follow Capitol Hill politics and news media punditry. To our shame, it is a reality present in the academy and in the church. This is the world in which the psalmist cries, “Confuse, O Lord, confound their speech; for I see violence and strife in the city” (Ps 55:9, NRSV). Micah dreamed of a different world. He dreamed of a world where swords and spears are decommissioned; a world where school curriculums help people unlearn war, where schools offer certificates in social justice sowing, where what is cutting-edge is used to break hardened ground in order to plant for a better future, where the symphony of doctrine unites rather than divides. Micah dreamed of a world beyond Babel.

I recently learned that the Divinity School worked together with the Pratt School of Engineering and the Kenan Center for Ethics in developing an initiative that promoted thinking around meaning, purpose, and ethics in engineering. I cannot help thinking, “What if my engineering school at Cornell had had a program like this?” I might still be an engineer. Because though I had grown up dreaming of being an aerospace engineer, the military applications of the technology during the Cold War concerned me, and my program did not make room for discussions of moral ends. In the Pratt Purposefully Duke Initiative, I sense a longing for a world arranged in a logic different than that of Babel. A new Pentecost is pressing.

In the world according to Babel, cultures and languages are ranked. Some cultures and languages are deemed more scientific than others. Some accents are considered more educated than others. In the time of the Apostles, the Galilean accent was distinctive. Peter is recognized as a follower of Jesus because of his Galilean accent. According to theologian Virgilio Elizondo, people from Galilee slurred hard consonant sounds in ways that made them sound provincial and uneducated.⁴ I am not sure if this is true, but scripture tells us that reputable Israelites like Nathanael had a very low opinion for what good could come out of the borderlands of Galilee.

Pentecost proved him wrong. On that day, the disciples of Jesus—all one-hundred-and-twenty of them, I believe—were gathered together in one place, *en conjunto*, waiting on God’s promises to be fulfilled. Before Pentecost, they were Galileans. After Pentecost, even as they received the gift of languages beyond their level of education, they were still recognizably Galileans. What does this mean? It means that the Spirit being poured on all flesh does not wash away particularity. The Holy Spirit purifies speech, but it does not burn off accents.

⁴ Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 52.

Students, you came to Duke Divinity because you know that the world according to Babel is not God's preferred world. You came here to learn how to proclaim the *magnalia Dei* in new theological languages. We want you to study Hebrew and Greek. We want you to learn new words like *homousios*. We want you to learn new practices: biblical exegesis, preaching, worship leadership, pastoral care. We do not want you to lose your accent. Do not be afraid of speaking with your accent. Do not be afraid of learning from new accents. Do not be afraid of sitting under your own fig tree and drinking from your own wells, even as you discover new wells and find new shady trees in the traditions of our mothers and fathers in the faith, and our sisters and brothers around the world. The world according to Babel needs to be turned upside down. A new Pentecost is pressing.

A new Pentecost is possible. In Peter's Pentecost sermon, he interprets the events of the day by appealing to Joel's prophecy. The day had come when the Spirit would be poured on all flesh and young and old would see visions and dream dreams. As the story of the Book of Acts unfolds, the prophesying and dreaming continues. There is Peter on the rooftop of the house of Simon the Tanner receiving a vision of the goodness of the diversity of creation. There are the young women, the four daughters of Philip, who had the gift of prophecy. I have news for you. These gifts are not ones that are taught at the Divinity School. We do not control the Spirit. What we can do is teach you where the Spirit has blown before and which places tend to be windy even today, so that you can be with the Spirit, to ride the breath of the third person of the Trinity. In other words, we can teach you a Pentecost view of the world.

Over the summer, as I was preparing to begin my service as Dean, I came across a story of John Henry Newman dining with a certain dean whose name I have already forgotten. Newman found the experience to be pleasant but frustrating. The dean was affable and cultured in his own way but lacked any firm and founded convictions. Instead of having considered views on important things, he had settled on what Newman called a superficial "viewiness." The result was that both the dean and his institution were like a ship without a rudder. I read this as a cautionary tale. I do not want to be known for promoting viewiness or truthiness. I do not want the Divinity School being known in this way, either. Instead, I long for our academic and vocational formation to be known for cultivating a Pentecost vision of God, the church, and the world. We form this vision by engaging in practices like close reading and analytical thinking. Basically, we are trying to help you develop habits of slowing down and going deep. However, it is not only the practices that contribute to developing a Pentecost vision. What and how you read and write matters. Where and with whom you read and write matters, too.

Latin American theologians contrast theology done from the balcony (teología del balcón) with theology done from the way (teología del camino). The contrast echoes the experience of religious processions in Latin America. Some people view the unfolding drama from the balconies of their residence. Others experience it from the midst of the procession. Theology from the balcony is theology from above. The theologians are spectators. They have an excellent view of all that happens below, but they are not in the

thick of the action. Theology from the way is different. It is practiced from street level. The theologian of the way is a pilgrim who is sometimes swept up by the movement of the people. The Divinity School is a balcony, but a new Pentecost is possible because this balcony has a staircase going down to the street.

Fred Herzog, who taught theology at Duke many years ago, made an observation that still haunts me. After reading a book mapping the currents of theological education, he noted that the term “poor” did not appear in the book once. This roadmap bypassed whole communities as insignificant to the story. By contrast, Herzog said, the peripheries and margins are the cardinal points for God’s action in the world today. A new Pentecost is possible because the poor and the oppressed are still with us and God still hears their cry. The balconies and penthouses need to be changed, the streets and alleyways need to be transformed, but trickle-down academics will not work. The jet stream of the Holy Spirit runs through Galilee and the borderlands of today.

As many of you know, I have been involved with a program that trains pastors in Central America for more than a decade. One of our practices is to pack the whole teaching and student body into buses and vans for a field teaching experience. On one occasion, we moved the school to a remote border crossing point between El Salvador and Guatemala. The sight of around sixty people disembarking at this place was unusual enough to attract the attention of the guards. We explained that we were there to teach a class in the public park at the border. The guards allowed it, but to the disappointment of some of our students, they made it clear that no one could cross the border bridge without the proper documentation. Moreover, the guards, armed with automatic rifles, surrounded our group and kept a close eye on us while the class transpired. The topic for our class was eschatology, the last things. We began by singing the hymn sung earlier in the service, “Tenemos esperanza.” As we discussed the imagery in the vision of Micah, the border guards listened intently; some nodded approvingly. I am not sure when it happened, but by the time our class ended, the guards had opened the border and allowed free movement back and forth. The bridge connecting the two countries became a selfie spot. Both sides of the border became a place for fiesta. A new Pentecost is possible!

Can this happen at a Divinity School at an R1 university? I will admit that Pentecosts are not common at modern universities. It is hard to imagine the Azusa Street Revival, which sparked the modern Pentecostal movement, starting at Cornell, my alma mater. “Far above Cayuga’s waters with its tongues of flame” does not quite work. Even so, a new Pentecost is pressing and possible. A new Pentecost started at the University of Oxford in the eighteenth century, when a few young students rediscovered the power of the Bible, the richness of early church practices, and the importance of visiting prisons. The result was the beginning of the Methodist movement. A new Pentecost started at the University of Central America in San Salvador when the leadership opened the windows and doors of their institution to the winds of the Spirit blowing through Latin America carrying the cries of the poor. The result was the martyrdom of key administrators, teachers, and staff. In the third century, Tertullian

spoke of the Holy Spirit as the “coach of the martyrs.”⁵ In the twentieth century, the Salvadoran martyrs proved this to be true.

A new Pentecost is possible at the Divinity School of Duke University. What does this mean? It means opening our minds and hearts to a new visitation of the Spirit. It means revisiting the Pentecost Window at the top of the Westbrook Building in the Divinity School and seeing our community in the image of the dove, the flames, and the people. Faculty and staff, it can happen. We only need to raise our students high. They are the sails that fill up when the wind of the Spirit blows from the places of marginality near and far. Students, we need you to stretch, to catch as much wind as you can. A new Pentecost is pressing; it is possible; it is promised. We may be still living with COVID in a world according to Babel, but a new Pentecost is promised, and the end is the day of the great fiesta.

I began with an invocation of the Holy Spirit from the hymn, “Veni Creator Spiritus.” In some traditions, this hymn is often sung in ordinations and at the opening of special church gatherings. For me, this prayer gives voice to the hope of the people of God: a new Pentecost is pressing, possible, and promised.

⁵ Tertullian, *To the Martyrs*, 3.3.

"Treasures Old and New: The Danger of Hell for Theologians." (Sept. 9, 2021)

Rev. Dr. Brian Lugioyo

(Methodist, FMC)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

The author engages with a rich set of parables and images to beautifully articulate the critical importance and responsibility of theological education. Recognizing the power of words to shape community and imagination, he calls on his colleagues and community to take seriously their “scribal” task of balancing the new and the old. He states that “the great temptation of theological education is to focus on one or the other: the old at the cost of the new, or the new at the cost of the old.” Challenging the community to move beyond the binary of nostalgia and novelty, he articulates the work of theological educators at a time of great disruption as being scribes of the kingdom who take the conjunction “and” seriously drawing on the wisdom of tradition and embracing the possibilities of change.

Installation Sermon

Dr. Brian Lugioyo, Ph.D.

Dean of the School of Theology and Seattle Pacific Seminary at

Seattle Pacific University

September 9, 2021

“‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been discipled for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’ When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.”

(Matthew 13:51-53, NRSV)

Scribes are curators of words. They are teachers. They love language and the ways in which turns of phrases might awaken wonder. Our roles as theology faculty aligns us with this scribal work. Most of our work is with words. We read them, copy them, speak them, write them. We are scribes. And as scribes we have chosen, perhaps, the most dangerous of professions.

Let me explain.

I've never gone through an entire theology or ethics class without a student wanting me to elaborate on hell. Usually because some part of my lecture felt like I was opening a door too wide, or lectures were challenging previously held perspectives. And so someone will inevitably ask me, "What is your view of hell?"

I answer that I don't like talking about hell because when I do I preach to a mirror. I tell them that hell is a significant conversation piece for Jesus, and that he seems to direct those conversations on hell toward those who are meant to curate and teach the faith to others. Jesus has a special place in mind for some of the pharisees and scribes of his day, and today.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matthew 23:29-33 NRSV).

