

Sapere aude! Daring to Savor *Churrasco*

by Vitor Westhelle

Since Horace used the expression *sapere aude* in (ca. 20 BCE) it has been associated with the courage to use one's intellect. In 1518 Melancthon quoted this expression by Horace in his inaugural lecture as professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg establishing it as the *bon mot* of the Renaissance's foundation of European modernity. From there it became the defining quality of the Enlightenment as enunciated by Kant in his classic 1784 essay titled "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?" But to translate the Latin root "*sapio*" as "I know" requires a metonymic dislocation, for it actually means "I savor." The editors of *Churrasco: A Theological Feast*¹ reestablished the etymology by the playful gesture of associating the production of knowledge with the delight of enjoying a banquet. With the culinary help of twenty contributors Ezekiel's vision of the glory of God, who gave him a scroll, a manuscript to eat, becomes tangible: "So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth." (Ezek 3:3).

Being at the receiving end of this tribute honors me beyond words as it also humbles me, leaving me overwhelmed, paralyzed and unable to offer adequate encomium. This explains, in part, the tardiness of this response (the rest is not of the *essence* of procrastination, but actually an *accident*). The receipt of a gift is indeed humbling for, if it is truly a gift, it suspends commerce and thus the satisfaction of having deserved it for a work accomplished or the incurrence of a debt that may be still paid back; it cannot. A gift infantilizes oneself. But, if accepted as a child, it is definitely well received. As the book starts, "gratitude is the memory of the heart" (xi), indeed—in this case of this childish heart, mine.

The book, after a section with helpful brief bios of the contributors, starts with a preface, presumably done by the three editors. Two of them, Mary Philip (Joy) and John Nunes, have chapters in the book, and will be acknowledged there, but here I offer my thanks for the initiative and the extra work incurred in planning, organizing, and editing this volume. Charlie Collier, the third name among the editors is a friend who has been wonderfully supportive of my work and ably responsible for two books that came out through the Cascade imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers where he is an editor. Charlie, your gracious work honors me and I thank you sincerely. In the preface the editors then explain the organization of the volume around the three human faculties devised by Aristotle: *theoria*, *poesis*, and *praxis*. The use of these categories follows the central role they play in the anthropology of the person it honors. Then the Introduction continues offer-

1. Mary Philip, John Arthur Nunes, and Charles M. Collier, eds. *Churrasco: A Theological Feast in Honor of Vitor Westhelle* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013). In this text the references to the work will appear as page numbers in parenthesis.

The editors of *Churrasco: A Theological Feast* reestablished the etymology by the playful gesture of associating the production of knowledge with the delight of enjoying a banquet.

ing a helpful didactical summary of each of the eighteen chapters plus the final prayer. It did not pass unnoticed that among the contributors, five continents are represented and half of them are women, the other half men. I intend in this review to offer my own reading of the text that should have been done long ago but circumstances beyond my control prevented me. My review, as it is proper, will refer not to the contributions alone, but to the individuals and their significance, for I am because you were part and parcel of my life.

The book opens properly with a homily that for me illustrates the context in which *theoria* takes place. The sermon offers the attending congregation the possibility to experience in *vita passiva* the good news that is given, presented. Professor Oswald Bayer announces the gift reflecting on Gen 32:23–32, Jacob struggling with the unknown. The author hosted me with open arms at the University of Tübingen in 1995 when I was there for my post-doctoral studies. Those studies would eventually result in the first book of my single authorship in English.² The theme of the book, the Theology of the Cross, is largely influenced by Bayer's interpretation of *Anfechtung* in Luther's theology as internal and external, trial and tribulation, that comes to us as this nameless power that is described in Jacob's ordeal at the Jabbok. Jacob was fighting the fights of all of us in which God is often experienced as a "God against God," an expression of Luther dear to Bayer. But Jacob struggles, and ends up lame and limping, as we in our trials often do. And yet Jacob prevails. That counts for him as a blessing that is the gift of saving grace, because he fought precisely the one who has given him life. Not struggling, and giving up would be tantamount to refusing the gift. As many of us, he might not have been a saint, but is blessed and receives a name. This name prefigures the sacrament of baptism, by which we are inducted into the company of the blessed.

2. Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

Professor Robert Kolb, offers a lineage of the interpretation of five distinct implications of Luther's *theologia crucis*, the central hermeneutical insight of the Reformer's theology. Kolb is uniquely equipped in reading not only Luther but theologians that followed his lead and some of whom were his direct pupils. He follows the last of the five as "the most fragile part" (8) of Luther's theological heritage: the hidden God. He not only points to the added difficulty of this concept in Luther (who uses it in at least three different senses), but also detects in Luther's followers the recurring hurdle they encounter in dealing with the basic perspicuity in the use of the notion in letting God be God: the anti-theodicy implied! To probe its impact, the author does a double move. First, the litmus test of a doctrine is in the sermon: "can the idea be preached?" (9) Second, is it biblically sustained? Starting with Luther he probes the two points and then follows the use of the idea in the first generation of Luther's disciples. Kolb with his signature traits keeps the faithfulness to the idea, scandalous for human reason as it is, and the deviations it also incurred when adjusted to a safe and accommodated orthodoxy. Bob Kolb's sensitivity to how the tradition is handed down and, in the process, at times betrayed (*traduttore, traditore!*), frees him to engage different theological systems in an ecumenical spirit, knowing that no tradition is kept free from derailments and yet all hand down something faithfully. It is for us to discern that which has been preserved.

Dealing with European secularization and its atheism, confronted now with the so-called returned of the sacred, Archbishop of Sweden, Antje Jackelén explores the possibilities of a new language for theology. This she finds in literature. In a gesture deployed not only to please the honoree, she uses the Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho to illustrate the emergence of a "spirituality released from formal religion" (19). I have known the author since 2000 as I was chairing the search committee for the successor of Philip Hefner. Needless to say, we became good friends and close colleagues in systematic theology, while she also inherited with the chair the position of Director of the Zygon Center for Religion and Science. With the particular emphases she brought with her, feminism and contextual epistemologies began to play a central role in the work and mission of the Zygon Center. She left the teaching position to become bishop of Lund and subsequently was elected Archbishop of the Church of Sweden with its seat in Uppsala. Combining an *in loco* knowledge of European secularism and the religion and science debate on both sides of the Atlantic, Jackelén's chapter is an informed itinerary that brings formal religion (she is Archbishop of the largest Lutheran church in the world, after all) to the confrontation with the spiritualities that bypass institutional religion. But, alas, these spiritualities equally embarrass the die-hard atheists who are finding refuge in "humanism" to cope with this return of the sacred. The way between the double-edged impasse (say, between the holism of a Fritjof Capra and starch agnosticism of a Richard Dawkins, 20) could be in custody of theology that may help to guide humanity to face the challenges that earth faces in the twenty-first century. These trials concern both God's glorious creation and the scientific concerns

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with sustenance of all existence. To this end, summoning all to face the most common and universal cause, she was instrumental in penning the pioneering document by the Church of Sweden *A Bishops' letter about the climate*.³

Professor Ted Peters is a friend, a reference for theology, who with Philip Hefner are a formidable pair in exploring the science and religion territory. Both in the traditional theological *loci* and specifically in the field of theology and science (not to mention his venturing into other literary genres), he is among Lutherans in the United States one of, if not the most published. But Peters adds to quantity, quality, depth, and insightful originality. This chapter he offers in *Churrasco* is a case in point. He critiques two of my books.⁴ I already had a chance to respond tentatively to his criticism in my contribution to his *Festschrift*.⁵ My answer was written with some haste however, and concentrated in his original counterproposal ("beatitudinal eschatology") to avoid the space/history conundrum. What I did not acknowledge is his insightful reading of the role irony plays in my argument, with which he has fellow feelings, insofar as it lifts up the paradox the Cross creates for all analogical reasoning. In an ingenious move the "beatitudinal eschatology" finds its expression in the reinterpretation of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1–12) with the eschatological dimension displaying itself in the tensions between what is despised according to the reasoning in the world and the blessing reversal. Peters indeed accompanies me in the criticism of a linear eschatological conception, but refuses to embark in a spatial eschatological vessel. In his interpretation, my criticism of historic-linear eschatology makes me "overcompensate" (36). "History and eschatology must remain temporal categories." (36f.) Even as he acknowledges the merit of some of my criticism he does miss the point when he says that my interpretation "must be brought from the frame to the center ... of our daily living." My argument for spatializing eschatology was precisely that the spatial emphasis in eschatology brings our gaze from the center to the frame, the margins of our

