

IT'S ALL ABOUT LANGUAGE:
TOWARDS AND INTERCULTURAL YOUTH MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

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Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Espinosa, Dorado, Puerto Rico

In light of the postmodern mind of the Twenty-first Century and the impact of globalization and technology the church faces enormous challenges. Within an intergenerational congregation, adolescents and young adults struggle to construct their religious identity and make sense of their faith tradition. The influence of secularism is most evident among emerging generations at church. The Christian Education curriculum and the traditional worship service seem to have lost their appeal. Further, a language barrier seems to be present that can hinder the communication of the Gospel message.

The challenge undertaken by this project was to find a common language of communication to present the Gospel in an attractive way through a Christian Education Experience. Furthermore, I hoped to make it meaningful to young adults in order to impact their own lives and the larger community. I identified parables as the biblical paradigm to follow but in the project time ascribed these to the narratives found in popular culture and among the group of young men and women who are part of the youth ministry.

Participants had the opportunity to engage in conversation and decide which topic to study, as well as the time and place where they would like to meet. Sunday Bible School turned into a series of educational experiences, which ignited conversation and created a liminal space. Through this experience participants renewed their social and religious identity based on personal and collective faith experience. As a final result, what began as a

project initiated by the Doctor of Ministry Candidate gave birth to a project of their own that has had an impact upon their own faith experience as well as that of the larger congregation.

DEDICATION

To Juan Gaddiel.

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INTRODUCTION

“It is one thing to talk about God. It is quite another thing to experience God.”

—Leonard Sweet¹

Looking back at the first time I set foot at the *Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Espinosa*, Dorado, Puerto Rico (ICDCE), I remember feeling very comfortable. But I could not help noticing that among a congregation of almost six hundred people, there were no more than twenty to twenty-five young adults between the ages of eighteen to thirty. ICDCE has a strong presence through Internet social feeds, media that is mostly accessed by emerging generations; having said that, the question that surfaces immediately to mind is: why is this age group missing from the physical congregational experience? A deep reflection took place, which led to the proposal for this project.

In order to take that original reflection deeper, I would like to start by briefly looking at the way modern and postmodern minds think and coexist within our society and church and the way young adults construct their identity. Where does the postmodern church stand between historical churches whose doctrines are mostly shaped by word and reason, and Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements governed by emotions? One group anchors in reason and science and the other pulls towards emotions and a literal biblical interpretation to resist the mosaic of diversity and pluralism that shapes the postmodern mind. In light of this debate, Christian futurist theologian Leonard Sweet’s words added to philosopher Immanuel Kant’s statement, “There is no doubt that all our knowledge begins with

¹ Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 31.

experience,”² opened a way for the challenge I would face ahead. I would accompany a group of young adults through a postmodern journey where education, tradition, Bible, reason and experience met to find a common language that would connect their personal and collective stories with the biblical narratives. The collision of these two narratives in light of a participatory, image driven and connected experience (EPIC³) that integrates elements of popular culture would lead them to a liminal space.⁴ In this space God could be revealed to face a transformative experience.

Globalization and the digital era present a challenge to the intergenerational dialogue within a congregation. Furthermore, our congregation at *ICDCE* inhabits a culture wherein individuals struggle to construct a national and religious identity among multiple socio-political and religious influences. Looking at the gospels and the book of Acts we can trace some parallels between the emerging generations at the *ICDCE* and the church of the first century. Characteristics the two periods have in common include the colonization of the mind and religion by dominant empires and the use of different languages to communicate.

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1973), 41.

³ In the book *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church*, Leonard Sweet defines EPIC as experiential, participatory, image driven and connected. Postmodern individuals seek for an experience with God as opposed to moderns who talk more about God. They live a participatory experience because they interact with the world as much as participants as observers while moderns take their cues from authorities above them; they are an Image driven generation because images generate emotions, as opposed to moderns who were a word based generation. Finally, connected to the postmodern means living their individuality in relation to others as opposed to moderns for whom everything was individual and little was communal.

⁴ A liminal space according to Richard Hester is defined as “a space separated from their usual daily activity and secured by a covenant of confidentiality... *Liminality* refers to a threshold situation where for a time people leave their ordinary worlds of roles, statuses, and familiar social structures... In liminal space people experience immediacy in relationships, unmediated by status, role, or social conventions. In this state they are open to transformative change, because they are able to view their culture ad themselves from a different perspective.” Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead With It: the Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership*. (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2009), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1129-1136.

Jesus' method for conveying the message of the good news of the Kingdom might be the clue for this generation of ministers, as we seek to reach the un-churched and revitalize our broken community of disciples. "The best tool religious leaders can give people to think and live differently is a metaphor or image."⁵ Perhaps we might take these words from Sweet and combine them with the concept of parables as metaphors that point towards God and the Reign of Heaven.⁶ Could there be a common language to address an intergenerational and intercultural congregation? Could we find that language in narratives, in visual and literary images extracted from the daily life of people and in the communication media of popular culture? Through the youth ministry at *ICDCE*, we immersed ourselves into the life of the congregation to promote a revitalized and integrated faith experience, which as a mosaic, could project an integral and holistic image without damaging the individual identity of each tessera.⁷

⁵ Sweet, 89.

⁶ I will explain this in greater detail in Chapter Two.

⁷ Term for an individual tile used in creating a mosaic.

CHAPTER ONE

NOTHING IN COMMON?

Who We Are and Where We Come From

I was very skeptical when I heard you speak. I thought, ‘I don’t have anything in common with a sixteen year old, this will be boring’; but to my surprise, through the covenant group I found out how much we have in common. It is the first time we got together in small groups and shared personal experiences. I feel that those of us who are older can give advice to others, but we can also learn from them.

This is what a twenty-eight year old female member of the youth ministry said the first time I met with the group of adolescents and young adults at the *Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo)* en Espinosa, Dorado, Puerto Rico (*ICDCE*). This story led to a process of sharing experiences and feelings about the youth ministry and their individual and collective identity.

“We are in a real sense, our stories. Who we are, what we think, and how we act are all shaped by the many large and small stories that make up the discourse embedded in our multi-sensory social experience.”¹ Each narrative opened a door into the intricate world of every person revealing how generational, linguistic and intercultural differences limited their participation in the youth ministry and the communal life of the church. As they learn to live their faith, this generation of young adults at the *ICDCE*, is challenged by the opposing

¹ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates, 2008), 25.

forces of a twentieth century, mainly modern, conservative congregation, anchored in absolutes about God and Christian faith and a secularized society, and a highly experiential, mediatized, globalized and cyber-connected twenty-first century world.

The ICDC at Espinosa (ICDCE) is a loving and caring community with a history of over eighty-six years of struggles and also significant achievements. Over time, they have faced the terrible winds of race and gender discrimination which they have overcome by their strong commitment to the ministry and mission of the church: “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39) and “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19); and to the ideals of the denomination’s founding fathers: “In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things love.”³ Despite the growing membership of 500 people and close to 100 visitors weekly, during the last six to ten years the youth ministry decreased from one hundred to twenty-three. Notable social and cultural differences have hindered young people’s experience and participation as a group and as an essential part of the faith community. Therefore, the process of constructing a religious *identity* among the youth at *ICDCE* has risen as a significant matter of concern that embraces every aspect of the life of the group and of each individual.

Religious Identity Through Biographical Narratives

Who am I and where I am going? This seems to be the question that encompasses the socio-political, gender, and religious construction of identity of young adults in the twenty-first century in general and of youth at the *ICDCE*, in particular. With regards to this subject, the social and technology media scholar David Buckingham states: “when we talk about

² Douglas Allen Foster and Anthony L. Dunnayant, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 854.

national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity, for example, we imply that our identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people.”³ Sharing becomes an intrinsic and vital part of the process of the construction of identity and vocation among adolescents and young adults. The process of sharing raises new questions and answers others in an ongoing process of reflection that may lead first to these answers and then on to action. These actions would become the visible manifestation of the inner process of identity formation.

The project of the *self* that every individual work through must develop into a “biographical ‘narrative’ that will explain themselves to themselves, and hence sustain a coherent and consistent identity.”⁴ Through this *biographical narrative* our group of young adults began reflecting upon their personalities, their vocation and their individual and collective identity as Christians in a bicultural social context.⁵ The youth ministry group became the space where they were able to share these narratives and the place where we generated a *reflexive habitus*⁶ to explore and live their faith. “Participation in the group is seen by young people as significant in managing challenges to faith and identity.”⁷

Such participation allowed them to explore their feelings, raise their doubts and affirm or reject their beliefs. While this process took place, a statement that kept surfacing

³ David Buckingham, ed. *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* (London: The MIT Press, 2008), 1.

⁴ Buckingham, 1.

⁵ Puerto Rico’s political status as a US Commonwealth retained Spanish as the primary language as well as Hispanic cultural heritage while facing a highly US-Americanized media and political influence with the use of English as a second language. The use of English is rapidly spreading through the most prominent social classes, creating class segregations through the use of language. Religious affiliations also respond to the process of US colonization of the territory and its people. I will explain the term “bicultural social context” later in this chapter when I discuss religious identity as part of social identity.

⁶ According to Pierre Bourdieu a “*Habitus* is a theoretical construct to explain how a person adopts views and practices within specific ‘cultural fields’ within which they are embedded”. (Silvia Collins-Mayo, Pink Dandelion, eds. Nicholas M. Shepherd. *Religion and Youth. “Religious Socialization and Reflexive Habitus,”* London: Ashgate Publishing, 151).

⁷ Buckingham, 153.

during conversation at the group gatherings was: “How can I live my faith, stand up and stay firm at college or among people that do not share my Christian beliefs? I feel that I don’t have the knowledge and the strength to achieve it.” The liminal space the group represented for these youngsters provided them with ways “to make faith ‘their choice’ and ‘their decision.’”⁸ Therefore, new relationships developed, new narratives surfaced and new learning experiences took place. All of these could be achieved through a collective construction of identity forged by religion.

Young adults associated with a church, a religious organization or group are “seen as some kind of category and implicitly labeled as such.” This label in turn responds to a preconceived idea or stereotype of “that kind of person” which becomes part of the collective identity of the group. Sociologists and psychologists describe how these labels influence people: “these effects influence both how people perceive themselves and how others perceive them, in relation to what is regarded as appropriate behavior for a person belonging to that category or collective identity, whether it is ‘American’, a ‘black women’ or a ‘Catholic’.”⁹

People respond to labels either in congruence with the expected behavior or against it. Most of the young adults at the ICDCE have inherited the faith of their parents and with it, an imposed social and religious identity. Now, they face the challenge —or opportunity— to decide, to opt-in or opt-out. Youth ministry meetings represent the opportunity to choose, to experience their faith and share with those who may have similar concerns, questions or beliefs. A new space, a liminal space, opens up for them, where they can share their stories,

⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁹ Ibid.

and even their unbelief. They face a new opportunity, a space where they are allowed to doubt, rebel, or even walk out. As we find in the parable of the Good Father and the Prodigal Son, the group, as the father in the story, has to provide an open space where group members may act and choose freely.

In face of this new reality, we created a *habitus* where they could opt-in and share their narratives. During almost a year prior to the project phase, we started to build new relations. Among them, the relationship with me as a pastor who is open to dialogue and willing to explore the needs of the group from within, became a reality. Through this process I gathered multiple stories that helped me pave the way through which we would later walk as a group:

Some of us know each other because our families come to church since we were kids, but we don't have anything else in common.

There is almost a generation gap between some of us. I am 28 and most of them are 18 to 23. I am writing my masters thesis and I have a job while others are just graduating from high school.

Half of the group speaks Spanish and the other half prefer to speak English. Those of us who speak Spanish feel alienated.

Our opinions are not taken into consideration. No one take us seriously.

We are addressed to as children.

We need new alternatives for bible studies. We have been listening to the same bible stories for years but we feel that we don't know anything about the bible.

I would like to come to Sunday bible school and to the Friday night meetings but I study full-time during, have a part-time job, rehearse with the worship ministry and teach kids' bible school. Weekends are the only time I have to rest and catch up with homework ☹ .

We think people at church underestimate what we do.

They don't understand what we have to face at school and with friends. I'm afraid to ask but I have many doubts. There are things in the bible that I don't understand but don't know who to talk to.

Through these narratives many feelings surfaced exposing a lack of interest for the youth ministry among young adults. Feelings of alienation, disinterest, frustration, sadness, ignorance, tiredness and fear, among others, pushed them away from a space where they could construct their religious identity. Even so, they are still looking for leaders who are not afraid to speak and face difficult but pertinent issues regardless possible disagreements. In dialogue, confidence and mutual respect they want to open the floor to diversity of opinion and to look through the bible for a word from God with the appropriate guidance. To them, the youth ministry group could become a place to live their faith and develop a stronger sense of self.

Religious Identity as Part of Social Identity

According to Buckingham, we could say that elements in constant dialogue within society such as gender, religion, age, race and nationality are part of what the author calls an *ongoing bricolage*¹⁰ named identity.

Identities are simultaneously both personal and social. We construct and reconstruct ourselves in dialectical relationship with the world (which include the material dialectical world and other people), and we construct others in relation to ourselves and our situation. Identities are negotiated and tested in the context of circles of relationships and the wider community, and fed back into the ongoing bricolage. Social and individual identities co-constitute each other.¹¹

This bricolage becomes the image of one's self as a *work in progress* and part of a process of interactions "with the digital and non-digital world, involving physical,

¹⁰ A term to describe the construction of a work of art out of a diverse range of things available. The term is mostly used in arts but it has spread to other fields as education, sociology and business.

¹¹ Buckingham, 2008, 44.

psychological, social and cultural agents.”¹² If this is so, religion as a social agent is part of the conversation that takes place within a smaller circle of relationships that progresses into a relationship with the wider community. Accordingly, we must seek to define religion as a social agent in order to understand its relevance in the process of constructing individual and social identities. This definition will also be valuable in order for us to decide which approach to take to address the issue of religious identity within the group of young adults. Religion sociologist expert Alan Aldridge, quoting sociologist Emile Durkheim’s definition of religion will serve as a way of entry into the realm of religious identity as part of the social identity of a group. For him, a religion is:

a ‘unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them’ Durkheim saw religion as essentially social in character. Religion integrates individuals into ‘one single moral community’.¹³

This moral community within society, called church by Durkheim, communicates its values and beliefs to the larger society; influencing and also being influenced. That being said, we could explore religious identity as part of the social identity of the group or as the acceptance and identification with the core values and doctrines presented by the church or the congregation. That, however, will not be our approach. We could say that “how religion, together with aspects such as age, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, play a part in how we present ourselves to and are regarded by others”¹⁴ represents one of the main concerns of

¹² Ibid., 43.

¹³ Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 38.

¹⁴ Maria Zackariasson, “Being Yourself: Identity and Self-presentation among Youth in Christian Youth Organizations,” Sage Publications, 2014, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://you.sagepub.com/content/22/2/153>.

the group. Therefore, for the purpose of this project, we will address religious identity as part of a social identity.

Accordingly, we cannot overlook the bicultural socio-political context in which adolescents and young adults in Puerto Rico construct their identity. “Who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time.”¹⁵ Social situations may hinder the way they live and experience their faith. Puerto Rico is a complex setting where US-American and Latin-American cultures, in all their dimensions, meet; and in that matrix, religion is no exception.

Colonized by Spain in 1493 under the influence of Catholicism, Puerto Rico entered into a new era of Protestantism and US-American colonization in 1898 when it was ceded to the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War. As a result-Puerto Ricans live under a strained and intense relationship between two dominant social, cultural political, religious and linguistic forces: 400 years of Spanish and Catholic heritage and over 100 years of an industrialized, modern, secularized and protestant colonization.¹⁶ Puerto Ricans are a blend of Roman Catholicism, American Protestantism and Caribbean popular religions, as well as US-American pop culture and a Hispanic culture strongly influenced by Ibero-American traditions. Accordingly, anthropology professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Jorge Duany says:

In the Island, the US citizenship coexists among a tenacious sense of belonging to an individual and collective Puerto Rican nationality. Here, a diversity of cultural and linguistic practices of Hispanic, African, Caribbean and Anglo-Saxon descent adjoin

¹⁵ Buckingham, 1.

¹⁶ Protestant colonization is a socio-theological term used in Puerto Rico that refers to the process of colonization through religion that took place in Puerto Rico at the arrival of the United States government in 1898 who brought along with them protestant mainland missionaries to evangelize locals.

and intermingle... Among other things, it is increasingly difficult to delimit the territorial, juridical and linguistic boundaries of the national Puerto Rican identity.¹⁷

Furthermore, in this early twenty-first century Puerto Rico faces the highest rates in history of: crimes, murder, unemployment, alcohol consumption, drug dealing and illegal substance abuse. These trends expose emerging generations to a landscape of uncertainty and desperation. In light of this information I would say that the issue of religious identity could not be addressed responsibly without looking at it through the lens of Puerto Rico's social identity.

According to important religious figures, theologians and anthropologists, Christianity lies at the heart of Puerto Rico's social identity. For Duany, "If the national identity is bound to something, it is precisely to popular religiosity."¹⁸ Likewise, but framed by catholic social thought, Archbishop Monsignor Roberto González tells us that "Christianity has penetrated the most secret recesses of the Puerto Rican soul" and as a result "our cultural and political tradition has assimilated its spiritual ideas from the Christian heritage."¹⁹ Moreover, Baptist theologian Luis Rivera-Pagán attributes to Protestantism a significant role in the construction of Puerto Rican identity:

Evangelical theology can collaborate incorporating the vast array of the spiritual resources as well as the existential and intellectual means from their religious traditions. Evangelical Christian faith is already a vital and crucial dimension of our creative national spirituality.²⁰

¹⁷ Jorge Duany, *La nación en vaivén: identidad, migración y cultura popular en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2009), 28-29. My translation.

¹⁸ Duany, 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰ Luis Rivera-Pagán, *Ensayos teológicos desde el Caribe* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2013), 228. My translation.

As the subjects of personality, vocation and identity arose within the group, the Doctor of Ministry project started to take shape along those topics. As part of the project implementation phase, a bible education experience took place in which we studied various biblical characters. We studied the calling of Moses as well as his personality in order to relate his story with the group's present religious and cultural reality. Moses' bicultural experience as a Hebrew raised and educated by the Egyptian kingship and religiosity became an example of their religious and cultural heritage versus the US-Americanized and protestant religious enculturation of their upbringing. We coined the term "religious biculturalism" to explain the influence of Catholicism and other Afro-Caribbean popular religions and Protestantism in our construction of social and religious identity. To everyone's surprise the next day a guest preacher at the Sunday service spontaneously exclaimed as part of the sermon "¡Ay Virgen!"²¹.

