



Introduction to This Issue

The January 2025 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* is published in honor of two Lutheran theologians, José David Rodríguez and Javier (Jay) Alanis (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and Wartburg Theological Seminary), whose contributions to theology and ministry have influenced generations of theological students and the world of theological and historical scholarship, particularly in global Lutheranism. Both colleagues retired from faculty positions during the years when a global pandemic made in-person celebrations impossible or, at best, difficult. But it is not too late to celebrate their legacies, especially when both colleagues (and all the students and colleagues inspired by their work) are still charting new directions.

When we envisioned this issue, the title “La Fiesta: Honoring Past Legacies and Charting New Directions in Theology and Ministry,” seemed an apt way of affirming that theology and ministry, when carried on with faithfulness and collaboration, is full of joy, like a party. Many voices are welcome. We wanted to especially highlight the voices of Latiné scholars and church leaders, who are themselves a diverse company of colleagues, showcasing the many contributions, past and present, that Latiné theology and ministerial leadership have made to the broad theological and ministerial enterprise.

The first essay is rich biographical detail about the individuals honored in this issue. The respect and appreciation expressed in the first essay threads its way through all the articles submitted, which either directly build on the work of the honorees or take up

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In “Embodying La Fiesta: A tribute” Patricia Cuyatti-Chavez employs the image of the “threshold” to describe how José David Rodríguez and Javier (Jay) Alanis taught, wrote, and led learning processes with a relational and community perspective. From the centrality of their respective communities, they have engaged other people and communities to continue developing theology and ministries *en conjunto*—together. These conjoint efforts have

nurtured people to serve in different capacities in churches and faith organizations and to continue crossing new thresholds of promise even when faced with obstacles. Cuyatti-Chavez offers readers moving biographical portraits of her colleagues, sharing some of their deeply held theological and ministerial convictions that inspired their students and colleagues.

Several essays reflect on important themes of Lutheran theology in a future key. In “Confessing the Faith in Spanglish: Recovering the Centrality of the Vernacular in the Lutheran Witness to the Gospel,” **Carmelo Santos** describes how the work of José Rodríguez rekindles a deep Lutheran conviction that sometimes is forgotten, namely the centrality of the vernacular. When the faith is confessed in the vernacular people can receive it in the language of their heart. New dimensions of the gospel message are also revealed that in turn enrich the larger church. The life and work of Jay Alanis centers on the journey with migrants crossing the borderlands between Mexico and the U.S. Navigating those borderlands creates a “third space”: an epiphanic space where the Holy One is revealed as one who walks with the people, loving them with the deep affection of a parent. Alanis uses the Spanish name *Diosito* to convey that affection and intimacy. In the journey accompanying each other through the desert, like the disciples on their way to Emmaus, not only is the Holy One revealed but also the indelible image that we all bear, namely the image of God. It is that conviction, that we all bear the image of God, that grounds the sense of dignity of the migrant Latiné community which is often vilified and marginalized.

In “Theological Education *en Español*,” **Francisco Javier Goitía Padilla** explores the situation of theological education in the United States, with attention to the ELCA theological network, and drafts a *latinés* contribution for envisioning the future. Using Martin Luther’s understanding of the vernacular and relating it inductively to his Puerto Rican identity, Goitía Padilla relates the colonial nature of the Western canon of knowledge and its use of power in the U.S. theological education system. Goitía Padilla proposes a *latinés* way of going forward that is “collaborative, pluriversal, communion-oriented, postcolonial, diverse, and inclusive.” It relates theological education *en español* with José David Rodríguez’ understanding of theology as a *praxis en conjunto*.

Ruben Duran (“Ambidextrous Leadership”) asserts that the teaching of Luther’s Two Kingdoms theory is resurging with greater clarity and relevance at a crucial time in the life of a church experiencing decline and disconnection from its surrounding communities. A historical misunderstanding has been to think of these two kingdoms as basis for the separation of church and state. Duran draws on Craig Nesson’s assertion that this teaching refers to the struggle between the forces of God’s Kingdom and the kingdom of evil and that God uses God’s right and left hands as two divine strategies to overcome evil and bring in the Kingdom. God works in and through the church and God works in and through civic society. God is ambidextrous. With gratitude for the ambidextrous leadership of Rodríguez and Alanis, Duran calls on all church leaders to experience greater vitality and capacity for

ministry by participating in the actions of the right and left hands of an ambidextrous God.

Eliseo Pérez Álvarez (“Baptism à la Chilaquil: Celebrating Equality and Diversity Here and Now”) argues that the original baptismal formula of Gal 3:26-28 has been “the great omission” throughout the Westernized version of Christianity. Nevertheless, Pérez Álvarez proposes that this formula, enfolded in communal practices (Acts 2, 4) of Jesus’ movement, is interpreted *koinonia* in non-dichotomous spiritual and material realms. From the metaphysical interpretation of “the great commission” (Matt 28:19), baptism was undermined from its horizontal imperatives imbricated in class, race, gender, cultural, and geopolitical oppressions. The port of departure of this essay is the naming of a myriad of dividing social isms, and the port of arrival is the Reign of God of equality and diversity here and now.