3. *A Bishops' letter about the climate* (Uppsala: Church of Sweden Bishops' Conference, 2014).

4. Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) and *Eschatology and Space* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2012).

5. *Anticipating God's New Creation: Essays in Honor of Ted Peters*, Carol R. Jacobson and Adam W. Pryor, eds. (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 140–151. Peters' response in the same volume (161–164) is for me one of the most elegant and discerning compliments a colleague could ever receive. His words are for me the most precious and joyful witty gems of elegiacs I have seen.

existence, the borders of spaces that enclose our existence. And these liminal spaces, these *eschata*, we inhabit; they are multiple and place us in cross-sectional layers of spaces between and betwixt. I look forward to continuing the conversation.

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, Professor of Dogmatics at the Aarhus University, Denmark, honors me with her piece on Bernard and Luther on the use of nuptial imagery for supplying an example of what I provocatively once called “grace-side economics” (38f.).⁶ In her masterful essay, Pedersen brings to the fore the normative importance of the nuptial imagery in both theologians who use it as the richest metaphor to render the relationship between God and the world, supplanting other metaphors available and even preferred by some who claim the reforming appeals of Bernard and Luther—as in the case of the use of the pedagogical image of tutor and pupil, the political image of ruler and subject, or the economic metaphor of master and servant. But in so doing, she makes a second decisive move by claiming that Bernard and Luther both queer the nuptial relationship. The traditional gender roles are transgendered; they are not fixed or essentialized. In a decisive final step the essay by Pedersen restores the erotic dimension of the image for both reformers. While many medieval interpreters de-eroticize the Song of Songs, for example, that is not the case with Bernard and Luther who use *eros* in its carnal, even indecent or shameful, expression as resource to underscore the physicality of God’s love, which come as an asymmetric gift (*donum*). This gift then becomes for humans an example (*exemplum*) for the exercise of love in the earthly regime. And even when de-sexualized in Luther’s employment of it in the economy/household and politics, love is still erotic, no longer expressed in interpersonal sexual relation, but converted into a “political and economic eroticism” (54). Else Marie arouses Bernard’s “eroticism of words” (42), and rejoices in finding Luther playing in the same garden.

John Nunes, a poet after my style, a theologian whose brilliance may be attested in this chapter, offers a reading of Derek Walcott’s poetry as expression of a “poetological” (Bayer) theology (49f.). Nunes finds in Walcott, with whom he shares the magnetism of the Caribbean charm of their native lands, the fascination for reading the “white fire” of the rabbinical tradition in deciphering between the lines (*inter-legere*, 54), which means something akin to reading the Gospel as an insurgence in between the fissures of the law (*lege*)! From these cracks emerge the “Hybrid” par excellence (56) the Christ, as truly human who hides the divine he is. In an interesting and illuminating move, Nunes gets into the cryptic vs. kenotic debate regarding the Chalcedonian *communicatio*. He sides with the former, but for reasons different from the school (Tübingen) that made it famous (57). The secret, cryptic character of the incarnation was God’s way of being fully present, yet disguised in this hybrid communion always present in a camouflaged, dissimulated mode. With this move Nunes makes an insightful and profound statement of theological theoretical demarcation between postcolonial theology and liberation theology. The lat-

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ter, while acknowledged as “first cousin to postcolonial theology” (56)—he uses Leonardo Boff as its representative—is still captive of the kenotic argument by which “any individual personality of Jesus seems to have been evacuated.”

