

A CONTEXTUALIZED APPROACH TO TEACHING CHRISTOLOGY IN A LATIN
AMERICAN SETTING

BY

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Abstract

Like the rest of the world, the person of Christ is attacked strongly in Latin America. There, he is often viewed not as the Risen Lord, but as a weak man who is in the process of dying. Many people do not believe that he holds any significant power whatsoever. Instead, they believe that it is the saints and the Virgin who hold the true power and are able to save. The goal of this thesis is to point out those most egregious problems which attack the person of Christ in Latin American settings. Then, the subsequent goal is to formulate a contextualized guide to teaching Christology in Latin American settings. This guide would show how to present Christ as the strong, comforting, and risen Lord, and not just as a weak man. Christ is not just someone who was born on Christmas and died on Good Friday. He is not someone who failed to appease the wrath of his Father in heaven. Rather, he is the omnipotent God, a dear brother, and the victorious Lord.

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Introduction

For the Winterims of 2011 and 2012, I had the privilege of being able to travel to Mexico on the SPICE program. One of the goals that I had for these trips was to more fully understand the Mexican culture. Thankfully, I was able to do this to a great extent. I talked with my Spanish teacher, with my host family, with my guide who showed me around the city of Puebla, and I was also able to simply observe people.

After spending some time in Mexico, one aspect of their culture became very evident. They were a very religious people.¹ As I would walk to school each day I would pass by a certain church. It seemed as if every person who walked by had to genuflect or cross themselves. When I went for a ride in a cab, many of the drivers had a picture of a saint to supposedly protect them, and some even kissed their rosary beads before putting the car into drive. Also, whenever I would tour a church, it was very clear that the people were proud of the beautiful structures in which they worshiped.

The problem though was not that these people were religious per se, but the problem was in whom they put their faith. Wherever I looked, the places of prominence in the churches always were filled with icons of either saints or the Virgin. There is nothing innately wrong with having pictures of the saints or of Mary because they are due respect and honor. But, the problem was that these icons took central place in the cathedrals and churches. The most prominent shrines would more often than not be set up for a guardian or patron saint of a town or a cathedral. And most disturbingly, the Virgin was often the one pictured on top of or right behind the altar, which serves as the focal point for the entire church.

At times there were icons of Jesus too. But, these icons almost always pictured Jesus in three ways. The first was the baby Jesus who sat on the knee of Mary. While pictured in this way, it appeared that Jesus was only a minor figure with no power, especially when compared to the Virgin who was pictured as a dominant and strong mother.

Another way in which Jesus was pictured was as *el Cristo moribundo*, or the one who was constantly in the agony of death. Many times I would walk into the cathedrals and witness a malnourished Jesus hanging on the cross, brutally beaten and bloody.

¹ This was also true for the people of Ecuador. I traveled there in 2009 with a group from MLC.

And finally, there were a number of other times where Jesus was simply depicted as a dead man. One of the most prominent sites for Roman Catholics in Mexico is La Basílica de Guadalupe, located in Mexico City. In one of the chapels located on this compound is a shrine of sorts that was constructed for Christ. There, in a faux casket, lies a mannequin which is supposed to depict a dead Christ.

It is true that none of these icons of Christ is wrong. He truly was at one time a baby who probably sat on his mother's lap. He also was indeed crucified and laid in a tomb. They are historically and biblically accurate.

But, the real reason why these depictions are so disturbing is because almost nowhere was there a depiction or an icon of the Risen Lord. In my five weeks in Ecuador and my four in Mexico I did not find a single piece of artwork with the victorious and Risen Christ in any of the Roman Catholic cathedrals and chapels.

And why is this such a problem? 1 Corinthians 15:17 explains it clearly, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Without the Risen Lord, faith in him is nothing. It is as valuable as placing one's faith in an inanimate object. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, it would have shown that his sacrifice was not sufficient, that sin had not been forgiven, and that he failed to win the victory over death. No person would ever escape the devil's bonds, and all would be doomed to an eternity in hell.

That is why the situation in Latin America is so dire for so many. That is why those truths listed before are so disturbing.

And so, it is due to these experiences in Mexico and Ecuador that I have decided to pursue the thesis that I have. That thesis is "A Contextualized Approach to Teaching Christology in a Latin American Setting." The ultimate goal for this paper would be how to show Christ as the strong, comforting, and Risen Lord to those in the Latino culture, not just that weak man who remained dead in a faux casket in La Basílica de Guadalupe. Christ is not just someone who was born on Christmas and died on Good Friday. He is not someone who failed to appease the wrath of his Father in heaven. Rather, he is the omnipotent God, a dear brother, and the victorious Lord.

Literature Review

One could say that to do evangelism work in a Latin American setting, all that is needed is to preach the gospel, to tell the history of Jesus and his love for his church. If a person said this, they would be right in a sense. God is the only one who can convert the hearts of people. The job of a Christian is not to convert hearts, but simply to proclaim God's Word.

Yet, it must be understood that there are different cultures in this world. People who live in different places think differently, learn differently, and act differently. God created this world with a number of natural laws. Two of those laws which he created were the sciences of sociology and anthropology. Obviously, whenever God's word is taught, he has the power to create faith in a person's heart. However, as evangelists, it is also important to keep in mind these natural laws that he created. Every person has a unique culture, and that should be kept in remembrance during evangelism work. It is important not to ride roughshod over that culture so that doors remain open for opportunities to preach Christ.²

What is needed is a contextualized approach to evangelism. Contextualization simply means that the Word of God is taught to a specific culture in a unique manner based off that culture's needs and unique characteristics. Ernst Wendland, Bruce Nicholls, and Richard Lauersdorf all make this point in their works.

Thus, in order to do evangelism work in a Latin American setting, it is important to understand the Latin American culture. Since that is such a broad topic, this paper does not intend to cover all of that information. Instead, it will simply cover the greatest enemies that oppose Christ and are unique to a Latin American setting. Those topics include the early history of Roman Catholicism in Latin America, Syncretism, Roman Catholic hermeneutics, *Machismo*³, and *La Gran Tradición* and *La Pequeña Tradición*.⁴

There is some literature which speaks of all these problems and how they affect the person of Christ. Those are the works of Rodolfo Blank in *Teología y Misión en América Latina*, and also of Eugene Nida in *Understanding Latin Americans: With Special Reference to Religious Values and Movements*.

² Rodolfo Blank, *Teología y Misión en América Latina*, ed. Héctor Hoppe (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 182.

³ *Machismo* is a type of male dominance or chauvinism in Latin America.

⁴ These terms will be explained later in the paper.

Most literature, however, identifies only one or two of these issues and explains them thoroughly. Patrizia Granziera does a magnificent job of outlining the history of the Virgin in Latin America and speaks of why she is still so important to this day. Another author who identified one of those issues is Christopher Vecsey. His article deals with the early history of the Roman Catholic Church in the New World and their evangelism tactics.

There are also WELS pastors who have written about and are quite knowledgeable about these topics as well. Those who are quoted in this paper include Timothy Otto, Timothy Flunker, and Paul Hartman.

The purpose of this thesis is to compile the information on these topics of contextualization and the problems which affect the person of Christ in Latin America. Then, based off of that information, it will form a contextualized approach to teaching Christology in Latin America. The thesis will take that initial information about Latin America and attempt to construct a guide on how to teach Christology in a manner that would be unique to the Latino culture.

One of the problems, however, is that the Latino culture in general is made up of many sub-cultures. Mexico is not Peru, and Nicaragua is not Argentina. Each Latin American country is different in certain ways than the rest. Thus, this thesis is not able to cover each of these sub-cultures completely. Instead, it intends to work with those characteristics that are generally true for all of Latin America.

I. A Brief Overview of Contextualization

First, what is contextualization? Gehman offers a good definition when he writes, “Contextualizing theology is that dynamic process whereby the people of God, living in community and interacting with believers throughout time and space, under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit, proclaim in their own language and thought forms the Word that God has spoken to them in their context through the study of the Scriptures.”⁵ Contextualization

⁵ Richard J. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Nairobi: Evangel Press, 1987), 77, quoted in Ernst, Wendland, “Who Do People Say I Am?” Contextualizing Christology in an African Cultural Setting,” In *Galu Wamkota : Missiological Reflections from South-Central Africa* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2007) 328.

is not a process which changes the Word of God. Rather, it is simply changing the manner of which the Word of God is proclaimed.

This should be done since the Word of God was not written for one culture alone. It is not as if God wrote the Bible so that only those who live in the American culture can truly understand his Word, and those who do not have this type of culture must convert to the American culture before they can be converted to faith in Christ. Lauersdorf states,

The work of missions is not to bring a foreign Christ or a Westernized Word to people, but the one Word and the one Savior, common to all. That Savior and His life-giving Word cut across time and culture, national boundaries and ethnic barriers, offering to and asking of people the same things everywhere. Yet we who seek to bring this Savior and His Word to the peoples of the world need to be aware that culture and customs do exist. We dare not be ignorant of the different ways and workings of people.⁶

People view what happens in their life based on their past experiences, worldview, and culture. It does not matter where and in what culture a person was raised. There is no such thing as a blank tablet when it comes to human beings. Thus, people will be biased when they read the Bible as well. Their worldview and culture shape the way in which they read the Scriptures. This does not mean that Scripture itself changes, simply that the person who reads it may understand a section a bit differently than someone from another culture. For instance, whereas the Israelites would have easily understood the Parable of the Sower and the Seed since they grew up in a largely agricultural setting, those who live in a more urban setting may not understand all of the same details.

