

Antitransformational Paradigms of the Latino Church

Oscar García-Johnson

Introduction

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,

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35

Vol. 10, No. 1

walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1–10)

“I am tired of seeing the same scene...” said the young Latino¹ preacher at the beginning of his sermon. He continued, “I am tired of seeing more and more people who come to the temple expecting to receive alms from God to sustain the mediocre lives they are living. I am bothered by the fact that God has been converted into a crutch that holds up our dysfunctional lives and is not seen as the way to develop wholeness—a God who affects every level of our lives.”

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When I heard David confront the audience, a US Latina church, with such boldness, I felt seriously convicted, concerned, and, at the same time, hopeful. I saw rising up before my eyes a nonconformist generation fed up with a rickety, transplanted Western Christianity. David is a second-generation Hispanic young adult who, thanks to his immigrant family, managed to hold on to the fundamentals of the Spanish language and developed a great appreciation for its Latino cultural tapestry.

1. The use of inclusive language is one of the values of US Latino/a theology. Due to the fact that no word in the English language suffices to represent the kind of gender inclusivity we seek, I will use “Latino” and “Latina” interchangeably to convey the spirit of such inclusivity. I will avoid the conventional “Latino/a” or the informal “Latin@” expressions in this particular document, except when it is a title or a quotation.