“Mentor” was a mythological character in Homer’s *Odyssey* whose name likely shares the same root as the English “mind” and ultimately derived from Proto-Indo-European *mon-eyo-*, causative form of *men-* (“to think”). This indeed describes Phil Hefner whose mind hosted me and caused mine to take flight. When I disagreed with him it was in part to be challenged, but the better part was to see him raise the bar by offering, not as apology of his position, but by positioning himself in a higher level exposing new dimensions of his argument that until then were hidden to me and, I surmise, quiescent in him but ready to burst. This happened in my taking to task nothing less than his signature concept of the “created co-creator.” He answers me with the kindness of a host who does not want to embarrass his guest who has behaved badly. My critique of the “created co-creator” was only part of my argument; the rest was my compliment for what the notion accomplishes. But in dealing only with my criticism, Hefner shows his brilliance. He goes from my calling the notion a too “straightforward concept” to offer the opportunity for him to show what it always was meant to show: “to probe the more ambiguous and darker side of the created co-creator” (64)! With elegance he shows how it functions as a “metaphor” for the emergence of the human in the whole of nature as creation, which, as a metaphor, elicits meaning by “self-destructing” (Ricoeur) its literalness, and brings us back to earth (66). Metaphors are mundane. But then it also functions as a symbol in Tillich’s acceptance of the concept (67f.), which points to transcendence and opens the religious dimension of human experiences with a sense of ultimacy and depth. In an ingenious employment of language, Hefner translates the Chalcedonian *communicatio idiomatum* (the communication of properties of the mundane and the sublime) in his “created co-created” who *communes* the metaphor and the symbol to explain how the mundane in its finitude is simultaneously open to transcendence and infinity.

Professor Claudia Janel offers us an incisive criticism of the “global village” in which a pretense conviviality of cultures, races, and religions create a sanitized hybridity in which the “other” is tolerated as long as it evokes in us the aseptic pristine and pre-modern Shangri-La that redeems our sense of disconnect with nature, and

6. Westhelle, *Scandalous God*, 176.

the awareness of the brokenness of our communities. Ironically and paradoxically this “rhetoric of multiculturalism” (75f.) comes in the wake of the awareness of the autonomous character of different cultures, which, in turn, places “the West” at the pinnacle of an evolutionary process of cultures. The western “tolerance” toward the other is precisely that, tolerance as long as the other emulates the western life style. To overcome this multiculturalism, Claudia offers the notion of “transculturality” (W. Welsch) in which the dynamic character of cultures is sustained without surrendering authentic non-static difference (77). The paradigm of transculturality is then presented as a helpful tool for the ecumenical movement in which one starts to approach difference knowing that one’s own identity is itself dynamic, fragmented, and nomadic, and not static or essentialist. But for this to happen there must be transparency as to power-relations for the achievement of new levels of justice. The recent pneumatological emphasis in the ecumenical movement seems to be a move in the right direction. In the Christian tradition, it is the Holy Spirit, as “a relational, dynamic, life- and experience-centered category” (80) that offers the most promising theological resource to practice transculturality.

Fides quaerens linguam carmen est. Faith in search of language is poetry. Roberto Zwetsch not only knows that, but practices it. In this beautiful chapter my friend and professor of Mission is not only searching for language, which he also does, but collecting what others in the same quest have already left as testaments. Using the works of a series of Brazilian poets—ranging from Adélia Prado to Armindo Trevisan, from Mario Quintana to Pedro Casaldáliga—Roberto weaves into a theological discourse what poets have themselves said explicitly about God and theology laying out what has been called poetological theology. In doing so he rediscovers some of the riches of the language of the gospel. More than many a theologian, a poem like Quintana’s speaks of a lost God who should be found in the depth of our reality and then not be lost again, “even if it be in heaven” (89f.). This God lost in heaven is the one of Jesus’ parable of the great judgment in Matthew 25 that speaks about “his absence amidst people who believe in him” (90), or so, as “Christians,” they claim. The chapter concludes with the evocation of Christian spirituality and prayer, which has distinctly in poetry “one of the most beautiful and instigating ways of expressing” themselves (92).

