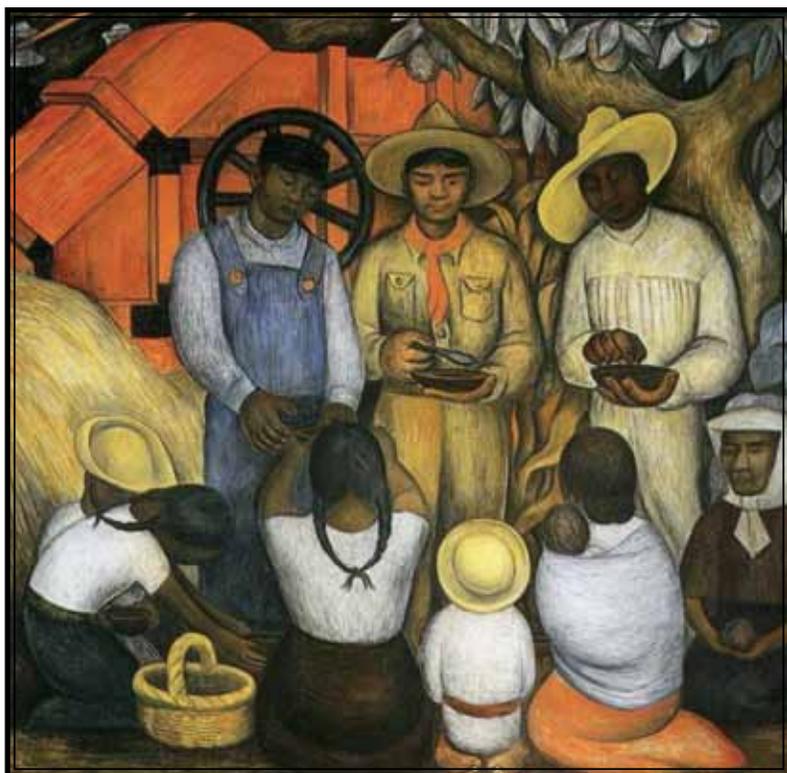


Honoring Professor Ismael García

INSIGHTS

The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary



FALL 2012

Donelson • Campbell • Greenway • González
Boursier • Chávez Saucedo • Todd • Armendáriz

Insights

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HONORING PROFESSOR ISMAEL GARCÍA



Dr. Ismael García
Professor of Christian Ethics
1987 - 2009

ISMAEL GARCÍA refuses to hide what he loves: his myriad chess sets—collected from all over the world—tucked in every corner of his home and office; his stack of “number 2” yellow pencils—used to make notes for class—loudly and meticulously sharpened at the last mounted, hand-cranked, pencil sharpener known to exist at Austin Seminary; his billiard sticks—propped expectantly against his bookshelf—with times to use them clearly blocked out on his schedule; his artwork, carefully hung on the walls of his windowless office (“to help me remember what’s outside,” he says); the lovingly laid tile ushering you into his home.

Ismael downplays the many ways he serves: by advising bioethics committees of Austin-area hospitals; by teaching in Pentecostal churches in Puerto Rico; by finding ways for Hispanic persons to study theology and ethics, even when they don’t meet “prerequisite” requirements for degree programs; by sitting in never-ending meetings and always preserving enough wisdom and energy to discern and represent whatever important position has been pushed to the side; by generously offering support and guidance to colleagues, when asked.

Ismael is known for many things, but most of all he is known for his commitment to justice. We who study with him, work with him, and are friends with him, when we remember what he stands for, can never be apathetic. Thank you, Ismael, for helping us better to listen; for helping us better to understand a broader range of perspectives and needs so we can more mutually serve.

—*The Editor*

INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Insights* is a festschrift honoring Ismael García, now retired, who was a beloved ethics professor here at Austin Seminary for years. In academia, a “festschrift”—a German word meaning a publication of essays in honor of a respected academician by that person’s closest colleagues, often including former students—is always a great tribute. One is never guaranteed such a thing, and, because of its rarity, when a festschrift is commissioned to mark someone’s contributions to his or her field of study, it is a very big deal. In this festschrift, Professor García’s impact on the field of Ethics is lifted up by a series of essays and short reflections.

New Testament Professor Lewis R. Donelson’s lead essay draws upon Ismael’s description of the moral life of Hispanic Christians in order to explore similar ethical tensions in the sayings of Jesus.

The Rev. Dr. Cynthia M. Campbell, formerly the president of McCormick Theological Seminary and once a theology professor here at Austin Seminary, reflects on Ismael’s commitment to shaping ethically responsible pastors by focusing on the relationship between ethics and the task of preaching.

Professor William Greenway, associate professor of Philosophical Theology, offers an essay on the Good Samaritan as a profound illustration of what he terms the moral reality of “having-been seized in and by love for others.”

Dr. Justo Gonzalez, a historian and theologian who taught for years at Candler School of Theology, contributes a delightful and provocative essay based on the paradigm of *familias* in order to propose what the church—as the embodiment of what García calls the ethics of recognition and care—ought to be.

Tributes are also offered by Austin Seminary alums Helen Taylor Boursier, Theresa Chávez Saucedo, Asante Todd, and Ruben Armendáriz. They each represent what has been said many times about Ismael—that he had an unfailing tendency to put the students first. As one of his admirers has put it, “he was almost unique in that regard.”

Enjoy this issue of *Insights*, and give thanks to God for the teachings and witness of Ismael García!

Theodore J. Wardlaw
President, Austin Seminary

THE MESSIAH IN THE HOUSE

LEWIS R. DONELSON

In his wide-ranging book *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes*, Ismael García explores the diverse and often competitive commitments that animate the moral life of Hispanic Christians.¹ He argues that the moral life is not derived from a carefully ordered hierarchy of values but rather emerges from the “creative tensions” among values that are often incompatible. García points in particular to the tensions in Hispanic Christians between the personal commitments to family and the distributive principles of public justice.² This tension cannot be avoided. And it is in the midst of this tension (and others) that the moral life must emerge.

Readers of gospels may recall similar conflicts in the sayings of Jesus. Jesus, for instance, tells his followers, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters ... cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). When Jesus the Messiah arrives, when the Messiah enters the house, the loyalties and promises that hold a family together come under attack. To make it worse, Jesus, when speaking of this family conflict, names not simply the “creative tensions” of moral diversity but the violence and terror of “the sword.”

“Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). And he brings not just a sword, but a sword within the most intimate and precious relationships in a family. There will be violence between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and among everyone else in the house (Matt. 10:35-36). In Luke, Jesus even laments over the slowness of arrival of this familial violence: “I came to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled” (Luke 12:49). To welcome the Messiah is to permit and provoke violence among your sons and daughters. What kind of ethic can emerge from



Lewis Donelson is The Ruth A. Campbell Professor of New Testament at Austin Seminary. Educated at Duke University, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, and The University of Chicago, Professor Donelson is the author of five books including *From Hebrews to Revelation: A Theological Introduction* (Westminster John Knox Press). He is the editor of the academic journal *Horizons in Biblical Theology* and leads travel seminars to Turkey and Greece.

something like this?

The purpose of this brief essay is to explore some of the ethical tensions in the sayings of Jesus by way of García's description of the moral life of Hispanic Christians. García draws four rather concise conclusions from his broad account of Hispanic ethics that will provide an entry into, or a geography for, an examination of the sayings of Jesus.

The third and fourth of these conclusions read as follows: "familial and group relationships are morally more significant than abstract principles and conceptions of justice; and the moral systems of subcultural groups are normatively more relevant than universal standards of ethics."³ García illustrates throughout his book how in Hispanic ethics the obligations to family and its related cultural norms dominate any obligations to larger public order or any claims of higher ethical principles. Family and its complex social orders have priority. It is not that the outsider has no status or that questions of social justice are irrelevant; it is that family must be honored and protected first. Furthermore, García describes how this tension between family obligation and larger ethical norms cannot be resolved. There will always be potential conflict between one's promises to loved ones and one's general obligations to the outsider and stranger.

As noted above, there is a group of Jesus sayings that are spoken in this space between family and non-family and that challenge the priority of family obligation. They are not couched, as in *Dignidad*, as a conflict between obligations to family and to public justice. Rather, the conflict is between loyalty to family and openness to the call of Jesus as Messiah. Jesus seems to ask his followers to choose between the demands of the Messiah and their promises to their families. Furthermore, this tension between following the Messiah and caring for family is seen not only as inevitable and impossible to overcome, it is described as full of violence, of hatred, of betrayal, and even of the sword. When the Messiah enters the house, when Jesus arrives at the family table, the family ends up hating and even killing one another.

Part of what makes this family violence so terrible is that these sayings seem to assume the preciousness, even the holiness, of the family. These sayings emerge from a culture akin to that of Hispanic Americans, as García describes them. These people have already chosen family over public order. They care more about mother and father, and husband and wife, and children than they do about Jerusalem or their village or the Roman troops over the horizon. They have retreated to the intimacies of family, where love and loyalty triumph over justice and order.

E. P. Sanders opined years ago that the single most offensive thing that Jesus said was to the disciple who asked permission to bury his father before leaving to follow Jesus.⁴ Sanders felt that Jesus' command "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:22; cf. Luke 9:60) effectively denied the most fundamental human obligation in the ancient Mediterranean world. A person who, out of loyalty to someone else, fails to bury his father, in that culture, would no longer be a normal human. He is certainly not a person who could ever be trusted again.