Immediately after, I received a text message from one of the young adults present at the study saying: "her Catholicism came out, watch out for the biculturalism ¡Ay Virgen!." I read multiple comments after the service and narratives developed over the topic. As a result, what I previously called "religious identity" was now a lively and conscious process of reflection and action, either in and out of the religious scenario. The educational experience as part of the youth ministry group meetings provided the *reflexive habitus* and a liminal



Illustration 1: iMessage image one

²¹ This popular expression calls upon the Virgin Mary mother of Jesus. It is rooted in a catholic popular tradition to invoke the "Lord", "Mary Mother God" or a "Saint" to manifest surprise or to ask for help. A similar expression in English would be "Oh, Lord".

space with the tools and framework needed to evaluate, assess and construct both, individual and collective identities.

Youth and Gender Identity

Ethnomusicologist Julissa Ossorio-Bermudez quotes Nancy J. Chodorow in her study about music, gender and religion as part of the construction of individual's identity:

Nancy J. Chodorow argues that gender is a human attribute that cannot be perceived as primarily constructed by linguistics, politics, culture or even biology only. She argues that 'there are individual, psychological processes in addition to, and in a different register from, culture, language, and power relations that construct gender for the individual'.²²

Therefore, "religion can play a central role in how people embody gender expectations."²³ In Puerto Rico as well as in most of the western world, different perspectives towards gender and the role of women in church and society are based on the biblical text. This is part of an extensive debate which impacts society as the wider community wherein an ongoing bricolage named identity takes place.

During the process of collecting narratives from the group of young adults, the biblical character of Esther emerged as an important figure to expose the challenges posed by gender issues for our youth today. A male young adult said, "I think things have changed quite a bit. Now women also sexually harass men and abuse them psychologically"; to which a young female responded with a blend of English and Spanish:

To achieve what they want, women still have to use any possible resources at their disposal. Just by opening their mouth and asking for it they will not make it. Sometimes they may get to extreme measures or try to find other solutions to achieve what they want. It may not be necessarily because they intend to do something wrong, but because by just saying or asking for it they will not achieve it; either

²² Julissa Ossorio-Bermudez, "Unveiling Popular Music?: A Study of How Muslim Girls in Belfast Negotiate Gender and Religion through Popular Music Listening" (PhD diss., Queen University, 2011), 61.

²³ Ossorio-Bermudez, 62.

because of sexism and male superiority or because people do not trust their capabilities.

The discussion went further and concluded with a question:

If things have changed, and they have; now that we have freedom to choose and to protest, why can't we defend ourselves and stand up for our rights and safety? Today what has really changed is that we have the freedom to choose.

This conversation reflects the issues of gender and the relevance to the construction of the youths, gender and religious identity. Harassment, psychological abuse, safety and freedom were the elements at the table when talking about Esther and Vasti. "If we have the freedom, why can't we stand up for what is just and safe?" Patriarchy and male superiority supported by many biblical texts pose a strong influence on gender identity for today's youth as they have for past generations. "The control and expression of sexual impulses have always been central issues for religion...this holds for both heterosexuality and homosexuality."²⁴ Also the biblical interpretation and doctrines about homosexuality have raised profound questions and challenges to the construction of the religious identity of some young adults. Furthermore, the hostility of many Christian traditions towards homosexuals has led to their separation from church and to the development of "confused and contradictory images of God, as well as with negative self-concepts. The latter tendency may be one adverse effect of damaged identity development."²⁵

How can I become an example for those younger than me if I struggle with my sexual orientation? I don't feel worthy to be part of the youth ministry. I've tried but I can't

²⁴ Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Peter C. Hill and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion* (London: The Guildford Press, 2009), 163.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

change what I feel. I know God loves me regardless of... but I fear that the people I love and the people at church will reject me. Church is my family, my whole life is connected to the people at church; if they find out I will lose them.²⁶

Losing, keeping or gaining the love, care and respect of the religious community can be a defining factor in the construction of youth identity at any congregation. Their gender identity, as well, plays an important role in the construction of the religious identity.

“Identity is forged in the tension between the possibility of gaining a self and the possibility of losing the self, which occurs in the absence of being known intimately and loved unconditionally.”²⁷

Relationships are essential to the construction of youth identity and are often defined by gender, as we have seen through these narratives. They also respond to many different elements of society such as economy, politics and culture. These and many other factors influence the way youth define marriage, sexuality, and other gender behavior.²⁸ Local Catholic Theologian Yamil Samalot widens this premise:

...evil rages against youth, because they are, from God's eyesight, a fertile ground for the incarnation of his Son, He who performs fully, the project of humanity... Puerto Rican young population is pierced in their most inner being by illegal substance abuse, by the abuse and exploitation through the consumerist advertising media, by the spread of ideologies of intolerance even within our own churches; all these represent a regression to the project of the construction of the Reign that will reach us all.²⁹

²⁶ Comments from a male young adult during a pastoral counseling session, displaying great suffering and distress.

²⁷ Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Illinois: IVPBooks, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 788.

²⁸ Karen J. Brison and Susan Dewey, “Gender and Globalization: Sugar Girls, Freeters, and Xenomaniacs: Gender and Modernity in Global Youth Cultures” in *Cross-Cultural Visios of Youth and Modernity* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 17.

²⁹ Yamil Samalot, *Otros Caminos: Propuestas para la crisis en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Isla Negra Editores, 2013), 35-36 (My translation.)

The *reflexive habitus* the youth ministry group provides for these young adults has constituted a *liminal space* where they can gather to release social tensions, to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct an image of themselves as individuals and as part of a larger community. This space should provide them with tools to critically evaluate and resist the culture of consumption directed towards them by the media and other major economic interests. But mostly, this space should offer a sound environment to fight against the social whirlwind of drugs and alcohol consumption which has led our youth to a sharp increase in violent death and imprisonment. Youth ministry groups must create lasting family bonds rooted in the Gospel which will present a future of hope and success in the midst of a, sometimes, obscure and mostly uncertain social landscape.

“The ultimate objective of youth ministry is to ignite young people’s passion in Godself, but the way to do this is to move them into practice. *Practice is the ground of divine and human encounter*. It is through practice that young people are given an identity as Christian, an identity that invites them to passionately practice their faith in the activity of God, to practice their faith in passion as opposed to giving their action and their identity to other cultural realities.”³⁰

This space has given birth to new projects where youth have been able to live their faith as a concrete experience in relation to and within the wider congregation and the community. In this practice they have discovered talents and gifts which have ignited a passion for discipleship and search for a religious identity connected to their personal faith experience—and not limited or subjected to adherence to rules and doctrines. “When youth’s gifts are not respected and cultivated, the beauty of God is limited and the reign of God is postponed.”³¹

³⁰ Root and Creasy Dean, 2750.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2808.

Popular Culture: is That What We Have in Common?

He will be an outcast; they'll kill him. How? He'll be a god to them. I have to believe that you were sent here for a reason and even if it takes the rest of your life, you owe it to yourself to find out what that reason is. How do you find someone who spent his lifetime covering his tracks? For some he was a guardian angel, for others, a ghost who never quite fit in. You will give the people on earth and ideal to strive towards. They'll race behind you, they will stumble, they will fall, but in time they will join you in the sun, in time, you will help them accomplish wonders. What's the S stands for? It is not an "S", in my world it means HOPE.³²

Who would have guessed this is a quote from *Superman, Man of Steel's* Movie trailer?

As part of the process of integration with the youth group, I developed different strategies to get the narratives started. One of them was a bible study on Matthew 16:13-20 titled "Who do you think I am?" The study was promoted through social media apps on the Internet and cellular phones such as *Facebook*, *Facebook Messenger* and *WhatsApp*. We published the visual material, which supports the study as well as the analysis regarding the text's historical background and hermeneutics, as a private webpage for group members. We accessed it at church during the bible study and was available for later viewing, as well.

The bible story revolved around Jesus' identity and how it relates to young people's own religious identities. The study began with a bilingual version of the trailer from *Man of Steel* and multiple visual representations of Jesus from older movies, paintings, illustrations and contemporary "memes."³³

³² "Man of Steel, Official Trailer #3," accessed July 9, 2014, <http://youtu.be/I8UrKWnwfWk>.

³³ An "Internet meme" is a concept that spreads rapidly from person to person via the internet.

According to philosopher Jacques Derrida “context defines the meaning of a text, the construal of a thing, or the ‘reading’ of an event.”³⁴ Therefore, when the youth watched this movie trailer within their religious context, it took a different meaning. The savior and source of hope could perfectly fit Jesus’ description: sent for a reason, an outcast, for some a guardian angel and for others a God. Even Mark’s messianic secret³⁵ lies behind the super hero’s efforts to cover his tracks. But, when watched at the movie theater, viewers often overlook theological or biblical references. Despite the way meaning changes among contexts, we can agree that most of us look for a symbol of hope and salvation, a model to follow or an imaginary figure to build a virtual reality that may provide us with a momentary vision of hope in the midst of human despair or uncertainty. Movie theaters as part of popular culture have become shrines for a popular religion born out of what sociologist Emile Durkheim described as the result of a *collective effervescence*, when emotions bubble over.³⁶

Adolescents and youth are the generation most susceptible to advertising and consumerist marketing. According to some sociologists and other scholars on the matter, such as David White in his book *Practicing Discernment with Youth* commercial and popular culture work as oppressive forces in the development of youth identity that alienate them from their true selves. Nonetheless, popular culture remains an important factor in the construction of youth identity, and cannot be overlooked. That is why I proposed the use of

³⁴ James K.A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 52.

³⁵ “Jesus seems to hide his identity as the Son of God until it is made apparent after his death on the cross.” Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 129.

³⁶ More details about Durkheim’s theory on collective effervesces can be found in Alan Aldbridge’s book *Religion in the Contemporary World*.

elements from popular culture to enhance the Christian education experience. This approach may lead youth into a process of discernment that could spring into liberating praxis and a reaffirmation or construction of a religious identity within the social identity. “Youth do not need more activity or more entertainment; they need ministers who dedicate whatever resources they already have to understanding and resisting the distortions of culture and living into the way of Jesus—and helping them to do the same.”³⁷

Theologian Rivera-Pagán considers Protestantism in Puerto Rico as an essential part of the *tapiz*³⁸ that forms the Puerto Rican cultural identity. He attributes to Protestantism the flexibility to absorb elements of the popular culture to construct a highly diverse experience of Protestantism integral to what he names *religiosidad Boricua*.³⁹ Following Pagan’s point of view, we could say that we have the theological resources from our protestant tradition to appropriate elements of the popular culture as a means to engage youth in a dialogue between faith, church and the secularized society in which they live.

From Boomers to Xers to Millennials, emerging generations have been accused of falling into secularism, skepticism, nihilism and lack of Christian or other religious values. Talking about Xers and the 1980’s decade, popular culture theologian Tom Beaudoin in his book *Virtual Faith* poses a statement that we can relate to the previous example of *Superman: Man of Steel* and many other movies we will mention ahead:

I began to notice how the popular culture seemed suffused with religious references. Our popular songs, music videos, and movies were about sin, salvation, and redemption, among other themes. Contrary to common perception, we appeared to have a very theological culture. Perhaps we were even a religious generation.

³⁷ Root and Creasy Dean, 2804.

³⁸ Tapestry.

³⁹ Rivera-Pagán uses “Boricua”, a term derived from the indigenous language, to take Puerto Rico’s religious identity as far as the afro-indigenous traditions. (Rivera-Pagán, 229)

...all forms of culture—and human experiences within culture—have a religious character that may be plumbed—even, in my view, pop culture, and the human experiences it describes...but, can pop culture, from rock songs to Barbie dolls, reveal the “mystery of God”?⁴⁰

The primary purpose of our discussion will not be whether popular culture reveals the mystery of God. Certainly, though, this can be a question that resonates throughout this paper. What I propose is the use of popular culture as a new barrel that holds the wine of the Good News and serves as the common language among a group whose social and cultural differences have hindered experiencing and living their faith individually as well as collectively.

Through observation, dialogue and immersion in the life of the community, I experienced how generational, linguistic and intercultural differences limit youth participation in the Friday evening meetings and in the Sunday Bible School. These differences have threatened the possibilities for a relational, experiential, vivid and relevant youth ministry. As a result I have engaged in the process of searching for a common language to communicate the Gospel to an emerging postmodern generation, which is characterized by diversity within the same ecclesiastic context and by globalization.

For a better understanding of the diversity among the group, I will describe further the ministerial setting. Approximately ten out of the twenty-three young adults who occasionally visited the youth group are college undergraduates or graduate students and the other thirteen are in high school. Some attend private schools where they learn English as a primary language. Some attend public schools where Spanish is the primary language and English is a secondary language. These language differences also reflect differences in

⁴⁰ Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 13-31.

socio-economic status and represent a barrier to relationships. Most of the high school students attend Sunday school and those who are eighteen and older arrive later at church to go straight to the worship service.

Age differences, subjects, teachers, teaching strategies as well as other ministerial responsibilities among the youth are some reasons that young adults and adolescents do not support Sunday school or Friday youth meetings. The church of the twenty-first century is challenged by the need to find a common element of interest among diversity. My proposal is that the common element is language: usage of English or Spanish, and also a contemporary, relevant and appealing language of communication.

Language: The Hermeneutical Problem

For philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “language is a lens through which we see the world...this lens is mediation, as soon as there is mediation, there is distortion,”⁴¹ therefore we could conclude that language can become a barrier to communication instead of a bridge or facilitator. So far, I have witnessed, through the process of collecting narratives within the group of young adults at *ICDCE*, that language has been a handicap to the construction of their religious identity and the experience of the Christian faith they profess.

Addressing the topic of hermeneutics through the use of language, German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer in his book *Truth and Method*, states that when two persons try to communicate using different languages “each understanding the other’s language but not speaking it... one of the languages always tries to establish himself above the other” as a means of understanding.⁴² Among the group of youngsters the use of English

⁴¹ Smith, 36.

⁴² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury), 402.

by some and Spanish by others within the same ecclesiastic context shows differences in socio-economic status. Again, these differences are barriers to relationships and to the hermeneutical experience: the conversation. Once one party sits over the other, the conversation deteriorates and the gap between them widens. If, according to Gadamer, the *hermeneutical problem* is the process of coming to an understanding,⁴³ then we must build a bridge so participants can come to that understanding and thus experience their faith as a group and within the larger congregation.

Searching for that bridge I came across French philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard's comment about language: "language is the object of an idea."⁴⁴ Accordingly, an idea can be communicated by spoken language, visually, musically or by a combination of all; anyone of these mediums could be considered language. Jesus was a master communicator—he used any medium at hand to get his message across. He created visual images with the use of spoken language by telling stories relevant to the context but pointing towards a deeper meaning.

"With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples." (Mark 4:33-34) If we look at this Bible verse and we study Jesus' teaching methods it will become clear that he conveyed his message using a language familiar to his generation. Therefore, it will not be a new strategy if we engage in the language and communication methods of the twenty-first century to bring the youth at church in conversation with the gospel and each other. We will adapt Jesus' own strategy to our time

⁴³ Gadamer, 402.

⁴⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *La Postmodernidad (explicada a los niños)* (Barcelona: Gedisa. S.A., 1996), 53.

and needs. Popular culture holds countless elements and means of communication that can be used to deliver the gospel message in an attractive way. This may resolve the hermeneutical problem of understanding and experiencing the faith. Therefore, movies and social media could become the common language suitable to make the message appealing for emerging generations.

Like Jesus we must use teaching as a mean to transform and renew the minds of people to become free, healed and saved. To achieve his purpose he did not use the same discourse as the Pharisees. Instead, he transformed the law into a new language that was inclusive and merciful. Like Jesus, we must look “in *the marketplace (the cultural hot seat)*” the place where:

“doubts are aired, gloves come off, politeness takes a rest. Pop culture is our marketplace —the arena we visit daily to encounter issues of life and death, to discover what it means to be human, to hear the questions society asks, to meet God. The marketplace can (and must) inform our theology.”⁴⁵

For the youth at *ICDCE* popular culture, movies and social media may be the common language suitable to make the message appealing and lively. But most important, the building of open channels of communication with respect, love and devotion, might be critical to development of a healthy religious identity and a new era of commitment to their faith through mentoring and accompaniment of younger generations.

⁴⁵ Craig Detweiler, *Matrix of Meaning* (Michigan: Baker Academics, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 479.

CHAPTER TWO
JESUS IN THE MARKETPLACE

“In America the cinema is the place where religious values and self identity is worked out publicly. We all go to different churches but all of us go to the same movies.”

—Humphries-Brooks¹

Popular culture has become our marketplace, where we meet and share our doubts, expectations and sorrows, and also where we nurture and develop our theological understanding. Doctrine and tradition are challenged at the public and secular arena while church may not be the place to raise difficult questions. At the public arena—social media, cinema, music—*todo se vale*.²

As a visual artist and communications professor, I have worked and gathered narratives at the marketplace of popular culture and social media for over twenty years. Young adults come in and out of my classroom, share their experiences and doubts but also invite me, as a creative mentor, into their “semi-private”³ space. From the first time I heard cultural theologian Craig Detweiler’s term “marketplace” as a metaphor to connect Jesus’ context with ours, many questions and images surfaced in my mind. Where would we meet

¹ Simon Hooper, “New Jesus film puts race into religion,” *CNN.com*, October 30, 2006, assessed October 23, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/SHOWBIZ/Movies/10/26/jesus.film/index.html>.

² Anything is possible.

³ Like any generation they keep a *private* space where they expose themselves freely with a language undisclosed to many of us.

with Jesus today? Where would he teach? Jesus walked along and engaged in conversation with people at the marketplace of the time: the surroundings of the temple where business took place, along sidewalks, at meals, banquets, feasts, weddings and family gatherings. Jesus himself evoked narratives: what do you want me to do for you?² Do you want to be made well?³ What are you discussing with each other? Why are you sad?⁴ Jesus listened to these narratives, “thirty years waiting for someone to come along and help me,” “have mercy on me, make me see again,” “are you the only stranger who doesn’t know the things that have taken place?” Every conversation led to an opportunity to learn, heal and teach according to what they could receive and understand (Mk 4:33-34).