The next chapter by Mary Philip (Joy) begins with a poem by the author herself. Referring to a beautiful song by Maria Gadú, sang by no one less than Caetano Veloso, one of Brazilian most gifted artists, Joy goes on composing an ode to memory! And the lyrics of the text tune in with charming melodious glamour. Memory, she suggests in a metaphor, is a living bridge through which hope, love, and care traverse and the absent is made presence, gift. In this presence life blossoms, says the professor of zoology turned Professor of Lutheran Global Theology and Mission at a university in Waterloo, Canada. She ends her chapter with a moving account of her root metaphor of living bridges in the northeast of her native India. They are actual bridges arranged by weaving living branches of strangler fig trees and aerial roots of

rubber figs, which over generations creates passages over rivers allowing for cohorts of people over ages to cross safely across them. Passages, Joy knows very well, are the same central metaphor in Walter Benjamin’s understanding for what constitutes memory, this word that for him (as for Joy) is both a verb and a noun, a “verboun” (99). But while Benjamin is inspired by the Parisian urban arcades, she goes for a more elemental—and in that, more vital—image of a memory evoked by another sort of passages, but in her use the medium itself is alive. These living bridges are life that in itself promotes life. As the biologist knows, this is close to the definition of cancer: life that grows within life. But unlike the often fatal illness, the living bridges don’t grow into life to destroy it, but out of life to enhance it.

Luís Dreher honors me in particular with a beautiful piece that pays tribute to many of my published scribbling. He does it as someone who knows in depth the literature that has formed my thinking, but has a command over them that certainly surpasses mine. Nonetheless, Professor Dreher does not restrict himself to my old passion with some motifs that elicited many of my theoretical conception, but dwells at length in some conceptual progenies I later developed (attested, e.g., in his astute phrasing: “latitudes are no platitudes”). Except for suggesting (when he could be making it peremptorily) that my use of conceptual categories are not only “latitudinal,” but alas, often “latitudinarian.” Luís makes associations of working categories that sometimes amaze me, as the connection of the notion of *Vorstellung* (representation) as I had earlier developed in connection with Hegel and the Hegelian school with the use of *Verstellung*, as “dissimulation” (108), which play an important role in my later conceptual repertoire. If he would say it I would have to acknowledge that I failed to elaborate the connection, but my dear friend, and former pupil, Luís is more interested, apparently, in proving Hegel wrong in his saying that “for the valet there is no hero.” And this is from someone that is now not writing from the chambers, but from the balcony of the Brazilian academy. I will keep learning from him.

Kathlen Luana de Oliveira gives continuity to this section on “*poiesis*” with, of course, poetry. With an opening poem, she addresses my work, calling this author with the description of the great Brazilian poet Manuel de Barros: “a boy who got a bird-like look” (114f.). With an insightful analysis of fifteen titles in my bibliography, she moves nimbly through the texts both in Portuguese and in English that I have written over the last two decades. She makes connections that both surprise me for their astuteness and instruct me on how to use a bird’s gaze, which she is gentle enough not to point out what this “boy” often fails to see. To Luana, my thanks for lending me glasses to see also that which I had missed. She then weaves it together with her own work on Hannah Arendt, which culminated in her brilliant and award winning doctoral thesis (the prestigious Prêmio CAPES 2014).⁷

7. Kathlen Luana de Oliveira, “Por Palavras e Ações: Há um Mundo entre Nós: Justiça, Liberdade e Comunhão: Sentidos Teológicos e Políticos nos Paradoxos na Democracia em Tempos De Direitos Humanos” (São Leopoldo, diss. Faculdades EST, 2013).

The chapter closes with the luminous Rubem Alves calling for a theology as “knowledge transfigured by love” (121), interestingly foreshadowing a theme to which my latest book (*Transfiguring Luther*) is dedicated, but which she had no knowledge of at the time she wrote her essay.