Woe to you scribes! Woe to us. How can we escape being sentenced to hell? That is as good a question as any for a new dean of a school of theology to ponder.¹

In Matthew 13, Jesus asks the disciples the question "Do you understand this?" Within the wider context of that passage, he is asking: Do you understand these parables of the kingdom? The kingdom's costliness and hiddenness? Do you understand this old word in new contexts about seeds that grow with weeds, about yeast that permeates the whole dough? The word of the kingdom is treasure hidden in a field; it is the pearl of great price. It is treasure and brings great joy. Do we understand this? Jesus asks us: do we understand the costliness, the value, the joy of this treasure of the word.

Can we, with those disciples whom Jesus was teaching then, answer now, "Yes." Do we understand this? Jesus is asking us if we understand what he is teaching. To these disciples and to us, Jesus desires to train us in the scribal work of holding and sharing the old and the new of the kingdom of heaven. "Therefore, every scribe who has

¹ The following biblical and theological reflections were informed by the works of Chris Keith and Walter Brueggemann. See Chris Keith, *Jesus Against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014) and Walter Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity: Biblical Provocations on Race, Religion, Climate, and the Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).

been disciplined for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt. 13:52 NRSV). Scribes disciplined for the kingdom, that is who we are called to be.

Yet it is as scribes that we are ever on the threshold of judgment. Scribal work is dangerous work; which is why paying attention to Jesus’ words in Matthew 13 is so important for theological educators. The words of the kingdom are both new and old. But the great temptation of theological education is to focus on one or the other: the old at the cost of the new, or the new at the cost of the old.

Many of the pharisees and scribes in conversation with Jesus, then and today, only hold the old words. That is to say that we remember the tradition and only the tradition. Ever since the days of Ezra there has been a longing to *make the temple great again*. A kind of religious MAGA that sentimentalizes the past and fears the new. And we can understand this, because the pressures of the empires of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and America often see Judeo-Christian identity as a profound inconvenience. And so, an act of resistance is to grip firmly the old words so that we can maintain our identity in the midst of disequilibrium; but here the temptation we find is nostalgia. It is not living in the present, but asking ourselves and others to move where they cannot go, that is, the past. So scribes in the Roman Mediterranean and scribes in America can be tempted to only bring out the treasures of old. The temptation is nostalgia and the consequence is a kind of hypocrisy.

Scribal hypocrisy. This is a real thing. It was the single-minded devotion to the God of the past, which encouraged the scribes and pharisees to kill the Son of God in the present. Jesus was killed on exegetical grounds. Exegesis will kill if it is not lived in new contexts. And thus, Jesus was killed by scribes who were devoted to the old word, but failed to see the incarnation of that word in front of them in a new day. And Jesus doesn’t mince his words or perspective on these types of scribes, *they only can honor the prophets because they are dead*. They cannot recognize the prophet in front of them.

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43). In exile, the Israelites are enthralled with a nostalgia for the Exodus, the old ways of Jerusalem. Walter Brueggemann says that “The prophet’s listeners were so preoccupied with the old exodus memory that they engaged in nostalgia about that miraculous event that had given them identity as God’s chosen people. They were apparently so fixed on the old exodus that they were unmoved by the poetic imaginative testimony about a new contemporary deliverance. ... What a strange thing to say to a displaced people: Do not remember! Do not cling to that past. Because if you cling excessively to the past, you will miss the newness being enacted before your very eyes.”²

Isaiah is pointing the exiles to the new word, *it springs forth, do you not perceive it?* Do you understand this? In the midst of their diaspora existence, God says do not

² Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity*, 267.

overly remember too fondly the past such that you fail to live into the new. Be careful! If all our words point back to the old, in a nostalgic fashion, we won't be able to live what we speak. Such a gaze for Christians is misguided, and the beginning of hypocrisy, because it forgets that Christ is coming back not for the first century church (not for Acts chapter 2), but the last century church—the church that knows how to hold the old with the new on the last day. It is also shameful and hypocritical because it diminishes the resurrection and only points to a historical Jesus. Following a historical Jesus is always, always easier than following a living one.

Woe to us scribes. The first temptation of the scribe is to bring out only the old, it is a form of nostalgia that often leads to hypocrisy.

Just as there were scribes who only held to the old, the other danger is the scribe who only has new treasures to share and display. For this scribe the temptation is novelty that results in forgetfulness.³

Today there is a never-ending supply of novel words. The fascination of progressive novelty that leaves the old behind is found everywhere. In society, in the churches, but especially in the universities. We are part of a tradition that has questioned all authorities and thus we have become highly skeptical of the past, and in so doing have sought after new, often rootless ways.

In Psalm 78, we are implored to set our hope in God and not forget the works of God. Moses knew from the very beginning that there will be a temptation to place our trust in other places. In his speech in Deuteronomy 8, he warns the Israelites of the way of self-sufficiency in which they will begin to think that they can control the kingdom through their own efforts, having no need of God and thus forgetting God's works. Again, here in the Psalm, God's people are being asked to remember, because they, like their ancestors of old, suffer from amnesia.⁴ They have forgotten the old word and have become enticed only by the new and progressive ones.

Both the Psalmist and Moses warn us of how the new situation, the new object of trust and hope can lead to forgetting. They call us to remember what God can and will do. For only in remembering what God has done, can we begin to understand what he is doing today. But if we forget, if we are a scribe with only the new words, we place ourselves next to those ancestors who were stubborn and rebellious, who were a generation that was not steadfast and whose spirit was not faithful to God. Woe to us scribes with only new words. Let us beware of this second temptation of novelty that leads us to forget.

Nostalgia and Novelty, hypocrisy and amnesia – These are the common traps for scribes. This is a dangerous profession.

³ Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity*, 237-264.

⁴ Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity*, 260.

“Therefore every scribe who has been discipled for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his *treasure* what is new *and* what is old” (Mt. 13:52 NRSV).

New *and* old. It is a both/and reality, not an either/or. Being a scribe of the kingdom takes the conjunction *and* seriously. Taking the conjunction seriously is an act of holy imagination. It is being able to hold the old and the new together. It is the act of rigorous remembering, that is lived in contemporary contexts. It is against hypocrisy, that remembers the past but cannot live it in the present. It is against novelty, that believes in new ways forward but forgets the works of God.

So what is this treasure? What is the word of the kingdom that is both new and old? Let me suggest that there is another parable that Jesus not only teaches but lives and explains in Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats. In this parable, Jesus is the word of the kingdom that is hidden and of great price.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” (Matthew 25:37-39, NRSV).

Do you understand this? Our treasure is not an antique; our treasure is not a new shiny gadget. Our treasure is the ancient of days and the one who is younger than us. Our treasure is the one who is the single savior and the bridegroom of the church. Our treasure is the creator of the mountains and the one who is renewing the earth. Our treasure is the manna of old and the eucharist, the bread of life. The Alpha and Omega. The alpha and omega is the pearl of great price. Our treasure is the old word that is incarnate. Our treasure is Jesus. Scribes discipled for the kingdom bring out treasure new and old. Here *treasure* is singular (θησαυροῦ). Our treasure is Jesus, the ancient Word expressed in fresh and new ways.

This year we will be the curators of words. We will do our scribal work. There are a lot of nostalgic words around race and sexuality and ecology and God’s kingdom; there are equally a lot of novel words around race and sexuality and ecology and God’s kingdom. But it is the work of a scribe with a discipled imagination trained for the kingdom to bring out the Word, bring out and share the Word that was in the beginning and incarnate in the resurrected Lord.

How can we escape the sentence of Hell? That is an odd question to begin a year with. But as scribes of the kingdom, we have the honor and the great responsibility to train others to find hidden treasure, to look on the margins to find it, and to explore the old to discover the new and to wonder about our great and costly treasure that is the Living Word Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Do we understand this?

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“An Unrelenting Hope.” (Oct. 20. 2021)

Rev. Dr. Javier Viera

(Methodist, UMC)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

This theological reflection centers around a confession and a call for “unrelenting hope” to claim and re-live in our times the “spiritual and institutional DNA” or identity that has characterized the seminary since its foundations, that is, its vocation to be and to serve at the margins. It is a vision and practice of ministry and theological education grounded in Jesus’ liberating and affirming ministry to marginal and poor people. “My unrelenting hope and vision for Garrett-Evangelical is that... we are a community unapologetically claimed and identified by the Spirit of Jesus... we will equip leaders to grow and thrive in spreading hope at the margins and wherever distorted versions of humanity and themselves grip people. Garrett is called to be both a mirror so that distortion can be exposed, and also the bearer of the gift of wholeness and flourishing that Jesus promised.”

Inaugural Address
The Reverend Javier A. Viera, Ed.D.
President
Professor of Education and Leadership
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
October 20, 2021

In what felt like an instant, the hope and joy of a people, of a nation, erupted in uncontrollable celebration. Moments before, the nervous energy was palpable wherever you found yourself as Jasmine Camacho-Quinn waved to the camera, knelt at the starting line, and waited for the starter’s gun to sound. Five years earlier she had also been the hope a nation, but at the Rio Olympics, while leading the pack, she tripped on the third to last hurdle and her pain, tears, and shock were representative of much more than just her personal disappointment. In a post-race interview, she made a promise to herself and her people: “I’m not going to let this race define my future...I felt

embarrassed, like I let the whole country down,” she said, “but I also received a lot of love. Everybody was so supportive and proud of me for making it this far, being so young, and representing Puerto Rico.”

Five years later the expectations and hopes were even higher. She was the highest ranked hurdler in the world. As fate would have it, in her qualifying heat in Tokyo, she broke the world record in the 100m hurdles. So imagine the pressure she felt, worried that this time around, ranked #1 and a world record holder, she might come home empty handed again, no medal, no victory. The suspense lasted for 12.37 seconds, and this is how it unfolded—first the race, then the reaction, then the moment that said it all.

[A Video is played of the final heat of the 100m Hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics, followed by scenes of celebrations around Puerto Rico, and concluding with the playing of the Puerto Rican national anthem as Camacho-Quinn stands on the gold medal stand and the Puerto Rican flag is raised above the U.S. flag.]