It is for these reasons that contextualization is a wise practice. This is why the Word of God should be presented in a different manner to different cultures. Yes, the Word of God is always powerful and effective, but there will be stumbling blocks to it. The goal of contextualization is simply to remove as many of those stumbling blocks as possible. Paul himself explains this in 1 Cor. 9:19-23,

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not

⁶ Richard E. Lauersdorf, "Contextualization of the Gospel, What Are the Implications for Our Work?" World Mission Conference, East Fork, AZ, 1984, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/LauersdorfGospel.pdf>. (accessed October 8, 2013).

having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Therefore, in order to make use of the contextualization process, remove stumbling blocks, and “win as many as possible,” an evangelist must not only understand his own culture, but others as well. In fact, the evangelist, according to Nicholls, must understand three cultures other than his own: “(Evangelists) need to understand at least four different cultures: The Bible’s, that of the Western missionary who first brought the gospel, their own, and that of the people to whom they take the gospel.”⁷ The evangelist takes time to do this so that the ones to whom the word of God is preached may say, “This is my gospel,” not simply, “This is the gospel of the man who is preaching to me.”⁸

Dangers of Contextualization

Although contextualization is a wise and useful practice, there are dangers that accompany it as well. These dangers occur either due to a lack of contextualization, or an over-contextualization.

About the lack of contextualization, Nicholls writes,

If there is a lack of cultural sensitivity, there can be great disasters. Often, people try and evangelize with the sole focus of maintaining the purity of Scripture without being culturally sensitive. For instance, when talking about the word “heaven,” it may mean one thing to the evangelist, but it could mean something completely different to the recipient of that gospel, or the word heaven could have somewhat of a double meaning. That is one reason why contextualization is vital in the work of evangelism.⁹

Obviously, an evangelist will want to keep the purity of the Word of God. He cannot compromise on that issue. But, if he explains or teaches the Word of God without thinking of the contextualization process, there may be a possibility that God’s Word is misunderstood.

Lauersdorf gives an example of this from the evangelism work being done in Taiwan. Obviously, the missionaries there wish to teach and uphold the Fourth Commandment. Elders and parents are to be honored and obeyed as God’s representatives. However, it is also

⁷ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 7.

⁸ Lauersdorf, 2.

⁹ Nicholls, 8.

important to recognize that a problem in Taiwan is ancestor worship. Thus, if the missionaries do not employ proper contextualization practices, they may in turn lead the people to believe that the Fourth Commandment upholds the practice of ancestor worship. This could lead to the belief that although there is only one true God, there are also a number of lesser deities.¹⁰

Another disaster that comes from under-contextualization, or even a lack of cultural sensitivity, is the belief that the blessings of the cross do not apply as much to some cultures as they do to others. Some might be lead to believe that Jesus is not as much their Savior as he is to the person of another culture.

Evangelists must be very conscious of this danger, and watch out for it. All evangelists have had the Word of God presented to them in a contextualized way that functions with their own culture for their entire life. Thus, they may be unconscious of the fact that the Word was presented to them in a contextualized manner due to life-long conditioning. They may then unwittingly present Christ in the same contextualized way they heard about him, and confuse their hearers.¹¹

The other danger of contextualization is over-contextualization. This would occur when principles and doctrines that are firmly established in Scripture are abolished or changed for the sake of cultural sensitivity.

The book of Galatians gives an example of over-contextualization. Paul was very aware of the culture of the Jews, since he himself was one. However, he could not allow Christian freedom and gospel truths to be destroyed for the sake of cultural sensitivity. If he would have said that Christians needed to follow the Old Testament ceremonial laws as the Judaizers wanted, then he would have distorted the gospel. This ultimately would have stated that Christians are not merely saved by Christ's work, but are saved by Christ's work plus their own good works. This would be as Paul said, no gospel at all.¹²

Wendland also points out another disastrous effect that can happen with over-contextualization. He states, "And the same thing occurs nowadays when overly-contextualized

¹⁰ Lauersdorf, 4.

¹¹ Ibid, 4.

¹² Galatians 1:7

theologies transform the Christ of Scripture into what amounts to a glorified, but essentially human (even if heroic), ‘salvation’ cult figure.”¹³

Finding “The Narrow Lutheran Middle”

So how does one avoid the Scylla of under-contextualization or the Charybdis of over-contextualization? The answer is found not only by looking at and studying contextualization techniques, but by studying the Word of God. “We look not for an Asian or African theology, but for Biblical theology in an Asian or African setting. We expect the Gospel not just to root itself in their culture, but also to judge that culture.”¹⁴ And as Wendland writes, “The contextualization process in theology and practice must always be governed by . . . inspiration, inerrancy, authority, perspicuity, and sufficiency of the Word of God. Furthermore, a proper orientation is necessary: the heart of the Bible as a whole is to be found in Jesus the Christ.”¹⁵

And in that Word of God, God actually gives different examples of that middle road of contextualization. Paul’s meeting with the people of Athens at the Areopagus serves as a proper use of contextualization.

Usually, when Paul would preach to the Jews, he would talk of the Church’s history and tradition. However, that type of approach that he used with the Jews would have been foolish in this circumstance since these Athenians knew next to nothing about the Church’s history. He employed the tactic of pre-evangelism by “introducing (his) remarks with a *captatio benevolentiae* (‘currying of favor’),”¹⁶ as is seen in Acts 17:22, “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.”

Paul continued to make use of contextualization in a variety of ways as he preached at the meeting of the Areopagus. One of his techniques worked very well with the Greek culture of the day, and is still a wise technique to employ. “Paul’s sermon features a variety of rhetorical

¹³ Ernst, Wendland, “Who Do People Say I Am?” Contextualizing Christology in an African Cultural Setting,” In *Galu Wamkoto : Missiological Reflections from South-Central Africa* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2007) 345.

¹⁴ Lauersdorf, 3.

¹⁵ Wendland, 366.

¹⁶ Dean Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul’s Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication,” *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 202, <http://web.ebscohost.com> (accessed August 29, 2013).

techniques that would have been familiar to educated Greeks. One such strategy is the use of delaying tactics of ‘insinuation’...Paul postpones the difficult subject of the resurrection of Jesus to the very end of the oration (Acts 17:31), after first establishing a rapport and building a foundation for understanding.”¹⁷ In Acts 17:28, Paul even quoted some of the pagan poets to establish a connection with the people. This is not to say that he placed such writings on the level of Scripture, but simply used them as a tactic for an introduction of sorts. By using this tactic of quoting these poets with whom the people of the Areopagus were accustomed, Paul placed himself on the same level as his hearers. He did not look down upon them as he preached the Word, nor did he come to them solely as someone who was weak and unlearned.¹⁸

Although the dangers are great, and the task is difficult, proper contextualization is possible. By continually studying God’s Word, an evangelist will be strengthened in his knowledge of the Scriptures and will understand doctrine better as well. The key to watching oneself against the errors of either over or under contextualization is to stay in the Word of God and ask for God’s blessing.

II. Problems in Latin America that Affect How the Person of Christ Is Viewed

As shown in the introduction, the key problem of faith that affects people in a Latin American setting is the heresies that attack the person of Christ. This next section will discuss those problems.

Problems Directly Related to the Roman Catholic Church

Centuries ago, before Roman Catholicism had reached the New World, the common belief of many people from today’s Americas was that this world was filled with spirits, gods, and demi-gods. Each spirit or god had its own realm in which it ruled. There was the creator god of the sun, who left his creation of the world behind; the spirit of the moon, who was the symbol of benefits and fertility; and the *dueño* of the soil, or the spirit which holds power of the

¹⁷ Ibid, 201-202.

¹⁸ Ibid, 201-202.

soil.¹⁹ Yet, these are just a few of the many other spirits and gods in whom people believed. Granziera states,

Images of the sun, the mountains, the waters of life and the community embedded in the natural environment stand at the center of pre-Hispanic religion... The main preoccupation (for the Aztec and Mayan societies) was fertility and fecundity, which they tried to maintain through the cult of gods associated with water and the earth. Other than Tlaloc, who was “the most venerated” of their gods, all the other gods related to vegetation and fertility were feminine.²⁰

Evangelism Tactics

Eventually, though, the people of Spain came. They brought along not only their desire for power, but also their religion and their want to proselytize the indigenous peoples of the New World. Although it appears to be wonderful that the people of the New World would finally hear the Word of God, as distorted as it was at times due to the Roman Catholic teachings, the truth was much different sometimes. “It is significant that the monastic missionaries complained of malaise and apathy already in the sixteenth century when the Indians of central Mexico were converted en masse. The Spaniards are depicted as supportive of the Church in theory but indifferent in practice.”²¹

This “indifference” of the Spanish people clearly manifested itself in many of the evangelism tactics performed in the New World. When they arrived, many noticed that there were significant similarities between their Catholicism and the paganism of the indigenous peoples. Because of this, some thought they could use these similarities as points of contact to begin their mission work.²²

Although this tactic of using analogies can work at times, the Spanish were lazy and too impatient with the Holy Spirit. Flunker writes,

Because (the priests) were for the most part lazy and didn’t want to really do the hard work of spreading the gospel and combating sin, they resorted to syncretism. They took the native gods, the ones that had been worshiped for about 500 years previously, and

¹⁹ Eugene Albert Nida, *Understanding Latin Americans: With Special Reference to Religious Values and Movements* (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1976) 108.