Where might the church find clues to help face the present and future challenges of today’s marketplace? Where would I find the metaphors and images to connect with emerging generations? How could we identify a suitable language to start an engaging conversation? According to theologians Richard Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones we should start with ourselves, our own narratives and experiences. They urge us to find our own story, to get to know ourselves, the unfolding direction of our lives and the way we do ministry in order to lead others effectively.⁵ This relates directly to theologian Stephen Pattison’s Critical Conversation method for theological reflection. Pattison suggests a three way conversation between the practical theologian (his or her own ideas, beliefs and perceptions), the Christian Tradition (biblical and denominational) and the situation (the congregation or group and the identified concern within that group). Accordingly, “our own ideas, beliefs, feelings,

⁴ Mark 10:51 (RV60)

⁵ John 5:6

⁶ Luke 24:17

⁷ Hester and Walker-Jones, 2261.

perceptions and assumptions” become the first person in dialogue.⁶ But, as Gadamer suggested, for a dialogue to take place we need to speak a language that others understand and also can speak. Otherwise one language may try to impose itself above others.

Motivated by Hester and Walker-Jones, I reflected on what I bring to my ministerial context. I was in search of that common language. Alongside the beliefs that I bring to my ministerial experience, I have had a lifetime of interaction with popular culture, media and communications that influences my theological perceptions and assumptions. If cultural theologian Paul Tillich calls our attention to the possibility that “the religious and the secular are not separated realms”, and that “rather they are within each other”⁷, we must consider all contemporary means of communication and aesthetic cultural expressions to be inherent to the life of the church and to the way we interpret, experience and live our faith.

When I started working as a visual artist and communicator twenty-four years ago I did not find the connection between my profession and ministry, and, furthermore, neither did the people around me. Music ministers were the first people to request my services but they always brought advertising and design pieces not related to the religious scenario as samples to emulate. Elements of the popular culture set the tone to follow; a total shift from ancient and medieval aesthetic theology had taken place. Today popular culture and secularized media set the style to pursue, the standard to imitate.

Two decades later, I found myself seated at the altar of the church where I now serve, waiting for the senior pastor to introduce me as the guest preacher. To my surprise, I was not introduced as a pastor, an aspirant to ordained ministry or as a Master of Divinity graduate.

⁸ Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 139.

⁹ Tillich, 41.

Instead, I was introduced as a communications professor and graphic artist. Twenty years ago I could not see the relevance of my profession to the ministerial life. Today it is what has given me a place to minister to youth and young adults! Now, instead of receiving samples from popular culture and secular media to imitate, I lead discussions about how the Gospel still has a strong influence in postmodern western society. Hollywood and other mass media enterprises have adopted the biblical and theological language that connects people's existential anguish with hope and meaning, and with this language have produced highly marketable and profitable material. Some content producers and artists work out of their own struggles and concerns. Others protest, satirize or criticize. Nonetheless, there is one thing they all have in common: they bring out the theological shadow influencing twenty-first century society even as they reconstruct it with new shades of a postmodern secularized notion of the divine and the self. *The Man of Steel*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Prometheus* and *Matrix* are a small sample of the typology of Christ present in our culture, of the Gospel's setting the standards once again. We seem to be traveling in time, going back in order to move forward.

Parables: Stories of “Future Past”⁸

After reflecting about oneself as the first person in this theological dialogue, the second person we need to incorporate as we engage in critical theological conversation is our Christian tradition – biblical and denominational. As part of our principal affirmation of faith, the *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* believes that: “The nature of the church, given by Christ, remains constant through the generations, yet in faithfulness to its nature, it continues to discern God’s vision and to adapt its mission and structures to the needs of a

¹⁰ In reference to *X-Men: Days of Future Past*.

changing world.”⁹ In order to live according to this affirmation, we hope to use Jesus’ own strategy to bring our youth into conversation with the gospel and each other through the communication modalities of the twenty-first century.

Today the *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* in Puerto Rico struggles “to adapt its mission and structures to the needs of a changing world”. Subjects such as discrimination, social justice and politics; new models of church and family, homosexuality and women at executive roles have polarized the Church and individual congregations. Shadow stories run through hallways and bible school classrooms from parishioners who think some local pastors avoid taking a public stand on those issues. “What do our pastors stand for?” “What would I say if someone asks me what does my church think about any of these issues?”

At my arrival to work as an assistant to the pastor at the *ICDCE* a young woman, mother of a twelve year old boy and a ten year old girl, asked me for pastoral counseling. As soon as we started talking she said:

My interpretation of the biblical texts and my experience as a discriminated child makes me think different than my religious tradition. I want to know if my point of view is acceptable to God? I cannot think of a God more judgmental than merciful? What can I do?

She was afraid to express her doubts and concerns about some doctrinal issues. She thought text and doctrine cling to tradition from a decontextualized stance that is detached from the suffering of people and the challenges they face daily. She expressed her concern and desire that the denomination and local pastors offer a contextually and academically informed education about the issues which are challenging the church.

¹¹ “The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),” *Disciples.org*, 2013, accessed September 7, 2013, <http://www.disciples.org/AboutTheDisciples/TheDesignoftheChristianChurch/tabid/228/Default.aspx>.

Jesus faced similar challenges when confronted by Pharisees about divorce, adultery, Sabbath and diseases that excluded people from life in community by labeling them as sinners. Jesus took a stand against religion and tradition and moved towards a paradigm shift when he healed on the Sabbath, forgave sinners and used Parables (such as the one about a “stubborn and rebellious son”¹⁰) to challenge the law.

Why Jesus used parables and why should we too?

Catholic priest and bible scholar Alessandro Pronzato helps us understand how Jesus used parables to incarnate God into our own stories:

Through parables... we find a God who stands in the midst of men [Sic], acts like men [Sic] and wants to be like us. He is the living God who refuses to be insensitive... inflexible, inaccessible. And so we have a God that is a sower, a father, a rich generous owner in a scandalous manner, a friend, a pastor, a husband that is delayed, a fisherman, a master traveling...but that does not take away that God likes to be dressed of a human coating that is not just a fiction.¹¹

For Jesus, parables were the common language for an intercultural generation. The cultural marketplace where Jesus gathered included Jews, Samaritans, Romans and the influence of a Hellenized Greek colonization under Alexander the Great. Popular Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew and Latin were languages spoken through the territory of Palestine at the time.¹² Within that diversity Jesus became immersed in the heart and souls of people, Romans, Samaritans

¹² The Parable about The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) challenged the law according to Deuteronomy 21:18-21: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

¹³ Alessandro Pronzato, *Las Parábolas de Jesús en el Evangelio de Lucas* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 2003), 18. My translation.

¹⁴ Additional information about the sociological background of the time of Jesus can be found in Raymond E. Brown’s *An Introduction to the New Testament* and Bruce J. Malina’s *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*.

(Pagans¹³) and Jews from different traditions. Jesus connected with them through their stories and used those stories to offer the Reign of God, make it accessible and pertinent for their lives. “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples” (Mark 4:33-34). Parables were narratives that related to many in Jesus’ time as they still relate to us 2,000 years later. They represented the common language in Jesus’ teaching ministry.

According to biblical scholar Raymond Brown “the particular point of parables takes on coloration from the context in which they are uttered or placed.”¹⁴ Jesus captured attention by teaching through the use of people’s own narratives and by taking those narratives to a metaphorical level. But a metaphor by itself is only a creative resource “ ‘carrying something over’ from one thing to another and thereby ‘seeing something as another’ or ‘speaking of something as another’ ”¹⁵. According to biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan Jesus interlaced stories and metaphors into a “metaphorical story” that we recognize as Parables. Jesus expanded the metaphors to explain something and point the story to a deeper and transcendent meaning. As ethnographer Mary Clark Moschella avers: “We will find in every parable that we will be looking at an everyday situation, when suddenly, there is an unexpected twist in the tale”.¹⁶

¹⁵ “In NT times it (the term Pagan) would cover the religious honoring the Greeks and the Roman, and the various religions of the Near East and Egypt” (Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 74.

¹⁶ Brown, 132.

¹⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus became Fiction about Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 158.

¹⁸ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: the Pilgrim Press, 2008), 79.

An ordinary story wants you to focus internally, on itself, in order for the reader to follow the plot by getting you in and out.¹⁷ But a Parable is much more than a story and a metaphor put together. Parables capture the power of personal stories to draw you in and out to make you part and character in the story; also, Parables take you to a new reality of hope, realized and present in the Reign of God through Jesus. Parables have different levels of significance, "... never about that content. Whatever its internal subject, a parable always points you towards and wants you to go to some external referent."¹⁸ Those with ears and hearts closed would not understand the transformative power behind the stories, "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven." (Mark 4:12 NRSV) Nonetheless, those with open eyes and ears, and also fertile hearts, would sit close to Jesus and experience the transformative power of a narrative that became real to them regardless of its basis in fact.

I propose that we look at Jesus and follow his lead, go to the marketplace of our generation, gather the stories and use a common language to draw people in to the Gospel. If we take into consideration feminist theologian Sallie McFague's suggestions to find metaphors and stories to engage everyone today, we would have to go out of the religious scenario:

...we are, even the most religious of us, secular in ways our foremothers and fathers were not. We do not live in a sacramental universe in which the things of this world, its joys and catastrophes, harvests and famines, births and deaths, are understood as connected to and permeated by divine power and love. Our experience, our daily experience, is for the most part nonreligious. Most of us go through the days accepting our fortunes and explaining our world without direct reference to God... the natural and public events of our world do not stand for or image God.¹⁹

¹⁹ Crossan, 172.

²⁰ Ibid., 183.

²¹ Sally McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 89.

Parables, the extended metaphorical language, were and can still be “a secular form of language, telling stories of ordinary people involved in mundane family, business, and social matters” that confront our ways versus the ways of the Kingdom, and stress the tension between assumptions and expectations.²⁰ Parables turn our stories toward that which affects our inner self, toward the deeper levels of our existence: they turn us to God, to redeem us from our *existential anguish*.²¹ Accordingly, a *Postmodern Parable*²² may be one that is created out of the experiences, imagination and vocabulary found in popular culture. That is to say, a Postmodern Parable draws people’s stories from the arena of popular culture or anywhere the contemporary marketplace is, and so becomes a preferred link to God’s presence and transforming power to this generation.

An Intercultural and Intergenerational Community

During the first century the confluence of cultures, Samaritans, Greeks, Romans and Jews, presented a challenge for Jesus and the apostles. This challenge was religious as well as cultural and socio-political. This is no different from what we face in a globalized twenty-first century world. The third person in our conversation is our faith community, who, like the ancient church, is also exposed to many influences that affect the way we live and learn about our faith. These influences include the way electronic media expose human beings to unlimited and unfiltered information. According to education expert Ted Robinson emerging generations “are living in the most intensive stimulating period of the history of the world.”²³

²² McFague, 284.

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Obras Completas*, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1032.

²⁴ I am coining the term “postmodern parable” to use throughout this project paper when referring to the use of contemporary parables which gather narratives from popular culture such as movies, music and social media, to connect to people and point towards God.

²⁵ Ken Robinson, 2010.

Nonetheless, both the church and traditional educational models, penalize youth by trying to divert their attention to old models that seem boring and decontextualized. This is the contemporary situation we will bring to our theological conversation, according to Pattison's model.

According to sociologist and digital strategist Meredith Gould, "In the world of church, quality social media content informs, educates, and inspires action that is Christ-centered and anchored in Gospel values."²⁴ Among other new ways to communicate the Gospel, the use of electronic media can be a necessary tool in a globalized, postmodern era. Today, accessibility at any time and in any place is vital for communication and the learning process. Therefore, I hope to rethink, as Gould suggests "the presentation and the content of the good news about Christ, to draw more deeply on the truth of the Gospel by coming at it in new ways."²⁵ Hence, this project aspired to relate to people through their own narratives and to find a common language to communicate the Gospel as Jesus did: using a language familiar to this generation. Engaging in the language and communication methods of the twenty-first century will not be a new strategy to bring youth into conversation with the gospel and each other; we will adapt Jesus' own strategy to our time and needs.

Jesus used teaching as a means to transform and renew the minds of people toward freedom, healing and salvation. Accordingly, we engaged participants in an educational experience with the intent to promote transformation and renewal. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

²⁶ Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 742.

²⁷ Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A first course for the curious Christian* (Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 166.

The church of the twenty-first century in Puerto Rico resembles the Apostolic Church. The phenomenon of globalization has emphasized diversity and promoted a secularized society stressed by the US-Americanization process. The use of Spanish and English represents the confrontation between tradition, local culture and religiosity versus the language of the imperial colonization forces. To many, English represents the voice of progress and to others a power that shreds the fibers of their national and religious identity. The *ICDCE* community embodies this social dilemma. Within this intercultural dilemma an intergenerational challenge also emerges. In the midst of all this, the wind of Pentecost²⁶ must blow again, bringing with it tongues “as of fire” that will allow us to communicate with each other, share the Gospel and make the Good News pertinent to our time and needs.

At Pentecost, as I have noted in the footnote scriptural quote below, people from most every nation in the then-known world heard the Gospel in their native language as one. Today, we are challenged to find a unifying language that will bring everyone together as told in that second chapter of the book of Acts.

I should emphasize a few important facts about the story of Pentecost in order to understand its pertinence to our project. First, Jesus followers were gathered together in a house when the Holy Spirit came as a strong wind and “divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” In this project, I preferred to use

²⁸ “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” (Acts 2:1-11 NRSV).

metaphor, as did Luke, the writer of Acts, as the literary form to help us visualize and understand the powerful nature of the experience lived by those present. If read as a metaphor, the narrative in Act 2 can be interpreted as a parable if we look for the transcendent meaning in the story and how it points to God and to the Kingdom proposed and present in Jesus. To do so, we must talk about some important distinctions made by Luke: a crowd of people from many places, who spoke different languages “gathered”—they approached “amazed and astonished” as they heard them speaking in their “native language.” Biblical Scholar Luis Alfonso Schokel in his commentary in *La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo*,²⁷ points out that there are two different scenarios in the story, the inside and the outside. Inside are Jesus’ followers and outside those from many different countries speaking different tongues. When those outside heard the Galileans speaking “in the native language of each” the immediate response was to get close—they gathered to listen. Regardless of their differences the Reign was being revealed to them in their own language, in a way they could understand. “A new era inaugurated by the Spirit, the Good News proclaimed by the Apostles can be understood and received by men and women from all nations of the earth, whom, as a consequence, are called to unity.”²⁸

The narrative of Pentecost could be interpreted as a Parable, because it uses a metaphor that takes the story further by pointing to the Reign of God; a place where the Good News legitimizes diversity as it is communicated in a way each can understand. Pentecost may be the answer to Gadamer’s concern of the hermeneutical problem: the process of coming to an understanding. As long as we communicate the Gospel in a

²⁹ Luis Alfonso Schokel, *La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo*. (España: Ediciones Mensajero, 2010), 1726.

³⁰ William Farmer, *Comentario Bíblico Internacional: comentario católico y ecuménico para el siglo XXI* (España: Verbo Divino, 2003), 1378.

language that others can understand but also speak (their native language) they will gather to listen. This may be the challenge for a “museum church”²⁹ facing an EPIC generation.

Una Generación EPICA (An EPIC Generation)

To Pattison’s conversation method for theological reflection I will add a fourth person: the postmodern generation within an intergenerational society; a highly secularized postmodern and globalized generation within society that postmodern theologian Leonard Sweet describes as an EPIC generation.³⁰ Accordingly, to Sweet’s **Experiential, Participatory, Image driven, Connected**, model I have added **Applicable/Active**, to complement the concept and adapt it to our context (EPICA³¹).

This project talks about postmodern, secular and globalized twenty-first century youth who are open to diversity and pluralism while striving to live their faith in the midst of a conservative protestant congregation. The group of young adults at *ICDCE* strives to construct identity within the polarization of forces: faith tradition and a secular and liberal society. To many, this presents enormous challenges and differences hard to reconcile; nonetheless, we have learned from our youth that many barriers can be overcome. As Sweet goes on to say: “One of the greatest challenges of an EPIC church is to help its members create a healthy image-scape not one controlled by popular culture, but by every image that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”³²

³⁰ Sweet’s definition for “Museum Churches: nostalgic testimonies to a culture that is no more. Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 30.

³¹ Experiential, Participatory, Image-driven, Connected (Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 28.

³² Spanish for EPIC.

³³ Sweet, 98.

We have identified the need to find a bridge to communicate with an emerging Christian generation immersed in a secular and globalized society. Church and society understand each other but do not speak each other's languages. From the pulpit and the Christian education podium we speak the language of doctrine and religious tradition. This is a language that according to Gadamer does not allow the fulfillment of the *hermeneutical problem* because, rather than offering a conversation, this is one-way speech. Therefore, we have to go back in time, sit in the upper room and look at what happened then. We must grab the "tongues as of fire" (Acts 2:3), the language of each generation of believers and unbelievers, to begin the conversation. Postmodernity calls us to go back in time, to fix the mistakes of centuries and "speak to them as they are able to hear it" (Mk 4:33). Leonard Sweet states further: "The EPIC church carries the brand of the past while being a barometer for the future."³³

Days of the Future Past, are times for an EPIC proclamation to a *Generación EPICA*. EPIC for **Experiential** because it is born out of the "Day by Day" experience at the marketplace, incarnated in the bible stories; this experience allows people to meet and share their narratives, while they construct new realities. The Gospel becomes an **Experience** when we are part of the story. An EPIC generation does not need to speak about God as much as it wants to experience God. **Participatory** because it takes people in as partakers in a mutual, inclusive and diverse process. "There are no more 'professional clergy' and pew-sitting laity. There are only ministers who look to leaders to mobilize and release ministry to them. All 'participants' are full partners."³⁴ Today social media, television and the Internet

³⁵ Sweet, 48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

invite people to become a vital and interactive part of shows like *American Idol*, *Americas Got Talent* and *So You Think You Can Dance*. Individuals are not only part of the process but most important, they have a vote and a say in the final result. The years of “listen, shut up and accept” are over. The postmodern generation is **Imaginative** because it is rich in images: visual, literary and audible. Images, not only placed in front of us, but as Martin Luther said: “in our minds and hearts,”³⁵ images that incite us to jump into the story, make us participants and stimulate our creative character.

Preaching, teaching and proclaiming the Gospel faces the challenge to communicate with an audience that is **Connected** and **Active**. Sweet uses “Connected” because “virtual” and “real” have taken new and different meaning that has broadened from physical presence (IRL=in real life)³⁶ to Social Media and instant connectivity regardless of physical distance. EPIC proclamation **connects** this emerging generation with church tradition encompassing **experience, participation and imagery, actively and applicable**. It challenges audience members to a paradigm shift, to step out of their comfort zones and act. It connects the biblical narrative *activamente* with our own stories, fills our minds with images through an experience where both the facilitator and the audience are equal participants. An EPIC proclamation to a *Generación EPICA* as part of a twenty-first century western society seizes the popular culture’s liminal space of momentary hope and *collective effervescence*³⁷ to introduce us into the **active** presence of God in the World.

