

Wittenberg Meets the World: Reimagining the Reformation at the Margins. By ALBERTO L. GARCÍA and JOHN A. NUNES. Pp. xx + 188. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN 978 0 8028 7328 6. Paper \$49.95.

THE significance of this book lies in a contextual ‘reimagining’, as the title indicates, of central themes of the (specifically Lutheran) Reformation. The Latino authors identify themselves as ‘evangelical catholic’ pastors within the strongly textualist–confessionalist Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in North America. They are concerned not only with the present immigration crisis but also the broader set of problems encountered historically by Latinos, namely, of cultural oppression and marginalization vis-à-vis the (northern) Eurocentric world from which the Reformation originated and its tradition still proceeds. Hence, their book is not so much a sustained argument in theology as a series of reflective and suggestive essays challenging readers to reimagine familiar Reformation themes from the Latino perspective of cultural marginality.

Central is *Christus praesens* as the living Word of God bringing a new righteousness of justice as mercy by the mediation of Luther’s celebrated ‘joyful exchange’. The *solus Christus* is justified for the sake of this soteriology and not for the sake of a hegemonic ecclesiology. The new justice in justification by faith is said to expose a radical sinfulness: an Adamic culture of envy, systemic covetousness, limitless greed, Augustine’s *libido dominandi*. This exposé of radical sinfulness comes about because the justice of the joyful exchange explodes the commercial transaction of the usual *quid pro quo* by giving as a gift precisely what is not deserved to the benefit of those who are not deserving. On account of this explosive force of Christ present in the joyful exchange, moreover, justification cannot only be extrinsic and forensic; instead, it is effective and transformative as it bakes Christ and the believer into one loaf.

The fruit of the radical diagnosis of the nature of human sinfulness and its equally radical remedy in Christ’s peculiar righteousness is a social interpretation revealing the systemic ways in which Latinos have been injuriously stigmatized, but equally providing a social interpretation of the eucharistic community of salvation, that is, the ecclesia. There is, however, an important qualification (against Flacius’s Manichaeism) to the radical view of sinfulness as envy (the serpent’s *sicut deus eritis*): the image of

God may be defaced thoroughly by envy in unlikeness to the creative God of generosity, but it cannot be eradicated. Thus *imago Dei* forms the theological basis for ineradicable human dignity, just as a generation ago Martin Luther King, Jr seized upon the doctrine to tell long-oppressed descendants of African slaves, 'You are somebody!' García and Nunes apply the doctrine of the image of God in the same way to the situation of the despised who have internalized their oppression.

This reimagining of Reformation themes for their relevance to the contemporary predicament of Latinos comes with some sharp criticisms of the heirs of theology in the tradition of Luther. On the right, they speak against the domestication of the living Word of God into lifeless doctrinal formulae by the conceit of self-anointed 'orthodoxy' and of the hard-heartedness of such theologically correct Lutherans who refuse to engage the predicament of Latino refugees and immigrants purely on the basis of formal illegality in the United States. They complain about the mercenary practice of shutting down and selling the property of churches in changing neighbourhoods instead of donating them to immigrant faith communities. Particularly sharp rebuke falls upon the understanding of the eucharist as a private, individualistic encounter with the Lord, ignoring the assembly of his body that is present, where and when the *Christus praesens* gives himself as the Bread of Life. But there is also a sharp critique of the left of liturgical dilettantism and the fetishizing of 'the other' by the spectacle of well-meaning Lutherans butchering Hispanic customs in denial of their own (northern) European cultural specificity. In this critique of the left the authors want to affirm a genuine multiculturalism over against the homogenization metaphor of the 'melting pot'.

The book leaves this reviewer with a question. The important notion in post-colonial thought of 'hybridity' that Vitor Westhelle has explored so helpfully goes insufficiently discussed, even though its reality appears on every page. For example, we read in conclusion: '[F]or the vast majority of visible minorities and recent immigrants, life now is better than ever and life here in the United States is better than anywhere else in the world . . . having traveled much of the world, I would rather reside here in the United States than in any other country in the world that I have experienced' (pp. 148–9). On the face of it, however, this candid confession ill comports with the conviction of the authors that Latino communitarianism can and will survive culturally to resist

assimilation into American individualism, which has in fact been the fate of every other immigrant tradition to the United States.

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