Furthermore, Jesus appears to create a new family from disciples who have rejected their own families. When Jesus' family, his mother, brothers, and sisters,

come to restrain him because people were saying that Jesus was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21), Jesus looks at the people who happen to be gathered around him at that particular moment and says, “Here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:34-35).⁵ We may hear this same disruption of family loyalty in the habit of early Christians to call each other “brother” and “sister.”

Thus, we can imagine a sequence wherein these Galileans first reject the demands of public order in order to adhere more closely to graces and obligations of the family. Then the Messiah comes and challenges this loyalty to family with the demands of messianic arrival. These people must choose the Messiah over family. Thus, they are called to choose Jesus above all public life and all private life. Just Jesus. And then, out of Jesus will come a new family, a new household, a new citizenship. Jesus seems to cancel all pre-messiah obligations and to put in place a new set of loyalties unconnected to the old.

But, the Jesus material should not be reduced to such a simple and clean sequence. Jesus says and does other things that complicate this account. For instance, a radical rejection of family does not square with how Jesus treats his own family and how they respond. Mary, his mother, becomes a central figure in the early church. And Jesus himself, for all his rhetoric of multiple mothers, on the cross rather tenderly names John as Mary’s new son and her as John’s new mother (John 19:26-27). His brothers are reported as being in the upper room with his mother and the eleven after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:14). His brother James becomes the head of the Jerusalem church. While we know little about how James assumed this role, it is hard to believe that being Jesus’ brother had nothing to do with it. All of this suggests that Jesus, while enforcing new messianic loyalties, preserves his familial affections and obligations. There may be tension and even violence between loyalties to family and to the Messiah, but Jesus does not appear to let one cancel the other. Rather, the terror of the Messiah is that his arrival creates a conflict with family that can never end.

García’s first and second conclusions read: “The needs of people have priority over principles; humans do not exist for ethics, but ethics exists for enhancing the goodness of our life together.”⁶ These conclusions echo Jesus’ argument that “the Sabbath was made for humans; not humans for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Furthermore, I think Jesus and García mean the comments the same way. It is not that the Sabbath does not matter; the Sabbath is precious and holy. It is not that ethics and the principles of ethics do not matter; they are essential for understanding human life. It is that the Sabbath and ethical values do not have holiness or value on their own. Their value comes from their capacity to bless human life. What is holy is the human self, not the ethic or the sacred calendar that might bless them.

Furthermore, this critique applies to the Messiah as well. As Jesus insists, “the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Thus, we cannot read the terror of the Messiah in the house as being that only the Messiah matters. It cannot mean that the value of all humans in the house is derivative of the value of the Messiah, as if each person receives her holiness through messianic

loyalty and commitment. If anything, it may be the opposite. The Messiah derives his holiness from his capacity to bless people and to call them to the kingdom.

The disruption caused by the Messiah comes not from the Messiah's demand for singular loyalty to him but from his commitment and vulnerability to every single person whether they belong or do not belong to a given family or tribe or city. This is, I think, the source of the overwhelming challenge of the Sermon on the Mount.⁷ Jesus speaks therein as if each person, each and every encounter with any person whatsoever, is holy and absolute.

"Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you" (NRSV; Matt. 5:42). This straightforward command has not troubled followers of Jesus because it encourages generosity. It has troubled followers of Jesus because it offers no exceptions. The command is to give to "everyone who begs from you." (The Greek reads, more literally, "the one who is begging from you.") It leaves no explicit room to make reasonable judgments about when and to whom to give. There is no space to calculate whether the person deserves it or needs it or will use it wisely. There is no space to calculate our own complicated obligations and the various claims on our resources. Jesus says, without qualification or caveat, "Give to everyone who begs from you." It is as if we are to assume that the person before us has unqualified and absolute value. It is as if every person were infinitely holy.

Furthermore, the larger context in the Sermon on the Mount forces this reading upon us. The passage begins with the nearly impossible command, "Do not resist the evildoer" (or "the evil one" or even "evil" itself). This command not to resist an evil person finds example in turning the other cheek, surrendering our legal rights when people want our possessions, and going the extra mile with the hated Roman soldier. We turn the other cheek to a person we know is likely to strike us. We refuse to protect ourselves from the violence of others. We do not resist evil people. We act as though the Kingdom of God were here. We treat all people the same.

In fact, Jesus insists that we love them all. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" This is, by the way, what reasonable people do, what good citizens do. We love our family and neighbors and we hate those who would harm them. But Jesus, as we know, insists not only that we love those who love us (Matt. 5:46) but that we love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). This is, by all accounts, a difficult task, perhaps even unthinkable. Furthermore, we usually describe love as something that can only exist in the interaction between two people, in the traditional face-to-face. Love is not something inside me that I spread around. Love comes into existence in the encounter with another. Thus, it takes two people to create love. But this command, at least as I have rendered it here, suggests that love is something I have as my possession and that I can share it as I will wherever and whenever I want. I can love even my enemy, even when there is no love between us.

Jesus then suggests that God is the model for this kind of love. You love your enemies "so that you may be children of your father in heaven; for he makes his sun

rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). God treats all people the same in that God gives good things to everyone. God does not calculate who deserves rain or sun. God gives to all. Thus, we—if want to be children of God—must love without calculation, without deciding who deserves our love. We love, not humanity, but the single individual who is standing before us, no matter who the person is.

Contrary to my account above, I do not think this narrative of love means that love is a possession for us to bestow as we wish. It is not that we are walking around so overflowing with love that anyone who comes within our horizon receives some of it, almost without us thinking or noticing. Rather, I think these passages describe love emerging as it usually does, from the miracle of two people encountering one another. Jesus' account assumes that even the enemy is holy. Each person—whether stranger or sister or friend or enemy—comes to me as holy and with infinite value. Love can emerge in any and all encounters.

In Emmanuel Levinas' beautiful narrative of ethics and the face-to-face, he suggests that the singular face-to-face is a moment of pure obligation.⁸ When we encounter another, we fall under a unique responsibility to that other. We become, in the face-to-face with another, accountable for that person's life and death. We behave toward that person as Jesus imagines we might in the Sermon on the Mount. We give; we share; we love. And we do not calculate if they deserve it or what the consequences might be for us. They claim us and we do not resist that claim. Levinas then suggests that it is the encounter with the next person—with the appearance of the third person in this holy encounter—that ethics emerges. The next person also claims us. But we cannot give all we have to both of them. We must, in our responsibility to each of them, begin to compare and weigh and calculate. This comparing what cannot be compared is, according to Levinas, the beginning of ethics.

However, I think Jesus and García are describing not the origin of ethics but what happens once ethics is in place. Jesus assumes the claim of Torah, of Sabbath, of public duty, of family promises, of village loyalty. García assumes the right of justice and its desire "to secure for all citizens their fair share of both social goods and burdens."⁹ Jesus is not describing the origin of Torah and ethics, he is returning them to their origin. If the holiness of the individual gives birth to Torah and to ethics, what happens when the individual reappears?

Jesus is deconstructing Torah. I am not speaking of deconstruction in its usual clichéd usage as "destruction" or "critique." I am trying to use it more as Derrida did, wherein the core principle of a system or sequence of thought undermines and destabilizes the system or sentences it creates.¹⁰ If ethics, if Torah, if Sabbath, all emerge in order to codify blessings on individual people, then Torah and ethics and Sabbath must constantly stand before the court of the single individual and be judged.

The terror of the Messiah is that Jesus thinks every single person is holy, that every single person deserves all of our and God's blessings, and that every single person is worthy of love. Thus, the stranger has as much claim upon us as a fam-

ily member. Furthermore, no family promise, no Sabbath law, and no principle of justice can silence this claim. We can abandon neither our family nor the stranger. Using García's imagery, this means that the ethical life for a follower of Jesus is one of eternal and insurmountable conflict among all the holy claims upon us from each and every holy person. ❀

NOTES

1. Ismael García, *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).
2. *Ibid.*, 107.
3. *Ibid.*, 53.
4. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 252-255.
5. It is curious that in this deed Jesus' family seems to uphold public norms rather than private affections.
6. García, 53.
7. The literature on the Sermon on the Mount is extensive. For exegetical issues, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*; Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). On the history of interpretation see Clarence Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for its Meaning* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1985) and Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, eds., *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007).
8. A rather straightforward summary of this sequence can be found in the "Interview with François Poirié" in *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins (Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics; Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press), 23-83.
9. García, 78.
10. See, for example, Derrida's famous reading of Michel Foucault, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 31-63.

ETHICS AND THE TASK OF PREACHING

CYNTHIA M. CAMPBELL

Introduction

Ethics is perhaps the most practical aspect of the theological curriculum because it concerns the fundamental human practice of attempting to discern and do the “good.” Christian ethics does that discernment through the lens of the gospel. The pastor engages in this practice of discerning and learning to do the good in all aspects of her or his work: in classes taught to children, youth, and adults; in counseling, as parishioners seek insight or help in sorting out the moral dilemmas of everyday living; in administration, as a pastor seeks to help the congregation live out its collective life and life in the community in such a way as to seek the greater good.

Ethics is closely wedded to the task of preaching. First of all, preaching should be done in an ethically responsible way. Preachers should use sources responsibly with citations for quoted material when they print or publish sermons on-line. Preaching should seek to persuade rather than badger, harangue, or intimidate listeners. Even when the purpose of a sermon is to teach a specific doctrine, the preacher should respect the questions and possible dissent on the part of congregation members.

Ethics is also very often the subject of preaching. Or, to put it another way, the moral and ethical implications of biblical texts are often the point of a sermon. Specific actions or behaviors or values are often the “so what” of a sermon. Thus, the study of ethics is invaluable to the preacher who seeks to guide people from text to action, from narrative to character formation, and from ancient text to contemporary implications.