²⁰ Patrizia Granziera, “From Coatlicue to Guadalupe: The Image of the Great Mother in Mexico,” *Studies In World Christianity* 10, no. 2 (October 2004): 250-251, <http://web.ebscohost.com> (accessed September 29, 2013).

²¹ Paul J. Hartman, “The Contemporary Roman Catholic Faith in Latin America,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (September 1, 1995): 10, <http://wlsessays.net/> (accessed August 29, 2013).

²² Blank, 36.

gave them Christian names and proclaimed them saints in the pantheon of God's kingdom. Therefore, to the uneducated and illiterate, who were used to form and tradition and custom rather than Biblical truth, they assented to the new way of worshiping the old gods.²³

The missionaries began to realize that it was easier by far to simply eradicate the ancient practices of the indigenous peoples and to supplant them with their own teachings.²⁴ They thought, "En primer lugar (los indígenas) necesitaban ser civilizados, es decir debían ser como los españoles; tenían que cambiar de cultura antes de cambiar de religión . . . a fin de que la mente y el alma del indio llegaran a ser como 'una tábula rasa.'" (In the first place, the indigenous peoples needed to be civilized, or they should become like the Spanish; they had to change their culture before they could change their religion . . . so that the mind and soul of the indigenous person would become a "blank tablet.")²⁵

The easiest way to put an end to those pagan practices and make the people into blank tablets was simply to use force. In fact, some began to believe "that evangelization was to require military conquest."²⁶ In his essay, Vecsey tells the account of Don Juan de Oñate who serves as an example of the force and cruelty that the Spanish used to do their work of "evangelism." Oñate, in 1589, defeated a number of towns in the New World. Afterwards, he required that the indigenous people submit to his authority. They did so, unknowing of what this authority would bring. His rule was so cruel that he allowed the Spanish soldiers to rape the indigenous women. Because of this, the indigenous people rose up and attacked the Spanish people, killing thirteen of them in the process. Oñate was then assured by some of the Franciscan monks that he could punish the people for their rebellion against him. But, his punishment was again all too excessive. He enslaved the people again, cut off one foot of all adult males, and sent the children away from their parents to be slaves for the monks and friars. Those monks and friars, in turn, tortured the people and used other corporal punishment techniques to make sure that they would never rebel again.²⁷

²³ Timothy Flunker, interview by author, Mequon, WI, October 30, 2013.

²⁴ Granziera, 264.

²⁵ Blank, 14.

²⁶ Christopher Vecsey, "Pueblo Indian Catholicism: The Isleta Case," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16, no. 2, Native-American Catholics (Spring 1998): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154631> (accessed September 29, 2013).

²⁷ *Ibid*, 1-3.

Yet, not all the Franciscans and the Spanish conquistadors were like this. Some did indeed care for the people. “(Los franciscanos) anhelaron la oportunidad de poner en práctica su sueño de construir una iglesia dedicada a la pobreza evangélica...Para los franciscanos, el Nuevo Mundo era el lugar ideal para construir su utopía espiritual.” ([The Franciscans] longed for the opportunity of being able to put their dream of constructing a church which was dedicated to the evangelical poverty into practice. . . . For the Franciscans, the New World was the ideal place to construct their spiritual utopia.)²⁸ The only problem was that this “social gospel” appeared to be their main goal for the people, to create a utopia on earth, instead of proclaiming Christ as the Savior from their sins.

Because of their questionable evangelism tactics, there was much confusion among the indigenous peoples. According to Blank, the Conquistadors never brought the truth of the real Christ over to the New World. They never taught the indigenous peoples how Christ was true God and yet true man, died, but also rose triumphantly from the grave. Instead they brought a number of different “Christs” over. Those “Christs” included the baby Jesus sitting on the Virgin’s lap, the Pacifist Jesus, the Christ of Mysterious Powers²⁹, the Sovereign Christ who rules in the heavens, and the dying Christ.³⁰ Although all those pictures of Christ are true or contain aspects of truth, the ultimate picture of Christ as the victorious and risen Lord is missing.

And ultimately, although there were a number of similarities between the old pagan religions and this new Catholicism, there was one crucial difference. The goal of the indigenous, pagan religion was to keep the universe and nature in harmony, while the goal of Catholicism was to get to heaven. However, the way in which they reached each goal was quite similar. The people would be required to do something in order for them to achieve their goal. In order for a Catholic to reach heaven, they believed they had to appease god. In order for an indigenous person to be in harmony with nature and receive a good harvest, they too would have to appease certain deities. Both religions required that man do something in order to reach his goal.³¹

²⁸ Blank, 31.

²⁹ Some take the idea of him being able to perform transubstantiation of the elements in the Lord’s Supper and believe that he is some sort of magical being.

³⁰ Ibid, 94-98.

³¹ Nida, 110.

Syncretism

Because of the laziness and questionable evangelism tactics of the Spanish priests, and because of the similarities between Roman Catholicism and the old paganism, there eventually became a syncretistic religion that grew from the two faiths in the New World. True, there were some who believed that “estas semejanzas (entre la nueva fe y la vieja religión) fueron inventadas por el ‘padre de mentiras’ para confundir las mentes de los pobres indios. Por lo tanto, estas analogías satánicas tenían que ser extirpadas en sus totalidad.” (These similarities [between the new faith and the old religion] were invented by the “Father of Lies” to confuse the poor natives. Therefore, these satanic analogies had to be totally exterminated.)³² But, the majority of those priests were not patient enough to simply preach the gospel. Instead, they accepted the similarities and resorted to syncretism.³³

Today in Latin America, that syncretism still exists. This religious phenomenon has been named “Christo-Paganism.” When taking a look at an average Latino, some would assume that some of their religious practices seem to contradict each other. People wonder, “How can someone worship the God in heaven in one moment, and then follow superstitious practices of old in the next?” Nida states, “On the one hand, the person looks to the God of heaven, the priest, and the Church, and in this he is quite a good Roman Catholic. On the other hand, he also looks to *Dios Mundo* ‘the God of the World’ (owner of the mountains, valleys, rivers, and springs), the sorcerer, and the *ermita* ‘local shrine.’”³⁴ The reason some Latinos do not see this apparent contradiction of religion is because many do not have a solid foundation in the Word of God. To them, they look at their world, and these two “religious beliefs” help to make sense of the “world, (the person) himself, and the supernatural.”³⁵

³² Blank, 37.

³³ Flunker, interview.

³⁴ Nida, 106.

³⁵ Ibid, 107.

Worship of the Saints

In the third and fourth centuries in Europe, many Christians were martyred. The surviving Christians did not want to simply forget them, so they constructed monuments of them in their memory. Those survivors did this to honor the martyrs, not to worship them.

However, over time, these martyrs and saints were transformed into people who should not just be honored and remembered, but into people who were worshiped. Because of this idolatry, theologians tried to make a distinction between the veneration of the saints and Mary, and the adoration of God. They proclaimed that God was the only one worthy of adoration, and that Mary and the saints were only to be honored, not worshiped. Sadly, many people still fell into idolatry despite the best efforts of these theologians.³⁶

At the time of the conquistadors, the idea of patron saints of towns and villages had become popular in Europe. Therefore, they brought this idea of patron saints over to the New World. The indigenous people appreciated this idea since they too had a similar practice in their previous pagan religions. Each town would have their own totem whether it be a certain type of animal, plant, or demi-god that symbolized their region. Whatever the totem might be, each one symbolized a certain mythical ancestor.³⁷

Despite their adoration of the saints, many of the Spanish still felt that the Roman Catholic faith was monotheistic in nature. However, the natives did not see Roman Catholicism in this light. Due to their own past experience of animism and paganism, the indigenous peoples did not view Roman Catholicism as monotheistic in nature, but polytheistic. To them, there was the God of the heavens, whom they equated with the creator God of the sun. Then, there were the different saints with their own particular realm of “power.” They likened these saints to the *dueños*, spirits, and demi-gods of their past pagan religions. The evil *dueños* they equated with evil spirits, and the devil with *Dios Mundo*. This made all too much sense since both Satan and *Dios Mundo* are characterized as unpredictable and cruel. The natives also linked the Virgin Mary with their god of the moon. And finally, they equated Jesus with the pagan god of death. For Jesus to be the one whose realm deals with death would be logical since he did die. But there is also another reason why this would be logical. In some of the pagan religions, the god of

³⁶ Blank, 67.