³⁷ Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 126.

³⁸ Gould, 528.

³⁹ Term coined by Emile Durkheim, mentioned previously in Chapter One.

Finally, “*Creemos en Dios. El sabe el lenguaje y nos entiende*”³⁸ (Samary Figueroa). That is what a young woman, deaf from birth, filled with passion, said to a crowd of deaf young adults and adolescents when speaking about sign language. Like Samary Figueroa, “*(I) believe in God*”, and I believe that “*God knows our language and understands us*”; and, as at Pentecost, I believe God will bring the Holy Spirit upon us to understand and comprehend each other regardless of language, cultural or religious differences.

⁴⁰ Translation: “We believe in God. He knows our language and understands us”.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DESIGN: BRAINSTORMING THE EXPERIENCE

“In turning to face each other, we listen, hear, and see a divinely story unfold. God is there in that person, in her doubt as well as in her faith, in the ambiguous and the painful experiences as well as in the joyful and the beautiful moments; God is present in the hope and the courage that go into composing a life.”¹

–Moschella, Mary Clark

During my first six months at *ICDCE* I became immersed with the congregation through observation and dialogue. Through this process, they shared experiences and feelings about the current state of the youth ministry at the church.² Some members of the congregation expressed their concerns about the interdenominational relations of the youth ministry group, others about their needs, commitment and participation at church activities and worship:

We want you to help the youth ministry straighten their relations with other groups within the denomination. They need to meet other Christians their age. During the last few years the church has grown apart from other churches in the denomination.

I’ve seen these kids grow; I care for them like a grandmother. I know they love and respect me, but I know that there is a bridge that I can’t cross, I don’t speak their language. They need someone who can understand them.

After listening to the stories and concerns from members of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) and other people in the congregation about the youth ministry I wondered

¹ Moschella, 150.

² For the purpose of this project Youth Ministry will be divided in two groups: Adolescents (from thirteen to seventeen) and Young Adults (from eighteen to thirty).

if generational, linguistic and intercultural differences limit youth participation at church, at Friday evening meetings and during Sunday Bible School. Another concern they shared was whether these differences threaten possibilities for a relational, experiential, vivid and relevant youth ministry.

As we have already seen, the youth group meets on Friday evenings for devotions and special events, and on Sundays for Bible school. Most of the high school students attend Sunday Bible school and those who are eighteen and older go straight to the worship service. Of those who attend Sunday school, none actually bring the bible study text book (lectionary) in print form³; 75% use smart phone Bible Apps, while the remaining 25% still bring printed Bibles. These Sunday school students say they do not read the lesson before coming to church and as a result, their class participation is limited. Approximately ten out of the twenty-three are college undergraduates or graduate students and the other thirteen are in high school. Within both age groups there are social and cultural differences that seem to hinder experiencing and living their faith as a group. Language and social differences seem to present a barrier to relationship. Those who attend private schools speak English most of the time among themselves and those who attend public schools speak Spanish as their primary language. As a result they tend to gather in smaller groups within the group. These language differences also reflect differences in socio-economic status.

Nonetheless, when this group of young adults engages in conversation and reflection about how Jesus' story is relevant to them, personally or as a group, they share meaningful testimonies of how the faith tradition and individual experiences with God have significant

³ *El Discípulo*, the Sunday School Curriculum published by and for the Iglesia Cristiana (Discipulos de Cristo) Denomination in Puerto Rico.

impact in their lives and shape their morality within a secularized and relativist society. Despite the challenges they face, they struggle every day to remain together and faithful.

According to Moschella “The work of creating a space in which new and honest speech can emerge in a community is theologically crucial.”⁴ This statement became a keystone in the process of getting to know the group, gaining their trust and bringing them together again to share their faith, visualize and start building an active future for the youth ministry at *ICDCDE*. Through a brief experience of covenant groups with young adults as leaders, and the use of cellphone apps such as *WhatsApp*, Texting and Facebook Groups to communicate and share experiences, thoughts, and prayers, this group of youngsters became revitalized, connected and enthusiastic as they brought youth ministry and their individual faith experience to a new level. These are some samples of their narratives:

When you asked us to break into small groups and ask someone to look after the group I thought it would not work. But it came natural to some of us to take a leading roll. It was not like you appointed one of us to lead, it just happened naturally. I feel I have to look out for the kids in my group. I texted them in the morning, occasionally with a bible text or just a morning greeting. We are bonding again.

We need to study the bible, but I feel like we’ve been listening to the same stories all our lives. I don’t feel motivated by Sunday Bible School, but when I hear you speak, and when I hear the pastor preach I now that we can go beyond what we have been taught. We need someone to teach us but treating us like adults. We’ve had enough about David and Goliath and Noah’s Ark.

I’ve been working at church since I can remember, I need some time to step back and breath.

I have two jobs and study, Sunday is the only day I have a break to sleep late and take it easy but I have to sing as part of the worship ministry and sometimes help with the children ministry. Even if I wanted to, I don’t have time to do anything else.

I would like a bible study with a group our age. The group at SBS is too broad and sometimes I feel that the topics are treated lightly. I have questions and opinions that I am afraid to talk about in front of them.

⁴ Moschella, 143.

We don't even have representation at the board, our opinions are never asked, much less heard. It is the first time someone sits down and ask about what do we want and how do we feel.

As a result of this experience, I met with the LAC to develop a project that would take the experience of the covenant groups further. We needed to come up with a project that would give them the opportunity speak and be heard, to choose the Bible Class topics and the conditions under which we would teach the class. This experience gave birth to the Doctor of Ministry project at *ICDCDE*.

Purpose: Building a Bridge Through Non-Linear Education

The purpose of this project is to find a common language in an intercultural youth group within an intergenerational congregation and to use that “found” language to communicate the Gospel in a relevant and attractive way. There is a saying attributed to McDonalds Corporation: *“Our food will always be the same, but the way we present it must change with the culture if we’re to be tasted by this generation.”*⁵ It is the ultimate purpose of this project to bring young adults to *taste* the Gospel, now *according to the language of their culture*, in order to revitalize their faith and transform their minds through this learning experience in hope of becoming mentors for adolescents and high school students.

To achieve the purpose of this project I used elements of Robinson’s non-linear, aesthetic and divergent thinking approach to education.⁶ According to Robinson “our current educational system [were] conceived on the intellectual culture of the enlightenment.” To this quote I would add that also the modern church; therefore Christian traditional education

⁵ *Children’s Ministry in the 21st Century* (Colorado: Group Publishing, 2007), 44.

⁶ Ken Robinson, “Changing Education Paradigms,” *RSA Animate*, October, 2010, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://youtu.be/zDZFcDGpL4U>.

holds a model of deductive reasoning and the superiority of the intellectual mind. Aesthetic and sensory experiences are not part of these modern educational and religious models, and the postmodern mind challenges this absence.⁷ The use of an aesthetic and diverse educational experience to address a millennial gospel may lead to a prospective goal for this project, which is to have a revitalized intercultural youth ministry that can speak the language of the culture and improve their relations with an intergenerational church and community.

Methodology: Unleashing the Power of Narratives

We combined narrative and ethnographic research as a pastoral postmodern approach to ministry and used this methodology to develop our project. The rest of this chapter details how that process unfolded. This methodology required us to become immersed in community as observers while promoting conversation and listening. The main objective behind this methodology was to gather relevant information necessary to implement the project according to the needs and concerns expressed by the group.

Ethnographic research by itself would have not been enough. An anthropologist, through the use of ethnographic research, participates with the selected group of people, but from a researcher's perspective. The anthropologist is present, with ears and eyes opened, but expects to have limited participation in the experience. The addition of narrative research in ministry allows the pastor/researcher to continue his or her mission within the group while doing research. Moschella comments on this: "The aim of pastoral listening in ethnography is that the speakers and the group become empowered, "heard to speech" that is authentic, honest and transformative."⁸ A process of Action-Reflection-Action takes place to

⁷ Robinson.

⁸ Moschella, 141.

constantly modify the way we do ministry according to the expressed needs of the group.

Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's educational method developed along with Latin-American Liberation Theology contributed to my research methodology:

It is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together upon their environment in order to critically reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection.

To enter into dialogue presupposes equality amongst participants. Each must trust the others; there must be mutual respect and love (care and commitment). Each one must question what he or she knows and realizes that through dialogue existing thoughts will change and new knowledge will be created.⁹

Months of dialogue took place in order to promote trust, reflection and the ability to enter into the process of action-reflection-action again. We developed an initial experience as a model of the proposed project.¹⁰ The group's response was enthusiastic and participatory, leading to the final proposed project which, by that time had evolved into three phases. During phase one, the LAC and I would collect narratives and data through interviews and group gatherings. In phase two, I would produce and design a Christian Education experience for young adults with the information collected from the previous phase and with the advice of the LAC. The third phase would be the practical part of the project: this would last six-weeks, and would consist of a weekly gathering for an interactive experience using the material designed and produced in phase two and ending with a sermon by one of the participants.

⁹ Paulo Freire, "Concepts used by Paulo Freire," *Freire Institute*, assessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/concepts-used-by-paulo-freire>.

¹⁰ The original experience can be found at: <http://quiencreesquesoy.wordpress.com> We later incorporated this initial experience into the final project at: <http://www.quiensoyadondevoy.com/jesus>. Translation to web domains: Who do you think I am? And Who I am and Where I am going?

Phase One: The beginning of a participatory experience

After approval of the proposed project by the LAC and the Doctor of Ministry Project advisors, we implemented phase one as follows:

From January-February 2014:

My Lay Advisory Committee, gathered the narratives from youth eighteen to thirty years old. During this time, I asked the youth for topics they wanted to learn about or discuss in Bible classes. During the interviews I also inquired about teaching aids they consider helpful for the learning experience.¹¹

I used the developmental methodology found in Mary Clark Moschella's book *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: an Introduction*¹² to start collecting the necessary information to prepare for the practical part of the project: a contextual, sensory, experiential and participatory Christian Education Experience for young adults. Qualitative interviews collected narratives from the group of young adults in order to understand: how the youth ministry has changed over the last six years, the possible reasons for the way things are today, how the young adults feel about the youth ministry's past and present and what their expectations of the future might be. Semi-structured and unstructured¹³ interviews used open-ended questions to provide the necessary information to determine the topics for the educational experience, teaching aids, resources and schedule: "How do you feel about Sunday bible school?" "What would you like to happen different?" Building the experience around the young adults' own suggestions made them part of the project from an early stage and increased the possibilities of making the experience relevant and contextual. Through

¹¹ More information about this phase of the project will be found in Chapter Four and Appendix 4.

¹² Moschella, 64-69.

¹³ Ossorio, 26.

this learning experience the group of young adults had the opportunity to strengthen their faith and relationships.

Key in this methodology was the use of the semiotic approach found in *Narrative Research in Ministry* by practical theologians Carl Savage and William Presnell¹⁴ to examine the images, stories, codes and messages that give meaning to the young adults' context. This approach allowed me to use this metaphoric language as an hermeneutical tool to bring meaning to scriptural passages and help contextualize them in the midst of an intercultural and postmodern youth ministry.

Phases Two and Three: Eclectic, Participatory and Contextual

After we would complete the first phase, we would then move into developing phases two and three of the project as follows:

In order to apply a non-linear, aesthetic and divergent approach to the educational experience, two principles from education theologian Jerry Larsen's book on *Religious Education and the Brain* were implemented. Larsen first states: that "what one sees, and the images one uses for thinking, shape one's faith." Therefore the experiences had to be filled with images to "ignite imagination and form meaning" through "the power of the visual."¹⁵ Second, Larsen's concept of "border-crossing" to the experience was incorporated. Each experience should "take students across at least four kinds of borders in search for a more complete model of the world." First: "**cultural borders**," "how do other groups of human beings understand this part of life?" Second: "**time borders**," "How did people understand this part of life in the past?" Third: "**economic borders**," "How does economic status affect

¹⁴ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 129.

¹⁵ Jerry Larsen, *Religious Education and the Brain: A Practical Resource for Understanding how we learn about God* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 2.

one's understanding and experience of life?" Four: "**biological borders**," "How do (men, women, blacks, browns, young, old, handicapped, and so forth) people I can never be like understand this part of life?"¹⁶ Through the use of videos, documentaries, movies and other forms of popular media, participants were invited to reflect and take a step across those borders. I find this methodology crucial to contextualize the Gospel, and to make Good News relevant to the process of constructing the participant's religious identity within a bi-cultural society.

From March-April 2014:

During the second phase of the project I would develop a Christian Education Experience for young adults with the use of social media, internet resources, and images from popular culture such as films or music, videos and any other aids participants may have suggested. With the help and advice of the LAC, and the information gathered at the interviews, I identified the content of the educational material for the experience. Further, I designed content according to participants' suggestions for making the Gospel message attractive in a new learning experience. In short, narratives shared by the group, together with biblical and popular narratives, would shape and inform the experience. To have a sound biblical foundation for the experience I would engage in a deep exegesis of the selected bible texts (see next chapter) while connecting to a strong postmodern hermeneutical emphasis that related the social, religious, generational and individual challenges of the group members (and the group itself) with the challenges of biblical characters. To advertise and create expectation about the experience I would design visual promotions that included ads to post through social media and group chats as well as visual teasers, movie trailers and

¹⁶ Larsen, 48-51.

trivia from popular movies and superheroes. I would continue to consult with the LAC who hopefully would continue to give pertinent advice throughout this and every phase.

During May 2014:

The third phase was the practical part of the project: a six-week Christian Education experience with the group I described above in phase one, ending with the youth ministry leading the Sunday service. I produced the educational material in two formats: a print-out that we handed to participants and a web-based application to access from computers, tablets or internet-capable mobile devices. All moving imagery such as movie clips or music videos and other full color visual aids were available online through www.quiensoyadondevoy.com.¹⁷ Through the experience the participants had the opportunity to incorporate familiar elements from popular culture and look at these elements through the lens of their faith and religious tradition. But most important, it would give them the opportunity to create a liminal space that could evoke new narratives and a renewed experience with the Sacred.

After the six-week experience the group would organize the Sunday Service, led worship and preached.¹⁸ The sermon allowed the young adults to share their experience with the congregation as part of an intergenerational family. Three group members proclaimed the Word as a multisensory experience using the biblical texts and topics studied for the last six-weeks. The preached sermon was encapsulated by two short monologues followed by a

¹⁷ This webpage remains available on the internet.

¹⁸ See Appendix 2 and 3.

song, to create an EPIC/A¹⁹ experience that involved the congregation and promoted a positive collective response.²⁰

Methodology for evaluation

The evaluation stage would begin immediately after the project concluded. As Savage and Pressnell suggest, this phase should consist on observing change and discerning transformation. When observing change “you compare the state of the context prior to a new ministry intervention and afterward;” while you discern a transformation “in appearance or character usually for the better.”²¹ This transformation represents a new situation according to theologian Laurie Green. For Green the theological reflection consists of a spiral process, which will begin once more, but now with the new situation, as the result of the previous experience.²² The method consists of identifying the situation (Experience phase), explore it through analysis and factual evidence (Exploration phase), reflect upon it from faith, biblical and doctrinal tradition (Reflection phase), and in the light of it all ponder the question: how does God wants us to Respond? At this point faith and action come together to arrive at a new situation, which is worthy of exploration, and reflection just as the first situation was. In this case the first situation was the one that gave birth to this project.

Along with the LAC I would explore, reflect and respond, this time in light of the functionalist evaluation approach found in Savage and Presnell: “how the combining narratives of the context fit together pre-and-post project”²³. After the last phase of the

¹⁹ Experiential, Participatory, Image-Driven, Connected and Active/Applicable.

²⁰ Chapter Four describes the experience and the response of the congregation in more detail.

²¹ Savage and Presnell, 124.

²² Green, 17-27.

²³ Savage and Presnell, 128.

project we would look for changes that showed some transformation as we took into consideration that “if one component system is changed, the change affects the whole”²⁴.

The semiotic approach used in our methodology would be also crucial in this final stage to re-examine images, codes and messages in light of the new situation. This approach might help me, and the LAC to discern whether the youth found new meaning in the bible texts so the Bible could come to life and become relevant to their context. Facing the new situation, the preferred future of a vital and connected intercultural youth ministry would lie ahead of us, not as a vision of eschatological hope but as a reality birthed out of a new-found common language. A reality that a member of the LAC called: *a revival according to this generation*.²⁵

²⁴ Savage and Presnell, 128.

²⁵ From now on I will refer to this new reality as *a postmodern revival*.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIENCE: ¿QUIÉN SOY? ¿ADÓNDE VOY?

"Un héroe auténtico es un ser humano, un héroe que tiene miedo, que es torpe, que es débil, y sabiendo que es torpe, débil y que tiene miedo se enfrenta al peligro. Ese es el auténtico héroe a mi manera de ver. No el que no tiene miedo y que es todopoderoso."¹

—Roberto Gómez Bolaños (Chespirito)

As we have already seen at the outset of this paper, during the first six months of my ministry at the *ICDCE* a common concern always surfaced at conversations with members of the LAC and youth counselors: the youth have lost their voice within the congregation. The youth ministry has no representation at the church's board of officials and elders, and has not had a significant voice and active involvement when organizing the events of their ministry, such as bible studies, worship services, campaigns or retreats. Their concern became my own. This meant I had to listen to the youth ministry members and hear their stories in order to identify the issues that were significant to them. Therefore, my immediate goal was to gain their trust by listening and validating their feelings. With that goal in mind we engaged in conversation for months.

These conversations shed light on what the Doctor of Ministry project could be: a Christian Education Experience. The group expressed their desire for a more contextual

¹ "An authentic hero is a human being, a hero who is afraid, who is clumsy, who is weak, and knowing that is clumsy, weak and is afraid he faces danger. From my perspective he is the authentic hero. Not those who are not afraid and are all mighty." Kiosco Lo del Chavo, Facebook post, September 23, 2014, accessed November 29, 2014, www.facebook.com/LodelchavoKiosco.

bible education experience, either as part of the Sunday school program or as a separate Bible Study. They wanted to be part of the process, to select the topics and consider alternative schedules and locations. These informal conversations led to phase one of the project. That moment came with a challenge: show the participants their opinions will matter, that their voices will be heard and that we would develop a project around their needs, expectations and desires. This chapter will reveal what happened when we implemented the project.