The third part of the book, “*praxis*,” starts with an essay by Musimbi Kanyoro who recounts our work together in the 90s at the LWF, she in charge of the Women’s Desk and I as theological advisor to the council. Her work is a celebration of diversity of God’s creation in the assumption of a founding commonality of all being part of what is good, indeed “very good” (Gen 1:31) in this very diversity. Evil manifests itself in the suppression of this diversity, as narrated in the story of the Tower of Babel. The counter narrative is the Pentecost event in Acts 2:1–21, which, she notes with exegetical precision, “does not say that they no longer had their own languages and customs but that they could understand one another” (128). This respect for diversity is demanding not only because of diversity, but because of inequality, injustice in the distribution of resources and power. This is the challenge of diversity: to include in the conversation the excluded, to empower the powerless. And she goes on to make concrete proposals. First, we need to work for the eradication of poverty, which can be done if a mere 1 percent of global income would be given toward that end. Second, we need to be prepared to have an honest conversation about our privileges as people *and* countries. Third, we are called to “be bold and refuse to be prisoners of ‘FEAR’ and claim the promise of hope” (130), for hope is resistance. As an example of this living hope she lifts the women’s movement, “the largest organized people’s movement in the world” (132). There, passion for true diversity is coupled with holding staunchly to principles. So, she offers this formula: principle+passion = compassion.

My first professor of systematic theology, Walter Altmann, offers me one of his virtuosic biblical reflections systematically correlated with the Brazilian context. He reads Psalm 90 along with the protest of Anacito, the Chief of the indigenous Xavante people of the Amazon region. Walter brings his decisive, but also critical, Lutheran theology to bear upon the contexts of the oppressed people, particularly in Latin America. This is what he does in joining the voice of Chief Anacito to Psalm 90, bringing heaven and earth in touch with each other in a Christological, incarnational move that questions even his esteemed theologian, Karl Barth (134f.), and reads the psalm as a cry for life cut short for so many of the oppressed, lifting up their labor in a bold socialist and materialist perspective. A world religious leader (among many other responsibilities and ecclesial and ecumenical positions held in Brazil and in Latin America, he was the moderator of the Central Committee of World Council of Churches 2006–2013), Walter calls for a fresh understanding of a new heaven *and* earth in which justice shall prevail (2 Pet 3:13; [138]) and gender, racial, and economic inequity will reveal the idol who is presented as a god (136).

Professor Reinhard Hütter, my former colleague and dear friend, contributed with his distinctive erudition a reflection on

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experience’s claim to universality. Detecting an apparent paradox of the two extreme poles of experiences, the ineffable personal nature of it and its universal communicability, he turns the paradox into an analogical argument that can be analytically examined as the relationship between the apophatic and the kataphatic aspects to the theological discourse. So Reinhard dissects the grammatical function of “experience” in three registers: as a transitive verb, as an intransitive verb, and as an adjective. These three linguistic registers are analogous to the three constitutive characteristics of the human condition in relationship to ultimacy: contingency, temporality, and finality. These characteristics are in an ascending movement toward perfection that are rendered by the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity as the proper expressions of the Christian stance over against contingency, temporality, and finality. Hope points still to something to be attained but for which being acted upon is received in faith, in the midst of temporal existence. In this hope-driven existence, the virtue of humility keeps lit the flame of hope for the final consummation, which in and through charity attains graceful participation in the divine life. The chapter ends with a postscript on the “experience” of saints who represent the most consummate stage of the human peregrination in humble expectation of God’s final consummation. In the life of the saints the apophatic and the kataphatic aspects of theology are given their due respect and linked by charity; this is why saints do not write autobiographies.

Professor Kathleen D. Billman, Kadi, as she is fondly called, is an enchantress! The course we taught together—“Narratives of Hope” (and despair)—offered an entry to her chapter in which she meditates on the experience of that class using a category, *choratic spaces*, I have developed. She envelops that class experience with brilliance and creativity, but most embarrassingly in a moving way that only a friend can do. Kadi works with this notion of spaces between spaces, *chora*, to find in them liminal stories that tell about hope and despair. With her therapeutic and poimenic skills she reflects on the power of these stories, the effect they have in the listeners when they resonate to expressions and images, but most importantly where it takes them. Stories are transporters. This is what stories do when they are “*choratic*.” She recalls one of the stories she used in class. Found in Joshua 4 there is the narrative of the people crossing the Jordan. After the passage, camping in Gilgal, Joshua sent representatives from each tribe back to the river to retrieve stones from the stream to be kept as reminders of the crossing. In telling the story, Kadi brought some pebbles and passed them around as a symbolic reenactment of that experience

of being between spaces. A few years later one student of that class, while marching back to his place after receiving his diploma lifted his arm and showed the stone he kept from that class to Kadi and the faculty. In a very significant way, that gesture told us that the story resonated with him, and in a very tangible way transported him to that day's commencement ceremony at St. Thomas Church.