³⁷ Ibid, 107.

death was the offspring of the god of the sun and the spirit of the moon, as Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.³⁸ Those are not the only similarities though. In the Aztec religion, Huitzilopochtli, a certain chief god, was born of a virgin as was Christ himself; the cross was a symbol of the four corners of the universe; a ceremony similar to the Lord's Supper was celebrated; and children underwent some sort of purification rite like baptism.³⁹

Another reason why the idea of patron saints became popular with the indigenous peoples was because they believed God to be an angry and manipulative judge. Therefore, they needed someone to serve as a buffer or an intercessor between themselves and God. Due to the fact that they believed the saints had a higher standing with God, it was not too farfetched to believe that these saints could fill that role of intercessor. Thus, they believed they could rely on the saints as intercessors between themselves and God.⁴⁰

Sadly, this worship of the saints and the idea of patron saints has carried over in the Latino culture of today. To this day, some people believe that “(The) saints are supernatural and of great relevance, among which the patron saint of each locality stands out, and to which the people go with their problems and for whom they dedicate an annual celebration.”⁴¹ Because of a lack of the pure truth of God's Word, this problem continues to manifest itself. Instead of placing their focus on Christ, many believe that their main goal in life is to appease certain gods, or saints.⁴²

The Virgin

What had happened to the indigenous peoples was horrendous. Without their consent, the Spanish simply came and took whatever they wanted. It did not matter whether it was gold, women, control, power, or even a person's life. By their actions, the Spanish demonstrated that they believed they had the right to do whatever they wanted in the New World.

Because of this, the people were left without hope. Their very lives had been taken from them and given into the hands of others. Where were they to turn? They couldn't look to their

³⁸ Nida, 108.

³⁹ Blank, 36.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 105-106.

⁴¹ Hartman, 7.

⁴² Flunker, interview.

armies to protect them because they had already been defeated. So to whom could they look? Their gods? The Spanish forbade them to worship in that way any longer. Could they look to the God whom the Spanish brought? Absolutely not. There was no way that righteous Judge would ever help them in their minds.

The answer slowly became apparent to the people. From the moment they met the Spanish, the Virgin was front and center.

Hernan Cortes sent his troops to destroy the Aztec idol, Hutzilopochtli, then set up the image of the “Virgen de los Remedios” on top of the main pyramid in Tenochtitlan in 1520. The Spanish who disembarked in Mexico brought with them many images and statues of the Virgin Mary. These images, brought to protect them during the voyage, turned out to be the first Catholic holy representation that the ‘indios’ saw replacing their idols.⁴³

After Cortes displayed the image of the “Virgen de los Remedios,” he spoke to the people about Mary and how she was the kind mother of God.⁴⁴

The indigenous people did not immediately begin to worship Mary, however. There was still a feeling of oppression because of the Spanish. However, according to tradition, one day in Mexico, a man by the name of Diego Rivera was walking to mass. On his way, a bright light appeared and the Virgin greeted him. There, she spoke with him in his own native language and told him to speak with his bishop about what had happened. She also requested that they construct a shrine to her at that exact location.

When Rivera told the bishop what had happened, he did not believe initially. The bishop required that Rivera bring him proof. Three days later, Rivera was visited by the Virgin again. He told her of his encounter with the bishop and his disbelief. So, as proof of their conversations, she told Rivera to collect roses from the field, despite the fact that it was December, and thus not a time when roses grew.

After collecting the roses, Rivera returned to the bishop. Once there, he opened his cloak to show him his proof. But, when the cloak was opened, and the roses fell on the floor, an image

⁴³Granziera, 250.

⁴⁴Hartman, 5.

of the Virgin appeared on Rivera's cloak. This sign served to be sufficient proof for the bishop, so he ordered the shrine be built to the Virgin.^{45, 46}

This, in many ways, was the initial reason why so many indigenous peoples, at least in Mexico, began to love the Virgin Mary. It was there, in the account of Diego Rivera, that she showed her love and concern for the indigenous people, and not just the Spanish. However, this was not the only reason why she became so loved by many of those Latinos.

First of all, Mary translated over to from the Spanish culture to the indigenous culture quite well. She became a new form of an old goddess, and simply took on a new name.

Hartman states,

“The importance of the Virgin Mary and especially her appearance at Tepeyac for the conversion of Mexico is readily apparent when one recalls that the Indian civilization, with its bloody sacrifices, huge and numerous temples, and its gods and countless priests, was avidly religious. The veneration of Mary clearly appealed to a need for visible gods. The name by which she was to be identified, *Santa María Virgen de Guadalupe*, may also imply something about the switch from pagan idolatry to mariolatry, since Guadalupe may have come from an Aztec word, *cuatlalupej*, meaning the conqueror of the serpent.”⁴⁷

This is not the only similarity between Mary and the pagan goddesses. Another such likeness occurs with the Aztec goddess named Coatlicue. According to the myths, she gave birth to Hutzilopochtli, who was a warrior and savior god of sorts. The interesting part of this story, though, is that Coatlicue was not impregnated in the natural way. While near Coatepec, the serpent mountain, Coatlicue was miraculously impregnated by a ball of down.⁴⁸ This obviously is very similar to Mary, who truly was impregnated in a miraculous way and gave birth to Immanuel. Also, because the people were already inclined to the worship of goddesses, this new “goddess” Mary should not have been too much of a transition for them.

Yet another reason Mary is so adored is because of her supposed assumption into heaven. None of the other saints are able to visit people who are still living on this earth. The bodies of those other saints died here on earth, and thus those saints do not hold such power. But,

⁴⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Saint Juan Diego," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/162607/Saint-Juan-Diego> (accessed November 16, 2013).

⁴⁶ Although this story is unique to Mexico, other Latin American countries have their own person reasons and stories why the Virgin Mary is important to them as well.

⁴⁷ Hartman, 6.

⁴⁸ Granziera, 250-251.

according to Roman Catholic dogma, Mary never died and thus has the power make visits to the earth and talk with people like Diego Rivera. On top of this, the majority of those she has “appeared” to have been the social outcasts, the poor, and the oppressed. These “appearances” have led people to believe that when they are oppressed they can look to her for assistance since she has been a help to many others who were at one time in the same position.⁴⁹

Sadly, for all these reasons, the Virgin Mary is still worshiped as a goddess today. In fact, one could rightly say that more people actually worship her than they do Jesus. This sadly makes logical sense when the images of Christ and Mary are taken into mind.

The images of Christ are gory and bloody. They depict a weak man who ultimately either is dead or is in the process of dying an extremely painful death. How could such a man protect others when he cannot even protect himself?

On the other hand though, there is Mary: “Sin embargo, el creyente será atraído mucho más por la imagen bella de la Virgen que por la del Cristo moribundo. En su hora de necesidad el creyente católico tradicional buscará el apoyo y el socorro de Nuestra Señora en lugar de la del único mediador entre Dios y los hombres.” (Nevertheless, the believer will be much more attracted to the beautiful image of the Virgin than to that of the dying Christ. In their hour of need the traditional Catholic believer will look for the help and the aid of the Virgin in place of the only mediator between God and men.)⁵⁰

In the minds of many, Jesus is the symbol of death and dying, whereas Mary is the symbol of life. One of the reasons why this is true comes from a syncretistic idea within the Lord’s Supper that appeared in the Middle Ages. Somehow, in the Western Church, pagan mysteries began to be incorporated with the sacrament. Since Christ died, people began to look to certain pagan religions where there was a god who was primarily represented by death. And once they started looking into these false, pagan beliefs, they became more and more enthralled and curious about them. One of the main beliefs of those pagan religions was that of fertility rites. In these rites there was a male god who had died, but was resurrected by some sort of feminine power. At the same time that pagan elements were being incorporated into the Catholic Church, the church also began to fall into another heresy. They began to view the Lord’s Supper not as a sacrament, but a sacrifice. Whenever Holy Communion was offered, Christ performed

⁴⁹ Blank, 98-100.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 65.

another sacrifice for sins. Thus with both of these heresies, it is no surprise why Christ became the symbol of death, while Mary became the symbol of life.⁵¹ Because of their false teaching that the mass is a continual sacrifice, many believe that Christ must over and over again lay down his life to pay for sin. The word *Τετέλεσται*, or it is finished, holds no weight in their teaching. Christ is not the one who died once, only to be raised again. Instead, he has become like the Old Testament animals that needed to be sacrificed day after day, directly contradicting the words of Hebrews 10:12, “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”

Ultimately, in the minds of many in Latin America, Jesus is weak, but Mary is strong. Their devotion to her is so strong that Nida states, “It is not without importance that in discussions with most Latins one can readily challenge almost any doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church without producing any special reaction, but even persons who are strongly anticlerical often react almost violently to any statement which seems to belittle the role of the Virgin.”⁵²

In his lecture on “The Hispanic/Latino Challenge,” Flunker points out an interesting observation of his. If a Latino were asked if they believed in the Triune God, they would most definitely say yes. Sadly though, that belief is in an empty Trinity. The Father is simply a mean dad who wants to get back at his children and punish them. The Son is a weakling who couldn’t live up to his Father’s expectation. And then the Holy Spirit is like “a crazy uncle” who pays for different church festivals like baptisms. Because of that, they need someone else, someone reliable. So, they look to the Virgin. They look to the one who brings them love and support, who identifies with those who have been oppressed, and the poor and needy. She is the one in whom most ultimately place their faith in Latin America.⁵³

Yet, the Virgin is not just important in Latin American settings because of religious reasons. She actually stands for much more than just the centrality of many people’s faith. Mary is also seen as a cultural or national icon.