That last video of the medal ceremony is the moment I claim said it all. There is so much going on there; so many subtle messages and emotions to unpack. Sure, it’s a moment of personal redemption and triumph, but that’s not the moral of this story. I’m not the sort of preacher who uses sport to make generalized lessons or pronouncements on life. I’m somewhat suspicious about those kinds of sermons. My point today is not about perseverance in the face of odds, or about redemption after humiliating defeat, or even about new life on the other side of suffering or after hitting bottom. This isn’t a redemption story; it’s an identity story. It’s about what claims one and about what one claims; it’s about how one sees the world and about how the world sees you; it’s about knowing who you are even when the world tells you you’re someone else; it’s about being connected to your deepest love, your deepest identity, your deepest purpose—which is always bigger than and beyond you. Let me explain.

Whilst standing on that podium three things instantly jumped out to most Puerto Ricans: 1) The visual power of Jasmine wearing the Flor de Maga in her hair, the Puerto Rican national flower, that dots the countryside and most roads and backyards on the island. It wasn’t just a lovely or fashionable accoutrement. A ubiquitous symbol of our small paradise, it was a message to a people back home that they were in Tokyo with her. 2) The moment the national anthem began to play and how her head almost uncontrollably flew back and looked up to the skies as tears flowed freely with emotion, in exaltation, and who knows what else, but it captured the sentiments of an entire people perhaps better than anything else could have. 3) The moment when the Puerto Rican flag is hoisted higher than the American flag, since all of our lives we’ve seen it the other way around. It was brief, but oh so significant and powerful. Even the most ardent proponents of annexation and statehood had to admit—that felt good. Really, really good.

The reason that this isn’t a redemption story, but instead an identity story, is because Jasmine Camacho-Quinn embodying the Puerto Rican nation so fully and completely is a conundrum. She doesn’t easily check all the boxes of what is “a real

Puerto Rican,” and being who she is—an Afro-Puerto Rican woman, raised outside of the island in the cradle of empire, speaking the empire’s language, studying in its schools, claiming multiple, fluid identities— was a bit much for the purists among us. Because we live in a world of social media haters, the reaction was swift and before you knew it the debate raged on whether she was truly one of us. Everyone was grateful for her victory and proud of her accomplishments, proud of how she represented us, but for some, albeit a small number, Jasmine being who Jasmine is was a threat to how they understood themselves and pushed the limits of what they would accept. And a national debate ensued.

Jasmine being who Jasmine is prompted serious reflection about our own history and about our own internalized coloniality. It exposed contradictions like how we resent the racism and second-class status that we often experience at the hands of our colonial superpower, and yet, we often inflict our own version of racism and second-class status upon ourselves. It exposed the contradiction between how hypocritical and indecent we find that the United States Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Rico is “foreign in a domestic sense” and yet we often practice a similar kind of hypocrisy in our own caste, class, racial, and gender hierarchies, often erasing blackness, indigeneity, and gender. The myths and tropes we tell ourselves about who are and who we’ve been all seemed to be under a microscope and up for reconsideration. Families who were willing had some seriously uncomfortable conversations, including my own. Who could have predicted that a little black girl born in South Carolina to an African American father and Puerto Rican mother would have the power and influence to provoke such critical reassessment? Jasmine being who Jasmine is momentarily lifted the spirits of beleaguered island while simultaneously holding up a mirror so that we could take a long gander at who is really there.

But there’s hope to this story, a hope that helps frame my own thinking about the future of Garrett-Evangelical. I’m so proud of many editorials, articles, tweets, news reports, etc. that I read or saw in response to questioning of Jasmine’s Puerto Ricanness. Her victory and our subsequent elation provoked an honest conversation about who’ve been and who we want to be. Her presence on that podium and the pandemonium it generated on the island and in the diaspora generated honest reflection about whether we will create ever-expanding space and make room for an expansive understanding of our peoplehood. Jasmine momentarily changed the national conversation and mindset—away from the colonial reality and economic challenges that reign supreme—and enabled a deeper, penetrating assessment of who we are, what we value, and who we are determined to be.

I hope you see where I’m going with this long story of identity and reckoning. Over the last 18 months we too have been engaged in many conversations and serious reflections about who are, who we’ve been, and who we are determined to be. It’s been painful and exhilarating, humbling and hopeful, revealing and invigorating. Some of the myths and tropes we tell ourselves about ourselves haven’t borne out as we hoped, and yet our spiritual and institutional DNA proved to be resilient.

And in our scenario, what I envision and long for is that we might be the Jasmine Camacho-Quinn of our moment— the institution that provokes a larger reckoning and reconsideration of what the church and the academy have been, who they serve, and who they are determined to be. Like Jasmine, who said after stumbling badly in Rio, “I’m not going to let this race define my future,” our story is bigger and grander than our stumbles and shortcomings, and we cannot let them define us. We repent and grow from them. We get stronger by reflecting honestly on them. We change as a result. And then we lean into that brilliant spiritual and institutional DNA that has marked us for so long and forge a path that has yet to be laid.

And as I learn about who we’ve been it clarifies for me who we should be determined to be. How many institutions like ours can claim not one, but two foundresses at a time when women couldn’t even be ordained, or vote, or exercise much public leadership? Yet, Eliza Garrett sensed in her spirit that a theological education could transform minds and lives and communities, and ultimately society as a whole. Lucy Rider Meyer knew deep in her spirit that regardless of who the church had been, the church she wanted to be a part of was one that served the poor and the least; that the church couldn’t sit idly by, praying and singing while our city was filled with suffering and hopelessness. The church she envisioned and worked to make possible was one that stood with the poor and with them fought to create a different reality and forge a different future grounded in the theological vision of the city of God. Our Evangelical Association forebears in Naperville knew that the church and the academy had to be responsive to the needs of recent immigrants and different language communities; they were determined to make more room, to draw the circle wider, so that the church and the academy would live into the biblical mandate from Leviticus...“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall do them no wrong. You shall treat the sojourner who dwells among you as one of you, and you shall love the sojourner as yourself, for you were once sojourners in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” (Lev. 19.33-34) Our forebears took that seriously, embodied it, and left us that tremendous legacy to advance.

In her most recent book, Dr. Nancy Bedford writes, “People who are not in a place of much power in society are constantly told, directly or indirectly, that they have no true value, and that they are not even fully human. By contrast, Jesus spent his whole ministry caring for the well-being of persons, particularly those who were not valued by the powerful in his society. In his actions and words, he showed that each person is intrinsically of value, starting with the most vulnerable. When he speaks in Mark of people ‘denying themselves’ when they become his followers, he is calling them to deny all the distorted versions of themselves that dominant societal norms and values have imposed on them. In exchange, he promises that they will receive the gift of being truly themselves in wholeness and flourishing, made in the image of God, beloved of God.”¹

¹ Nancy Bedford. Who Was Jesus and What Does It Mean to Follow Him? (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2021) p. 69.

That's it. That's the work we've been called to and that's the legacy our forebears left for us to refine and accomplish. From our earliest days as a community of learning, we have been called to the margins, called to make the wisdom and the resources and opportunities that exist among us available beyond us and especially to those who cannot yet fathom being a part of us or that we have inadvertently or intentionally left out.

When I'm constantly asked, "What is your vision for Garrett?" I'm reminded of that verse from 1 Peter that we read earlier, "...always be prepared to give an account, to anyone who asks, of the hope that is within you." And we all should be so prepared. The truth is that I am filled with hope, an unrelenting hope, about our future, because I believe that our future belongs to God, the God that we encounter and find at the margins, the God who calls us to the work that Professor Bedford described. What she described is what I believe Jasmine did for her people: calling them deny all the distorted versions of themselves that have been imposed on them and to instead receive the gift of wholeness and flourishing that being made in the image of God bestows. She didn't set out to do that, but the beauty of her story is that simply being who she is caused that. Oh, may that be said of us.

My unrelenting hope and vision for Garrett-Evangelical is that we do that work; that we are a community unapologetically claimed and identified by the Spirit of Jesus, called to the margins where Jesus served, seeing and relating to the earth and its people as he saw them and related to them. I believe that as we sustain our connection to that Source, that Spirit, we will equip leaders to grow and thrive in spreading hope at the margins and wherever people are gripped by distorted versions of humanity and of themselves. Garrett is called to be both a mirror so that distortion can be exposed, and also the bearer of the gift of wholeness and flourishing that Jesus promised.

In his most recent book, Dr. Patrick Reyes, a good friend to this seminary, speaks to what he calls The Purpose Gap and how that gap can be closed or bridged to include and welcome and see those at the margins. "The work is not hard," he says. "Like [when] being in Yosemite, we need to learn to slow down and value the beauty that is already present. We do not need to control it or extract it but simply be inspired by it. For those from marginalized communities, the work is about honoring the lives of everyone who makes up the community. For those from the dominant culture, it is about looking at those places and communities that have been cast aside and violated and valuing the experience, knowledge, and wisdom that exist in that space... We must practice [this] together. To create conditions for future generations to thrive, we must practice a new way of seeing the world."²

What Drs. Bedford and Reyes are claiming is not that the world is changing. Rather, how I read them is that they are revealing or reminding us of who God has always been, where God has always been found, and what Christian communities have always been called to do. Theirs is a call to faithfulness; a call to recover a Christian identity and purpose that makes very clear how our work can and

² Patrick Reyes. The Purpose Gap. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2021) pp. 100-101.

should align with the work Jesus set out to accomplish long ago, and, I would argue, the work that our foundresses and founders also set out to accomplish long ago.