My Opinion Matters: Phase One

We planned a Friday night meeting titled “Decide tú el tema” (Choose the Subject). We advertised the meeting through *Facebook* and *Whatsapp* using English and Spanish

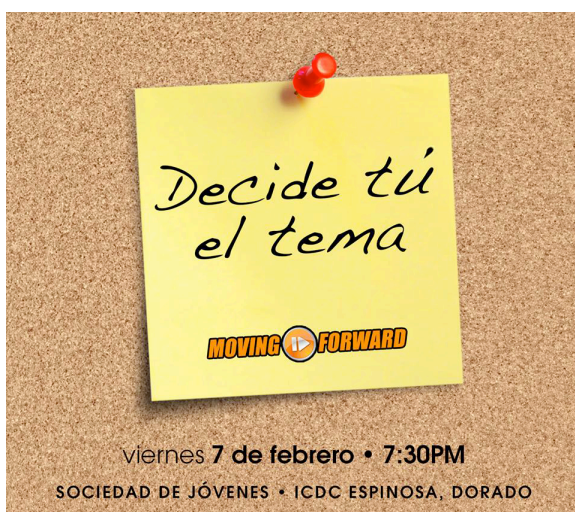


Illustration 2: Decide tú

expressed their desire for a Bible Study project separate from the Sunday Bible School. We could develop this Bible study according to what the youth had already expressed during informal conversations and meetings, but we needed to choose concrete subjects and methodology to implement it. This meeting would give them the opportunity to express their feelings, needs and expectations.

intentionally as a way to welcome diversity in the group. Thirteen young adults were present at the meeting that started with a short devotional that included singing, praying and reading a bible text.

I engaged in conversation with the group explaining the purpose of the meeting.

Through informal conversations they

To promote conversation and more interactive participation, I handed out blank papers with three open questions to answer instead of pre-written forms with options to choose from:

1. What topic or topics would you like to learn from in a Bible Study experience?
2. What day or days of the week and where would you like it to take place?
3. What resources do you suggest as learning aids for the experience?



Illustration 3: Who me?

The group responded with enthusiasm to the fact that we took care to protect their identity, and that we provided a space in which they could freely express their needs and comments. Some of them talked to each other while others isolated themselves from the group while writing. After they finished I went away with the papers they handed back to me and made a list of topics and

suggestions. From the first glance I noticed a predominance of topics related to interpersonal relations, vision of self and search for knowledge, purpose and vocation.

After ten minutes, I rejoined the group and gathered the participants in a circle facing each other to discuss the results. I read all their suggestions out loud and wrote them on a board. This led to an open conversation where the youth opened up and made comments about what they had written. Participants engaged freely in conversation. Some of them were not hesitant to acknowledge what they had written about their concerns and expectations. Others preferred to remain anonymous and became part of the conversation cautiously, but these were only a few. Important comments surfaced like: "I had the

opportunity to work in school with a group of students from different religious traditions. Through that experience I learned that there is so much that we don't know about other people's faith because no one teaches us about it at church." The conversation went on and topics started to narrow down until they easily came to an agreement on the subjects to they wanted to address primarily: **personality and vocation**.

After they arrived at a decision regarding the topic, the group moved on to question number two: when and where the experience would take place. They unanimously agreed to separate the Bible Study from Sunday Bible School, but opinions were split regarding specific dates. Finally they decided to alternate between Fridays and Saturdays, and considered Sunday as a possible option if necessary.

Then we discussed the third question: resources or learning aids that would enrich and contextualize the experience. They immediately discarded any media that reminded them of traditional school or college teaching methods, such as *Power Point*. Within a wide range of possibilities, the group agreed upon short videos, movies, music and recreational activities as creative tools to engage in the learning process. We agreed that we were looking to experience rather than learn about God as a school matter or a scientific topic of exploration. As Larsen expresses in his book *Religious Education and the Brain: A Practical Resource for Understanding How We Learn about God*:

Humans learn best from a curriculum of rich personal experience, rather than from a curriculum of someone else's conclusions. The one most potent curriculum strategy a teacher can employ for the benefit of learners is to let students experience everything possible related to a subject.²

² Larsen, 48.

The group longed for an experience, an experience that they could validate by knowledge and reason, but one without the other would not be an option. Whatever we did had to travel between the brain and the inner self, or vice versa, but could not get caught in the middle. To emerging generations reason and probable facts are not enough; God has to become an experience that engages their senses and propels them to action.

Effective worship and ministry in our time is *experiential*; the senses as well as the mind are engaged through changes in body posture, touch, smell, and taste; and people are encouraged to *experience* the presence of God, not simply talk about it.³

To approach the traditional Bible Study as a multisensory, contemporary experience linked to elements of popular culture gave the group a sense of expectancy towards the project that had been lacking in previous efforts. The group participated with enthusiasm and new suggestions came up in addition to those already written down. Someone suggested we could invite the youth ministry from a church close to *ICDCE* which whom they have a close relation. The group left the meeting with excitement and vitality. We had sketched a new way to a new objective! With the help and oversight of the LAC team I faced phase two of the project.

Finding The Connections: Phase Two

Now that they had selected the dates, locations and additional resources for the educational experience, I met with the LAC to narrow down topics and decide upon Bible texts, characters and strategies for the design and writing phase. We discussed the opinions, desires and concerns of the young adults and the experiences they shared from their youth. They mentioned that thirty years ago the youth ministry was proactive:

³ Lynne M. Baab, *Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul* (Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2008), 47.

We made things happen, we protested and made demands. Today, these kids give up easily and eventually leave the church. Some of us were even thrown out of church, discriminated by race and political views; but we remained faithful.

For a long time now, they have been neglected. We need to provide them with a safe space to share their thoughts and ask questions. But most of all they need to feel we care and that they are important to us. We need to address matters that are important to them, not what we want to tell them but instead what they want to know about.

During the meeting with the participants, we had agreed to address the topic of personality through the study of different Bible characters. After careful consideration of the narratives I had gathered during the previous months, we developed criteria to select the characters for our study. These were the most significant elements to consider when choosing characters:

- age
- gender
- vocational issues
- challenges to national and religious identity
- multicultural issues such as language, politics and religion

Finally, working with the LAC, we decided to develop a series of studies on Daniel, Esther, Moses, Mary the mother of Jesus and Simon Peter. After we selected the topics and characters, new challenges arrived: how to connect the characters' personality and vocation to the contextual reality of our twenty-first century Puerto Rican young adults. How could we bring the text forward without losing pertinence? How could we take participants back in history without losing connections with contemporary reality? What hermeneutical clues could we use?

The Marketplace: Internet, Cell Phones, Music and Movies

As I had mentioned in previous chapters, Tom Beaudoin in his book *Virtual Faith* led me to find the hermeneutical clues to make Biblical texts relevant for this generation: find the marketplace of the twenty-first century and do as Jesus did: sit there, listen and interact with people. Therefore, I visited the Internet; surfed through social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*; watched movies, videos and digital imagery; and listened carefully to the news and all that seemed relevant to young people. I talked with them to ask about their favorite movies, the people they admire, the commercial music they prefer and also what they dislike or are not attracted to.

While I was finding the connections between the group, popular culture and the Biblical texts, I talked to the LAC about the possibility of inviting a local comedian and motivational speaker who hosts a daily late night TV show, Silverio Pérez, to offer a stand-up comedy session on the topic of personality. They welcomed the idea with excitement; since it is not common to have public personalities who are not Protestants speak at church events. We planned phase three as follows:

- First Experience:
Saturday, April 26, 2014, 11AM at church: “Stand-up Comedy with Silverio Pérez: Biblia, Humor y Motivación”
- Second Experience:
Saturday, May 3, 2014, 2PM at church: “Inteligentes y Bien parecidos”, meeting Daniel.
- Third Experience:

Saturday, May 10, 2014, 2PM at church: “Bellas, Sabias y Prudentes”, meeting Esther.

- Fourth Experience: Saturday, May 17, 2014, 2PM at church: “Gago, Inseguro, Juez y Pastor”, meeting Moses.
- Fifth Experience: Sunday, May 25, 2014, 5PM at the apartment of one of the members of the LAC: “¿Sumisa o Rebelde? ¿Tímida o Valiente?” meeting Mary mother of Jesus.
- Sixth Experience: Thursday, May 29th, 2014, 6:30PM at the house of one of the participants: ¿Héroes o Discípulos? Meeting Peter.
- Sunday Morning Service: Sunday, June 1st, 2014, 10:30AM. The Youth Ministry would coordinate the worship service including worship and preaching.

Finally, the writing phase for the Experiences began. We made a thorough exegesis of every text to find links with popular culture. During the process we found two approaches to be effective: a private *Facebook* group with LAC members to share what I had written for the experience and to record their advice and opinions; the Church’s *Facebook* pages to advertise the meetings. Through the process, I had found that the best way to communicate with participants was through the *WhatsApp* mobile messaging application. Each week, prior to our meeting, I would post comments and questions regarding movies that might be of interest to the youth and an ad for the weekly event. For the ads I used images that evoked the movie or movie characters connected to the bible characters or topic we would study.

Regarding creative elements of culture, Paul Tillich points out that the ultimate concern and search for meaning “is manifest in all creative functions of the human spirit”.

“Ultimate concern is manifest in the aesthetic function of the human spirit as the infinite desire to express ultimate meaning.”⁴ Accordingly, Tillich continues: “He who can read the style of a culture can discover its ultimate concern, its religious substance.”⁵ Reflecting on his words, an expression from one of the youth ministry members heard in previous dialogs came to mind: “people have a need for heroes and Jesus is a type of hero.”⁶ Therefore, I decided to develop the experiences by searching for Hollywood super heroes and historical characters whose lives had been taken to the movies to grab the young people’s attention, ignite conversation and create an atmosphere where they could become part of the experience because they had something to say.

The first experience would relate personality types with Abraham, Moses, Peter and Paul through the use of comedy. During the following educational experiences, Peeta from *The Hunger Games* would become Daniel, Malala would relate to Queen Esther, Neo from *The Matrix* would emerge as Moses, Leigh Anne Tuony from *The Blind Side* would bring out Mary mother of Jesus, Wolverine would reveal similar characteristics with Peter and the X-Men would be related to a group of disciples.

I had made the connections, now the new journey was about to begin.

New Packaging: Phase Three

A Christian Education Experience

The time to implement the project arrived. Two weeks prior to the start of phase three the promotion for Experience #1 began. Two weeks before Experience #1, I published an ad through the private *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* groups for the youth and through the

⁴ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1959), 8.

⁵ Tillich, 42.

⁶ Quotes from the participants will continue to be anonymous in order to protect their identity.

church's social media. We also kept the congregation up to date by sharing all information about the project through the weekly bulletin and open mic invitations during announcements in the Sunday service. Since more than 50% of the participants are part of the Worship Ministry, they decided to open this first experience to the rest of the Worship Ministry members.

We arrived at the Experience with great expectations; most of the youth ministry members and some people from the Worship Ministry formed a crowd of about 30 people.



Illustration 4: 1ra Experiencia

The speech by Silverio Pérez was humorous, motivational and educational. Pérez made beautiful connections with Biblical characters. Interweaving humor with profound reflections he invited the participants to look into themselves and find traces that may lead them to a more concrete understanding of their own personalities and how personality affects interpersonal relationships.

Pérez used four basic descriptions of personality types inherited from Hippocrates: choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic.⁷ Participants had the opportunity to relate Moses to the melancholic personality, Abraham as a phlegmatic, Peter sanguine and Paul choleric.⁸ The experience led each group member to link her/his own personality to the Biblical characters and bring to consciousness how God uses each person according to

⁷ Dr. C. George Boeree, "Early Medicine and Physiology," Webspaceship.edu, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://webspaceship.edu/cgboer/neurophysio.html>.

⁸ <http://quiensoyadondevoy.wordpress.com/personalidades/> Also refer to Appendix One.

his/her characteristics and capabilities. Even character traits that can be considered negative, such as Peter’s impulsiveness or Paul’s cruelty and intolerance, can be transformed to accomplish our vocation.

Once the speaker finished, I drew a connection with the project and welcomed participants to our new Christian Education Experience. The crowd was enthusiastic and eager to continue. Comments included: “I never thought about Moses and Abraham like that” or “this kind of event should take place more often.”



Illustration 5: 2da Experiencia

The following week “Experience #2” took place. This one was titled *Inteligentes y Bien parecidos*. During the days before the experience I posted teaser questions about the movie through the private groups in *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* to build anticipation. Some comments in the social feeds revolved around “what would she be up to?” A total of twenty-one people showed up, including three

LAC members who are also youth counselors and youth Bible School teachers. Four of the participants were new to the group although they are church members and assist in Sunday service regularly.

The experience linked the story of Daniel to the life of Peeta Mellark from *The Hunger Games*.⁸ During a scene at the beginning of the movie, the character expresses his feelings, which clearly show a connection with the biblical text:

⁹ <http://quiensoyadondevoy.wordpress.com/daniel/> Also refer to Appendix One.

I don't want them to change me... by turning into something I'm not... I don't want to be another piece in their game... I just keep thinking of a way to show them that they don't own me. If I'm going to die I want to still be me."¹⁰

We invited participants to comment on the movie and make connections by engaging in conversation. Their participation, questions and comments were fluid, honest and insightful:

“Oh my God, I saw the movie but I never made the connection with any bible story.”

“Sometimes it is difficult to stand up for what we believe because the peer pressure is too strong!” “I feel I don't have a strong bible knowledge to engage in conversation with professors and other university students.”

Experience #3 took place a week later. We developed a narrative from the book of Esther and linked Esther's story to the contemporary story of Malala.¹¹ The Pakistani girl is



about the same age that Queen Esther may have been. Both challenged the government to defend what they considered a just cause for their people. This connection also opened the door to an inter-religious dialogue, which was one of the topics the youth had mentioned during phase one of the project.

Illustration 6: 3ra Experiencia

At this experience some participants were absent but some others returned so that the number of

participants remained constant. During this study the senior pastor was present and made some comments about the subject, particularly from the perspective of the Hispanic community in the United States. He discussed the book of Esther as an identity resource for

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUA9AhhX2eI>

¹¹ Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani young activist for female education and the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate. <http://quiensoyadondevoy.wordpress.com/ester/>. Also refer to Appendix One.

those who live within a different culture. The crowd present seemed more introspective and less communicative than at previous experiences.

During the days between Experience #3 and Experience #4, I asked questions about the *Matrix Trilogy* through the social feeds and invited participants to wonder about the possible connection with our Bible studies. Older youth were excited; those who were younger expressed curiosity about the topic and how it would turn out. When the day arrived the attendance remained constant.

Moses and Neo would be the subject of our discussion under the theme: “Gago, Inseguro, Juez y Pastor”.¹² By now the group was more communicative and willing to dig deeper into the topic. The conversation revolved around Moses’ bicultural background (political and religious as well as linguistic) his doubts and his challenges as a type of Christ. The link with the *Matrix Trilogy* brought interesting perspectives to the topic. During the last quarter of the experience we invited participants to select a contemporary figure with this prompt: Can you identify a contemporary

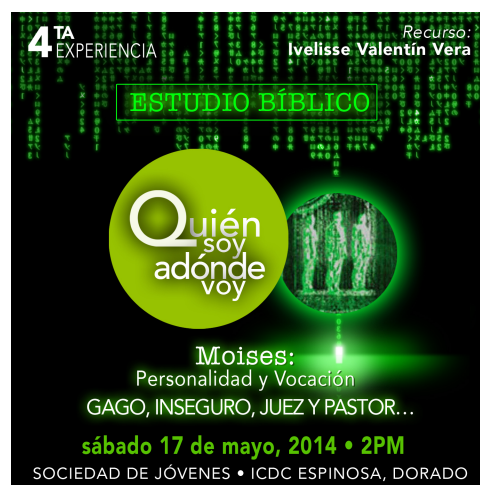


Illustration 7: 4ta Experiencia

type of Moses or Christ? Nelson Mandela was the character identified and linked to the study through the use of clips of the movie *Long Walk to Freedom*.¹³

By the time we reached Experience #5, we were ready to meet outside the church. We scheduled the meeting for Sunday evening at a youth counselor’s apartment at the beach.

¹² <http://quiensoyadondevoy.wordpress.com/moises/>. Also refer to Appendix One.

¹³ David M. Thompson and Anant Singh, prods., *Long Walk to Freedom* (United Kingdom: Pathé, 2013).

New participants arrived and brought food, drinks, musical instruments and tabletop games to play after the study. We gathered around the TV as some sat on the floor, others squeezed tight in the sofa or shared a chair. The atmosphere was comfortable and the expectation was evident.

The experience revolved around Mary mother of Jesus under the title: ¿Sumisa o Rebelde, Tímida o Valiente?¹⁴ We made a connection with Leigh Anne Tuony from *The*



Blind Side and the story of her adopted son, Michael Oher. Earlier during that week a local newspaper published an article about a girl named Mónica Navarro. Navarro told her story: “I’m ‘like’ the hope to my family.” We linked her story to a type of Mary within our local context that at her young age carries hope for her family and her nation amidst all odds. The experience

Illustration 8: 5ta Experiencia

moved to deep comments and extensive analysis. The enthusiasm was evident and gave birth to the liturgy for the following Sunday’s worship service that would be an opportunity to take this month’s learning experience to the community at large.

We planned the final Experience for a Thursday night at the house of one of the participants. Previously, during the experience about Moses and the *Matrix Trilogy*, one of the guys wondered what could come from *X-Men*. I took this into consideration and looked for possible connections. I posted teaser questions through the social feeds to gather reactions. Finally I decided to go ahead and open up the study by making a connection from one *X-Men* character, Peter, to the disciples. Wolverine from *X-Men* reminded us of Peter,

¹⁴ <http://quiensoyadondevoy.wordpress.com/maria/> Also refer to Appendix One.

the X-Men connected with the disciples and X-avier called to mind the Master/Teacher.

Having made this connection, we titled the study ¿Héroes o discípulos?¹⁵

The young man who had talked about *X-Men* was surprised that I took his comment into consideration. The subject ignited a conversation that turned into a deep reflection about discipleship, calling and commitment. Participants gave brief impressions about the impact this experience had on them and how they saw themselves walking towards ministry and interpersonal relations from now on. The atmosphere was solemn but festive, God had revealed to us and now it was time to take what we had gained and share it with the congregation on Sunday.