⁵¹ Ibid, 65.

⁵² Nida, 70.

⁵³ Timothy Flunker, “Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Hispanic/Latino Challenge” (lecture, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, September 27, 2013).

Often, when Protestants hear that Latinos worship Mary, they think of the theological implications. That is only part of the issue. She has become a crucial part of the Latin American history, culture, and racial identity.⁵⁴ “For the average Latin Roman Catholic the Virgin is not primarily the historical personage who lived in Nazareth, gave birth to Jesus Christ, and nurtured him to manhood. Rather, the Virgin is the symbolic projection of a series of emotional attitudes formed within the very first years of a child’s life.”⁵⁵

In the War of Independence in Mexico, there is proof of just how much the Virgin symbolizes the Latin American identity. In this war, the Mexicans fought to gain their independence from Spain. Both sides chose depictions of the Virgin Mary for their flags. However, Mary was portrayed in two very different ways on those flags. Those who fought with the Spanish chose the Virgin of the Remedies to be on their flag. As the Virgin of the Remedies, Mary is pictured as having blonde hair. On the other side, those who sought independence for Mexico chose Guadalupe to be on their flag. Guadalupe is almost always pictured with dark skin and dark hair, thus matching the complexion of the people. Because Guadalupe was chosen for the flag in this war, she became a symbol of Mexican independence. To this day, this feeling holds true for the Mexican people.⁵⁶

Over time, the Virgin became less and less affiliated with the religious ideas, and more identified with the culture of an area. This holds especially true in Mexico with Guadalupe.⁵⁷ Because of this, Hartman states, “A closely related concern is that if Mexico becomes less Catholic it will also become a weaker nation since one of its strong unifying factors has been its Catholic faith.”⁵⁸

In Latin America, there is a strong connection between one’s culture and heritage and one’s religion. Since this is true, and also since Christ is viewed as the dying God, he is not a very attractive figure to many Latinos. They are looking for someone who could lead them, give them hope, give them strength, and a dying God could not possibly do this in their minds. So, they instead look to Mary, the one who in their minds does offer comfort, hope, peace, and

⁵⁴ Hartman, 6.

⁵⁵ Nida, 131.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 69-70.

⁵⁷ Flunker, interview.

⁵⁸ Hartman, 9.

strength. Why would they ever depend on the weak God who is always pictured as being in the agony of death, when they could follow Mary who is the very symbol of life?⁵⁹

Why would they follow after a Father who is more concerned about punishing them, when they could go to the one who is like their mother, who protects them from this world and seemingly gives them comfort? Because the gospel was not taught in its truth and purity, much of the superstition of the pagan religions remained. To this day, there is a great deal of superstition in Latin America. Because Christ is not taught, they constantly search for something that will give them comfort. But, because nothing can offer the same comfort that Christ gives, many Latinos are left to despair. If a light flickers, it is a sign that their house is possessed. If an appliance dies, or a tire blows out, or the alarm doesn't go off, it is proof that God hates them and wants to punish them.⁶⁰ So since they cannot find the real peace of Christ, they settle for that which the Virgin falsely gives them.

Hermeneutics in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America

“(Many people think,) ‘Why should we even reach out to Hispanics? They’re all Catholic!’ Every Hispanic is Catholic. You ask a Hispanic person, ‘What are you?’ And they will say, ‘Catholic.’ The reality is, when they say the word ‘Catholic’ and what you think about Catholicism . . . not the same.”⁶¹ Many Protestants tend to think that Catholicism is a religion. But, for the Latino, it is much more. It is a way of life, it is a culture, and it is their family’s tradition.

Part of the reason that is true is because according to the Papacy, Scripture cannot stand alone. It must be guided by the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. And with such a low view of Scripture, it is no wonder why it is not clearly known by the people in that Church. Flunker gave a story which demonstrates this point. There once was a man who was the leader of a town. Whatever that man did, the rest of the town did as well. So, the Catholic priest decided to talk with him and invite him to mass every week. He obliged. And so he, along with his family, and most of the town, went to mass. Flunker had the opportunity to meet that man’s son. He states that the son, who is now grown, practiced his faith more regularly than any other

⁵⁹ Nida, 126.

⁶⁰ Flunker, interview.

⁶¹ Flunker, “Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Hispanic/Latino Challenge.”

Mexican he knew. Yet, even though that son had heard the accounts of Scripture regularly, no one ever took the time out to explain them to him. In fact, he did not even realize that Jesus had the power to drive out demons. He thought that the priests were the only one with this power.⁶²

Hartman too shared a story which shows how the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America has done an abysmal job of teaching the doctrines of Scripture. There was a Hispanic member who was visited by the local WELS pastor one day. When he spoke with her, she claimed that she saw a kind of glow around him. This made too much sense since “her Roman Catholic heritage has taught for centuries that God can be known through mystical contemplation, that the Virgin Mary has granted special revelations of her presence, and that God continually guides the magisterium of the church to perceive new doctrinal and moral truth.”⁶³

Sadly, without the true teaching and explanation of the gospel, many people do not believe that they are saved by Christ’s work alone. Their *opinio legis*⁶⁴ is allowed to grow and prosper so that they have been convinced that they must do something to inherit salvation. “Do people confess that they are justified by grace alone because of the all-sufficient work of Christ? No . . . In the Catechism one clear example that the Catholic Church still views salvation as something obtained by the believer in cooperation with God is the teaching concerning the Sacrament of Penance.”⁶⁵

Besides confusing the doctrine of justification, the Roman Catholic Church also does not understand that the Holy Christian Church cannot be identified by an outward, or visible Church. Although the Roman Catholics have become more ecumenical in most of the world since Vatican II, their practice in Latin America has not.⁶⁶

Secular Problems

There are many religious problems that attack the person of Christ in Latin America. However, there are also secular problems that do the same. One of the greatest of those secular problems is *machismo*.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Hartman, 4.

⁶⁴ The natural belief in man that he can win salvation with his works.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 13-14.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 8-9.

Machismo and the Family Structure

Since this section of the thesis deals with generalizations of a culture, it is wise to look to Baerbock's words as he states,

As we list the following characteristics, we need to keep three things ever in mind: 1) These characteristics are generalizations and do not fit everyone; 2) One often finds a changed person in the church as compared to the world, a person changed by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word; 3) Characteristics which may seem strange to us of a different culture and which seem to present obstacles to church work can actually be used in a positive way to foster the growth of faith and church."

At this point, it is also important to give a definition of *machismo*. *Machismo* is a type of male dominance or chauvinism in Latin America in which the male feels that he must control others in order to establish himself as a man.

Origins of Machismo

Perhaps the whole idea of machismo began with the age of the Conquistadors. At that time in Spain, more so than in any other area in Europe, men sought to show their masculinity in their "conquest" of women. And so, when the Spanish conquistadors came to the New World, this idea of conquering women followed with them. These men did not bring over their families. Instead, they came with the goal of conquering a land. A way in which they could accomplish this goal was to exploit the native women. The Spanish conquistadors raped many of the indigenous women to assert their dominance. Because of the horrific situations into which they were born, the children born of these "temporary unions of conquerors and Indian women" viewed their fathers as distant. Yet, there was a deep desire that was born into these children to be even more macho and domineering than their fathers. One of the reasons that this idea of *machismo* grew in the mestizo children was because of their cultural status. They loved their mothers since they provided the only parental guidance in their lives. But, their mothers "belonged to a socially inferior and despised class" of citizenry. In their minds, their mothers could not provide them with any source of true power. And in order for these young men to receive power and status within their community, they reverted back to the ways of their fathers. They in turn tried to prove their masculinity through conquest. Sadly, to this day, the cycle of

proving one's masculinity by dominating women can still be seen in some, if not most, family structures.⁶⁷

Flunker also provides another reason why *machismo* is so prevalent. He states

In a culture where Christ wasn't front and center, man's ego is the only alternative. In a culture where a woman was proclaimed to be the savior (the Virgin), men rebel by showing off. In a culture that recently (last 500 years) was dominated by conquistadores, men try to copy their recent past. Machismo is alive and well, but often a hidden reality that is only uncovered when confronted. Men will show their loving side to their wives and children, but really don't like doing it. Christ isn't a man because he isn't macho. Therefore, why follow him?⁶⁸

Role of Man in Society and the Family

A Latino male can assert his dominance as a man and express *machismo* in a number of ways: "In the quality of a man's mistresses, in the number of women whom he has 'conquered,' and in the undisputed supremacy of the father within the family-involving also at least an outward form of self-sacrifice and subjection on the part of the mother."⁶⁹

Because of this, the children of such men who practice *machismo* often view their fathers in a bad light. This is the man who has cheated on their mother with other women and who feels that he must constantly assert his dominance over them, his children, as well. The father often becomes someone who is distant and uncaring.