Jon Sobrino said that Hope is the seed of liberation, and honestly, that's why I actually think that Puerto Ricans everywhere erupted in celebration when Jasmine crossed that finish line. It's why we recognized all the symbolism of her standing proudly on that medal stand, bearing our flag and our people in heart. It was much more than just a race, it was a seed, a seed of hope that may one day lead to our real liberation. But Sobrino's claim is also why I cling to an unrelenting hope about Garrett, because I believe that we can and must be that seed of hope in the world, that seed of liberation. At times that work will feel daunting, and what it requires of us personally and collectively may even be overwhelming, but we must not lose hope. As the psalmist began a potentially daunting and overwhelming journey, they wisely asked, "I will lift my eyes to the hills, from where will my hope come?" A fair question indeed, and the answer is swift. "My help comes from the Lord." My mother used to sing this psalm to my brothers and me every night before we went to bed. She'd sit on our bedside and rub our back or hair and just sing it to us like a lullaby. *"Alzaré mis ojos a los montes; ¿de dónde vendrá mi socorro? Mi socorro viene de Jehová, que hizo los cielos y la tierra..."*

I cannot tell you how often these words and that lullaby have accompanied me during life's most difficult moments. Their truth grounds me when I otherwise despair. They've grounded me in these first months here with you. We must remember that as we walk this sometimes-perilous path together, and whenever we're riddled with doubt or fear or gripped by uncertainty about who we are or why we're here, I implore you to return to this psalm. Find hope and confidence in its closing words, words that today I hear as a promise to Garrett-Evangelical, the foundation we stand on as we risk, as we dream, as we dare together. The psalmist promises: "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; will keep your life (our life). The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time and for evermore."

May those words be the hope that seeds the work of liberation among us and through us. Amen.

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“Cornerstone University and Cornerstone Theological Seminary. The Destination of Choice.” (Oct. 23, 2021)

Dr. Gerson Moreno-Riaño

(Independent Baptist)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

The author seeks to unite and help the Cornerstone community to focus on the historic opportunity for Cornerstone University and Cornerstone Theological Seminary to arise and become the destination of choice for Christian Higher Education. “And my vision, our vision for this wonderful, great university called Cornerstone University, is to have a Cornerstone graduate in every household of America.” He delineates a vision and the qualities needed to achieve this goal and its impact. He calls the university and seminary to show “great moral courage proclaiming and defending... The faith of Jesus and the gospel;” “to be a beautiful community that mirrors the kingdom of God” in accepting diversity in hospitable ways; to be committed to “truth and not ideologies” and to practice holistic spiritual formation.

Inaugural Presidential Speech

As the Twelfth President

Dr. Gerson Moreno-Riaño, Ph.D.

President

Professor of Government

Cornerstone University and Cornerstone Theological Seminary

October 23, 2021

Thank you, Admiral Vern Clark, for your kind introduction, those wonderful words, your friendship over the years, your love, your mentorship. I will never forget the first time I met the Admiral, I was sitting down in a moot court room, and he said, “young man, I would like to mentor you.” I said, “yes, sir.” He said, “usually, it costs a lot, but for you it’s free.” And I never knew that that would be a journey of four years, that in the fall and spring over four years he would come and mentor me. And I sat there oftentimes just in awe of the amazing opportunity that the Lord had given to me to meet

this man of God, a leader among leaders. Thank you, Admiral Clark, for your tremendous service, for being a great American, sir. Thank you.

Thank you, Dr. Kay Cole James, for your tremendous speech, for being here, for your tremendous years of service, for mentoring so many generations of young men and women, for being an example of a follower of Jesus Christ. Thank you for your tremendous service to our country. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Shirley Hoogstra, for being here. You're on the front lines representing almost 200 Christian colleges and universities. Thank you for your faithful service to Jesus, your incredible wisdom and discernment. Every time I read your newsletters, I am always in awe of the wisdom and discernment that God has given to you. Thank you for your service and love for our great university – Cornerstone. Thank you for being here, Shirley.

And Mr. Josh Wilson, wherever you may be, thank you for being here. You have blessed us with your incredible music. An incredible reminder of amazing grace – where would we be without the grace of God, without God's amazing grace? And thank you for your tremendous band.

I want to thank all of you for being here this evening to celebrate with us and, really, to give honor and glory to Jesus Christ. He is the reason we are here. He is the reason Cornerstone University exists. Thank you to our tremendous faculty and staff who are here tonight. Thank you to our students who are here this evening. Thank you to our wonderful alumni who are here tonight. I have received letters from our alumni since July 1, men and women who love this institution and are serving throughout the world – 17,000 alumni. Thank you, alumni, for being here and for your tremendous support.

I want to thank our tremendous Board of Trustees. I will never forget the first time I met the search committee. I will never forget that day, it was a day that changed my life. We have a fantastic Board of Trustees led by an incredible, and brilliant Chairwoman. It is a Board of women and men who love Jesus Christ, who love the Word of God, who love the Gospel, who love Christian higher education, and who love Cornerstone University.

We must thank an incredible team of people who have worked tirelessly to put on a wonderful inauguration weekend – thank you to all our Advancement Team and to our Vice President for Advancement for a tremendous weekend.

I always tell individuals that we stand on the shoulders of giants, men and women who have come before us and have done some great things. And I must ask you to help me honor my wonderful mother who is here this evening, a woman of God, a humble woman who carries the burdens of her children and family on her shoulders full of prayer and fasting for them. Mom, thank you for being here; I love you. Thank you for your wonderful example, your love, and your faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

I want to ask you to help me honor the second most important woman in my life, my beautiful wife of almost thirty years. I always tell individuals that God brought my

wife to me. The Lord in His goodness provided the most incredible human being to love me, to help me, to sanctify me, to bless me—my wife of thirty years and the mother of my wonderful six children, Ellen, honey, thank you for being here. I love you and thank you.

And I must thank my children who are here; the most beautiful, wonderful children in the world. As I shared with our search committee back in April, one of the things that I love to do the most is to be a father. I love my children. The greatest joy I have is for my children to serve the Lord and to walk with the Lord. And they have become my friends. I love each of you so much. Thank you for being here.

When Shirley and I first arrived to this wonderful, great university, thank you for all the wonderful things you shared about the legacy, the beauty of our great university, Cornerstone University, I met with our Vice President for Advancement who shared with me that he asks himself this question every morning when he gets up, “What would happen to the world, to our nation, if Cornerstone wasn't here?”

I must confess to you that is one of the most fundamental questions we can ask ourselves. And it is this question that I want to ask us to think about tonight. Why Cornerstone? Why Cornerstone among all the other universities that exist? What kind of university do we need to be as we continue to build on the incredible Cornerstone legacy of 80 years and the work that has been done over the last decade, the incredible work of Cornerstone's Board of Trustees, our beautiful campus, and our beautiful location? Why this university? And why do West Michigan, and the Midwest, and our country and the planet need a place like Cornerstone University? What kind of university do we need to be? The reason the world needs Cornerstone University is because Cornerstone University is an institution where Jesus Christ has been, is and will be central in all its doings. That is why we speak about an institution where we graduate influencers for Jesus Christ. And I know that Cornerstone's ability to fulfill its mission is due to no other reason than the fact that Jesus Christ has been this institution's central influence for the last 80 years.

Ladies and gentlemen may that always be the case. Jesus Christ is the most important person with the most important grace message that has ever been delivered—the message of the good news of God to us. I have always spoken about Cornerstone in the last three months as being and becoming the destination of choice in Christian higher education. That is a high goal. I want Cornerstone to be top of mind, top of heart, for every family in our country. I will put it in a different way, and it is not original to me. I have been deeply influenced by the vision of Bill Gates and Microsoft. When he launched Microsoft, his vision was simple: “I want a PC in every home.” With all the Microsoft products in our homes and places of work, we now have more than just a PC in every home.

And my vision, our vision for this wonderful, great university called Cornerstone University is to have a Cornerstone graduate in every household in America. This is big. It is bold. But we have a great big God for whom nothing is impossible. So, I want us to think through this big vision together. This big vision means that Cornerstone is the

destination of choice, the place that far outranks any other institution in the country. It is the university that when individuals think about Christian higher education, they are thinking, “Cornerstone is the place we want to go.” This big vision means that Cornerstone is the university that becomes the place to educate the 35 million adults in our country that have some college education but have not completed their college degrees. It is the place that these individuals look toward and say, “that is where we want to go.” This big vision means that Cornerstone is the place that those who are looking for a top-tier seminary education and for education in and preparation for ministry say, “That is the place we want to go.” *The*—not a—*the* destination of choice in Christian higher education. That is the vision for our great university – Cornerstone University.

What must we do to continue to build on our great legacy to realize this vision? What kind of institution do we have to be to become that destination of choice? I want to delineate a number of things for us to consider. One, we must be an institution of great moral courage, courage defined as the ability to discern what is right and wrong, what is true and what is not true and defend the right and true with our very life. That is what courage is and what should characterize the kind of institution that our country needs, that our churches need, and that our homes need. We need an institution like Cornerstone University that can educate men and women to have great courage. Great courage, great courage! I have never forgotten the time I visited some of the catacombs in Rome. It is a must for visit for any believer. And I will tell you, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, then when I left that place, I realized the incredible heritage of faith that we have as Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ. Hundreds upon hundreds of Christians there were persecuted, died for the faith and are buried in those catacombs.

I left that place thinking those men and women had incredible courage. This is one of the things we must continue to be, we must demonstrate great moral courage proclaiming and defending the incredible faith that has been given to us. The faith of Jesus and the gospel. We must be fearless. Our culture right now is being torn apart by fear and anxiety everywhere we go. I am sure you remember, during the first few weeks of the pandemic, how terrifying it was. I would drive the streets of our home in Virginia, and it really, literally, looked like a zombie film. I remember sitting in my home for weeks and feeling like the world was falling apart. It is fearful and it's anxious out there. Is it not? And yet amidst this, we must remain completely fearless and have incredible courage, great faith, and trust in God. I remember when my children were young, I would say to them, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. And he will direct your path. It is easy to say that, is it not? It is much more difficult to do.

And for our university to be the destination of choice, to be the place where men and women come to acquire a world-class Christian education, we must be men and women of courage and not yield to fear and anxiety. Not because we have the strength in ourselves, but because God is our rock. He is our refuge, a very present help in trouble because He is the one who covers us with favor as with a shield, because it is He who makes His way straight for us, where there seems to be no way.

For Cornerstone University to be the destination of choice, we must also be a beautiful community that mirrors the kingdom of God. This means that Cornerstone must be known as a place of great hospitality, a place where everyone is welcomed, a place where everyone wants to come, wants to remain, wants to graduate, and wants to come back. A place where no one feels left out because of how they look or where they come from or their economic background. That is what we must be because that is what the kingdom of God is and that is what Jesus has done for us. He did not just die for some; He did not just love some. He died for all, and He loved all.