Aside from Roberto (whom I have known since 1972), José David Rodriguez is my oldest friend in this collection of essays. We met in 1978 when both of us were starting our graduate studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). José David starts his essay with recalling a transcultural seminar that happened at LSTC in 1981 in which the keynote address was given by our common friend, the late Albert "Pete" Pero, launching his program of cultural "self-transcendence" as a missionary strategy for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) facing two problems, identity and perspective (161). The failure of the ELCA and Lutheranism in general in the United States in confronting these challenges is the result of confusing identity with the "manifest-destiny" mentality so prevalent in the States. This confusion renders the church without perspective for it becomes introverted. The apostle Paul is called upon to provide more than a *dream* out of the introverted self-absorption, but rather a *vision* that offers a strategy to address the challenges of multiculturalism by showing the universal appeal of the Gospel. The vision remains and it is necessary "to move from *vision* to *strategy*" (168). This can only be actualized by the overcoming of the "idolatry of the marketplace" and the culture of self-contentment buttressed by a "theology of prosperity." The journey ought to continue, but it will only move us somewhere toward cultural self-transcendence if all voices that have not counted may be lifted as the spiritual hymn sings: "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (169f.).

Prof. Barbara Rossing brings to this book a reworked and expanded version of an argument that she has made and that has fascinated me for its bold criticism of the use of a concept that has been naïvely employed by well-intended people not realizing the trap they fall into: *oikoumenē*. The Greek noun, she shows well, has two meanings when used in biblical literature. One is to designate the whole inhabited world (Hebrew: *tebel*). So it is used in the

Septuagint in poetic parallelism to earth (*gē*; Hebrew *eretz*; 174). But with the consolidation and expansion of the Roman Empire the word assumes, in the century before the Common Era, another political and economic meaning to designate the domain of the empire. This is the sense in which it is employed most often in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Revelation where it should be translated as "empire." Barbara moves into drawing decisive implications for ecology and for eschatology. She shows that the end of *oikoumenē* in the Book of Revelation announces not the end of the earth or the world, our *oikos*, but of the empire, of the political and economic order of domination; the end of the empire is for the sake of a world that allows for all life in its biodiversity to flourish. Only then can *oikoumenē* be employed in the sense it is used in the Septuagint (181f.). The tension between the two senses of the word has repercussions for the ecumenical movement in which voices are already being heard that, aware of the ambivalence in the use of *oikoumenē*, are calling for an ecumenism against the political and economic *oikoumenē*, that is of empire (179f.).

The book ends with a paraphrased rendition of the "Lord's Prayer" by Deanna Thompson (184). In her version, she carefully crafts the petitions with a language taken mostly from concepts I have developed in books and articles. She does an amazing job in coining the prayer with such precision and elegance that it speaks volumes to me and should also resonate with others, for it is radically inclusive of all peoples and places. By expanding the vocabulary, she moves from words that, worn over the centuries, have turned into platitudes to a new language for expressing afresh what once was astonishingly new in the mouth of the Nazarene.

And finally, I would be negligent in not acknowledging the generous and kind words offered in the cover blurbs. These wonderful people, renowned theologians with singular marks in their theological contributions—and I dare to call them my friends—pay homage to me by endorsing the work that the editors so skillfully assembled. To Catherine Keller, Robin Steinke, Mark Mattes, Neal Anthony, Martha Stortz, and Guillermo Hansen, I pay my tribute.

Thanks for the feast, it is exquisitely delicious!

Vitor Westhelle