And so, the children must look to someone who can hold their family together and serve as a constant. They must find someone who can act as an intercessor between themselves and their father. This person is the mother. Lavrin states,

In the early 1970s, the concept of *machismo*, the undue stress of male values and male roles in Latin American societies, was widely discussed and identified as a major cultural force behind behavioral patterns which upheld the preeminence of men in all aspects of decision-taking. (At this time another concept named *marianismo*), the idealization of female values, which confer on women a special form of authority within and outside the home, not only avoiding a confrontation with men, but establishing an understanding of the boundaries of power of each sex.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Nida, 57.

⁶⁸ Flunker, interview.

⁶⁹ Nida, 56.

⁷⁰ Asunción Lavrin, "Women, the Family, and Social Change in Latin America," *World Affairs* 150, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 12, <http://web.ebscohost.com> (accessed September 2, 2013).

Because of that, it does not take much to see how these characteristics of the intercessor, the loving mother, and the caring savior could all be placed upon Mary. This is why she is so dear to Latinos. When talking about Mary, the people view her as their number one ally. She will always be there for them, prepared to dole out her love and grace in abundance. She is the only one who is not only caring enough, but powerful enough to stand up to the Father on behalf of the people. In the minds of many, she is in many ways their mother.

La Gran Tradición and La Pequeña Tradición

Until the 1940s and 50s, the outlook on Catholicism in Latin America was optimistic. Ninety percent of all people in Latin America had been baptized in the Catholic Church. However, during these decades, theologians began to take an in-depth look at the religiosity of the people. After the publishing of some material such as Alberto Hurtado's *¿Es Chile un país católico?* (Is Chile a Catholic Country?), "Theologians began to wonder whether there was any real Christian faith in Latin America. Our people, it seemed, were imbued with superstitious beliefs and practices; magic and miracle seemed to be their major interest."⁷¹

What had happened in Latin America was not Christianity. Blank, instead, refers to it as "el sistema de cristiandad" (the system of Christendom). Whereas Christianity revolves around Christ, "(El sistema de cristiandad) es una mezcla de cultura, religión y gobierno, en la cual la identificación del Reino de Dios está ligada con la iglesia institucional." (The system of Christendom is a mix of culture, religion, and government, in which the identification of the Reign of God is bound with the institutional church.)⁷²

In chapter 4 of Blank's book, he says that there are three distinct parts to every church system's structure. The first is the "gran tradición" (great tradition). This deals with a church's structure and administration. An example of this would be the Pope and Cardinals in Roman Catholicism. This is the part of the church that tries to centralize and control the practices of the congregations themselves.

The second is "la pequeña tradición" (the small tradition). This is a system of local beliefs and customs that takes place in individual congregations. Many times, the beliefs and

⁷¹ Enrique D. Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), 162.

⁷²Blank, 54.

practices of “la pequeña tradición” vary from those of “la gran tradición.” Sometimes this means that a church simply has a different culture than another in its own circle of “gran tradición.” For example, the worship style of churches in Milwaukee, WI differs from many churches in Tennessee although they belong to the same denomination. Other times, there is a great difference between what “la gran tradición” teaches about the Bible and what individual congregations actually believe. Blank gives an example of this difference between “la gran tradición” and the belief system of individual congregations, or “la pequeña tradición,” “En la pequeña tradición, las fiestas locales y santos locales frecuentemente tienen más importancia que las fiestas del año litúrgico y las tres Divinas Personas que componen la Santa Trinidad.” (In the small tradition, the local parties and local saints frequently are more important than the festivals of the church year and the Three Divine Persons that form the Holy Trinity.)⁷³

Often times then, “la religión folclórica” (the folkloric tradition) is very intimately connected to “la pequeña tradición.” The customs and beliefs that the congregations hold to often are founded in local religious folklore. An example of this can be seen with the “curers” and “los brujos” (witch doctors) in Latin America. These “brujos” and “curers” employ the same “magic words” that the church does so that they can perform their duties of helping people. There is a syncretism of the old beliefs and the beliefs of “la gran tradición.”⁷⁴ Mosqueda states why this is so detrimental to the person of Christ:

What is often thought of as “folk Catholicism” is the result of hundreds of years of the failure of the Spanish and Mexican church to fully indoctrinate (as opposed to merely baptize) the Indian-Mestizo population. . . In addition to providing little formal training in the principles of the church, the institutional clergy gave many contradictory signals to Mexicans which did not engender a strong commitment to the institution. . . Mexicans have developed a strong attachment to the symbols and rituals of Catholicism, while developing a weak commitment to its institutional obligations.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid, 57-58

⁷⁴ Ibid, 57-58.

⁷⁵ Lawrence J. Mosqueda, “Twentieth Century Arizona, Hispanics, and the Catholic Church Source,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 9, no. 1/2. Hispanic Catholics: Historical Explorations and Cultural Analysis (Winter-Spring 1990): 89-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25146238> (accessed September 29, 2013).

III. A Contextualized Approach to Teaching Christology in Latin America

Now that the subjects of both contextualization and the problems which affect the person of Christ in a Latin American setting have been discussed, it is finally time to propose a contextualized approach to teaching Christology in this setting.

First of all, although this point has already been stated, it is important to state it again. The Word of God is always powerful and effective. God can create faith in a person's heart through whatever method of evangelism that is used as long as the Word of God is present. The most important part of evangelism is simply preaching Christ and God's love for sinners. When that Word is present, God has the power to create faith in spite of an evangelist's weaknesses.

However, although God can work in spite of an evangelist's weaknesses, this does not give us the license to be lazy, to be unprepared, or to be apathetic towards the culture in which we are working. God wants his people to preach the Word, but he also wants us to preach it in such a way that it becomes personal to the hearers.

Also, the gospel has enough obstacles as it is. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2 are very true: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." We, to the best of our ability, must try not to be yet another obstacle in the path of the gospel.

Clearly, our job is to preach the gospel. But God also wants us to do so in a wise, clear, and loving manner. Because of humanity's sinful nature, the gospel is offensive as 1 Corinthians 2 states. We then must try to present it in such a way that it does not cause unnecessary offenses to people because of their lifestyle or culture.

Besides this, by understanding a certain group's culture and present beliefs, we may not just avoid making unnecessary offenses, but may also understand the needs of this specific group better. It is true that we are to teach and preach the whole counsel of God. We do not have the right to pick and choose specific beliefs to avoid altogether. But, at the same time, not all Christians can handle the same spiritual diet: "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready." (1 Corinthians 3:2)

Also, before the proposal of this topic, one more point needs to be stated. Some people may feel uncomfortable because evangelism in a Latin American setting could possibly be seen

as proselytizing or “sheep stealing” since so many of them already belong to a church. Hartman gives an answer to that question in his essay:

So, if the Catholic Church says “don't proselytize,” are we in fact doing just that, if we evangelize in Latin America? Our response is to decide if an individual is active in a parish. Is he in fact under the spiritual care of a shepherd, or only in theory? Furthermore we do not hesitate to share with anyone our hope in Jesus Christ. There are many with whom we can share the gospel without disturbing the relationship between a pastor and his sheep.⁷⁶

Beneficial Evangelism Approaches to Follow in Latin America

Sometimes evangelism tactics are not planned, they just happen because God is at work. For instance, although many monks and Spanish soldiers were cruel and ruthless when they first came to the New World, not all were. Some Franciscan monks, for example, were kind to the indigenous peoples. They showed their concern by identifying themselves with these peoples of the New World. They did so by eating their food, working with them, dressing like them, and speaking their native language.⁷⁷ Because these kind monks took the time to adapt to the culture, they gained opportunities to preach the gospel of Christ instead of forcing it upon the people.

This is practical advice for today too. If someone travels to a new area, they should not be afraid to dive right into the culture of that area. If this does not happen, the people of that culture may think that this person is an outsider, someone who really doesn't care as deeply about their wants and needs. Then, why would they even care to hear about what this person has to say? It is possible that the person who does not take interest in the culture of others will have ruined some, and perhaps many, opportunities to share the Word of Christ.

One of the best ways that a person can show their concern for another culture is simply to accept it. Blank writes, “Dios es capaz de utilizar cualquier civilización o cultura como su instrumento en la comunicación del evangelio. Por lo tanto, no es necesario destruir la cultura de un pueblo para poder evangelizarlo.” (God is capable of utilizing whatever civilization or culture as his instrument in evangelism communication. Therefore, it is not necessary to destroy the culture of a town in order to do evangelism work in it.)⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Hartman, 11.

⁷⁷ Blank, 40.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 15.

Even with those things which stand in opposition to God's Word, it is not necessary to destroy them first in order to preach God's Word. Look back at the example of Paul in Athens. He did not immediately call the people a group of heathens because of all their idols. Instead, he was as shrewd as a snake and as innocent as a dove. He patiently let the gospel change the people's hearts instead of utilizing the law as his primary method of evangelism.