Cynthia M. Campbell is interim pastor at Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. She is president emerita of McCormick Theological Seminary, having served as president from 1995-2011. Campbell earned her MDiv from Harvard University and her PhD from Southern Methodist University. Prior to her appointment to McCormick she was a professor at Austin Seminary and pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Salina, Kansas.

This past summer, the ministers at Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville decided to ask the congregation to suggest either passages of scripture or topics for our preaching. People wanted to know (among other things) about evil, about God's vengeance, and about justice. One family requested that I preach on Numbers 27:1-11, the story of the daughters of Zelophehad and the question of inheritance. I decided to pair it with Luke 18:1-8, Jesus' parable of the widow and the unjust judge. I preached the sermon just after the end of the Olympics, and the introduction reflected on the unprecedented number of women athletes at the games and the fact that American women beat their male colleagues in the number of medals won. I suggested (as had many others) that we were seeing the fruits of the still-controversial provisions of Title IX, the legislation that required colleges and universities receiving federal funds to provide scholarships for women athletes.

“God’s Justice” (A Sermon on Numbers 27:1-11)

How do we decide whether something is just or unjust? Clearly, ideas about justice evolve over time and vary from one society and culture to another. Inevitably, debates about what is just or unjust becomes a political matter, since justice by its very nature has to do with how we treat one another in society. Justice is about our social and political and economic relationships. As people of faith, justice should be at the heart of our discussions, our prayers, and our ministries. A Christianity that focuses only or even primarily on individual salvation or personal spirituality simply isn't true to the Bible. The verses of Psalm 146 make this abundantly clear: God is praised as the maker of heaven and earth *and* as the One who provides justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry, protection for the stranger (read: immigrant), and care for the widow and orphan. And the wicked (that is, those who do not follow God's example) are brought to ruin—at least in theory.

Justice, and especially how our understandings of it evolve and grow, is the topic presented by the Old Testament reading one of you suggested for our summer sermon series. We don't read the book of Numbers very often. In fact, it rarely appears in Christian lectionary readings. The book is so-named because it opens with a counting or census of the tribes of Israel during the wilderness wandering after the Exodus from Egypt. Then, in chapter 26, God instructs Moses and Eleazar the priest to make another census, this time for the purpose of determining the size of each of the twelve tribes. This will be used to determine the portions of land that will be allotted to each tribe when they move into Canaan, the Promised Land (which will then become Israel).

The problem in our story is first noted in Chapter 26, in the enumeration of the descendants of Joseph. Joseph was the son of Jacob, sold into slavery by his brothers who rose to high position in the Pharaoh's administration and eventually rescued his brothers and their families from starvation. Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. In the tribe of Manasseh, four generations later, is a man by the name of Zelophehad who had no sons but only daughters. The problem, of course, is that both according to law and custom, inheritance in Israel passes only from fathers to sons. But what to do when a man dies without sons? Katharine

Sakenfeld, Old Testament scholar at Princeton Seminary, says in her commentary on Numbers that the question is not simply one of an interpretation of the law; it is an entire situation that the law (and therefore God!) seems not to have envisioned.¹

Several things are surprising about this story. First of all, in a text where few women are known by their own names, all five daughters of Zelophehad are named: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. Second, we can assume that they are unmarried (because if they were married, they would already belong to their husband's clans). In a culture where women were generally married at an early age, the picture we then have is of five young women—we might call them middle school, maybe high school, age—who go right up to Moses and Eleazar and ask for justice.

The appeal itself is a nuanced argument. If justice means following the letter of the law, doing only what the current law requires, then there is no problem: Zelophehad has no legal heirs. Therefore, his allotment of land will go to someone else, and his name will disappear from the families of Israel. But Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah argue that the *law* in this case does not meet a higher standard of *justice*. Their father died in the wilderness, but he died “for his own sins” (or on his own account) and not as a result of having taken part in a rebellion against Moses. Therefore, since there is no reason to punish Zelophehad, the daughters argue, provision should be made to continue his name by allowing his portion of land to pass to them and then eventually on to their children.

The problem is weighty enough that Moses decides to take the case to God, and God (upon reflection) agrees with Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah! And here is the decision: there are principles of justice (in this case the equitable distribution of land among the tribes and families of Israel) that outweigh the law (specifically the law that says that only sons inherit from their fathers). One commentator notes that while God's decision in this case does not completely overturn patrilineal inheritance, it signals an approach to social change and provides a model for understanding the evolution of justice. “God's word,” Dennis Olson writes, “is not a sterile and entrenched legalism but a robust and living tradition that leans toward the future in hope and anticipation.”²

If you think about it, this is precisely the argument that civil rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used. The laws that segregated the races and deprived African-American citizens of equal access to public places, to education, to voting were unjust when seen over against the founding principles of the nation. If indeed all are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights which include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, how could the laws that restrict those things for some people be justified? It was an appeal to a larger or deeper concept of justice that eventually led to older laws and customs being modified or overturned.

We are weeks away from a general election. This brings out both the best and the worst of our nation. On the one hand, we have the opportunity to exercise our precious and hard-won right to elect those who make and enforce our laws. On the other hand, we engage in a political process that allows those running for office and their supporters to appeal to our fear and selfishness and greed. There are issues of

great importance before us that require us to think about justice. For example: in our rush to energy independence and need for economic growth, who will speak for the environment? In a state economically dependent on coal, who speaks for clean air and for our own health and safety and for the health and safety of miners?

In an economy that is both changing and struggling, the highest level of unemployment is among those who have not completed high school because fewer and fewer jobs are available for such persons. Do we really want to let a permanent under-class of unemployable people grow? What are the implications of this for our public schools and our support of public education?

Our constitution guarantees the right of citizens to keep and bear arms. But surely this right must be balanced by other important rights and freedoms, such as the right to assemble freely in a movie theater or the right to the free exercise of religion for any and all religious communities.

Eventually we will have to talk seriously about health care and whether it is something that should be available only to those with the means to pay for it. Or is a society better (both morally and economically) if it provides basic health care to all its members?

These are important issues. They are issues about which there is room for various opinions and differing strategies. But these are all issues that should matter deeply to Christians. In recent years, the phrase “Christian values” has been virtually co-opted by those who believe that the most important moral issues facing our society have to do with human sexuality, notably homosexuality, contraception, and abortion. For whatever reason, perhaps because we dislike the way others have used the Christian tradition, many of us have become reluctant to use faith language in social debates. But doing so has cut us off from our most important resource: a religious tradition in which justice is every bit as important as love as a standard for both personal and social ethics. And if we ignore these big issues of our collective life, we are simply not being true to our religious faith.

The daughters of Zelophehad—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—walked right up to Moses, the leader of Israel, the one who brought the law from God and taught it to the entire people. They went to meet Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, in the place where legal questions were traditionally brought and answered. They posed a question that so confounded him that he appealed to God, and God took their side. The spiritual kinswoman of these bold and brave young women is the widow in Jesus’ parable. In a certain city, Jesus said, there was a judge who was notorious: he did not honor God and he had no respect for other people. That is to say, he failed the most basic test of Jewish life: he loved neither God nor his neighbor. A widow (usually understood to be poor and disenfranchised) had a case before him—some grievance to be redressed, some restitution to be made, some damage to be compensated, we don’t know. Despite the judge’s awful reputation, the widow is relentless. Eventually the judge decides to give her the justice she is due simply to get her off his back.

The author of the gospel suggests that this parable is about “the need to pray always and not to lose heart.” But I think that spiritualization takes away from the

point Jesus clearly makes. The rabbis of his day called this kind of story a “qal va-homer,” which literally means “from the lesser case to the greater.” Jesus’ point is not so much about the widow as it is about God. If a wicked judge can do the right thing for the wrong reason (the lesser case), then how much more will the God of justice do what is right for God’s people? Jesus concludes the parable, “Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Well he delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them.” Why? Because it is in the nature of God not only to be loving but to be just. And so must it be with us.

Conclusion

Ismael García was a consummate teacher. He was not only good technically as a scholar and classroom instructor, he was deeply committed to ethical work and to the growth of his students as ethically responsible pastors. I like to think that the opportunity to teach and work with Ismael and ethicists like him have helped me be a better theologian, a better administrator, and a better preacher. In particular, they remind me that there are always new challenges to the good and many more voices that need to be heard in the ongoing conversation about how we fulfill God’s call to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly both with the Holy One and with one another. ☸

NOTES

1. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Journeying With God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).
2. Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*. Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1995), 166.

Coming in the Spring 2013 issue:

Dr. Timothy Lincoln on The Future of Academic Libraries

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

JESUS AS MORAL PHILOSOPHER

WILLIAM GREENWAY

I am privileged to write this essay in honor of my colleague, friend, chess teacher (and chess nemesis!) Ismael Garcia. While this essay draws upon my own areas of expertise in theology and ethics, I consider it to provide an independent line of support for the rich and interdependent notions of dignidad and community that Ismael Garcia unfolds in *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes*. Not surprisingly, I discern considerable common ground between the ethical wisdom Ismael discerns among Hispanic peoples and the ethical wisdom of Jesus.

The “Parable of the Good Samaritan,” Jesus’ globally admired interpretation of “love your neighbor as yourself,” is the fount of innumerable thoughtful and inspiring sermons and commentaries. What remains largely underdeveloped, however, is full appreciation for the philosophical genius of Jesus’ parable and, as a result, full appreciation for the parable’s significance in the face of influential modern Western conceptual trajectories that are threatening for classic moral realism (i.e., the idea that “good” and “evil” are more than products of human history).