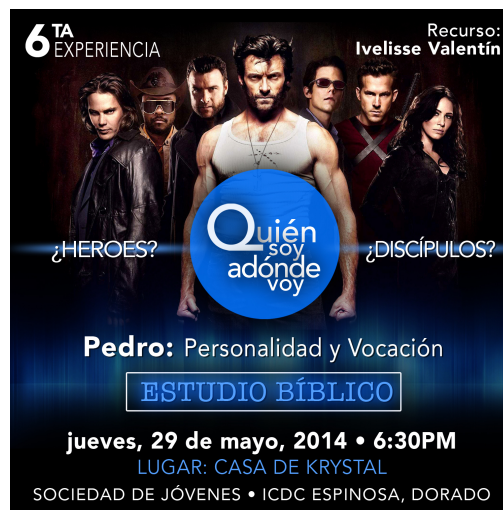


Illustration 9: 6ta Experiencia



Illustration 10: Quién soy, adónde voy: Servicio Especial

For Sunday liturgy the group decided to sing special hymns related to what they had experienced during the past month. They were very enthusiastic, confident and showed a sincere commitment to the task at hand. To the question of who would like to preach, to everyone's surprise, the only person new to the group since the project started, someone characterized as shy, responded affirmatively without hesitation. She

¹⁵ <http://quiensoyadondevoy.wordpress.com/pedro/> Also refer to Appendix One.

explained how she feels like Moses many times, confronted by challenges that she does not feel she can accomplish. Nonetheless, and also like Moses, she feels nervous but at the same time confident that the Lord will accompany her to fulfill the task. Everyone shared their ideas for liturgy and proclamation, and finally agreed on working on a collaborative sermon. The proclamation was encapsulated between two monologues followed by songs. The opening monologue was about Peter, his shame and regret when he encountered the resurrected Jesus. Then our volunteer preached a fifteen minute message. The message brought together the topics studied during the educational experience and was also an opportunity to testify about how the project had impacted the youth ministry. The young preacher made the connection between the biblical texts studied, the youth ministry experience and the congregation's needs and expectations: "Every biblical character we have talked about faced his or her fears. Now, think about all the things you have not been able to do just because you didn't have the strength to face your own fears."¹⁶ The message created a beautiful atmosphere of praise and awe. To conclude, a monologue and a song about Esther and her calling led the way to the altar call followed by an impressive response from the congregation.

Our congregation was filled with tears of joy and feelings of accomplishment. The congregation could not stop praising and giving thanks to God for the commitment and conviction the youth ministry had shown during this project and particularly at the Sunday service. One of the participants sent me a text later in the afternoon saying: "I feel so happy, fulfilled and accomplished, that I hadn't felt like that in long time." A lady from the congregation said: "I cried during the entire service. Every service should be like this."

¹⁶ Find complete sermon on Appendix 2.

As I approached my car when leaving church, a young man stopped me and handed me a paper with some notes. It was then when Green's spiral suddenly made sense. That note could have the clue to the new situation.

CHAPTER FIVE:
WHAT HAPPENED: A POSTMODERN REVIVAL

We mentioned earlier that as theologian Laurie Green suggests in his book *Let's Do Theology*: the spiral process begins once more, this time with the new situation that has resulted from the previous experience which brought the project to life. In this chapter we will look at what happened through the eyes of the members of the LAC, participants and other members of the congregation in order to lead the way to identify the new situation. The following are samples of narratives that I heard:

We all contributed on trying to identify people whose contribution could resonate with the members of the Youth Group. We all had the opportunity to give ideas on movies that could relate to Youth Group members and engage them in Bible study discussions.

The use of movies that could relate and call the attention of the Youth Group members proved to be vital. Youth members seemed to enjoy each of the Bible studies and were very eager to share their thoughts, stories, theological and personal concerns. The use of the website she created was very engaging as well.

Listening has been the key to this project, but listening alone does not always bring results. In my experience, to promote change, listening and reflection must be followed by actions. That is why, together with Green's model of Experience-Exploration-Reflecting, I

applied the Action-Reflection method each week.¹ After each meeting, I sought to engage the new situation in a reflexive process drawn from the primary experience. Each week, I talked to members of the LAC and participants to gather information and apply suggestions they might consider necessary. The use of movies built expectancy during the week but the use of contemporary characters to connect the Bible stories and the movie fiction launched the experience toward a deeper level.

Through the weekly analysis I made modifications so the next experience would be more effective. Every lesson included two commentaries, one by a pastor (not known to the youth) and the other by a young adult who remained anonymous for the time being. These commentaries, from the pen of a spiritual leader and even more relevant, in some instances, from one of their own, connected the narratives from the past with today's stories that reveal God in the midst of every human situation. Also, after listening to them I modified the upcoming experience. By the third experience the project reached maturity but I suspected it was time to move out of the church setting as the youth had suggested during phase one of the project. The group had become less participative and some of them asked me if we could meet somewhere else. So we moved outside the church setting to give the experience a new perspective.

That Sunday we asked the congregation if anyone were willing to host the group for one of the experiences. The response was positive and after that morning we had a schedule

¹ "Therefore, all work with people needs these two elements, linked: theory (reflection, study, analysis, comprehension) and praxis (practice, action, commitment, struggle). It deals exactly with two moments of the same process or two time frames of the same liberating practice. It is important that these two moments are always articulated or interlinked with each other. Thereby, this action must always be enlightened and guided by reflection and reflection linked and related to the action (made or to be made). In summary, one can say that all work with people, as political work, is executed within the dialectical theory - praxis. It comprises the forming of the awareness and the molding of the experience or action." (Clodovis Boff, *Cómo Trabajar con el Pueblo* (Brasil: Editora Vozes), 1986. PDF.) My translation.

of meeting places for the following weeks. The attendance increased by 35% and the group was more participative, outgoing and spontaneous. They brought musical instruments and board games to play and sing after the Bible study. They engaged in conversation, looked more deeply into their own feelings and shared meaningful narratives that surfaced as a result of the time they spent together and the new perspectives from which they studied the Bible. At this point I felt we were achieving significant results.

The last week, the lesson about Peter turned into an experience about discipleship using the X-Men movie series. Two factors shaped this experience: the concerns the youth had expressed in the previous gatherings and their statements about the movies and topics they like to talk about outside the religious scenario. By the time we reached this last experience the movie *Days of the Future Past* was at the movie theaters and had created expectation among some of the participants regarding what message, if any, we might derive from it. At the end of this experience each participant shared how the project had engaged with his/her personality, vocation and calling. After the experience the youth got together again, this time to rehearse and work on the Sunday service. We collected some impressions from the congregation and from members of the LAC at that time:

We have witnessed the benefits of the project and the fruits of the experience through their creativity, sense of responsibility and organizational skills by putting together the Sunday worship and preaching service. They conveyed their faith and what they learned through the Christian Education Experiences for the past six weeks with the use of artistic expressions as music, singing, acting and preaching.

The Youth Group, at the same time, had an opportunity to grasp how much God can use them to nourish their Church.

Through the study of the question of 'who am I and where am I going to' using the bible texts the Youth Group members seem to be much more clear on God's love for them and how much they, with their life experiences, can contribute in the Gospel.

As noted in the statement above, the project has impacted the congregation as well as the youth ministry. Parents and Elders became involved in prayer and supported the project by offering help in any way possible. They offered their houses for meeting and welcomed the group with food and beverages. Some members of the congregation affirmed the need for such projects and expressed their support for the participants along the way. They told us how the congregation used to be committed to the youth ministry, children and adolescents and how they interacted and grew together as one body despite their generational differences. This experience made them aware of the need to cultivate their intergenerational relations, but also of the need for an ongoing plan to continue the revitalization of the youth ministry. Also, the feedback after the Sunday Sermon was very significant to reaffirm the youth and motivate them to continue developing new projects.

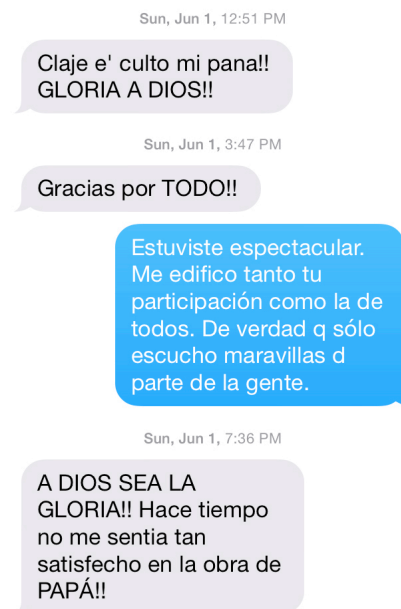


Illustration 11: iMessage image two

The service was magnificent, it turned out beautiful! It was a true blessing!

I cried over the whole service. Every service should be like that.

The service was beautiful. They did a great job. They should continue.

Someone who watched the service through Internet live broadcast wrote:

The service was beautiful! Some of the participants have an innate ability to lead. Everything flowed at ease. Even through the Internet I enjoyed it very much and felt blessed. We have a privilege to have such wonderful youth who are filled with the Spirit of the Lord! I congratulate you for the work you have done with the youth group.

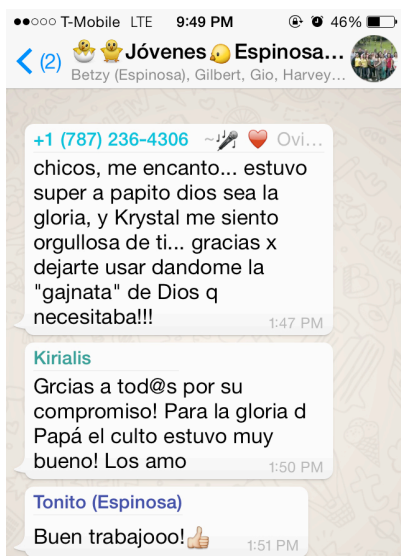


Illustration 12: Whatsapp
Image one

Some of the expressions are almost impossible to translate. They expressed feelings of surprise, amusement, gratitude and humbleness among others. "What a service, my friend!"

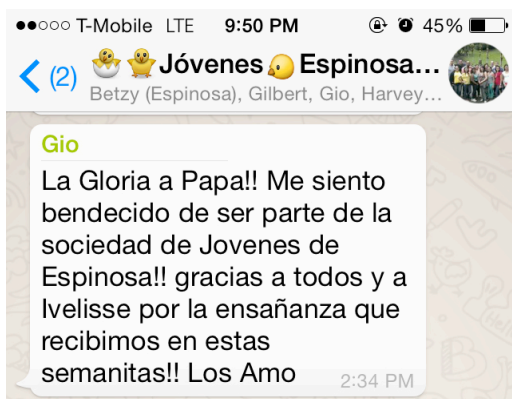


Illustration 13: Whatsapp Image two

"I am so proud of you... Thanks for letting the Lord use you and for slapping me in the face (from the Lord) the way I needed!!" A conversation developed through the private group at *WhatsApp* in which the youth gave each other words of encouragement as they acknowledged the work they had done. Other social media applications such as *Facebook* or

In their own words

Right after the Sunday service phone and Internet messages started to flow. Participants, youth counselors and other members of the congregation used social media feeds to express their feelings and congratulate the group for what they had accomplished. The following images show, to some extent, the impact the experience had in the group, in their own words and through their preferred media.

Some of the expressions are almost impossible to

"Let's give the glory to the Lord!!" "It has been a long time since I felt so satisfied when working for my Father!!" But they did not limit themselves to acknowledging their own feelings. They also encouraged and gave thanks to each other for the effort, the commitment and the good work they had done.

Twitter were not used so effectively. The group seemed to prefer more privacy and kept their commentary within a close group.

“I feel blessed to be part of the Youth at Espinosa!!”

Words of encouragement from members of the LAC and Youth Counselors through the group chat were not delayed:

Almost immediately after leaving church, a *Facebook* private message arrived from a young man who had approached me in the parking lot to ask me for the opportunity to share some ideas with me. He handed me a paper with some notes but told me he would develop the ideas further and send them to me

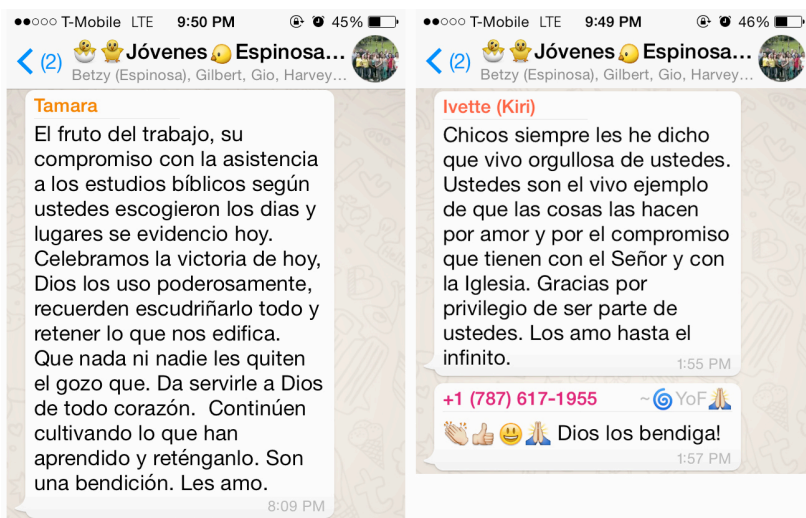


Illustration 14: Whatsapp Image three

through the Internet. To my surprise the message contained three topics for future Bible studies and an offer to help me develop the experiences. He wanted to get involved and make connections with the other participants in the process.

The questions that gave birth to his proposed topics were challenging and, might I say, daring. He raised theologically profound issues such as theodicy, predestination and free will with an honest expectation of finding answers. However, more than getting the answers from a lecture, Bible or theology class, he proposed arranging for the youth to have their own

space and opportunity to do research, study, debate about the issues, share concerns and voice opinions in an open, interactive, non-linear experience – as had the project!

A new situation had arrived sooner than expected. As one of the members of the LAC named it, *a postmodern revival* had taken place. It was time to evaluate the experience

and look at the new spiral for reflection and action.

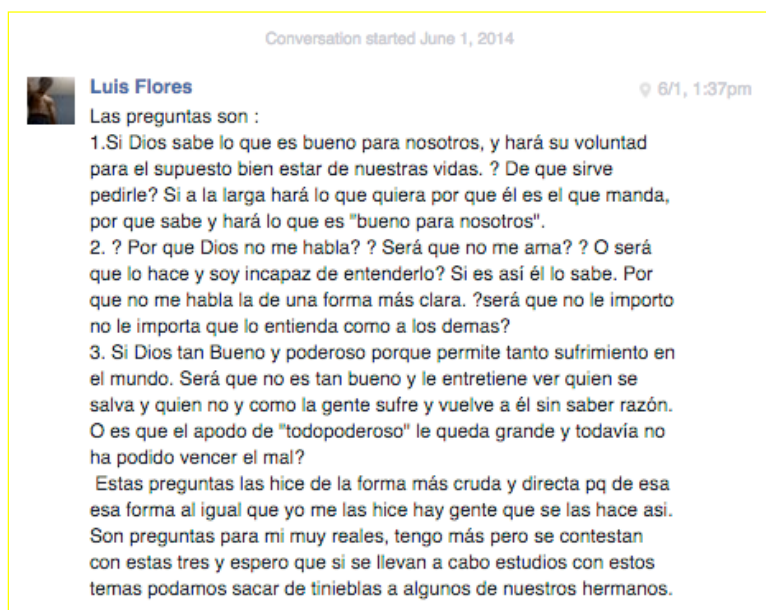


Illustration 15: Facebook Image one

CHAPTER SIX

SIGNS OF HOPE

Youth: A sign of hope for the congregation

In this chapter, I will explore and reflect in light of the functionalist evaluation approach that we find in Savage and Presnell: “how the combining narratives of the context fit together pre-and-post project.”¹ After the last phase of the project the LAC and I looked for changes or signs of transformation as we took into consideration that “if one component system is changed, the change affects the whole”².

As we read in Chapter Five, the narratives during and immediately after the project started to change. During phase one of the project the group of young adults seemed less motivated and more disconnected. However, parallel to the project the group started to meet regularly to share experiences at dinner, movies or informal gatherings outside the church. A sense of trust was developing among them and toward me as their pastor. By the time we reached phase three of the project they seemed more open to conversation among themselves, towards me and with other members of the congregation outside their generation.

“El combo que no se quita” (those who never get separated and never give up) is a group of nine young adults who formed a private chat through *WhatsApp* and started to meet

¹ Savage and Presnell, 128.

² Ibid., 128.

outside the church setting as a result of the new approach to ministry among the youth. Through this chat the group developed stronger ties, strengthened their sense of confidentiality and deepened their mutual support. Although the group remains private and does not allow participation of any of counselors or pastors, they have invited me to hear about some of the stories and concerns that rise from their meetings and conversations.

In Chapter One we mentioned that according to Buckingham, participation in a group is significant to young people as they manage challenges related to faith and identity. In this last chapter we will compare narratives and analyze results. We will share our conclusion that strengthening the existing group and creating new groups for church related activities, recreation or other social events has reinforced young people's faith and religious and social identity.

Many members of the congregation and the LAC have perceived these changes in the group. Their own narratives about the youth and their participation at church have now changed. The turned into a life-changing project to all: the local Church, Youth Group members and the candidate. Before this project, the local Church, one that has over 600 members, had not much support from the Youth Group in their program, except for those Youth Group members that were involved in the Worship team. Most of the Youth Group members felt disengaged, felt little or no call to get involved with Church, and felt little or no support from the Church members. The Youth Group was very much divided, little or no sense of community was present, but amongst few exceptions; and there seemed to be a lack of interest, as a group, in getting involved with what the Youth Group leaders planned.

In my experience, a common social behavior towards youth and adolescents is to notice what they do wrong or what they do not do according to social expectations. Adults

sometimes neglect to notice the positive things young people do or the activities in which they succeed. This has been a common attitude among some leaders at the *ICDCE*. However, through the project the congregation was always informed about the group's interest in Bible study and their commitment toward the youth ministry. Even more significant, the Sunday service showed the congregation the spiritual growth and sense of calling and vocation among the group.

After this project, Church members have seen a stronger, more defined, more willing to work, and more mature Youth Group. They have witness the talent and love of God that lays within each and every young man and young woman that praises God amongst them. The Youth Group itself has seen how much they can contribute to Church, how they can serve God, how much they can do when they are together. They have felt a stronger bond; one that can lead them to express their happiness, concerns, doubts, and questions in a safe environment. They seemed to be eager to keep fostering their Bible/theological knowledge while cultivating their Youth Group relationship.

Certainly, narratives have changed within the youth group, from and toward the congregation: "It has been a long time since we felt so much support from the congregation." "After the last few services we participated on we were always criticized for some reason. Today it was different, we felt different and the congregation was different." A revitalized youth ministry seems to be flourishing, not apart from the congregation or parallel, but within it. In combination with the functionalist approach of evaluation, the use of the semiotic approach has allowed me to identify the genesis of some of these changes in narratives. Re-examining images, codes and messages in light of the new situation is crucial to this final stage of the project. This approach helps us discern whether new meaning has been found in

the Bible texts and how this can or has come to life in our context, within the group and congregation.