In Latin America, there is much worship of the saints and of the Virgin. These things are obviously wrong and break the First Commandment. However, the goal when evangelizing is not to use the law as the primary method of evangelism, but simply to preach the gospel and let God change people's hearts. Otto states, "When teaching how we correctly view Mary and the saints, I don't bash the Virgin like (some church bodies) tend to do at times. (Instead, it's all about the truth in love.) My goal is to point them to Christ, not necessarily get into big discussions trying to convince them that the Virgin is not it. The Holy Spirit does that. It happens as they grow in the faith.)"⁷⁹

Also, when dealing with the issue of the worship of the saints and Mariolatry, it is important to remember who these people are. Mary is the *theotokos*, the God-bearer. For this reason alone, she is due honor and respect. On top of this, she was a believer. In her *Magnificat*, she proclaimed this truth by singing about the Christ as her Savior. Yes, she was a sinner, and she is not to be worshiped as God, but she should not be blasted and ridiculed. Because of her position as the mother of Jesus and as a believer, she is to be respected.

Although many of those who are considered saints in the Roman Catholic Church may have been unbelievers who actually fought against the true faith, there are some saints who did stand upon the truths of God. Those saints are to be classified as heroes, as giants of the faith upon whose shoulders we now stand. Although they too should not be worshiped, this does not mean that they should be ridiculed either. They are worthy of our respect and honor.

Again, though, the law will not be the tool God uses to change people's hearts on these issues. It is his truth about Christ and his love that changes hearts. Follow the advice Flunker gives, "Since so many Latino Catholics believe God hates them, and since the gospel was never taught to them, give them hope. Ask them what their hope is. And then listen to their individual

⁷⁹Timothy Otto, interview with author, Mequon, WI, November 2, 2013.

story. Let them explain where they're at. And in doing so, the person will see that the gospel is for (them) personally."⁸⁰

Simply put, the best evangelism advice about teaching Christology in a Latin American setting is just to preach the Word of God. Don't fight people with the law. Proclaim the gospel and its one simple truth. So many Latinos know about Christ's death, yet have no knowledge of his resurrection. Make that the centerpiece of all evangelism tactics.⁸¹

Christ the Risen Victor

In general, the Roman Catholic and Latin American culture considers Christ as someone who is weak. He holds no true power. Although many Latinos say that he is God, many do not see him as having the same kind of power as the Father. To them, Christ is simply the weakling that could not live up to his Father's standards. Many believe that he is the one who failed because he was oppressed and was killed. No one who holds any power would allow this to happen to them.

What, then, can be done to change this commonly held belief that Christ is powerless? Nida offers this advice, "The one incontrovertible way to demonstrate one's own power is to take power away from those who have had it in the past."⁸²

Although God was always in power, it did not always appear so. Those who believe that Christ looked powerless as he was crucified are right. When he died, it appeared that Satan had won. It appeared that men truly had power over him as they cursed him, mocked him, and beat him. He appeared weak and powerless as he hung on the cross. Yet, this appearance was not reality. Although he did so quietly, Christ showed his power while on the cross. Somehow, one of the criminals who had mocked Jesus, turned to him while on the cross and asked him to be remembered. Jesus spoke these words to him, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."⁸³ With those words, Jesus showed that he had the power over Satan. Although he appeared weak, he was still strong. He was in control. By speaking these words, he made it evident that he had power over Satan, death, and sin.

⁸⁰ Flunker, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Hispanic/Latino Challenge."

⁸¹ Flunker, interview.

⁸² Nida, 74.

⁸³ Luke 23:43

Yet, this was not the only showing of his power. Three days after the crucifixion, Christ gave another example of the fact that he always held the power. On that Sunday, Christ rose from the dead. This was the dominant sign that proved that God the Father's wrath had been satisfied. The price of sin had been paid for in full and Jesus' resurrection served as proof. Christ showed that he always held the power, that he was the dominant force, by rising from the dead. That apparent power that Satan seemingly held was put to an end. Christ was the victor, and his power and victory can never be taken away.

Many Latinos have not heard of this part of the Bible. Nida states that many never realized that Christ lived, and that they only thought of him as dying.⁸⁴ This shows why they think of Christ as a weak man who never was able to live up to his Father's expectations. This is the reason why there is a glass casket in which lies a representation of a dead Jesus in La Basílica de Guadalupe in Mexico. And this is also why the truth of Christ's victorious resurrection from the grave changes everything for so many people.

Jesus is not some weakling who was forced upon the cross. He was not someone who failed his Father. He was not powerless. Instead, he is the greatest victor this world has ever seen. There is no one besides him who could have taken on the culmination of the forces of evil in sin, death, and the devil and win. Only God has this power. He was the only one who could fight this battle and win. And that is exactly what he did. What no other person could ever accomplish on their own, Christ did. He was the only one capable of winning this victory. He is the greatest champion, warrior, and fighter this world has ever seen.

By presenting him in this manner, an evangelist does not have to directly take on the fact that many believe Mary holds the real power. Instead, the evangelist can simply allow the Word of God to speak for itself. In this way, the evangelist can unleash the Lion of Judah and allow him to do the work. As Charles Spurgeon once wrote,

The Word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See you that lion. They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools, and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter

⁸⁴ Nida, 132.

him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries.⁸⁵

Also, by allowing Christ to simply assert himself as the champion through preaching the gospel, the issue of *machismo* will be confronted in some ways as well. Since one of the causes of *machismo* is a feeling of inadequacy or weakness, Christ will help to change this. By presenting Christ as this victor, and as one who is willing to share this victory, a person will find their true source of self-esteem in him, and not in themselves. As a Christian, a person does not have to rely on their job, on their position in life, on their salary, or on anyone else to be powerful. Simply by being a Christian, a person is already made powerful because of their status as God's heirs. Also, Christians are powerful because, like Christ, and with his help, they are able to fight the powers of Satan and overcome him on a daily basis. Ultimately, they will see the final result of their victory. And, knowledge of this triumph, completely changes how a person views themselves and everything else.

Christ must be portrayed as this ultimate champion, exactly how the Scripture describes him. He cannot be portrayed as some weakling, but as the one who has rescued the damsel in distress, namely his Church. Because, after all, that's who he is.

The Omnipotence of Christ as Seen in His Miracles

The account of Christ's resurrection is not the only account of his power, however. The Bible is absolutely filled with other examples of Christ's omnipotence. Even those miracles which are perceived by some to be somewhat unimpressive, are impossible for normal human beings. For instance, take the miracle of Jesus changing water into wine. Compared to his resurrection from the dead, this seems quite small. But no human relying solely on their own power could ever imagine trying to do this. Only God himself is capable of such an act.

In his presentation, Flunker shared a story in which he was teaching a class about Jesus driving the demons out of the man named "Legion." After he told that Jesus commanded the demons to leave the man and enter the nearby pigs, who ran off a cliff and died, one of the men in his class gave a look that was filled with awe. That man stated, "I didn't know anyone had the power to perform exorcisms besides Catholic priests."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Charles Spurgeon, "The Lover of God's Law Filled with Peace" (sermon, Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, January 22, 1888).

⁸⁶ Flunker, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Hispanic/Latino Challenge."

Simply by preaching the Word and by allowing the Lion out of its cage, miracles happen. People are brought to faith. They begin to see that Jesus did many more things than just being born and dying on the cross. And having learned of something new, the Spirit works on them, and they are left hungry for more. They wonder what else there is to know about Jesus. They thirst to understand even more about who this powerful God-man is.

Also, by teaching Jesus' power, people will begin to realize the source of true power. It is not the saints, or Mary, or the priests who are omnipotent. All those people are sinners, just like the rest of us. There is nothing innately powerful about them. The only one who holds true power is God. Therefore, why would anyone ever rely on a simple, weak sinner like them? Instead, they can rely on the omnipotent, perfect Christ.

These accounts of Jesus' miracles again serve to show how Jesus is not just a weakling. Instead, he is the Son of God who has the power to free his people from their sin.

Christ as Our Brother

But, what good is Jesus' power, if he is not loving? In order for him to mean anything to people, they must also hear of his love. They must hear how he uses his power for our benefit. Latinos, like everyone else, need to see that Jesus is not just some powerful God. He is also our loving brother who cares about us all on a personal level.

Sadly, many Latinos only see God as some stern judge whose primary goal is to punish us for our wrongdoings. As Flunker stated in his presentation, when something bad happens to a Latino, such as a blown tire or an electrical problem, many of them feel as if God himself is sending this to them as punishment for some wrong that they had done.⁸⁷

They must be shown that God is not just some far off God who only acts as a judge or a boss. He is not someone whose primary goal is to find ways to harm or condemn us. In fact, his primary goal is quite the opposite. 1 Timothy 2:4 states, "God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

~~And~~ although Jesus is King of kings, he is not too far off for his people. He even became one of us by taking on our human nature. Christ knows what it is like to live here on this world. He understands how awful the effects of sin are since he dealt with them on daily basis. Jesus

⁸⁷ Flunker, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Hispanic/Latino Challenge."

knows exactly what it is like to deal with temptation, pain, suffering, and every other kind of evil that we feel.