And we must endeavor and labor daily to commit to our hearts, to love God with all our being and to love our neighbors. This is hard work by the way, ladies and gentlemen. It is easy to say, is it not? It is difficult to do. Humility is not a virtue that human beings are known for or with which they are born. I have realized that one of the virtues of God that we seldom ever talk about is God's great humility. The fact that God reaches down and continually pursues us nonstop every day. And yet, it is so easy for us to forget that, to stiff-arm God and to neglect the duties that His grace places on us. It is hard work. God help us. We have an incredible obligation and incredible opportunity for our university to be not just the destination of choice, but the place to which everybody wants to come. Oftentimes in the last few days, people have told me, "You're the first minority president of Cornerstone University." I sometimes say, "I am just glad that I made it to be president." And I have sensed a great outpouring of love from day one on this campus.

But we can do more. I had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Julián Guzmán, president of the Urban Church Leadership Center, the other evening and had the privilege of hearing and seeing a number of African American and Hispanic pastors in the community. I have used my Spanish more here in Michigan in the last three months than I have in 40 years in this country. I will never forget how they prayed for me. And after that meeting, many people came to me and some of them said to me, "help us have our children in your school." And we are going to do it. We are going to do it in great ways.

I say that because as a minority, as a Hispanic, it has been solely by God's grace and goodness to me that I have been brought to this point in my life. And it is solely by God's grace and goodness as manifested to me through the goodness of people, of all walks of life, who have invested in me. Next week, I celebrate 41 years in this country. Now, the Lord has blessed me with the opportunity to serve as president of a wonderful university. It is only by God's grace and dozens of people—African American, Black, Brown, White, American, European American, you name it, whom the Lord brought into my life and used to influence me, to pour into me, and to help me.

I have oftentimes stood back and said, only your grace, oh God. And that is what we need to be saying, too. It is hard work. When I speak about a beautiful community, one that is diverse and represents every walk of life, I oftentimes equate it to living in a family. Family life is beautiful, but family life requires work and humility. It requires that we roll up our sleeves and pray and listen. It is hard work. It does not come naturally to anybody. Cornerstone has a tremendous history of doing that. And yet we

can do more. And we will do more together to ensure this university continues to magnify the name of Jesus and represent the kingdom in all its beauty, to continue to be the destination of choice.

For Cornerstone University to be the destination of choice, we must also continue to ensure that we are committed to truth and not ideologies. There is a significantly blurred line between those two things in today's culture. What is ideological and what is true, and what do we, as Christians, pursue and give our lives to defend and proclaim. This dawned on me two years ago, working through Matthew 4 and the temptations of Christ. As I read and reflected on Matthew 4, it dawned on me that two of the three temptations that Jesus Christ faced were to misuse His identity as the Son of God for personal gain. "If you're the Son of God, then take your identity and use it for your own personal gain."

I think this is the great temptation that we face in the church today. I think this is the great temptation that we face in Christian universities and seminaries today. I think there is a great temptation that we as Christians misuse our identity in Jesus for personal, professional, political, and communal gains. In John 4, when Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well, it is an incredible conversation where identity plays a central role. Who truly worships God, Jews or Samaritans? Two central ideas run through this chapter, identity and worship. And what did Jesus say? "The Father is looking for the true worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth." (4:23) That is what we must endeavor to do. And it is hard work. God help us to discern what is true. The truth will set us free. It is the truth for which students come to our university. Praise God that our university has stood over 80 years, committed to truth, committed to the centrality of the gospel. May this continue forever.

For Cornerstone University to be the destination of choice, we must also be committed to what I call spiritual formation. It is wonderful to hear our speakers tonight speak about the beauty and power of Christian education. I discovered that as a little boy in Bogotá, Colombia, where my mother and father enrolled me in Colegio Berea – an Assemblies of God Christian K-12 school. Colegio Berea had chapel every day. And I remember the importance of biblical education as a child because it was in third grade, in that school, that the principal preached a sermon and called for an invitation. As I bowed my head, the Lord spoke to me and said, "You do not know me." I will never forget that day.

As I grew older, I began to understand that Christian schools are really important. Christian schools magnify the Lord. Christian schools teach and preach. Christian schools help you to think about what is good and bad, and about what is right and wrong. I understood that Christian schools are also a safe place to learn, to be challenged, to be prepared.

Then I went to Cedarville University and there encountered the beauty and power of spiritual formation through the gospel, through Christian faith learning integration. As an undergraduate, I realized the beauty and importance of coming to a Christian university where students are thinking about Christ in a community of learners, and

your character and your heart are being shaped by the Lord through the love of faculty, staff, and students.

I have had the privilege and blessing in the last three months to meet lots and lots of Cornerstone students. And I can share this with you, ladies and gentlemen, that almost every single question that I have been asked by these students has been a question about spiritual formation. They did not ask me about academics. They did not ask me about the latest theory in sociology or biology. What they wanted to know was simple, how should we live? I had one student say this to me in one meeting, “I have five siblings, and we do not get along. Can you help me? Can you give me advice on how to be a good sister?” I had another student, one in a special scholarship program ask me, “What is your favorite attribute of God and why?”

That is profound. These students come to Cornerstone for the wonderful education we provide for them. The wonderful degrees we offer, the incredible learning experiences. But I will tell you that at the end of the day, what many of these students want to know is how we should live. Well, what does it mean to be a good human being, a good mom, a good dad, a good spouse, a good man, a good woman? Many, many years ago, Stanley Fish, a higher education scholar, wrote a book on this issue of formation. And he wrote that it is not the job of universities to be in the business of moral and character formation. In short, argued Mr. Fish, universities should stick to academics. I am sorry. That is just not right. Academics is always about formation, be it spiritual, intellectual, professional, and personal. And Cornerstone must lead the way in the holistic spiritual formation of all its students.

For many years, the Pew Research Center has run studies on higher education and have asked this question to parents, to adults. Do universities teach the most fundamental, important things about life? The answer is that a high percentage of Americans do not believe universities do this. Ladies and gentlemen, praise God that for 80 years, our university has been doing spiritual formation, and my prayer is that it continues until the Lord returns. As we give students great academics, great faculty experiences, great laboratory experiences, those individuals are going to leave, and they are going to live their lives out as a particular kind of human being. And we must do everything we can, by God's grace, to form those souls and hearts.

A destination, *the* destination of choice university is one that has great courage grounded in God. It is grounded in trust in our Lord, grounded in great humility, grounded in great love for one another, and grounded in incredible commitment to truth and humility to pursue it, to defend it, to share it with love and compassion, and with conviction. That destination of choice university is also one that believes and cares for the most important, fundamental questions of life that our students are asking and have nowhere else to go. But they come here seeking those answers. And ladies and gentlemen, I pledge to you, that is who we are going to be as we build on the great Cornerstone legacy that has been bequeathed to us.

Lastly, this great destination of choice vision is not something that I can do alone. It is something that requires all of us to do together. It's something that will require

incredible amounts of collaboration, incredible amounts of prayer, and incredible amounts of unity. There is no other way. It is going to require an incredible amount of prayer, deep prayer, serious prayer. It will require that we call on God and ask God to pour his spirit on us, to transform our hearts and minds, to give us wisdom, and to give us help. We do not have it on our own.

I will never forget one day when I was at a large megachurch which shall go nameless. I was sitting in the pews, and the pastor came up and here is what he said. “Our church is so good, so well organized, so well-planned that if the Holy Spirit went on vacation, we’d do just fine.” The temptation for us is to think that our planning and our organizing are going to lead the way to a great future. It is not going to happen. Instead, God must be central to us, in us, and in everything we do. That is the beauty of this institution committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The task that is before us, to build on a great, incredible past, an amazing present, and a great foundation to move forward toward a great future with the Lord. But let us not forget that this is going to require an incredible amount of prayer.

I call on all of us here tonight to pray like we have never prayed before for our wonderful university. That God will protect it. That God will guide it. That God will direct it. That God will bring great resources to our university, that God will help us to remain humble and diligent, full of courage and full of love. And that is why I want to ask our Cornerstone family, friends, alumni, faculty, staff, and board members, let us commit ourselves to prayer and expect God to do great things in our midst.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your support. Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your hospitality to my family and to me. Thank you for your love for this wonderful university called Cornerstone University. More than anything, thank you for your faithful commitment to Jesus Christ. To Him belongs all honor and all glory, and all praise forever and ever. Amen. Thank you.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2025

“A Widening Place.” (Nov. 12, 2022)

Rev. Dr. José I. Irizarry

(Presbyterian, PCUSA)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

The author calls the Austin Seminary to celebrate, re-examine its history, and lament what has perished without feeling defeated or abandoned. He beacons the question: “What is this place of learning and faith we call Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary? He quotes Martin Heidegger, “We ought to be keenly aware of our (Dasein) “being there” of our place as prophetic voice amid unjust systems of exclusion and oppression. He uses the term immigrant imagination to exhort the community to ponder what it means to find a place of belonging in our world, especially when at times it is indifferent, self-preoccupied, and inhospitable. To be aware of this place, Austin Seminary, and to listen to the wisdom of the apostle in Ephesians, who invites us to be rooted and established in love so that we may be empowered to grasp another model of dimensionality, not measured solely in numbers, but on how wide and long and high and deep is the love of the one we seek to emulate in all forms of service. Calling the seminary to teach new generations of Christians and listening to the faith of Millennials, Gen Z’s, Gen Alphas, and those who will follow, in whatever form that faith is emerging should start to inform Austin’s curriculum now. He exhorts the seminary to plant seeds that will sustain people in the continuum of theological learning which begins before seminary education and continues after they leave the classroom. Making Austin a place of cultivation, a widening place seeking out special gifts for service within the church and helping them discern such passions that may signal a vocation for ministry.

Inaugural Speech as the Tenth President
The Reverend José Irizarry, Ph.D.
President
Professor of Practical Theology
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
November 12, 2022

Standing in this privileged site of vision, as I assemble the image of multiple faces, each one filling up this space with meaning and memory, I am humbled by the realization that although I stand before you as the person inaugurated into a significant leadership role in this centenary institution, this is indeed a celebration of community. A celebration of long-standing traditions of teaching and learning, but also of history about to be reexamined. This is a celebration of stories of people who have dreamed a church that is faithful to its call, but also stories of those who despite institutional limitations, have dared to follow imaginative paths of ministry and service. Today our hearts are full of joy for the possibilities ahead of us and for the ability to lament that which has perished without feeling defeated or abandoned.