Let me explain three especially influential and damaging trajectories: 1). metaphysical naturalism, 2). existential atomism, and 3). the equating of legitimate reasoning with objective reasoning. “Metaphysical naturalism” is the belief that ultimately everything is natural or physical in a modern scientific sense. As one metaphysical naturalist, Wayne Proudfoot, professor of religion (!) at Columbia University, put it:

The inquiries into language and culture that have occupied the humanities and the social sciences for most of the twentieth century, along with progress in the natural sciences, have led to beliefs that conflict with what [William] James took



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to be the religious hypothesis. Any moral order, any more that is continuous with the higher parts of the self, any forces that might help to bring our ideals about, can be understood only as the emergent social products of the beliefs, desires, and actions of men and women. At the end of the nineteenth century, a number of thinkers subscribed to a kind of panpsychism, which they took to be compatible with the science of their day. At the end of the twentieth century, that belief is no longer plausible.¹

Proudfoot goes on to explain that while there “is an unseen moral order,” this moral order exclusively “consists of the social and cultural world that is a product of history.”² All this, Proudfoot explains, is why for the past century, “the humanities and social sciences have been preoccupied with the ways in which language is constitutive of agency, experience, social practices, and everything identified with Geist [i.e., “spirit”] in the Geisteswissenschaften [i.e., sciences of the spirit, social sciences, humanities].”³

In other words, the mainstream modern Western natural and social sciences, and even the humanities, have presumed, and in many elite circles now find unquestionable (i.e., treat as dogma), the truth of metaphysical naturalism, an affirmation that entails the denial of moral realism in the classic religious and philosophical senses, for moral “realities” are considered to be wholly a product of human linguistic capacities.

The second influential modern Western conceptual trajectory, existential atomism, is in significant tension with metaphysical naturalism, for the mainstream of philosophers who are metaphysical naturalists find the idea of free will to be unintelligible. They acknowledge that we are self-conscious and thinking beings. Nonetheless, our brains/minds, which are understood to be physical in the modern scientific sense, can in no way transcend the deterministic/random progressions of nature. “Existential atomism” is incompatible with metaphysical naturalism because it maintains that ordinarily we are, within some natural and socio-cultural limits, free to decide whether we will do one thing or another in any particular circumstance. That is, it affirms a power that transcends the determined and random, a power that transcends the “physical” or “natural” in the modern sense.

For the existential atomist, notably, the only thing that distinguishes me from the deterministic/random machinery of reality, is my ability to decide for myself, to create myself, my autonomy. The danger is subservience to external conditioning, the possibility that I will never be anything but a product of socio-cultural and genetic conditioning (of memes and genes), that I will never have a real “I” at all. The ideal is authenticity, creating the “I” each of us wants to create, accepting the power of choice that distinguishes us from the brute machinery of existence. As the celebrated American philosopher Richard Rorty summed up this conceptual trajectory, our greatest potential possibility, the sole potential source of our dignity as humans, “is the one Coleridge recommended to the great and original poet: to create the taste by which he will be judged.”⁴

Momentously, this conceptual trajectory sets up an either/or between autonomy/authenticity and heteronomy/servitude. So all ethical imperatives—the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the reality of any external “ought” that delimits

my ability to create the very taste by which I will judge myself – become a threat to the sole possible source of human dignity. Furthermore, in this modern Western conceptual context, what is “natural” and “rational” (e.g., see modern “decision theory”) is for me to pursue my own interests and desires. Even if my actions look altruistic, to the degree I am not determined or deluded, to the degree my actions are free and rational, then the real reason I am ever engaging in any action must be because it fulfills my own desires.

In the wake of metaphysical naturalism and existential atomism, altruistic motivation in the classic sense is rendered unreal and irrational by definition. The question “why be moral?” rises up with unprecedented force and finally, at best, allows for only one answer: “because it is in accord with my own enlightened self-interest.” What can be “ethical” in the wake of these two conceptual trajectories, then, bears no relation to moral reality in the classic sense (for there is no such). The ethical at best relates to what *I have rationally agreed to treat* as ethical (if only implicitly, as in social contract theory). Moral realism and ethics as classically understood has been rendered unintelligible.

The third conceptual trajectory, the equating of legitimate reasoning with objective reasoning, is devastating because it demands not only that we distance ourselves from self-interest and subjective preferences when reflecting ethically (a classic ethical recommendation to guard against prejudice), but also that we distance ourselves from any feelings of sympathy, any moral intuition, any sense of call from another. We are to reason dispassionately and construct ethical theories using only explanations that are natural and reasonable within modern parameters (i.e., the parameters of metaphysical naturalism and existential atomism). This requirement methodologically shuts us off from moral reality as classically understood.⁵

Numerous theologians and philosophers have recognized and responded to these devastating conceptual trajectories. Indeed, our own reading of Jesus’ interpretation of the love command is decisively informed by another Jewish interpreter of Torah, Emmanuel Levinas, whose understanding we consider strikingly similar to Jesus’ own. But, again, the philosophical significance of Jesus’ “Parable of the Good Samaritan,” most especially for modern ethics, has yet to be unfolded.

The “Parable of the Good Samaritan” is Jesus’ interpretation of “love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus’ parable is part of his ministry to a lawyer seeking “eternal life.” Jesus first elicits and affirms the standard two-fold summary of the Torah: 1). love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and 2). love your neighbor as yourself. “Do this,” Jesus affirms, “and you will live.”

There was no debate over this summary of the Law, but there was debate over who counted as “neighbor.” So the lawyer asks, “who is my neighbor?” For centuries commentators, noting that in Jesus’ day Samaritans were considered to be enemies by Jews, and noting also that the Samaritan proved to be neighbor, have read the parable as a call to radically expand the parameters of “neighbor.”⁶ Who is neighbor? Answer: everyone, even those who profess other faiths, even enemies. This interpretation is certainly not incorrect. Moreover, Jesus’ portrayal of an enemy as the one who fulfilled the Law is significant, especially given the historic and endur-

ing power of “us” versus “them” sectarian impulses, for the parable makes clear that anyone, regardless of national or religious identity, may prove to be neighbor.

But to think that Jesus is straightforwardly extending the category of “neighbor” is to miss the depth of his spiritual genius. Jesus realizes that what is keeping the lawyer from true “living” (“do this and you will live”) is his all-consuming self-interest. For the lawyer any “neighbors,” whoever they might be, will only be means to realizing his own self-interested desire for eternal life. Jesus realizes that the lawyer, and for that matter everyone who accepts the standard framing of the debate over “who counts as neighbor?” is confused over the meaning of “love.” Accordingly, it is the meaning of “love” in the *agape*/altruistic sense that is movingly conveyed by the parable.⁷

Jesus displaces the standard debate by radically changing the meaning of “neighbor.” Jesus draws our attention to this profound shift when he asks the lawyer, “who proved neighbor?” For Jesus’ question regarding “neighbor” directs our focus away from any other (e.g., the man in the ditch) and toward the one who was seized by compassion for another (e.g., the Samaritan). In short, in Jesus’ understanding, the meaning of “neighbor” in “love your neighbor” has nothing to do with the identity of the man in the ditch. In the parable not only is “neighbor” not *every* other; “neighbor” is not *any* other.

In contrast to standard definition, in the parable “neighbor” names the spiritual orientation of the Samaritan, the spiritual orientation of the one who was seized by compassion for the man in the ditch. “Neighbor” names a way of being, a spiritual orientation, a way of living in this world. “Neighbor” names the spiritual orientation of the Prodigal’s father, who was also (same Greek word) seized by compassion. “Neighbor” names the spiritual orientation of those who feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the imprisoned. “Neighbor” names the spiritual orientation of sheep (Matt. 25).

Note the passive character of this love in and by which we find ourselves seized. This love comes from without and cannot be heard (no “ears to hear”) if one insists that authentic life depends upon the atomistic (intentional) self and its power of choice being absolutely primary. The Samaritan is not obeying any command in the sense of *choosing* to be obedient to any concept, principle, divinity, or any other inert external authority. The Samaritan is directly seized in and by love for the wounded man. “Love of neighbor” commands with utter immediacy and orients our desire, which becomes essentially a desire *from* love and *for* another.

All this reveals the brilliance and necessity of Jesus’ use of narrative, which compels passionate engagement, to unfold the meaning of the love command. In order to discern existential/moral/spiritual truths, one must open oneself up subjectively, for existential/moral/spiritual truths cannot be discerned dispassionately. Indeed, an objective, dispassionate stance shuts one off from existential/moral/spiritual truth. The “command” of the two-fold call to love, indeed, the command of Torah, cannot be objectively and dispassionately discerned. Spiritual talk of “command,” then, should be understood in terms of call, in terms of having-been-seized, in the case of the two-fold love commands, in terms of having-been-seized in and

by love.

While *agape* commands us with absolute intimacy and directness, then, it is not a coercive, power-based command to obey an objective external imperative, let alone an inducement to act in selfish response to potential reward or punishment. Moreover, as the two who passed by illustrate, the command of love is not irresistible. It does not negate our autonomy. Indeed, ominously, those who over time have hardened their hearts may barely feel it. In any case, there is an asymmetry with regard to having-been-seized in and by love for others. Our autonomy is neither primary nor negated: we cannot choose to love, but we can choose to harden our hearts. Our autonomy is affirmed, then, even as the reality of the love of having-been-seized is made primary.