In “Theology and the Church in a Populist Era: A Lutheran Critique of the Collusion between Evangelicals and Right-Wing Populism,” **Guillermo Hansen** explores how the logic, discourse, and practices of right-wing populism in the U.S. are characterized by a “thin ideology” which is parasitic on religious preexisting narratives and practices. Populism depends on thicker “host ideologies,” and in its capacity to tap into unconscious root metaphors. Evangelical Christianity, which has structured its discourse around the metaphor of the “strict-father” serves the right-wing populist agenda by providing it with moral traction and “thickness.” This collusion must be contested not just through a progressive political ideology, but a critical theology centered on the biblical “nurturing” root metaphors that may contribute to a different conceptual and axiological framing. This new horizon presents a creative challenge for Lutheranism to correct the instabilities of the so-called doctrine of the two regiments with its mixture of authoritarian and nurturing metaphors.

In recognition of the contributions of Alanis and Rodríguez to Latiné ministry and the mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ, **Craig L. Nesson** reflects on his introduction to the writings of Paulo Freire and Gustavo Gutiérrez while in seminary, his doctoral study in Germany, and his scholarly engagement with Latin American liberation theology. The method of liberation theology has been a source of creativity for global theology, including in North America and Europe, and for Lutheran theology. “My Journey with Liberation Theology” concludes with consideration of the significance of Our Lady of Guadalupe for the Lutheran tradition.

Guest co-editor for this celebratory issue, **Rafael Malpica Padilla**, affirms Catherine M. LaCugna’s assertion that the doctrine of the Trinity is a “doctrine for the life of the church.” “From Origins to the Table: Identity, Sacraments, and Mission” explores the movement and dance within the Trinity as constitutive for our human experience and its implications for God’s mission to the world. In these very divisive times, reflecting on the journey from our origins to the table offers us the opportunity to explore the contours of a relational ontology that drives us into a future of hope.

In the first of two *Currents Focus* articles, **Stephen D. Morrison** reflects on the inadequacy of a strictly personal definition of sin. The author argues this is a concept that no longer speaks adequately to our present situation, plagued by systemic injustices, such as climate change, inequality, and global neoliberalism. The article addresses the themes of religious trauma, soteriology, escapism, cheap hope, and the radical hope of resurrection. The vital question today is: What does the gospel mean for the systemic injustices of our time?

Larry D. Laine and **Diane M. Laine**, with daughters **Karin M. Laine McMillen** and **Britta M. Laine**, contribute the poem cycle, “In Remembrance of...” These evocative poems reflect experiences, thoughts, and emotions at the death of their daughter and sister, Ingrid. These poems of grief, love, and reconciliation were written over a period of months following her death. They document feelings and emotions, observations and questions that belong to the human experience of grieving. Readers will find dynamics that are similar in all of us—shock, numbness, loss, anger, hurt, resentment, denial, futility, disappointments, unfulfilled dreams, unspoken words, acceptance, memories, love, and joy—in our relationship with those who have died. The authors hope you discover consolation and comfort in your griefs through their poetry.

Rafael Malpica Padilla

Issue Co-Editor

Kathleen D. Billman

Issue Co-Editor



The Rev. José David Rodríguez, PhD, is the Augustana Heritage Professor/Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus of Global Mission and World Christianity at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), where he also served as director of advanced studies, acting academic dean, division chair, director of the multicultural

center, and director of the Hispanic ministry program over the course of his thirty-five plus years of teaching at LSTC. Author of a myriad of books and articles in both Spanish and English, his most recent publication is *Caribbean Lutherans: The History of the Church in Puerto Rico* (2024). Along with his service in many national and global associations (e.g., Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, La Comunidad, Hispanic Theological Initiative) he served as interim rector/president of the Instituto Universitario Superior Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies in Argentina (2011-13); and has been deeply active in the ELCA has an administrator, pastor, and mentor for new generations of academic and pastoral leaders.



The Rev. Javier “Jay” Alanis, PhD, JD, is a pastor and teaching theologian of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. From 2009-2020 Dr. Alanis served as executive director of the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest (LSPS). Prior to that, he had been associate professor of theology, culture, and mission, as well as associate academic dean at LSPS. His academic interests include liberation theology and ethics from the underside of history, missiology in a multicultural context, and peace with justice concerns related to the role of the church in society, particularly in the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. A trained spiritual director, Alanis has written numerous articles on the image of God from a Hispanic/Latino perspective and has developed a borderlands hermeneutics as lens for understanding and interpreting the ethical response to migration.

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