Within the group of young adults three important elements brought to the project should be examined in order to identify any changes in narratives that have taken place and how we have arrived at our new situation. Movies, music, and Christian symbols became part of the project significantly. The project helped contextualize the Bible stories and weave God's revelation through history, metaphors and literary images into today's narratives to provoke the birth of new meaning for the elements of the Christian faith.

Before the project, participants considered Hollywood movies, literary or movie characters mainly for distraction or recreational purposes. Even to the adults present, the possibility seemed a far-fetched idea. Would it be possible to find meaning in, and make connections with movies such as Hunger Games and X-Men? By the third experience participants were looking forward to making connections between visual elements such as movies or fictional characters and their faith tradition.

We reached a turning point in the project when the young adults realized that some of the most significant questions that rise from our inner self are contained in both the imagery of our daily life and secular environment and the elements of our faith tradition such as the Bible or liturgy. "Who I am" and "Where am I going" are muses to artists as well as theologians, Bible scholars, pastors and every man and woman in search of meaning, purpose and identity construction. The element of surprise was the discovery of how Christianity has influenced the aspects and artistic expressions of our western society in a way that one can trace elements of our faith even to the marketplace of popular culture. We seem to have made a connection between the secular and the sacred. The secular is not necessarily a

profane space; even in the realm of the secular the influence of Christianity permeates. These shadows of faith could be surfaced to ignite a dialogue between our faith and the challenges of the postmodern society.

Sometimes their faces glowed with awe and surprise as they ignited a profound conversation. Now the Bible stories and characters took new faces and meaning; somehow the old stories about God and humanity had landed at the seat of the movie theater, their homes, colleges, work and even their recreational activities. New lenses and tools appeared, and now they seem to be looking through them to read and interpret the Bible text and life events. A new meaning was bursting out of the old children's stories of Moses, Esther and Daniel. "Prior to these studies I was tired of listening to the same stories, but the way you have connected the stories with history and with the way those characters still relate to us and the experiences and challenges that we go through has made me want to learn more."

Even the cross seemed to have taken a new meaning for the group, the congregation, the LAC and me. By the end of phase three of the project, the group met to organize the worship service. Looking for hymns, monologues and different artistic expressions to convey the message as part of the liturgy, one of the participants suggested they could sing a contemporary hymn composed by Jacobo Ramos, called "Si acaso se me olvida" (If ever I forget). One of the verses of the hymn reads, "Take me to the cross, the place where we first met". The group agreed with enthusiasm to include the song as a preamble to the altar call.

Si acaso se me olvida, Si acaso se me escapa
Si acaso se me nubla la pasión en mi mirada

Coro
Llévame al madero, al rincón de nuestro encuentro
Llévame al lugar donde empezó nuestra amistad
Llévame a la cruz

Si acaso se me olvida, Si acaso se me escapa
Si acaso se me nubla la pasión en mi mirada

Coro

Solo ahí hay restauración, solo en ti renuevo mi amor
Solo ahí hay restauración, solo en ti renuevo mi amor
Llévame a la cruz, llévame a la cruz, amado mío
Acércame, yo te necesito, llévame a la cruz

Si acaso se me olvida, si acaso se me escapa

Llévame a tu corazón, amado mío
Te necesito
Llévame a la cruz, llévame a la cruz³

I thought about bringing a new element to the group, an element that could serve as a symbol. I was looking for an image with which we could identify, something to hold close to our hearts as a reminder of our experience. A member of the LAC handcrafted thirty small wooden cross pendants to give to every participant as part of a brief ceremony prior to the Sunday service. When the group



Illustration 16: Cross Pendant

arrived on Sunday we gathered at the altar to pray and I gave a pendant to each one. I gave a brief message connecting the experience and the song they would sing with the cross they were about to receive:

We have shared our stories and we have connected our own narratives with the stories of the bible. Today we come together to give witness to the congregation and share with them what God has done with everyone of us. As a symbol and as a reminder of

³ Brief translation: If I ever forget, If my eyes lose their passion, take me to the cross, the place where we first met. Take me to the place where our friendship began. Take me to the cross. Only at the cross there is restoration, Bring me closer. I need you.

the one story, the story of love that brought us together, the story of the cross that connects our lives to God, I want to give you this small cross pendant. I don't expect you to wear it. What I do expect is that just like the hymn tells, if after time passes and years go by you forget... always come back to the cross, the place where you met God, the place where we all have met.

Time will pass, I will not be here, and you may not be here either; but maybe one day, when moving from one house to another, or from a college dorm after graduation, or from your parent's house to your own, you will open a drawer and find this little wood pendant, with the shape of a cross; if that day comes along, look at it and never forget, come back to the place where all started, come back to the cross.

Certainly, what I did not expect was that people in the congregation who saw and heard what happened would also want a cross. Also, to my surprise, after six months, from time to time, a photo on *Facebook* catches my attention because one of the participants is wearing the wooden cross-shaped pendant. The cross binds them, pulls them together from east or west, from north or south. The cross of our salvation has also taken a meaning for them as a group; it represents friendship, the blood that makes us brothers and sisters, the love we share, and the reminder of shared experiences. It is the cross that binds us together! The cross has taken on new meaning: no longer limited to the individual story of salvation, it now talks about relationships and collective experiences.

After the experience images, music and other elements from popular culture such as movies or fictional characters have revealed a liminal space where the secular meets the sacred. As a result we have found new meaning in everyday activities outside the ecclesiastic context. After this experience the Bible's message has new meaning as well. The Bible is no longer a book to accept without questions, no longer a far-away back story without contemporary relevance, no longer a law book to obey unquestionably. The youth have realized that they are allowed to ask and to doubt and to look for answers by themselves. God has become accessible through the Bible, but even more through a personal experience.

A new project was proposed by few of the participants as a result of the project experiences; four new experiences in the form of debates: creationism vs big bang theory, human suffering, free will and sovereignty of God. The first two experiences have already taken place. The group got together to study and organize the debates, but this time the young adults did most of the work, research, exegesis and presentation. In this process the participants asked the senior pastor and me for advice but our input did not shape the experience. They remained faithful to their goal: to provide an open space for discussion and questioning where their doubts and opinions could be expressed through a learning and faith transforming experience.

According to Green's spiral method for practical theology we have arrived at the new situation.⁴ The preferred future of a vital and connected intercultural youth ministry is now an emergent reality just birthed out of a newfound common language.

A Tattoo: an indelible mark for the Candidate and the LAC

Like a tattoo, the faces and voices of the group are stained in our hearts. The LAC calls the experience a "Postmodern Revival," a "life-changing project to all: the local Church, Youth Group members and the candidate."⁵ When reflecting upon the phrase a "Postmodern Revival," images come to my mind of the church spiritual awakenings of other decades: Pentecostals, Charismatics, Televangelist and Catacombs⁶ among others. This postmodern revival we have experienced does not conform to the characteristics of many of these previous movements that included isolation from "the world," charismatic emotional

⁴ Green, 17-27.

⁵ This statement was made by one member of the LAC during an informal conversation at the evaluation period.

⁶ A youth revival movement in Puerto Rico during the 70's. (<http://catacumbas.org/>).

manifestations, emphasis on economic prosperity or a fundamentalist approach to scriptures as a reaction to modernity. The youth at *ICDCE* have experienced a revival motivated by a non-linear education with a solid biblical and theological foundation. We achieved this experience through a participative experience and the integration of elements from popular culture and the secular realm. Through this experience, they have converged in a liminal space to find God in the challenges, doubts, plurality and open questions that characterize the twenty-first century.

As I reflect back to when I requested admission to Drew Theological School's Doctor of Ministry program in 2012, I remember my answer to one of the questions for the admission's essay. I acknowledged, as one of my main weaknesses or areas to strengthen the fact that despite being in constant contact with adolescents and young adults as an undergraduate professor, I needed to improve my ministry skills, capabilities and resources to accompany them and to make the message pertinent and engaging to their generation. I hope that through the merging between my teaching experience and with the Doctor of Ministry program I would be able to further my knowledge and strengthen this area.

When I started to work at the *ICDCE* I was hired as an assistant to the pastor. Christian Education would be one of my areas of focus but not the youth ministry. Nonetheless, what I did not expect was that the members of the youth ministry would ask the senior pastor and the church board to have me as their pastor. Today, when I reflect upon the past three years and evaluate the project I can describe the impact it has on me as one of "integration." Just as the group of young adults struggled to build an identity that could merge their religious and social personas, I struggled to merge my professional experience with my ministry. The realms of the secular and the sacred seemed like opposing forces in a

fight for one of them to prevail. Although at a rational level I knew my professional experience could impact my ministry in a relevant way for this generation, I lacked the experience and probably the confidence to engage in such a project.

When the group invited me to be their youth pastor they opened a door. They welcomed my contribution to their spiritual growth even though I had no previous experience with youth ministry. So, I set out to undertake the project; a project that changed my life and ministry. Today, as the young adults have been able to reconcile secular and sacred spaces and build a healthier religious and social identity, I have been able to synthesize, as a concrete and satisfying ministerial experience, the knowledge and theory I had gained from my professional career. A new area of ministry has emerged for me in the church: to educate and lead projects of church revitalization and intergenerational integration at a denominational and interdenominational level.

But more relevant than finding a place for ministry at church, like the group, I also found answers to the questions “Who am I?” and “Where am I going?” I am an artist and communicator; unavoidably connected to the secular and commercial world of images, whether visual or literary; immersed in a fast changing secular and globalized world that impacts the way we negotiate our faith in our religious institutional experience. But I am also a minister whom, like Moses, can bring her bicultural self to ministry for the benefit of a generation that needs to be taken to the other shore, where the land is green with hope for a revitalized, contextual, intercultural and intergenerational ministry.

CONCLUSION

The project was a transforming experience to all: to me as the candidate, to the members of the LAC, to the congregation and especially to the participants and their families. Today we can say that the objective was met: “bring young adults to *taste* the Gospel, now *according to the language of their culture*, in order to revitalize their faith and transform their minds through this learning experience, in hope of becoming mentors to others”.

The twenty-first century poses enormous challenges to society but particularly to faith communities. Intergenerational and intercultural differences intensified by globalization and technology are forces that should not be overlooked, but faced with optimism. Many people consider postmodernism a negative force sweeping away what has constituted the most intrinsic values of Christianity; but as happened at Easter and later at Pentecost, an earthquake or a strong wind is blowing to bring significant changes to the church. Our metanarratives and religious traditions are being shaken for the Holy Spirit to bring a new revival; a postmodern revival based on experience, participation and connection.

DEFINITIONS

Conservative: The term is used to describe a religious set of beliefs that focuses on absolutes attained by reason in a modern secularized twentieth-century dominated by empirical and scientific data. Conservative also refers to a tendency towards a more literal interpretation of Scriptures but is not to be confused with Fundamentalism, which is a reaction towards Modernism and secularism.

EPIC: experiential, participatory, image driven and connected. EPIC, a term coined by postmodern theologian Leonard Sweet, refers to the postmodern individuals as someone who seeks for an experience with God as opposed to moderns who talk more about God. They live a participatory experience because they interact with the world as much as participants as observers while moderns take their cues from authorities above them; they are an Image driven generation because images generate emotions, as opposed to moderns who were a word based generation. Finally, connected to the postmodern means living their individuality in relation to others as opposed to moderns for whom everything was individual and little was communal.

Globalization: The term was originally related to the economy and originated in the western capitalist societies. Today, globalization is defined in a much broader sense. It is “a multidimensional process that consists of the expansion of different manifestations of human activities through the planet”¹, which not only affects economy, transportation, science, technology, communications, recreation, film, television, beauty and fashion, but also

¹ Juan José, Tamayo-Acosta, ed. *10 Palabras Clave sobre Globalización* (España: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2002), 89.

culture, religion, moral values, ideas and education.² A dominant characteristic of the phenomenon of globalization is the accessibility and immediacy of information.

Liminal Space: According to anthropologist Victor Turner, *liminality* is a space where people arrive through rituals that separate them from usual activity and introduce them to a space where they experience different ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Within this space the participation is more inclusive and open than in ordinary life, resulting in personal change, which may lead to social change.

Modernism: I use the term modern or modernism in reference to “The forces of the surrounding culture (which have affected) how (people) live (their) individual and collective Christian life”³ during the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century. From that time on, individuals have transferred to religion the social codes that shaped community as opposed to the previous eras when religious codes, symbols and beliefs were used to shape society⁴. The modern mind questioned the traditional interpretation of the bible and the authority of the religious institutions and promoted the superiority of reason and science over faith, tradition and experience. Knowledge attained by a deeper understanding of the scriptures became the key to spiritual growth in a modern church whose liturgical structure was based on the sermon and where collective human reason replaced monarchical authority. Absolutes attained by reason and knowledge of scriptures govern the life of the church.

Postmodernism: According to Heath White, postmodernism is an attitude or a way of looking at things and a reaction against the tendency of the modern era to exalt science and

² Tamayo-Acosta, 90-94.

³ Heath White, 114.

⁴ Luis A. Vázquez Pasos. *Modernidad y Religión al Filo de Dos Siglos*. (Convergencia, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, num. 22, agosto 2000), 133. PDF.

reason at the expense of emotions and intuition. “Postmodernism tends toward moral relativism and a rejection of all absolutes, while Christianity has historically insisted upon moral absolutes as part of its ethical teaching and doctrinal absolutes as part of its theology.”⁵ The postmodern individual hears, sees and experiences rather than rationalizes or measures results. To Leonard Sweet postmodernity is an “EPIC culture: Experiential, Participatory, Image-driven, Connected”⁶, and the postmodern individual (Pilgrim) “does not seek new truth, but seeks with new eyes eternal truths”.⁷

Secularism: It can be described as a way of life based on knowledge. For the secular individual an ethic based on reason is enough to achieve the transformation of the self and of society. Humanity can achieve the “highest possible point” by the development of its physical, moral and intellectual nature apart from religion or Theism. It promotes the separation of religion and state under the premise that “no special privileges or advantages shall be conceded to Christianity or any other religion”.⁸

⁵ Heath White, Kindle location 140-188.

⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁸ New Advent, *Secularism*, Catholic Encyclopedia (accessed September 23, 2013) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13676a.htm>.

APPENDIX 1

¿QUIÉN SOY? ¿A DÓNDE VOY?

Nuestra personalidad puede ser un enigma para nosotros como para otros puede estar muy clara. Las características que componen la misma pueden facilitar nuestras relaciones interpersonales así como entorpecerlas, y en la medida que nos conocemos mejor también podemos entender mejor quienes somos y hacia donde vamos. Dios nos ha creado con un conjunto de características que nos hacen únicos y que determinarán nuestra vocación. A través de estas experiencias con diversos personajes bíblicos, sus historias y cómo estas se relacionan con nosotros y nosotras podremos identificar elementos de su personalidad y de la nuestra que sean similares y nos sirvan de indicativo de nuestra vocación, llamado y misión en el Reino.

Emprendamos este viaje juntos ya sea que seamos introvertidos, extrovertidos, racionales o sentimentales, Coléricos como Pablo, Flemáticos como Abraham, Melancólicos como Moisés, o Sanguíneos como Pedro. Cada uno y cada una con nuestras diferencias formamos el hermoso mosaico que compone el cuerpo de Cristo en esta tierra.

¡Descubramos nuestra vocación!

PERSONALIDADES

...según Silverio Pérez

¿CUÁL ES TU TEMPERAMENTO?

Extrovertido y “craneal”: Coléricos

Extrovertido y “de corazón”: Sanguíneos

Introvertido “craneal”: Analíticos

Introvertido “de corazón”: Flemáticos

COLERICOS:

Fuertes y voluntariosos

Mandonos y controladores

Orientados a Resultados

Extrovertidos

Autosuficientes

Duros, abrasivos, iracundos

Supervisores, Persistentes

Optimistas, Sabeotodos

SANGUINEO:

amigables, cálidos

emocionales, explosivos

inquietos, habladores

simpáticos, extrovertidos

amorosos, divertidos

dinámicos, entusiastas

despistados, desenfocados

desorganizados

MELANCOLICO:

Analíticos, Perfeccionistas

Brillantes, Pesimistas

Mártires, Críticos

Taciturnos, Sacrificados

Egocéntricos, Fieles

FLEMATICOS:

Los “easy going”... se bañan en aceite

Serenos y tranquilos

Ingeniosos

Buen sentido del humor

Buenazos, Conservadores

Pacifistas

Evaden responsabilidades... indecisos

Manipuladores... se salen con la suya

Lucen desmostivados... vagos

Aletargados, Tercos

PERSONALIDADES BÍBLICAS

MOISES: Melancólico

•Confiable

•Inteligente

•Firme

•Inseguro

•Pasivo/agresivo

•Depresivo

•Perfeccionista

PEDRO: Sanguíneo

- Impulsivo
- Irreflexivo
- Franco
- Egoista

ABRAHAM: Flemático

- Temeroso
- Pasivo
- Confiable
- Trabajador
- Conservador
- Tranquilo

- Fanfarrón

- Explosivo
- Noble
- Dispuesto

PABLO: Colérico

- Cruel
- Persistente
- Intolerante
- Hostil
- Incansable
- Peleón
- Humilde
- Fiel
- Valiente

DANIEL: INTELIGENTES Y BIEN PARECIDOS

Traducción del corto *The Hunger Games*:

–(P) “No quiero que me cambien?”

–(K) “Cómo te cambiarán?”

–(P) “No lo se, lo que se es que no quiero ser otra pieza en su tablero de juego. Yo solo pienso en cómo podré encontrar una manera de enseñarles que ellos no son mis dueños, que si voy a morir, quiero seguir siendo yo. ¿Eso hace sentido?”

–(K) “Sí, es solo que yo no puedo darme el lujo de pensar así.”

HUNGER GAMES

Todos los años en las ruinas de lo que era una vez América del Norte, la nación de Panem obliga a cada uno de sus doce distritos a enviar a un chico y a una chica, adolescentes, para competir en *The Hunger Games*. En parte es un entretenimiento rebuscado y en parte es una táctica de intimidación por parte del gobierno. Peeta Mellark de 16 años es uno de los personajes principales, rubio, de ojos azules. No es muy alto pero tiene una gran fuerza. Es capaz de levantar objetos muy pesados. “Fuerte y de mediana estatura, con brillantes ojos azules y pelo rubio ceniza que le cae en ondas sobre la frente”.