For those with “ears to hear” the command is received in a radically passive, subjective dynamic. Love in the *agape*/altruistic sense is never something we initiate, cause, create, choose, or give. The love we give and share is always a love in and by which we first find ourselves seized. One finds oneself having-been-seized in and by love for those who are needy and wounded (in which case one finds oneself immediately/intimately troubled and moved to help), and also by those who are happy and rejoicing (in which case one finds oneself immediately/intimately joyful and smiling). Of course, we also find ourselves seized in and by love not only for other people, but also for cats, dogs, horses, seals, rats, and (hopefully) all manner of other animals, even, in our most spiritually sensitive moments, by plants.

Most famously, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is not something we initiate, but begins in response to having-been-seized in and by love (“This is love, not that we first loved God, but that God first loved us”). Indeed, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength names the radical passivity of allowing oneself to be seized fully in and by love for all others and acting accordingly (“insofar as you have done it for the least of these, you have done it for me”). Just so, the second great command is “like unto” the first.

Insofar as one has been awakened to having-been-seized in and by this love, the question, Why be moral? has been rendered utterly superfluous, for the motivation is intrinsic to the dynamic of having-been-seized in and by love. Moreover, one has *de facto* and without any reason for real doubt rejected both metaphysical naturalism and existential atomism. This makes clear the full significance of global admiration for this parable, for it amounts to a massive, overwhelmingly positive, millennia-old, cross-cultural, and multi-faith affirmation of its truth. And given the power and profundity of this affirmation, which presupposes the legitimacy of engaged, passionate reasoning, we quite reasonably reject the equating of legitimate reasoning with objective reasoning.

Certainly in our world, where so many legitimate needs conflict, and where it is not always clear what action is most loving, we will always be faced with ethical quandaries. There is no reason to expect that theoretical closure will ever be within our grasp. But there is no basis for any real doubt over this moral reality, over the reality of the command of having-been-seized in and by love for others, over the call to *be* neighbor, and no question of what those who are neighbor are called to

do when there is no conflict of legitimate needs and it is clear what action is most loving (this means that while we will ever face ethical quandaries, it is unreasonable to affirm ethical relativism).

Granted, it is logically possible that this “love” is wholly a product of socio-cultural and physical forces (of genes and memes). But there is no reason to worry over this logical possibility. For as Proudfoot’s very precise précis unwittingly reveals, there has been no argument establishing the truth of metaphysical naturalism. Instead, as Proudfoot acknowledges, for nearly a century metaphysical naturalism has been both the working presupposition and the preoccupation of mainstream modern thought. This nearly century-old preoccupation has been buoyed by the success of the natural sciences, and this has created a massive bias in favor of metaphysical naturalism.

But since any actual argument for metaphysical naturalism is still lacking, and since only methodological naturalism, not metaphysical naturalism, is required to practice modern science (as a multitude of first-rate, morally realistic, and even theistic scientists illustrate), and since the vocabularies/rationalities of metaphysical naturalism, while clearly accurate and wonderfully productive within certain boundaries, are so woefully inadequate to the spiritual/moral/existential dimensions of human experience (lament on this score is a standard trope in the literature even among metaphysical naturalists), a heavy burden of proof lies decidedly with metaphysical naturalism.

Since there is no good reason to conclude that *agape* must come from either one’s own or others’ intentionality, or from “nature” in the modern sense, there is no good reason to doubt that this love is as real as the sound you hear when a tree falls in the woods. That is, while this love is not “physical” in the modern sense, it is “natural” and most reasonably received as a part of “reality” (typically the part designated as “divine”) in the classic sense.⁸ If “faith” names living in the light of having-been-seized in and by love, and if “God” is understood strictly in the sense of “God is love,” then to understand oneself to be living by faith which is the gift of God, while certainly not the product of human reasoning or argument, is entirely reasonable.

Our reading of Jesus’ interpretation of “love your neighbor as yourself” is confirmed by two striking aspects of Jesus’ exchange with the lawyer. First, in the New Testament, “eternal life” is typically in the aorist tense, which signifies an immediately effective and ongoing state of affairs. That is, while in the New Testament “eternal life” does refer to life after death, life after death is not the defining characteristic of “eternal life.” “Eternal life” names a way of living here and now. But Jesus tells the lawyer that if he keeps these commands he “will” (future tense) receive eternal life. If “eternal life” for Jesus does not specify life after death, why does Jesus use the future tense in “do this and you will live”?

An answer becomes apparent in light of the second striking aspect of Jesus’ interchange with the lawyer. Note that though the parable defines “love your neighbor” in terms of a spiritual orientation, a way of *being*, Jesus does not say, “go and *be* likewise,” but “go and *do* likewise.” On our reading, this is because Jesus

brilliantly relates intentional action and *agape*, which is neither self interested nor directly intended. In brief, one cannot decide to love the homeless, but one can decide to work in a soup kitchen. And as one gets to know homeless folk personally in the context of acting in loving ways toward them, one will begin to find oneself having-been-seized in and by love for them.

Furthermore, and this is a cliché in ministry, mission, and social services circles, one finds oneself, even in devastating circumstance, full of a sense of meaningfulness and certain of purpose, and insofar as good results, one finds oneself overcome with the fullness of joy. That is, insofar as one begins in this sense to live “love your neighbor,” one finds *oneself* having-been-seized in and by love, one finds that one has oneself received the gift of being loved, one receives and lives the gift of the “as thyself.” This too is a cliché in mission and service circles, folks come back from mission trips inspired, excited, loving, loved, gifted, full of a sense of purpose and meaningfulness, they can hardly wait to do it again, and they say things like, “I went there to give to them, I thought they were the needy ones, but it turns out that I was more needy than I ever imagined, and I received not only far more than I gave, but far more than I realized was even possible.”⁹

Acting as neighbors, doing likewise, they taste what it is to be neighbor, what it is in this world right now to be living eternally, and they are filled with joy, happiness, and love (they receive the “as thyself”). All of this names life in the light of having-been-seized in and by love. All of this describes, here and now, eternal living. All of this depicts Jesus’ understanding of, “love your neighbor as yourself” and reveals the spiritual genius of his counsel to the lawyer: Go and do likewise. ☼

NOTES

1. Wayne Proudfoot, “Religious Belief and Naturalism,” *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, Nancy Frankenberry, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 85.

2. *Ibid*, 85.

3. *Ibid*.

4. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97.

5. Not surprisingly, this naturalistic turn gave prominence and plausibility to “ethical” theories indexed to pain and pleasure; unsurprisingly, it was never made clear why I should be concerned with anyone else’s pain and pleasure (unless such concern related ultimately to my own pain and pleasure).

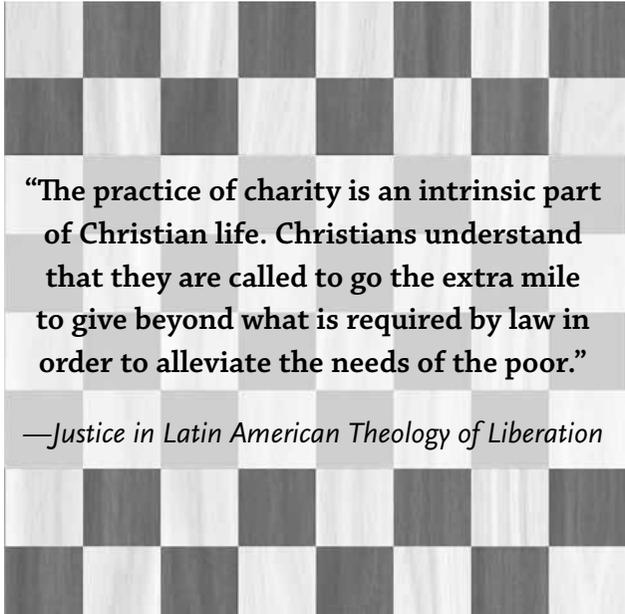
6. On Samaritans as enemies and for an excellent brief survey of some problematic and common tendencies in interpreting the parable, see Amy Jill-Levine, “The Many Faces of the Good Samaritan—Most Wrong,” *Christian Ethics Today*, 20:1 (Winter 2012) 20-21. Note that Jill-Levine understands “neighbor” in the ordinary sense, thereby joining a virtually universal consensus that stretches at least back to St. Augustine, who in his interpretation gives the ordinary meaning of “neighbor” and interprets the parable accordingly (*On Christian Doctrine*, I.XXX.31).

7. Though I cannot unfold the point here, note that affirmation of *agape* constrains but does not entail rejection or condemnation of *eros* (i.e., aesthetic, including erotic, desires).

8. Like the sound of the tree falling, if there is no hearing being in range of hearing it,

then there is no sound. But the reality (i.e., the sound waves) that the sound manifests to hearing beings when they are in range of hearing is really there, whether there is a hearing being in range or not. Likewise, if there is, for instance, no being capable of having-been-seized in and by love in the presence of some unconscious and wounded creature, then there is no having-been-seized in and by love for that creature. But the reality of the love that is realized when someone is present and seized in and by love for that creature is as real a part of reality as the sound waves, though, unlike the sound waves, it is not a part of “physical” reality in the modern sense. That is, not only is there no argument for metaphysical naturalism, but one of the most powerful and treasured of human experiences (though not “experience” in the modern sense), an experience for which there is widespread and revered testimony throughout history and across cultures, an experience whose power and exquisite character commonly calls forth talk of the divine, this widely shared experience quite reasonably leads to the classic and near-global conclusion that the parameters of the “physical” in the modern sense are not coterminous with the parameters of reality.