By this gathering, I am awakened to memories of childhood and family members who are part of my emergence as the person who stands before you today. Memories of school and church friends whose stories are intertwined with the most adventurous chapters of my biography, co-workers at many places of labor who have enriched my life with their wisdom, care, and support, and new colleagues and friends who make me enthusiastic about the company I will keep in the years ahead. I can only affirm that I am deeply fortunate, this empty space that hours ago was occupied by air, light, and quietness, has become today, by this ceremony, a living place, a place made wider by the meaning and memories you have all brought in.

Since the moment I was appointed to serve as the 10th President of Austin Theological Seminary, I have often mused the answers to a modest question: What is this place of learning and faith formation we call Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary? While basic in its formulation, the answer to this question cannot be readily assumed. And in fact, most ideas we can construct, as possibilities for theological education, are determined by our ability to name the purpose of our institutional existence in today's world. To quote Martin Heidegger, we ought to be keenly aware of our (Dasein) "being-there,"- of our place. Our place in the community where our beautiful campus rests as an oasis in the middle of a hectic and vibrant university town. Our place in the church, in affiliation to a denomination that we are proud to belong to for its enduring commitments to educated, imaginative, energetic, and compassionate leaders, and with many other Christian traditions that join our search for truth and authenticity. And ultimately, our place in society as a prophetic voice in the midst of unjust systems of exclusion and oppression. With what I call an *immigrant imagination* we should constantly ponder what does it mean to find a place of belonging in our world. Especially a world that at times seems indifferent, self-preoccupied, and inhospitable.

More than once, in the few months, I have served in this role. I have visited places and people have introduced me, in an unfortunate slip of the tongue, as the president of Austin's Cemetery. This gaffe produces some embarrassment in the speaker as listeners respond with quiet laughter. But I have learned from great teachers that you should never let a good metaphor go to waste. Therefore, I cannot resist but to bring the image of such a place of final rest to inform my reflection on this dilemma of finding our

place in the world as a theological institution. What is dying here that needs the services of interment? Is it the end of the church within which we are trying to find our place? Is it the vanishing of humanity's ability to relate to each other in ways that respect the dignity of every person regardless of who they are and where they come from?

Or is it perhaps, our loss of community and belonging trumped by our technologically-fed self-centeredness. Are we officiating the last rites for God's creation as the future of our ecosystem slips away from our hands? And what are we, as institutions of theological education, asked to do with the remains? Are we here, in this place, to say our farewell to hope with good thoughts and prayers or to infuse life grounded in an ever-present promise of resurrection?

Yet, there may be other possibilities for this metaphor. We can claim to be the place where outmoded ideas and ways of thinking, that have for decades—if not centuries—hindered our self-realization as beloved Children of God, come to die. Or alternatively, we can create a special burial plot for those certainties that come with some forms of faith that refuse to acknowledge that what God intends to do with us and through us is still to be encountered. As poet Maya Angelou reminds us, “we are never to call ourselves Christians in absolute and determinative ways, a Christian is something we are always becoming.”¹ And this place, as any community that claims to exercise the charge of educating individuals, should always provide learners with possibilities for becoming what God is calling them to be.

All these may be generative questions for our work ahead, but I prefer to correct the gaffe and return to the factual record, that we have been intentional in naming this place a Seminary—a place of cultivation. Stone and mortar are particularly powerful symbols of places, but places are much more than that. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary is more than walls, and pathways, rooms, and coordinates on the city map, it is a stage for relationships where affective bonds can be cultivated, and a field of care and knowledge that extends beyond campus and touches communities, congregations, and families.

As a place that fosters a sense of belonging and develops capacities to serve (both intellectual and practical), Austin Seminary exists within and outside our campus. It is a widening place. Because that is how education for cultivation works. Seeds go into the ground, but what emerges from it through nurture and care cannot be determined as it scatters organically. The scale of the shade provided by a tree, the amount of fruit or flowers that blossom, the depth of the roots, even the ability to continue to reproduce in grounds we did not intend to plant defy both our good intentions and expectations.

Aware of this place, and its widening nature, I look forward to engaging this community of theological teaching and learning as we exercise our leadership for seeding. The times for trying to straighten bent trunks from old trees, or cutting branches here and there to stimulate growth, or trying new technologies for watering already infertile soils, (what in educational theory we call reforms) may be over. It may

¹ Maya Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (New York: Random House, 1993), 73.

be a time for reconsidering the model of theological teaching and learning as a whole and move beyond the secular paradigm of growth and development as the main conceptual guide for our efforts. It may be a time to listen to the wisdom of the apostle in Ephesians: who invites us to be rooted and established in love, so that we may be empowered to grasp another model of dimensionality, not measured in numbers, but on how wide and long and high and deep is the love of the one we seek to emulate in all forms of service. What can a seminary of the 21st century located in Austin Texas cultivate so that its place—its landscape of mission and purpose—can be widened?

At Austin Seminary, we may want to plant seeds today for fruits that other generations may enjoy. This means that attention to whatever we consider to be urgent needs to be cautiously scaled within a long-term view. Remember that in a constantly changing world what is urgent today turns into obsolescence tomorrow. In times like this we are cautioned to avoid the temptation to see continuous adaptation as the most valuable asset of education. At times, sacrificing good sense and vision for the sake of acceleration, which gives the appearance of momentary achievement, but ultimately reduces opportunities for those who will need these resources in the future.

Theological institutions should be teaching today with a new generation of Christians in mind. Be mindful that in our intention to be innovative we don't become so transient that we become a non-place for the next generation, a fleeting and ephemeral institution. The faith of Millennials, Gen Z's, Gen Alphas, and those who will follow, in whatever form that faith is emerging, should start to inform our curriculum now. And this should be done with a clear recognition that the world our young have encountered is significantly different than the one that gave origin to our current models of ministry and faith expression. Places are widened by the bodies and movements that shape their environment. Our campus environment, day in and day out, is asking us to pay attention to the young. For those concerned with the ecclesial aging, the "youngering" of the church might indeed be good news.

At Austin Seminary, we want to plant seeds that would allow us to sustain people in the continuum of theological learning that starts before seminary education and continues after people leave our classrooms. If theology is religious discourse, as theologian and professor Cynthia Rigby establishes, "determined to share something about everything in a world brimming with beauty, pain, and perennial desire to know more," then faith requires theological wisdom as an ongoing process.² As a place of cultivation, we can widen this place by seeking out those who show special gifts for service within the church and who do not know that such passion may signal a vocation for ministry. Alternatively, we may need to institute programs to provide ongoing support to those who graduate as they face the realities of ministry during their first years of service.

At Austin Seminary, we may want to cultivate relationships and partnerships that are missionally driven to support common social projects, and to bring the outside

² Cynthia L. Rigby, *Holding Faith: A Practical Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 63.

world into the register of theological education. This may require inviting and welcoming other higher educational institutions, non-profit organizations, art collectives, inter-faith groups, in exploring ways mission is strengthened and disseminated to larger publics. Forging theological literacy among Christian professionals on any field of work cannot be considered any longer outside the scope of theological education. Our social and political order may necessitate people of faith who are as theologically sophisticated as they are technologically literate and who, in embodying Christ, love the world sufficiently to be accountable for it.

At Austin Seminary we will commit to cultivate and nurture, among all members of the community, a culture of empathy and tolerance amid our current, normalized divisiveness. Without compromising people's ability to ground themselves theologically and ideologically, and without concealing our strong institutional identity, educational places like this one should strive to be spaces for difficult and deep conversations that can restore a sense of conviviality among those who think differently. A seminary so close to the borderlands, should be able to explore how to educate in the in-between where more than visions of the world collide as we seek to live together without cultural and social erasures. A widening place is a healing place—any other model of theological formation would be simply reductive and limiting.

This is a place of cultivation. And there will be no offense if once again the words seminary and cemetery collude in real-time speech. To mind will come the words in the epitaph engraved on the headstone of Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, “you can go ahead and bury us, for we are seeds”.

The widening of this place will require good and faithful laborers for the work of cultivation.

It will require people whose scholarship is evolving with the world, fostering alternative ways of thinking, and incentivizing diverse models of practice. I count my blessings, for we have such laborers in our faculty.

This cultivation will require individuals with enough commitment so that this place can remain hospitable, welcoming, and supportive. Here too, I count my blessings, for we have such laborers in Austin Seminary's staff.

And, for sure, this labor will require people with ample vision, who invest talent, treasure, and time to guide the direction of this place. And yet again, I feel deeply blessed for we have those laborers in the members of our Board of Trustees.

Last, but not least. Our widened place necessitates networks and partners who understand that our educational project *for another possible world* cannot be carried out in isolation. In gratitude, for the gifts and efforts you bring to this task, I celebrate delegates from our theological schools and institutions of higher learning present today.

Above all, we recognize that the fruit of our labor, that which will be widened, that which will grow deeper, will be nurtured by God, in the fullness of Christ, through

the work of the Spirit. All of this, so that we can proclaim in one indisputable voice that truth of our Reformed confession: *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God alone be the Glory).

AMEN

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“In Abundance and Grace.” (Nov. 12, 2022)

Rev. Dr. Víctor Aloyo, Jr.

(Presbyterian, PCUSA)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

In this presidential address Rev. Dr. Aloyo calls Columbia Seminary to start a new day in abundance and grace and not scarcity and fear. He uses both Isaiah 55:1-9 and Revelations 22:1-5 to say that God’s affirmations of abundance and grace are pushing, in fact, demanding that Colombia re-engage both locally and in communities abroad in new ways. Making Columbia an institution where all feel welcomed and included, where candid conversations and vigorous debates can be had. Harnessing the power of the institutional human and financial capital in collaboration with civic partners, foundations, government agencies, and corporations to create and learn new knowledge, invest collaboratively, and apply resources to critical needs. It requires an approach that spans multiple disciplines, a mindset that embraces collaboration, and, yes, the funding and philanthropic support necessary to succeed.

Inaugural Speech as
The Eleventh President
The Reverend Victor Aloyo, Jr., Ed.D.
President
Columbia Theological Seminary
November 12, 2022

A text from Psalm 62:1-2 that has served as one of my foundational pillars of inspiration, and I humbly share this text with you this afternoon.