Since he is not some far off king who does not have time for his people, he does not require a magic formula or elegance to pray to him. He simply wants us to talk to him. Prayer can be constructed in a regal tone, or it could just be us talking to our Brother. Jesus wants to hear our greatest fears and problems, and our praise for him, but he also wants to hear about the little things that are happening to us right now.

By teaching these truths, Latinos will come to realize that they do not need to rely on Mary, or the saints, or the priests. They have the Lord himself as their brother, their friend, and their greatest ally. They can talk to him, without fear, whenever they want.

It is important to understand that one of the greatest ideologies in Latin America is that of oppression. Many Latinos feel that there are those who are in power, and their true wish is to keep the people down, to view them almost as slaves. Thus, there is a constant fight not to only survive this oppression, but to fight back, to liberate themselves.⁸⁸ However, not all are aware of the true fight of oppression that faces every person, the fact that sin holds us all as slaves for eternity. There is no escaping this oppression by mere human power. Even man's greatest efforts to appease God will fall short. But then there's Christ, the great liberator and the one about whom it's written, "It is for freedom that Christ set us free." (Galatians 5:1)

Christ is not just another person who is trying to oppress people. His goal is to build us up. He wants to see us succeed. Jesus' primary goal is for every person to receive the greatest reward of heaven.

Jesus understands that the Church, like a hospital, is not for the healthy, but the sick. The Church is made up of Christ first of all, but then just normal everyday people—people who know how awful their sin is and thus are in need of forgiveness. This is what Christ wants. He wants people to come to him so that they may be forgiven.

Christ views his people as his brothers, someone for whom he is willing to rule the world for their benefit. He understands the problems of people because he himself is true man. He lived on this earth and dealt with all the problems that people have to confront such as oppression and the effects of sin. And unlike the Virgin Mary, Christ truly has the power to protect and save people.

⁸⁸Dussel, 127.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I related some of the problems that I observed with the Roman Catholic Church and her members in Latin America. The worst of those problems was obviously the lack of truth when it came to the person of Christ. Yes, he was at one point an infant in his mother's arms, and yes he did experience the agonies of death. However, that is not the whole account of Christ's work. Christ is not just someone who was born on Christmas and died on Good Friday.

Christ is also not some weak man that failed to live up to his Father's expectations and really has accomplished nothing.

So, how would an evangelist go about changing these depictions of Christ? The answer is simple. Understand those opponents which attack the person of Christ, but most importantly, just preach the Word. Tell them those truths of Scripture.

And then, they will see him as he truly is. Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the victorious one, the first born from the dead. Jesus is the one who defeated sin, death, and the devil, and proved that victory by his resurrection on Easter Sunday. ~~And~~ although he is this great champion, he has not deemed it too low a thing to consider us as brothers. He loves us, protects us, and cares for us every day. He is willing to give this same love to all people.

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APPENDICES

Interview 1: Pastor Timothy Otto

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest opponents to the person of Christ that are unique to the situation in Latin America? For what reasons?

a. The Catholic Church in general with its teachings of work righteousness. Christ's suffering is really looked at as an example and a motive to "wake up spiritually". But really, it comes down to putting in your time with certain steps (baptisms, first communion, quinceañera etc. works of penance especially done during holy week and lent, rosaries). All this puts focus on self and away from Christ. Also, RCs in Latin America are more superstitious. All of the superstitious practices keep the focus away from Christ.

b. The Virgin Mary (Guadalupe, Fatima etc. depending on what part of Latin America you are in). So much emphasis is put on her to take care of us, do miracles, intercede for us. How can it not take the place of Christ? I once went into a little chapel close in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico. There was no sign of a cross or Christ, just a huge statue of the Virgin with huge words in the front of the church "Hoy aquí estoy aquí. Soy su Madre."

c. The largest growing church in Latin America is charismatic Pentecostalism. The focus is on emotion and personal experience which keeps the focus away from Christ and on the person. Many jump from one law based church (RC) to another one (Pent.) Que pena!

2. What does it mean to be Catholic in Latin America?

A pretty loaded question. For many it is simply what you are and what you should be because of your culture even if you don't practice your religion i.e. go to church with any regularity. There is pride in it. You are catholic if you do the basic steps (baptism, first communion, quinceañera, go to church during holy week, cross yourself regularly, have picture of the Virgen somewhere in the house and other santos around). Sometimes there is real persecution when a family member starts going to a different church, although this is changing as many denominations have made inroads in Latin America and the thinking of the Hispanic has become more modern (there is good and bad to that).

3. For what reasons is the Virgin so important to many Latinos?

I am not 100% sure, but I think that the Aztecs and Mayans had a goddess that was pretty much everything to them. When Cortez and others came to conquer and forced Catholicism on them the Virgin was an easy substitute. You'll want to check the history on that to be sure. Also, because Latin America is a matriarchal society and the kids gravitate toward the mother and see her as the caregiver the one who shows the love in the family, it is easier for them to gravitate toward a female god.

4. How would you combat those opponents of the person of Christ in Latin America?

The Word. They do in their culture have a high regard for Christ, the crucifix, the Holy Trinity, crossing themselves, the Lord's prayer. All of these things really bring the focus back the God and specifically Christ. As I teach and preach with patience I use these things as a way to be all things to all men trying to reach them where they are at in their cultural context. I am also careful in how I express myself when teaching how we correctly view Mary and the saints i.e. I don't bash the Virgin like the JWs and Pentecostals tend to do at times. Truth in love, you know. My goal is to point them to Christ, not necessary get into big discussions trying to convince them that the Virgin is not it. The Holy Spirit does that. It happens as they grow in the faith.

Interview 2: Pastor Timothy Flunker

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest opponents to the person of Christ that are unique to the situation in Latin America? For what reasons?

#1: Spiritism

The reality is that the damage for Christianity was done as soon as the priests got off of the boats alongside of the conquistadores after 1492. Because they were for the most part lazy and didn't want to really do the hard work of spreading the gospel and combating sin, they resorted to syncretism. They took the native gods, the ones that had been worshiped for about 500 years previously, and gave them Christian names and proclaimed them saints in the pantheon of God's kingdom. Therefore, to the uneducated and illiterate, who were used to form and tradition and custom rather than Biblical truth, they assented to the new way of worshiping the old gods. What exists today in Latin America is a veiled Gospel that is much more concerned about pleasing and appeasing all the gods in every area of their lives rather than the Christ.

#2: Superstition

This is a specific derivative from spiritism. When the Gospel wasn't proclaimed correctly and the life, death and resurrection of the Christ wasn't front and center, Hispanic looked to every corner of their lives for help. Now they just see despair, and are quite superstitious. A light flickers, and their house is possessed. A nail ends up in their tire, and God is telling them something. A wife/girlfriend leaves them, well, that is the next point.

#3: Machismo

In a culture where Christ wasn't front and center, man's ego is the only alternative. In a culture where a woman was proclaimed to be the savior (see #4), men rebel by showing off. In a culture that recently (last 500 years) was dominated by conquistadores, men try to copy their recent past. Machismo is alive and well, but often a hidden reality that is only uncovered when confronted. Men will show their loving side to their wives and children, but really don't like doing it. Christ isn't a man because he isn't macho. Therefore, why follow him?

2. What does it mean to be Catholic in Latin America?

Catholicism in Latin America is a culture, not a religion. It identifies with country, not with faith. It manifests itself in ancient tradition, not necessarily in current action. With the most recent deviation (liberation theology), being Catholic is identified with liberty from control of others. Yet, the average person complains and claims that they don't want the church, papacy or

local priest telling them what to do, but when the Pope shows up – well, there is salvation on earth. Superstitious and fearful at the same time means that there is not hope. Death is feared, because beyond death isn't the unknown. Most know they are going to hell. They feel hopeless. There is no future, so they are resigned to their fate.

3. For what reasons is the Virgin so important to many Latinos?

There are almost 400 years of history in Latin America, and the key center has been the Virgen de la Guadalupe. Here is my short answer. The virgin is important because in the early 1500's, the virgin appeared to Juan Diego. The longer version is found here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Guadalupe

What isn't explained well is that at the same time that the virgin appeared, Mexico and its people were competing with old Europe. Mexico wanted its own identity. What better to do what than with its own virgin? So, over the course of years, the virgin became less affiliated with the religious aspect of life and more with the cultural aspect of life. Now, she is truly the patron saint of Mexico.

Besides, in a culture that believes the God the Father is an angry judge; God the son is a bit wimpy (he couldn't quite fulfill what the Father asked) and God the Holy Spirit is the weird uncle, who becomes the centerpiece? Mom. She calms Dad down; she urges the son along on his path; she makes the uncle become more respectable.

4. How would you combat those opponents of the person of Christ in Latin America?

I don't fight. I proclaim. With so much history against us, the only way to change is to continue to proclaim one simple truth. The death of Christ secured the forgiveness of sins, but the resurrection secured our eternity. So many Hispanics don't know the resurrection, so they have no hope. We need to focus on the resurrection. Proclaim it. Praise it. Live it. That will be the centerpiece.