9. Many have thought that “love your neighbor as yourself” must be interpreted in accord with the logic of selfish self-love. In short, “just as much as you love yourself, you must love your neighbor.” But if one abides by the Torah sequence and grasps Jesus’ holistic interpretation of “love your neighbor as yourself,” one realizes that the love which is the concern and compassion of the having-been-seized in and by love for others is precisely and simultaneously the love in and by which one finds oneself seized for oneself (a reality for self made most obvious vis-à-vis others). This love of self is not selfish because it does not originate in oneself at all, let alone in self-love in the selfish sense. Significantly, this is a real love and valuing of self and so decisively rejects any denigration or neglect of self. To be clear, this means that to be neighbor is not to allow oneself to be abused, suckered, taken advantage of, cheated or discriminated against. One loves enemies of the good, but insofar as they remain enemies of the good, one works and in extreme circumstances fights for what is good.



“The practice of charity is an intrinsic part of Christian life. Christians understand that they are called to go the extra mile to give beyond what is required by law in order to alleviate the needs of the poor.”

—Justice in Latin American Theology of Liberation

CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH AS *FAMILIA*: REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF ISMAEL GARCÍA

JUSTO L. GONZÁLEZ

I am honored to have been invited to write a brief article in recognition of my friend and colleague Dr. Ismael García for his many years of service, reflection, and teaching. I remember first meeting him many years ago, when, as a doctoral student, he came to the Fund for Theological Education in quest of funds to pursue his studies. I was fortunate to be presiding over the committee that interviewed him and which enthusiastically decided to support him. I am glad to be able to look back and be more than assured that our trust was well placed.

In this very brief article, I propose to look at his contribution to Hispanic-Latino/a ethical reflection (I use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” interchangeably, moving from one to the other only for reasons of style). Apart from years of teaching and mentoring Latina and Latino students and leaders, particularly in connection with the Hispanic Summer Program, the Hispanic Theological Initiative, and the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH), Ismael’s contribution may best be seen in his book *Dignidad: Ethics through Hispanic Eyes*, published by Abingdon Press in 1997. The very process of developing the manuscript for this book underscores the nature of Hispanic theology in general and of what Ismael seeks to communicate in particular—a matter to which I shall return.

In *Dignidad*, Ismael proposes a typology of ethical reflection consisting of [a] the ethics of principle, [b] character ethics, and [c] the “ethics of recognition and care.” As is the case with any typology, he underlines points of difference rather than commonality, while acknowledging that in truth all these three types of ethics appear in various degrees in all Hispanic ethical reflection. Still, he argues, the dominant type—the one that Latinos and Latinas have to contribute to ethical re-



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lection at large—is what he calls the “ethics of recognition and care.”

In order to make this point, and to clarify its meaning, Ismael leads the reader through an analysis of the movie “Mi Familia,” directed by Gregory Nava. This movie is about a family constantly stressed, and at a point even torn apart, by conflicting ethical views and the ensuing actions. In the family’s sometimes angry debates, one often sees the conflict between principle ethics and the ethics of character formation. One also sees how they overlap, and how these conflicts are made more acute by the pressures of the dominant culture and the attempts both to integrate into and to resist it. The two children who are most acculturated into Anglo-Saxon values and practices stand primarily on an ethics of principle. However, this does not mean that they agree with one another, for one—a rather successful lawyer—seems to believe that the law must be obeyed at all costs, while the other is willing to twist the law and to go beyond it for the benefit of those whom the law would crush. On the other hand, the parents—particularly the mother—incarnate an ethics of character formation, sometimes wondering how their children have wandered so far from what they sought to instill. But, Ismael argues, underlying these conflicts, and somehow keeping the family together, is the ethics of recognition and care. The debates and even conflicts within the family take place within a context in which each recognizes the other, and ultimately cares for her or him. In fact, this is what makes the conflicts more acute, for the one thing they cannot do is simply ignore or dismiss one another. Even at the most bitter point, where the father denounces a very wayward child, declaring, “You are no longer my son,” there is still this element of care and recognition.

In analyzing this movie, and the dynamics within the family, Ismael has clearly drawn an accurate profile of much of Hispanic ethics. Latino and Latina ethicists, both in the United States and in Latin America, often bemoan what they call our “personalismo”—our tendency to place persons and our relationships with them above ethical principle and character. In analyzing the ills of our societies, many say that they are unmanageable because we will repeatedly bend principles in order to serve relationships. While Ismael does not deny this outright, by stressing the value of the ethics of recognition and care he leads to a deeper reflection in which the object is not merely that principles be obeyed, but also that people be recognized, and that they be granted the care they deserve. This is what happens in the fictional—but very true to life—family in the movie.

While Ismael does not dwell on this point, it is clear that the stresses on that particular family are compounded by their situation as semi-aliens in a semi-foreign land—by what many Latina and Latino authors call our “in-betweenness,” our “living on the hyphen,” our “mestizaje” and “mulatez,” our “living in Nepantla.”¹ The parents in the movie “Mi Familia” grew up in Mexico, within the context of an extended family. Now they must care for their own nuclear family in a land that is still rather foreign to them. This puts on them a burden that at times is too heavy and even incomprehensible to them.

In many cases, this difficult transition from an extended to a nuclear family is one of the most painful and perplexing processes through which immigrant

families from Latin America must go. Back in their country of origin, *familia* had a different meaning than it does here. Here, a family is a nuclear group, usually composed of those who live or grew up under the same roof—most commonly, parents and children. There, the *familia* was a complex network of relatives by blood, by marriage, and even by baptism. It included parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, and many more. Here, one can say exactly how many people are in one's family. There, the question would be meaningless, for the *familia* is an ever-widening circle of relatives who must recognize and care for one another. Here, the family is a tightly knit nucleus within which secrets are kept both from the world at large and from other relatives. There, in the *familia*, there can hardly be many secrets. As a result, even in the happiest of circumstances where a nuclear family is able to migrate together, for many immigrants "here" is a place of loneliness and alienation, not just because the culture is different, or because they do not speak the language, but because the *familia* is mostly gone.

It would be simplistic to say that this is only the result of immigration. It is also and foremost the result of the passage from an agricultural and settled society to an industrial and mobile one. While compounded by the experience of migration to an alien culture, the breakdown of the extended family—of what I here call the *familia*—is not limited to those who cross political borders. It is also present in the burgeoning cities of Latin America, Asia, and Africa to which people migrate from the countryside in quest of a better life. There, too, the wider bonds of the extended *familia* are stressed and often broken.

Still, migration is an important factor in the process. Indeed, the North American stress on the nuclear family may be seen as the result of both the industrial revolution and the immigrant origins of most of the population. Traditional extended family ties were soon broken for those who migrated to North America voluntarily—British, Germans, Irish, and Italian—as well as for those who did so involuntarily—slaves and those deported to penal colonies.

The ethics of recognition and care which Ismael proposes are more readily developed within the context of a society composed of intertwined and not clearly delimited *familias*, whereas in one composed of separate and clearly defined nuclear families there is a greater emphasis on the ethics of principles. As to the ethics of character, this is stressed in both contexts, but in different ways: in a society of nuclear families, character formation is mostly the responsibility of the mother and father—and perhaps of a few mother and father figures, such as teachers and pastors—while in a society of extended *familias* it is the responsibility of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, and the *familia* as a whole.

As we transpose all of this to the field of Christian ethics, it is clear that the contrast between a society structured around families and one structured around *familias* leads to a parallel contrast between a church conceived as a conglomeration of families—traditional families of parents and children, as well as non-traditional families of single people, same-sex couples, etc.—and one conceived in terms of a *familia*. As I visit churches in this country, I often hear pastors and other leaders in Euro-American congregations referring to the families in the church, or to how

many families there are in the congregation—always in the plural—while I also hear their Latina and Latino counterparts referring to the church as a *familia*—in the singular. Clearly, for many immigrants who have been cut off from much of their extended familias, the church has become a new *familia*—one to which they can belong without thereby rejecting their other *familias*, just as back home they belonged simultaneously to several *familias*.

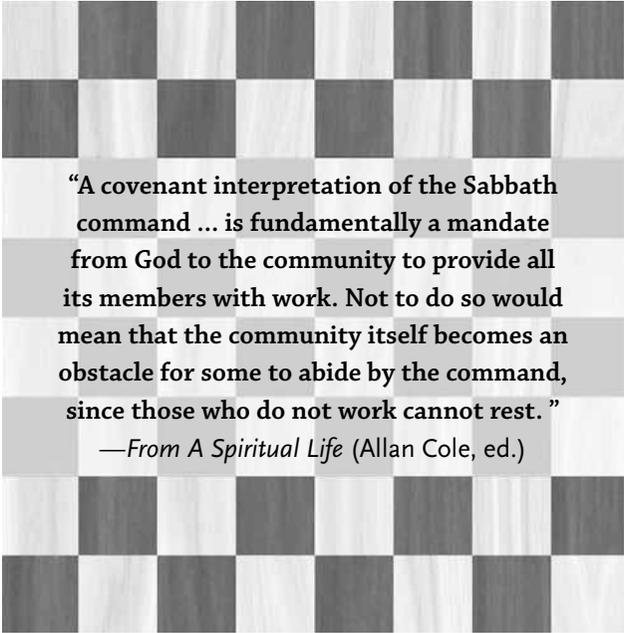
In this context, the ethics of recognition and care, as Ismael defines it, tend to take precedence over the ethics of principle, even though this does not take place without a measure of conflict and struggle. This may be seen in any of the debates on ethics taking place in the United States today. To take one example, one may look at the so-called “social issues” debated in today’s politics—quite a misnomer, for any issue worth debating is by definition a social issue. On these issues, Latino churches are currently torn between an ethics of principle, often strengthened by the influence of the surrounding emphasis on such an ethics, and an ethics of recognition and care. They are told by their larger church communities—mostly by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and by the majority of Euro-American Evangelicals—that certain forms of conduct are wrong, and are encouraged to stand in judgment against those who practice them. But then, these people whom they are supposed to condemn and reject are still part of the *familia*. We cannot simply wish them away, just as we cannot wish away our cousin José. No matter what he does or who he is José is still my cousin. I must recognize him and care for him. Abortion is wrong, we are told. But then, we know the case of María, and we understand her reasons. Gay sexuality is wrong, we are told. But then, Pedro and Ernesto are such loving and caring people! Practically in every Latino church that I know, this tension between an ethics of principle and an ethics of recognition and care is prevalent and will not go away.