¹Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.

² Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

I would like to recognize our distinguished guests who honor us with their presence today. I am at a loss for words to express my gratitude to each of you here, those who are online, and for all the special notes of affirmation I have received these last few weeks. I can only think to say, “Your solidarity humbles me, and thank you so much from the bottom of my heart.” **Me siento honrado por su solidaridad y muchas gracias desde lo más profundo de mi corazón.** It is incredible to stand before all of you and share this special moment particular to the history of Columbia Theological Seminary. I am beyond humbled and honored to be part of this dedicated community, grounded in the utmost integrity of purpose and passionate about getting things done! All of you here are sharing the most special gift you can possibly give. That is the gift of your time, presence, support, and love!

Thank you for being part of this special day at this great Seminary whose mission is to educate and nurture faithful, imaginative, and effective leaders for the sake of the Church and the world! I want to thank the Presidential Search Committee members for their due diligence and, among many inspiring candidates, nominated this servant to the Board of Trustees for approval. I am grateful to the Board of Trustees for the confidence of your vote to select me as the 11th President of Columbia Theological Seminary. I am incredibly thankful to the Inauguration Planning Committee, the chair, Dr. Raj Nadella, and our student partners for your tireless efforts in coordinating and implementing the inauguration events these past few days. I also gratefully acknowledge the presence of distinguished delegates from peer institutions.

There are many people here who play a crucial role in my life. Time does not allow me to mention everyone by name, but each of you knows I will always be grateful for your support. I want to recognize my loving and lovely family: my wife, Suzette; our daughters Kayla and Alyssa; my sister-in-law, the Rev. Noreen Santos; and my son-in-law Alex Carrere. I also honor my parents, Victorino & Esperanza Aloyo from Vieques, PR, who have transitioned to the Church Triumphant, and who modeled essential values of responsibility, integrity, cross-cultural relationship-building, the value of education for transformative leadership, and owning one’s voice to create change amidst the challenges of life.

I approach today’s installation as president of Columbia Theological Seminary with honor and humility. I want to thank the President’s Council for the confidence they have shown in me, the faculty for the opportunity to create collegiality bonds, the administration for their vulnerability in sharing their aspirations, and the welcoming embrace of our students. I offer a special thanks to all prior presidents for their remarkable stewardship of this Seminary and their leadership in the 194-year history of Columbia Seminary.

In the days ahead, we will focus on our future together. But for now, let us pause for a few minutes and be present to each other and to this occasion and time in our history as an educational institution of the Church. Let us be grateful, celebrate the path traveled to get us here, and thank all who were part of the journey. It is, after all, why we can be here today.

I celebrated the first 100 days of my new call as President of Columbia Theological Seminary two days ago. Through many intentional one-on-one conversations and dialogues with faculty, administrators, alums, and Seminary partners, I have found an insatiable love of learning, a longing for discovery, a commitment to pursuing truth, a responsibility to discern innovative vocational opportunities of service, and a deeply forged foundation in making the world a better place through the Gospel message of Jesus Christ in the deep and wide currents of a great Seminary.

I find these currents in abundance here at Columbia Seminary. During these past four and a half months as president, I have spent much time learning about this exceptional place. I had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with hundreds of people. Warm, passionate, dedicated, hopeful, proud, pragmatic, imaginative, attentive, supportive, enthusiastic, and mission-focused people. I am walking in new directions, asking many questions, learning about aspirations, of what people are most proud of, and about what they are anxious about, as we move forward together. More than anything, I am listening. There has been no shortage of opinions or ideas, and they are always voiced with a desire to make Columbia better.

Through this process, I have learned that, for a Seminary with such a rich and challenged history, we are immensely grateful for our roots while bold enough to question the complicity of behaviors and policies from its humble beginnings. We are resilient – enduring and growing through turmoil, threat, and challenge. And, we have an extraordinary capacity for renewal, reinventing ourselves and leaning into hurricane-like forces that reshape our landscape. I also learned that we are driven by a deep commitment to reach new heights. We are refreshing our strategic plan based on a Vision statement approved by the Board of Trustees in March 2022, leading to a sustainable future for Columbia.¹ Faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners are part of this critical process.

An inauguration is about far more than welcoming a new president. It is a solemn and joyous occasion; it is a moment for our community to reaffirm the foundational values that have shaped this Seminary. It is a time to reflect on a shared journey's arc and commit to bringing our collective imaginations, talents, and diversity of experience and perspective to bear in new and innovative ways. The word "investiture," when used synonymously with the inauguration, originates in ceremonies of clothing in the robes of a new office. It also reflects the meaning of invest, to clothe or commit our human and fiscal capital. How should we invest together? This afternoon, as I accept, with the guidance of our Lord, the great responsibility of the presidency of Columbia Theological Seminary, I want to acknowledge and honor our Seminary's enduring values, as well as the leaders before me who have brought us to this moment.

I would also like to address why now is the right time, for it is imperative that we fully engage with the world around us. We live in a period of distinct challenges and

¹ "Our Mission and Vision," Columbia Theological Seminary, accessed Nov. 20, 2024, <https://www.ctsnet.edu/about-us/>.

remarkable opportunities. As we cautiously re-emerge from the pandemic and begin to reckon with its consequences, we also must grapple with political division, growing inequality, intentional marginalization of people groups, the perpetuation of racist behaviors at all levels of society, including the church, unnerving changes in the global political order and economy, and a challenge that is unprecedented in human history — that of global climate change.

Notwithstanding, we are moving forward in developing our strategic blueprint by engaging these realities that provide lived experiences of marginalization, desperation, abandonment, suffering, and loss, by pivoting our theological lens to one of listening to this all-benevolent God that is more than just provisional in view. *The people are to listen to what Yahweh is about to say, suggesting that the word of Yahweh is indeed the “stuff” of life. This point is even more evident in Isaiah 3a: “Listen, so that you may live.” For a people who had drunk deeply from the waters of deportation, exile, and estrangement, this invitation to return to the waters of Zion signaled a new day.*²

In abundance and grace and not scarcity and fear, we at Columbia are experiencing a new day, not for the moment, for this invitation is “an everlasting covenant” according to Isaiah, that is to be lived and experienced by our words and deeds reflecting the presence of our God who says that “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). In these texts from Isaiah and Revelations, we are reminded that in abundance and grace, no human being is an accident, and all humanity is created in the image of God. When life seems to be dim and the love of God distant because we weaponize the dialect of our language, the color of our skin, the socio-economic status of our being, the differences of our political ideology, the realization of the events of the Cross will reorient us to what matters in our spiritual and faith journeys. The exhortation of Revelation 22:1-5, that God is the source of life and that God never abandons us, is as true in the realm of revelation as it is in life tribulations, trials, and hardships.

In the Revelation text, God’s future is pictured as a city with a garden at its center. The human world and the natural world are reconciled here.

The Tree of Life stands within the city with its gates of pearl. Saint Peter does not guard these pearly gates as in the popular imagination. Instead, the gates stand open all the time to invite people into the presence of God. Here the rivers that give life flow, the tree of life has leaves to heal the nations, and the radiant presence of God illumines the city.³

This is the future that beckons people everywhere. Those gripped by such a vision ask how such scenes of life might shape a way of life now. To live in anticipation of New

² W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., “Commentary on Isaiah 55:1-9”, *Working Preacher*, March 7, 2010, accessed November 15, 2025, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-isaiah-551-9>.

³ Craig R. Koester, Commentary on Revelation 21:1-6; 22:1-5,” *Working Preacher*, September 3, 2017, accessed October 30, 2024, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/preaching-series-on-revelation-5/31536>.

Jerusalem is to embrace its way of life and bear witness to God's purposes, whose work as the author of creation and new creation is ultimately life.

These affirmations of God's abundance and grace are pushing us—in fact, demanding—that we engage with and impact our world in new ways. To do this, we must take the next step in what I am calling our “journey of re-engagement” — with our campus, our community, our Decatur, city, and the wider world.

When I talk about re-engagement, I mean enhancing the connections within our campus community, both here and abroad, to make the Seminary an environment where all feel welcome and included and where they genuinely belong - where we both talk and listen to each other. Where we can have candid conversations and vigorous debates. Beyond the campus, engagement means listening and responding to those we serve locally, nationally, and globally. It means living up to our responsibilities to our neighbors as a theological institution in service to the church and being a leader in engagement around the southeast, the country, and indeed the world. It means harnessing the power of our institutional human and financial capital in collaboration with civic partners, foundations, government agencies, and corporations to create and learn new knowledge, invest collaboratively, and apply our resources to critical needs and impact areas that share our knowledge broadly.

“As a global community, we face complex, multifaceted, and often interconnected challenges that detrimentally affect the lives of individuals, communities, and nations worldwide. If left unresolved, we will continue to do so for generations to come.... These are problems that no one expert or even institution can solve.”⁴ They require approaches that span the disciplines, a mindset that embraces collaboration, and, yes, the funding and philanthropic support to succeed. In short, these challenges require an unprecedented level of incremental engagement and connection and call upon the theological academy to evolve in response. As focal points for the power of ideas and hubs for broad networks of partnerships, resources, and engagement, theological institutions can uniquely address these problems from many angles and perspectives.

At this time, Columbia Theological Seminary is incredibly poised to play such a role. Our history of discovery and innovation, of scholarship that transcends the disciplines, of free expression and academic freedom, our desire to forge new partnerships, the generations of graduates we have sent into the world and who remain engaged with us, our brilliant faculty, students, and staff who are drawn here from across the globe, our library and center for life-long learning, our initiatives in diversity, equity, and inclusion, and our enduring values provide the bedrock upon which we can build the foundations of this next stage of our work.

We have already begun our journey of re-engagement. To carry this vision of an engaged Seminary further, we must continue to find new ways of doing things while revitalizing the distinctive academic style and core values that make us who we are.

⁴ “Inaugural address by President Paul Alivisatos”, *University of Chicago News*, October 29, 2021, accessed Nov. 11, 2024, <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/inaugural-address-president-paul-alivisatos>.