Then, there is the ethics of character formation. Here again, as stated above, there is a difference between Latino and Euro-American churches. In the latter, the church seeks to form character by transforming families, particularly parents. In the former, the church seeks to transform character by trying to become a *familia* in which character is formed. In a Latino church, all adults are parents responsible for the upbringing of all children—an attitude that often results in conflicts with teenagers brought up in the Euro-American culture who therefore feel free to say, You are not my Dad, so don’t tell me what to do.

In short, as we look at ethics as conceived and practiced in most Hispanic churches in this country we see them torn—as the family in the movie to which Ismael refers is torn—between an ethics of principle and an ethics of care and recognition. Yet, in this inner conflict they may be paving the way for what will inevitably become part of the task of the church at large in a society in which there is bitter debate on abstract matters of principle, and increasing incivility and disrespect for those who disagree with those principles or are not willing to live by them. If the church at large is to develop ethical character among its members, it will only be able to do so by realizing that, while principles are important, such principles must be grounded in and applied under an ethics of recognition and care. We must all be

grateful to Ismael for pointing us along this path.

Back to Ismael's book *Dignidad*, it is important to point out that the process through which this book was shaped is in itself an example of how this ethical reflection is to take place. Ismael did not simply sit down and write this book. He was part of a long process in which he engaged many others of us, and we engaged him, sometimes in agreement, and sometimes not, but always in recognition and care. We shared and debated ideas. And we also shared and debated dreams. We left our imprint on his thought, and he left his on ours. This is a clear example of what in Latin American theology is often called "teología en conjunto"—theology as a communal process—and it shows that it is also possible to do "ética en conjunto"—ethics as a joint project. As this project advances, all of us, in the Latino church as well as in the church at large, will be gratefully moving along the path that Ismael has paved. ❁



“A covenant interpretation of the Sabbath command ... is fundamentally a mandate from God to the community to provide all its members with work. Not to do so would mean that the community itself becomes an obstacle for some to abide by the command, since those who do not work cannot rest.”
—*From A Spiritual Life* (Allan Cole, ed.)

Moral Issues: Layers of Learning Embedded in PhD Dissertations

HELEN TAYLOR BOURSIER

The litany of pointed rhetorical questions that Ismael García asks during class lectures challenges students to be both faithful and intentional in forming their ethical positions. When I was his student, he encouraged me to reflect on a broad range of issues, including: terrorism, the nature of evil, theodicy, stem cell research, hospitality, prison reform, religion and politics, gender equality, and the church's role and voice in social in/justice. In all our discussions of the "issues," he also drew upon theological themes, reconstructing Judeo Christian notions of justice through a confession of faith which is accompanied by responsible response—"This is the nature of my God. This is where I stand and how I will live out my faith through my actions."

Ismael insists that critical ethical reflection includes a descriptive element to define practice. In other words, orthodoxy alone is inadequate but also must include *orthopraxis*; our theories about ethics always must be wedded with ethical actions. In other words, the ethical life means thoughtfully formulating a belief system about the nature of a particular in/justice (orthodoxy), for example gender or racial inequality, which is followed by taking specific actions (orthopraxis) to transform the injustice. His course on the ethics of Martin Luther King Jr. provided excellent examples of King living out his theories of social justice through non-violent actions to break down the "great wall of segregation."

As I reviewed my class notes from Moral Issues (spring 2005) and Introduction to Ethics (fall 2006) I was struck by the significant impact these introductory classes had in shaping my theory in academic research as a PhD student and my *praxis* as organizing pastor of a PC(USA) missional paradigm new church development, which means the congregation is organized around doing mission in the community and around the world. In particular, Ismael's teaching continues to inform my position that the struggle for human rights is not only a categorical ethical demand incumbent upon every Christian, nor merely a critical part of the church's



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missional praxis, but “an inescapable imperative.” His insistence that individuals have an ethical responsibility shaped my belief that churches can and must make a difference in the world for justice.

Ismael assigned readings, gave lectures, and facilitated challenging class discussions that insisted the church engage in contemporary issues of justice. I credit him with an important layer of learning echoed in my dissertation, “The Necessity of Social Justice as Ecclesial Praxis in a Postmodern Context.” The dissertation argues for what I call an “ecclesi-odicy.” What I’m aiming to convey, through my use of this term, is that the church will rediscover what she ought to be in essence through its actual practice. Through practicing justice, I believe, the church will experience a renewing of its original intent—an “ecclesiogenesis” (or “new beginning”). In this paradigm, the action of the people of God is sacramental—it cannot in any way be disconnected from responsibility. Part and parcel of the church’s mission is to be engaged in social justice—if the church is not redemptively encountering the problems of evil and suffering, it is not being the church.

Ismael introduced me to several of the dissertation’s key conversation partners, most notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jon Sobrino, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and H. Richard Niebuhr. He also helped me understand how a “postmodern view” lends itself to reconsideration of the church’s mission to “do justice” by insisting that we engage in practice even as we develop ethical theories. Ismael maintains that “right believing” be coupled with “right acting” by responding to his rhetorical question, “What is the Christ-centered response to this situation?” For example, in the discussion on prison reform in the Moral Issues class, Ismael emphasizes the church’s two-fold responsibility: (1) To teach and preach Christian theological ethics related to prison reform, including instruction on the collateral consequences of mass imprisonment; the call to jubilee in the Old Testament (Lev. 25:10), Jesus’ claim of ministry when the Spirit of the Lord was upon him that he would “proclaim freedom for the prisoners” (Luke 4: 18); and the experiences of Paul in prison. (2) The church also must be involved in prison ministry in practical ways by, for example, sponsoring the phone bill for the spouse of someone who is incarcerated.

I am grateful for Ismael’s “open door” after graduation and for ongoing conversations about ethics and justice during my PhD studies. In short, I am in Ismael’s debt for giving me the tools to be a theological ethicist in my own right. I draw from his teachings daily in exploring, teaching, and living the truth that social justice as the church’s missional praxis provides a contemporary, relevant, and necessary way for the people of God to be a visible presence of the Triune God’s abundant generosity of redemption through Jesus Christ. ❀

What issues are disturbing? Illuminating?

SHOULD THE CHURCH

What and who will I become by this action?

HAVE OPINIONS ON

THINGS THAT MATTER?

What is the balance between ethics and power?

How do I exercise my citizenship rights

—especially in light of certain

things that are wrong?

*What are the local issues
in my community,
and where do I stand?*

Who determines the good?

What is the nature of evil?

What really hurts the body? Soul? Our relationship with God?

*How does one integrate
ethics in the role as pastor?*

Is there a need out there that we are called to meet?

How do you determine the rules?

ARE THINGS GOOD BECAUSE
GOD COMMANDS THEM,
OR DOES GOD COMMAND THEM
BECAUSE THEY ARE GOOD?

A sampling of the questions Professor García asked during his Moral Issues class in 2005.

Becoming Scholars and Advocates

TERESA CHÁVEZ SAUCEDA

Several years ago, I walked into a meeting at the World Council of Churches offices in Geneva, Switzerland, and saw someone who looked familiar. Indeed, it turned out to be a fellow alum from Austin Seminary, Moses Yesudoss. It was one of those wonderful moments of recognition and re-connection. He had only been there for one year while I was there—one of the few MATS students, and had gone back to India.

I found out that he had also gone on to do a PhD in ethics and was working as an advocate for justice for the Dahlit in India. I had gone from Austin to do my PhD in religion and society at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and was working as Associate for Racial Justice for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Our work had brought us both to this meeting in Geneva, a follow-up to the Global Conference on racism a few years earlier.

We commented on the similar paths our studies and ministry had taken, and how our time at Austin had helped us on this journey. “You know,” Moses said, “there was one class that helped more than anything else in my doctoral studies, do you remember that class on justice we took with Ismael?”

“Of course, yes, yes—it made a huge difference for me too!”

Of course, part of what we shared and found nurtured in that class was our shared passion for justice. And to be honest, I don’t remember much of what we read in that course on justice theory. What I remember is Ismael—week after week, as we discussed another theory—asking, But what is your question? In that course, he taught us critical skills and helped equip us to become scholars and advocates.

As a student, I always felt that Ismael expected a lot, but he also cared a lot. While a student, I had the privilege of going on a January-term study trip to Central America, with Ismael as our faculty advisor. Our days were full, and often emotionally challenging as well. Every evening we gathered to debrief, no matter how

Continued on page 33



The Reverend Dr. Teresa Chávez Saucedá (MDiv’88), serves as chaplain at the UC, Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, California. She has been an advocate, author, and teacher in racial justice and Latina/o theology for more than thirty years, including serving as the former associate for Racial Justice and Advocacy in the PC(USA). She earned the PhD from the Graduate Theological Union after receiving her MDiv from Austin Seminary.

For the Well-Being of Others

ASANTE TODD

Dr. Ismael Garcia taught Christian ethics at Austin Seminary for roughly twenty years, joining the faculty in 1986 and retiring in 2009. Just before he retired, I had the opportunity to study under him, and found him to be both a good teacher and a man of good character as well. It was not until I read Dr. Garcia's works, however, that I got a more complete understanding of who he was and what he was about.

Above all, Dr. Garcia was devoted to seeing the God-breathed dignity of Hispanics recognized on earth as it is in heaven. For him, this required confronting the personal and political dimensions of moral injustice, a task that many of us, frankly, either lack the courage or the care to do. His approach to Christian ethics was nuanced, combining aspects of liberationist theology and political theory in ways that allowed him to clearly and passionately articulate an agenda for Hispanic liberation from forced integration and cultural imperialism. Even for those of us who have qualms with liberation theology, his work merits our attention. His wisdom enabled him to recognize that any approach to ethics that did not include talk of both charity *and* justice was unfaithful to the gospel. He also understood all too well that any approach to ethics that leaned too heavily toward either the personal or social dimension was unbalanced: refusal to challenge individuals denies their moral agency, and failure to confront social ills is to fall into the destructive logic of autonomous individuality. Undoubtedly, Dr. Garcia's work was and remains a much-needed critical voice for our own country, which continues to exploit not only Hispanics but also the poor and others called "different" and castigated as "deviant."

Perhaps most importantly, Dr. Garcia's labors were inspired by his commitment to Christ, which for him necessarily involved a concern for others. "At the heart of Christian ethics," he wrote, "is the confession that we gain life by surrendering it for the well-being of others." This recognition allowed him to realize that



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our criticism of the ideology of unity and the celebration of a plurality of moral values should not lead us to neglect structures of solidarity and mutuality. It also allowed him to acknowledge that the church, quite literally a gathering of strangers, can only fulfill God's purposes through interdependence and mutual accountability. Thank you, Dr. Garcia, for reminding us that failure to confront personal shortcomings is to deny that God works in the hearts of men and women. Thank you, also, for reminding us that failure to confront issues of social justice alienates believers from their worldly responsibilities, facilitates theology's submission to the secular dogma of privatized religion, and, perhaps worst of all, traps Christian ethics in the cage of moral ecclesiocentrism, a space wherein a domesticated and anemic church must necessarily fail to realize its call to be a servant in the process of creating a more inclusive and loving world. Godspeed. We wish you nothing but the best. ☸

Scholars and Advocates

Continued from page 31

late! What did you see? What did you hear? What did you feel? How does this help you understand God? Your faith? And even when your body was so tired you didn't think you could think, the conversation was rich; the experience, transforming.

As a colleague, I value the fact that he demands even more of himself than he does his students! His groundbreaking work in *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes* is an invaluable contribution to the body of U.S. Latino theology that I have used in my own writing and teaching.

As a friend, I value his integrity and his humor. My husband and I remember great meals and conversations with him and his family, late into the night, rich with laughter. And we treasure the black and white photos he took and printed of Leo's graduation from the LBJ School of Public Affairs. Another talent and gift he shared with us! ☸

FLYING WITH ISMAEL

RUBEN ARMENDÁRIZ

I met Ismael García in 1976 when I accepted an appointment to McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois. Ismael was working on his PhD at the University of Chicago Divinity School and I had just begun as associate professor of Ministry and director of the Latino Studies Program, renamed the Hispanic Ministries Program in 1981. It became my first responsibility to develop a core of courses in Spanish comparable to the seminary's English courses and at the same time identify faculty to teach them.

In 1976, to my knowledge, I was the only Hispanic faculty member in the twelve schools of theology in the Chicago metro known as the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS). You can image my delight upon learning that right there in Hyde Park resided a possible resource for our program, namely Ismael García. I met Ismael on the street between McCormick Theological Seminary and Lutheran School of Theology. I do not recall the date or the time of day but it was actually on the sidewalk of Woodlawn Ave., between those two schools. I remember walking with a student from Lutheran School of Theology, David Rodriguez, who knew Ismael since they both lived in Hyde Park and were fellow Puertorriqueños. David knew about my search for Hispanic faculty and saw Ismael walking toward us. He introduced us and there began a long and wonderful relationship which exists to this day.

Ismael began as adjunct faculty teaching in the Latino Studies Program and as we began working together, we discovered that we had a connection. Ismael received funds from The Fund for Theological Education headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey. I served as Special Associate for The Fund and helped develop and re-



Ruben Armendáriz (MDiv'61) serves Mission Presbytery as a Church Development Consultant. He was formerly professor of ministry, director of the Hispanic Ministries Program, and vice president for seminary operations at McCormick Theological Seminary. He also taught at Austin Seminary and Seminary of the Southwest and served churches in San Antonio, Dallas, and Corpus Christi.

cruit for two programs known as Special Opportunities for Hispanics in preparation for Master of Divinity and Doctoral (PhD) degrees. Ismael was one of the first recipients of that program.

Two qualities that describe Ismael, not only in our personal relation as friends and colleagues, but also in relation to our Latino Studies Program and its students were his excellence as a scholar and his genuine dedication to friendship.

The Latino Studies Program accepted students from several diverse Christian traditions and various levels of formal education. Ismael was deeply concerned with the Hispanic student's ability to learn in the seminary environment. His response to that diversity was to develop an intensive course, which he taught, on Learning to Think Critically. He was a genuine friend to students in our program but he was first an excellent teacher and scholar. His contributions as instructor and as assistant professor in Christian ethics, as well as assistant to the Latino Studies Program / The Hispanic Studies Program were valuable to all of McCormick Seminary. He aided in developing Hispanic courses particular to preparation for Hispanics in ministry and in helping identify Hispanic faculty to teach the courses.

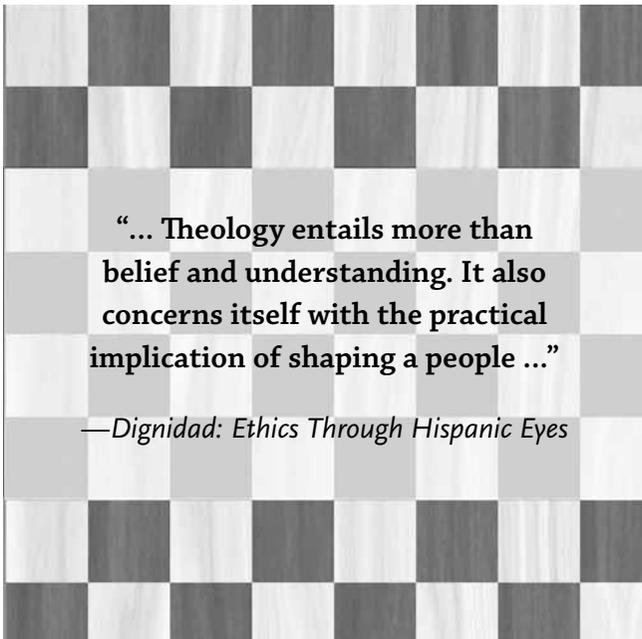
I want to take credit for helping Ismael get rid of his fear of flying. When he began as assistant to the Hispanic Program, one of our responsibilities was the recruitment of Hispanic students. We would seek students not only from the Chicago metro areas but also from all of the United States and Puerto Rico. I had planned a recruitment trip to California and invited Ismael to accompany me. I quickly learned that he did not like airplanes in air. According to him, it had been literally years since he had returned to Puerto Rico because he did not like to fly.

I convinced him to come with me and promised that I would prepare him for the flight. We arrived at the airport early enough to have him enjoy some "festive" beverages. Needless to say, Ismael lost his fear of flying that very day. I am sure he remembers that day. I imagine that is why he had a special name for me. Every time he saw me he would say "hola bandido, ¿como estas?" Hello you bandit, how are you? It was his friendly way of greeting me simply because he felt I would do anything for our Hispanic students to facilitate their preparation including taking special measures to help rid him of his fear of flying.

As most everyone knows, Ismael loved chess and he loved it so much that he had a vast collection of chess sets. I myself contributed to his collection. He was the first person I saw playing on an electronic chess game set. It was a mystery to me, being electronically challenged; but to Ismael, it was a challenge he could not dismiss. The same can be said for any project he engaged in. I recall visiting his home in Austin and he had just converted his garage into a family room. He decided to lay ceramic tile for the floor and he had never attempted any such project. This only encouraged him to study on the art a laying ceramic and then proceeded to install ceramic tile on all the floors in his house. What surprised me because Ismael was not known for his love of physical work, rather he was known for "working out" physically. Just before he retired from Austin Seminary, while visiting him on campus, he shared with me that he was studying and mastering the art of billiards. Since I have a pool table in my home in San Antonio, I invited him to come and

engage in some games with me. We have not yet had the opportunity; however, I am certain that I would not be a match for him. He was always a serious student of whatever task in which he became engaged.

I am pleased that I was requested to make this brief contribution as a tribute to Ismael García since he and I grew together in an experience of delivering theological preparation for ministry more than 122 Hispanic/Latino men and woman working together for approximately nine years. I experienced his development from student to academican, from instructor to assistant professor in Christian ethics and assistant to the Hispanic Ministries Program at McCormick Theological Seminary. ☼





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