These are essential steps in our ongoing efforts to be better listeners and partners with our neighbors, who bring enormous creativity and resilience towards a vision of a vibrant and thriving community, for we are moving forward, no, we are re-engaging in abundance and grace.

Thank you once again for allowing me to be your President!

P E R S P E C T I V A S • 2025

“Now what?” (Mar. 30, 2023)

Rev. Dr. Edwin Aponte

(Presbyterian, PCUSA)

• THIS ADDRESS IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

The author references two murals found in small town of Lavapiés in Spain, the first with the wording “Usted Está Aquí” (you are here) to bring attention to the current situation in theological education and the negative and discouraging narratives like declining enrollment and decreasing interest in all types of organized religion. He is mindful that these are real and can’t be ignored, and he calls Drew University to reflect as Easter approaches how millions are still preparing in the season of Lent and how even the so-called Religions Nones are deeply committed to values like tolerance, and engaged in serving communities, work in social, economic, environmental justices to build vital healthy, stable, and caring societies. He points to research that shows that the vast majority of the world’s people will continue to identify with a religion. He then references the late Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015, an author, poet and journalist from Uruguay, and the mural art with the wording, “Somos lo que hacemos para cambiar lo que somos” (We are what we do in order to change what we are) as well as Micah chapter 6, and begs the question, “Now what?” Will Drew University revisit its mission and vision and be creative and take courageous action to advance justice, peace and love of God, neighbor, and the earth? He responds by saying, “Yes, we can do this because we have this within us collectively.”

Installation Address, Drew University Theological School
Reverend Edwin David Aponte, Ph.D.
Dean of the Theological School
Professor of Religion and Culture
Drew University
March 30, 2023

¡Somos lo que hacemos para cambiar lo que somos!

In late December 2019 and early January 2020, my spouse, Laura Jakubowski and I were blessed to be visiting Madrid, Spain. At that time, little did we know that we were at the start of a global pandemic and in our ignorance, we wandered the streets of Madrid oblivious to any health danger, seeing some of the sites, and of course visiting a couple of the world-famous museums, like the Reina Sofia which houses Pablo Picasso's Guernica, his 1937 antiwar protest to the bombing of the small village in northern Spain. And of course, we went to El Prado Museum where we saw art work by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, such as the court painting of the royal household "The Family of Carlos IV," and more Goya, including the painting of "The Clothed Maja" (1807), the shocking war painting "Third of May" (1808), and even more Goya including hundreds of etchings and drawings, such as the etching "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" (1799). There's lots and lots of Goya at the Museo Nacional del Prado.

In Madrid, we stayed in a neighborhood called Lavapiés, an interesting, eclectic neighborhood, a bit edgy, a little bit artsy. If you ever have a chance to go to Lavapiés and come up out of the metro/subway station you will come face-to-face with a building with lettering that loudly proclaims: "Usted Está Aquí," "You are Here." It could be interesting and perhaps worthwhile for us to ponder and unpack that pithy saying, but today I want us to consider what was around the corner from "Usted Está Aquí" on the other side of the same building. I was surprised that on the other side of this building near the Metro station, in the midst of that busy neighborhood where we stayed there was public art, this mural that proclaims: "Somos lo que hacemos para cambiar lo que somos." Of course, these words in that piece of urban art are from the late Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015), the author, poet, and journalist from Uruguay who wrote on history, politics, sports, and many other things.

Today we can interpret Eduardo Galeano's words into English to say, "We are what we do in order to change who we are." One way to understand this phrase is to say that in life we are what we choose, what we do, and how we do it, and that in turn defines us. Fine, perhaps a nice sentiment, but what does that have to do with the mission and work of the Theological School at Drew University? Well, for the moment, let us stay here, "Usted Está Aquí."

We live in a time of many negative narratives. No doubt you've heard expressions of this such as, "Things are bad, and they're just getting worse!" or "You know when I was young this was so much better." Some of these discouraging stories, negative narratives that impact the mission and work of the Theological School are stories about the decline of religion, the passing away of faith communities, decline church membership, indeed the shrinking membership congregations of all faith traditions, reflecting decreasing interest in all types of organized religion. There are various studies that tell us that people are becoming less religious in the U.S. and many other countries. Here in the United States the percentage of adults who identify with different types of organized religion is declining each year. Surveys testify about how fewer U.S. adults how often they attend religious services, pray less frequently, and say that

religion is not very important in their lives.¹ Similar research also shows similar patterns among Western Europeans and also in Australia and New Zealand.²

There's an additional aspect to these changes that has caught media attention. Places like the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), the University of Southern California Center for Religion and Civic Culture, and the Pew Research Center talk about the so-called "Religious Nones" — those who answer "none of the above" when asked their religious identification. Pew Research Center proclaims that about three-in-ten U.S. Adults no longer have any religious affiliation. In this time of declining commitment to organized religion as the result of pandemic patterns of participation religious communities shifted, we saw fewer people actually show up in congregational buildings.

There are challenges to be sure, and it is foolish to ignore realities, especially for those of us whose daily work has something to do with religion. But it is equally foolish to join the herd of proverbial lemmings running off the cliff of decline, and gloom and doom. Here are a few observations that compel me to offer this caution. At the same time as narratives of decline, and gloom and doom right now as we gather in Craig Chapel at Drew University on March 30th:

- Since March 23, 2023 hundreds of millions of observant Muslims began the daily fast of Ramadan, seeking to draw closer to God.
- Next week Passover starts on April 5th and will be observed by millions of Jews around the world.
- Whether in the Western Christian tradition or the Eastern Christian tradition we are right now in the season of Lent or Great Lent looking ahead to Easter, again observed by millions of people around the world.

Even among the so-called Religious Nones, many who have chosen to leave historic forms of organized or establishment religion, they simultaneously show that they are deeply and actively committed to values like tolerance, they are engaged in service to communities, working for social justice, economic justice, environmental justice, striving to build vital healthy, stable, caring societies. The same kinds of things that religious people say that interested in doing.

Despite stories of gloom, doom, and decline religion is still a big deal in the world,. And if we look beyond the United States, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand to the rest of the world religion is a very big deal especially in Africa, Asia, the political region we call the Middle East, and in Latin America. And this is not even beginning to consider the various traditions that have their origins in Asia and are

¹ Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys, conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/pf_10-17-19_rdd_update-00-018/.

² Being Christian in Western Europe." Australia Bureau of Statistics, "Religious Affiliation in Australia" April 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia>.; StasNZ, "Losing Our Religion," 2019. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/losing-our-religion>.

embraced by people all over the world, sometimes fully, sometimes people are picking and choosing what from those Asian traditions they find meaningful in their daily lives.

Even the same research centers that talk about the decline of religious affiliation state that the vast majority of the world's people will continue to identify with a religion. Moreover, there are those in their daily lives who embrace multiple traditions and practices simultaneously without any sense of conflict or contradiction.

Religion, spirituality, multiple pathways for the search for meaning and inspiration, all that is not going to disappear. Yes, things are changing. The question is do we want to recognize nature of the changes? Or do we want to respond to what is happening around us by trying to freeze what used to be?

Here is the temptation, one of many, trying to keep on doing things the way they used to be, a "business-as-usual religious people as a response to a perceived crisis in Church, higher education, and theological education. Instead of giving in to these stories of decline as the final word, perhaps we should adjust the way we look at such things. And here the words of prophet Micah chapter six are helpful;

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

And now at a place like this, here is something for us to ponder. And faculty colleagues, I say ponder, but I mean something more. What might it look like if we embrace a way of doing theological education that takes the values of Micah 6:8 at the heart of our work? Can we imagine a theological education shaped by the principles of Micah 6:8 and folded into what we are called to do, call not just individually, but called collectively? How can we shape our curriculum in a way that captures that nearly untranslatable word because it is full of so rich in meaning in Hebrew, here translated "kindness"? How can we shape a curriculum that is constantly intentionally attentive to the call of the Holy One on our lives on the world, and everything that lives on this earth. You recall the opening words of Micah chapter six, all of the creation has been called as witnesses, and so creation is called as witnesses of what we do at Drew Theological School. What does it mean for us to do what is good? What does it mean to love the way God loves humanity and the world, and to fold all that in theological education and doing religious studies here at this place.

And so, no what? This is a good moment to remind ourselves of the mission and vision of Drew Theological School to empower "creative thought and courageous action to advance justice, peace and love of God, neighbor and the earth." But what does that mean in this new age where what we thought was settled no longer is? The nature of culture and society, and of faith communities is changing. The demands of everyday life mean that we embrace understandings of the world in holistic ways. It means taking action, even if we don't have everything figured out. And for some of us that is a scary thing to do. It means paying attention to everyday life, where we don't have the luxury of only doing one thing at a time. And let's remind ourselves that is the nature of everyday

life. The demands of everyday life, lo cotidiano, mean that we need to do this and that, and something else all at the same time.

Drew Theological School has a history of taking a risk. This faculty committed itself four Shared Values of

1. Dismantling Racism and Racial Justice
2. Interfaith and Ecumenical Understanding and Solidarity
3. Ecological Sustainability and Environmental Justice
4. Sexual and Gender Justice

And all of that is good and right, but as we engage everyday life are there are other things that we need to name and value beyond these four? I am not saying give up the four. It means doing these four and perhaps four more. I don't know yet. Part of Drew Theological School's calling is to do justice, justice in the fullest way possible, to lean into justice even more. Part of the good news for us is that Drew does this now. And this one of the reasons I accepted the invitation to join my faculty colleagues. You are above and beyond the pack of many other theological schools in working for justice. But here is the other side of where are at because you have done so much we, our School, our faculty, students, and staff we are blessed, we are positioned differently. We can press further beyond. I don't know what that looks like, but we will find out together. And in pushing further on, doing justice, loving kindness and mercy, walking humbly with focused attention on the Holy One, means living into what has become the unofficial Drew Theological School anthem of "Drawing the Circle wide, and wider still."

To do this work it is going to be hard. It means that we are going to lean into not just revitalizing theological education, but also reimagining it. Can we do this? Can we be so bold? Can we do things so "crazy." Can we take the risk? "Somos lo que hacemos para cambiar lo que somos." "We are what we do in order to change who we are." We can do this. We must do this. And we can do this together because we have this within us collectively. We can do this as we draw the circle wide.

Thank you.