Peeta es gentil y amable, aunque cuando se ve amenazado, es un gran luchador. Es bueno creando estrategias, algo que le ayuda a sobrevivir aun sin tener ningún tipo de conocimientos en armas. Peeta es autocrítico y no tiene problemas en reírse de sí mismo, es

simpático y suele caerle bien a la gente. Es muy persuasivo, capaz de influir en las multitudes a su manera agradable y de lograr que ellos hagan lo que dice. Gracias a su agradable carácter, hace relaciones fácilmente y se preocupa por lo demás.

NARRATIVA DE DANIEL 1

Luego de capturar la ciudad de Judá, el rey Nabucodonosor se llevó los tesoros del templo de Jerusalén y los metió en el templo de su dios en Babilonia. Una vez allí ordenó traer jóvenes de la realeza y de familias distinguidas israelitas. Estos jóvenes debían ser “bien parecidos, sin ningún defecto físico, cultos e inteligentes, entendidos en todos los campos del saber y aptos para servir en el palacio real... Entre estos jóvenes estaban Daniel, Ananías, Misael y Azarías, de la tribu de Judá (vs 4-6)”. El rey ordenó que se les alimentara con la misma comida y el vino de su corte y que se les educara para ponerlos a su servicio. “Pero Daniel se propuso no contaminarse con la comida y el vino del rey, y pidió al jefe del servicio de palacio que no le obligara a contaminarse con tales alimentos (vs 8)”.

El jefe de palacio, se compadeció de Daniel pero aun así se encontraba temeroso de lo que el Rey pudiera hacer con él si se deterioraba el aspecto de los jóvenes. Daniel habló con él y le pidió que los pusiera a prueba por diez días comiendo solo legumbres y agua. Al cabo de los diez días los jóvenes tenían mejor aspecto que todos los demás. De ahí en adelante el mayordomo continuo alimentándolos de acuerdo a sus costumbres y retiraba la comida de palacio. “A estos cuatro jóvenes, Dios les dio inteligencia y entendimiento para comprender toda clase de libros y toda ciencia. Daniel entendía además el significado de toda clase de visiones y sueños. Al cumplirse el plazo que el rey había señalado para que le fueran presentados los jóvenes, el jefe del servicio de palacio los llevó a su presencia. El rey habló

con ellos y, entre todos los jóvenes, no encontró ni uno solo que pudiera compararse con Daniel, Ananías, Misael y Azarías, quienes, por lo tanto, quedaron al servicio del rey. En todos los asuntos que requerían sabiduría e inteligencia, y sobre los cuales les preguntó el rey, los encontró diez veces más sabios que todos los magos y adivinos que había en su reino (vss 17-20).”

1. ¿Qué relación podemos encontrar entre el personaje Peeta Mellark de the Hunger Games y Daniel en el texto bíblico?
2. ¿Cómo contrasta la personalidad y forma de pensar de Peeta con la de Katniss?
3. ¿Con cual te identificas?
4. ¿Cómo podemos identificarnos con Peeta o Daniel ante los retos que vivimos como juventud en cristiana en el siglo XXI?

TRASFONDO DEL TEXTO [Ivelisse Valentín Vera, D.Min.(C)]

El libro de Daniel en sus primeros capítulos (1-6) nos presenta las narrativas de Daniel y sus amigos. Estas historias nos permiten conocer el personaje principal, un joven sabio judío en la corte de Nabucodonosor rey de Babilonia durante el periodo de cautiverio del pueblo de Israel. Luego de la destrucción del templo de Jerusalén en el año 587 a.C. el rey llevó a Babilonia algunos miembros de familias de sangre real, sacerdotes y nobleza entre los que el relato dice que se encontraban Daniel, Ananías, Misael y Azarías. Aunque estos primeros capítulos nos relatan las historias de estos jóvenes ubicándolos en ese periodo, el contenido del texto y su significado además de los relatos de los capítulos del siete al once revelan que el mismo fue escrito aproximadamente 400

años después durante el periodo de Helenización griega. Este periodo es significativo para el libro de Daniel porque representa la invasión de una cultura y un estilo de vida que eran considerados abominables para los judíos. El helenismo promovía competencias deportivas al desnudo, prostitución, artes y fusión de diferentes creencias y costumbres religiosas provenientes de las diferentes regiones que había conquistado el imperio desde Grecia, Siria, Media, Persia, Babilonia hasta la India. Todo judío debía resistir estas influencias para no contaminarse y mantenerse digno delante de Jehová.

Esto significa que el autor de Daniel cuenta la historia del pasado como nosotros contaríamos la historia de Puerto Rico a nuestros hijos y nietos, desde el conocimiento que tenemos hoy. Cuando hablamos de la conquista española sobre el pueblo indígena taíno lo hacemos con el conocimiento de las consecuencias positivas y negativas de dicho evento histórico, así mismo sucede con el texto bíblico.

ANÁLISIS DEL TEXTO

El texto nos presenta al Rey de Babilonia solicitando para servir en su corte jóvenes judíos que fuesen: **Sabios, Inteligentes, Cultos, Sanos, Elegantes, Serviciales**

Las características más importantes que debían tener estos jóvenes según el texto son, la sabiduría y la inteligencia. Durante la época de la conquista de Alejandro Magno que se conoce como el periodo de Helenismo Griego, durante el cual se cree que se escribió el libro de Daniel, la sabiduría y el conocimiento eran elementos importantes en la formación del individuo. Los griegos entendían que su conocimiento y sabiduría excedía mucho más la de los babilonios. Sin embargo, en Daniel, el autor demuestra que la sabiduría griega o babilónica no está por encima de la sabiduría y el conocimiento judío que proviene

exclusivamente del Dios de Israel.

Hoy día podemos encontrar muchas similitudes con la época de Daniel. Durante el siglo XX la inteligencia o sabiduría predominante era aquella que provenía de la ciencia y la razón. Hoy se ha demostrado que esto no es suficiente. De la misma manera que en la historia de Daniel, el conocimiento proveniente de babilonios o griegos no era suficiente para solucionar los problemas del rey. Se necesitan jóvenes como Daniel que puedan poner sus conocimientos humanos al servicio de Dios para que pueda brillar a través de ellos la sabiduría divina que sobrepasa la humana.

Los jóvenes del siglo XXI han visto el colapso de las grandes revoluciones de la modernidad; la ciencia, la industrialización, la globalización y la tecnología no han podido resolver las grandes interrogantes del ser humano y no han podido proveer estabilidad, prosperidad y justicia a la humanidad.

OPINIÓN PASTORAL [Rvda. Ilka Esteva]

La analogía entre el personaje Peeta Mellark y el Daniel bíblico es muy significativa y alentadora para la juventud cristiana del presente siglo y de los que están por venir. Tanto los personajes de la saga *The Hunger Games* como la humanidad de hoy se encuentran en el centro de un juego brutal, de una lucha en la que aquellos que ostentan el poder someten a las masas humanas mediante la manipulación de sus hambres: las del cuerpo, las del alma y las del espíritu. En medio de estos siempre hambrientos destaca el joven Peeta, tal como destaca Daniel en la corte de Nabucodonozor. ¿Cuál es el secreto de su saciedad? ¿Porqué están fuertes y saludables? Ser hijos del que hace el pan y de poseer la certeza de su constante provisión. Vivir de lo esencial los capacita para no depender de la mesa del Rey de los

Hambrientos, los hace libres, les otorga la capacidad de superar las circunstancias y de resistir.

OPINIÓN JOVEN [Roseleni Ortiz-Ramos]

“Definimos nuestra identidad a base de lo que nos atrae o nos apela como también nos puede definirla de acuerdo a lo que no somos. En el ejemplo de Daniel podemos ver cómo el se define por lo que lo hace distinto del resto de las personas que tenía a su alrededor. Se propuso ser distinto y a llevar a cabo las cosas de acuerdo a lo que creía firmemente y Dios le respaldó. El poner la confianza en Dios y en lo que creemos demuestra –no sólo valentía si no- auto-confianza, lo cual muchas veces carecemos en nuestro diario vivir.

Nuestra identidad como jóvenes cristianos no necesariamente se tiene que ajustar a un molde o unas expectativas pre-definidas, Dios sabe lo que hay en lo más íntimo de nuestros corazones y de Él jamás podremos escondernos. A medida que desarrollamos una relación con Dios (whatever that may mean for you), también esa identidad como joven cristiano se va formando. Si conocemos lo que Dios espera de nosotros, entre otras cosas, sabemos que eso implica atrevernos a ser nosotros mismos sin titubear. Al fin y al cabo, ser nosotros mismos es ser diferente.”

MIND BREAKERS [para pensar]:

1. ¿Qué retos tenemos hoy día ante los cuales mantenernos firmes?
2. ¿Cómo podemos contribuir como Daniel para devolver la esperanza a la sociedad?

3. ¿Qué características definen la personalidad de Daniel?
4. ¿Cómo los elementos de la personalidad de Daniel pudieron ayudarlo a identificar y ejercer su vocación?

ESTER: BELLAS, SABIAS Y PRUDENTES

MALALA:

Nacida en Pakistán, la joven Malala es hija de un maestro de profesión. Es conocida por su activismo a favor de los derechos civiles, especialmente de los derechos de las mujeres en el valle del río Swat, donde el régimen talibán ha prohibido la asistencia a la escuela de las niñas. A la edad de 13 años, Malala alcanzó notoriedad al escribir un blog para la BBC bajo el pseudónimo Gul Makai, explicando su vida bajo el régimen del Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) y sus intentos de recuperar el control del valle, luego de que la ocupación militar les obligara a salir a las zonas rurales. Los talibanes obligaron el cierre de las escuelas privadas y se prohibió la educación de las niñas entre 2003 y 2009.^{1 2}

El 9 de octubre de 2012 en Mingora, fue víctima de un atentado por un miliciano de un grupo terrorista vinculado a los Talibanes, el cual, después de abordar el vehículo que servía como autobús escolar, le disparó en repetidas ocasiones con un fusil impactándole en el cráneo y cuello, por lo cual debió ser intervenida quirúrgicamente. El portavoz del TTP, Ehsanullah Ehsan, afirmó que intentarán matarla de nuevo. Además, otras dos estudiantes resultaron heridas junto a Malala mientras se dirigían a su casa en el autobús escolar. Al día de hoy Malala se encuentra recuperada de las heridas y viviendo en Inglaterra, donde se mantiene activa en favor de los derechos de la niñez y las mujeres. Ha recibido numerosos reconocimientos alrededor del mundo por sus esfuerzos en favor de la paz y la educación.

NARRATIVA DEL LIBRO DE ESTER:

Durante el reinado del rey Asuero quien reinó desde la India hasta Etiopia, el rey invitó a príncipes y poderosos de toda Persia y Media para mostrar sus riquezas. En las fiestas abundaba la comida y el vino pero según la ley “nadie era obligado a beber”, sino “que se hiciese la voluntad de cada uno” (vs 8). En el séptimo día estando ebrio el rey, mandó buscar a la “reina Vasti a la presencia del rey con la corona regia, para mostrar a los pueblos y a los príncipes su belleza; porque era hermosa” (vs 11). Mas la reina no aceptó y el rey enfureció. Temiendo que ante la conducta de la reina las demás mujeres se tornaran en contra de sus maridos el rey y sus asesores decidieron hacer reinar “a otra que sea mejor que ella” (vs 19) de manera que todas las mujeres del reino dieran honra a sus maridos y que estos pudieran afirmar “su autoridad en su casa” (vs 22). Así fue como Ester, una joven huérfana, “de hermosa figura y de buen parecer” (cap 2:7), criada por Mardoqueo, varón judío que servía en la casa del rey, agradó y encontró gracia ante el rey para poder permanecer en palacio. Ester nunca declaró su nacionalidad ni parentesco y consiguió el amor del rey “más que todas las demás vírgenes” (vs 17) haciéndola reina en lugar de Vasti.

Pasado el tiempo el rey engrandeció a Amán, enemigo de los judíos, ante quien todos se “arrodillaban e inclinaban” (cap 3:2) menos Mardoqueo. Llenándose de ira Amán procuró destruir a todos los judíos hablando con el rey y pidiendo su exterminio, a lo que el rey asintió mandando matar “a todos los judíos, jóvenes y ancianos, niños y mujeres, en un mismo día” (vs 3). Al conocer Mardoqueo lo sucedido se vistió de cilicio y ceniza y se sentó frente a la puerta de palacio. Al enterarse la reina Ester de que su tío se encontraba en ayuno se compungió enormemente y envió a preguntarle las razones. Mardoqueo mandó explicar a Ester lo que sucedía y le pidió “que fuese ante el rey a suplicarle y a interceder delante de él

por su pueblo” (cap 4:8). Temiendo morir al entrar a la presencia del rey sin ser llamada, Ester no aceptó la encomienda. Al enterarse Mardoqueo “le envió a su vez este mensaje: «No creas que tú, por estar en el palacio real, vas a ser la única judía que salve la vida. Si ahora callas y no dices nada, la liberación de los judíos vendrá de otra parte, pero tú y la familia de tu padre morirán. ¡A lo mejor tú has llegado a ser reina precisamente para ayudarnos en esta situación!» (vs 13-14).” A lo que la reina contesta: “iré a ver al rey, aunque eso vaya contra la ley. Y si me matan, que me maten” (vs 16b).

Ester halló nuevamente gracia ante lo ojos del rey y le invitó a un banquete junto a su siervo Amán. Amán no podía disfrutar del banquete viendo a Mardoqueo sentado a la puerta del palacio vestido de cilicio. Sin embargo esa misma noche el rey recordó como Mardoqueo le había salvado de la muerte anteriormente y mandó a Amán a honrarlo frente al pueblo con las distinciones de la nobleza. Decepcionado Amán porque pensaba que esos honores serían para él regresó apesadumbrado a su casa cuando fue llamado para ir nuevamente al banquete de la reina. Una vez todos en el banquete, Ester reveló al rey las artimañas de Amán para exterminarla a ella y a su pueblo y este fue colgado de la misma orca que preparó para dar muerte a Mardoqueo públicamente. Una vez muerto Amán solo era necesario pedir al rey que proclamara un edicto para deshacer la orden de dar muerte a los judíos. «Ella se levantó, y de pie ante él dijo: “Pues ¿cómo podré soportar la desgracia que está por caer sobre mi pueblo, y la exterminación de mi propia familia?”» (Cap 8:4-6). El Rey otorgó el favor a Ester y con esto quedaron todos a salvo. De ahí en adelante celebraron la fiesta de Purín por la suerte que habían tenido de librarse de manos de sus enemigos.

1. ¿Que similitudes hay entre la historia y la personalidad de Ester y la de Malala?

2. ¿Dónde está Dios en las historias de Ester y de Malala?

TRASFONDO DEL TEXTO [Ivelisse Valentín Vera, D.Min.(C)]

El libro de Ester es el único libro de la Biblia que no menciona a Dios en toda la narrativa. Por esa y otras razones sufrió mucho para quedarse en el canon bíblico. Es más bien un libro histórico para explicar y justificar la fiesta de Purín. Aunque Purín viene de “pur” que significa “suerte” y está relacionado a una fiesta pagana, dar lugar al libro dentro de la biblia hebrea permite al lector ir más allá de la historia de dicha celebración. El libro reconoce la acción prodigiosa de Dios (aunque este no sea mencionado directamente) para transformar las amenazas de muerte en vida y la dignidad de la mujer como enviada de Dios para la liberación de su pueblo. El libro de Ester así como el de Daniel parece que fue escrito durante el periodo de Helenización griega para los años 150-100 a.C. porque a esa época corresponde la primer mención sobre la fiesta de Purín que se ha encontrado. Aunque el libro habla de la época de dominación Persa y de los padres de Mardoqueo durante el exilio en Babilonia el contexto secularizado y de sincretismo que evade el lenguaje religioso al punto de no mencionar directamente a Dios apunta (como en Daniel) hacia el periodo helénico relatando una historia del pasado. Sin embargo, aunque el sincretismo religioso de la época es evidente, vemos a través de Mardoqueo un pueblo que se resiste a entregar su fe y sus costumbres a la secularización del estado y el gobierno del rey colonizador. Tanto Ester como Daniel han llegado a la corte y alcanzado el favor del rey en medio de un gobierno que ha adoptado la diversidad religiosa de los países conquistados, desde Turquía y Etiopía hasta la India, amenazando así la cultura, costumbres, identidad y fidelidad a Dios del pueblo judío.

ANALISIS DEL TEXTO:

Las mujeres en este libro tienen un papel protagónico y decisivo para la vida de los judíos pero también para el rey. El acto de desobediencia de la reina Vasti como el de las parteras en Éxodo 1:16-21, cambiaron la historia del pueblo de Israel. La aparente desobediencia de la reina así como la de las parteras responde a una ética mayor: el valor y dignidad de la mujer así como su importancia en el plan de Dios para salvar al pueblo oprimido. Las parteras salvarían a Moisés, el libertador del pueblo de Israel, y Vasti demostraría la lucha de la mujer ante el patriarcado y el abuso de poder que aun prevalecen en nuestra sociedad; pero también abriría camino a Ester como nuevo Moisés quien a pesar de estar en la corte real no olvidaría sus raíces y obraría para salvar a su pueblo. Aunque inicialmente Ester se resiste a intervenir por su pueblo ante el rey por temor de su vida, como Moisés ante Faraón, Ester finalmente escoge en favor de la justicia y en contra del prejuicio religioso y racial, y la maldad representada por Amán.

La belleza de Ester podría parecer a simple vista su principal atributo, sin embargo es su sabiduría, valentía, prudencia, sensibilidad y lealtad las que le permiten desarrollar un plan para mantenerse con vida frente al rey y lograr la salvación de su pueblo. Ester, tanto como Vasti no actuaron conforme exigía la ley (cap 4:16), sin embargo fueron obedientes a aquello que representaba un bien mayor, y que determinó la salvación de todo un pueblo. De la misma ellas, hoy vivimos en una sociedad que sobrevalora la belleza física así como la sumisión de la mujer. Con estas características Ester logró entrar a palacio y agradar al rey pero son su inteligencia y fidelidad las que le llevaron a prevalecer ante los planes del enemigo y lograr salvar su vida y la de los suyos en una sociedad secularizada y sincretista

donde su tradición religiosa no era del agrado de todos.

OPINIÓN PASTORAL [Rvda. Ilka Esteva]

Ester y Malala son dos figuras femeninas que destacan en medio de un entorno cultural que las limita. Ester se enfrenta al odio que lleva al etnocidio (la muerte por prejuicios raciales); Malala, al odio que alimenta al feminicidio (muerte por razón de género). Ester usa su ingenio para entrar a la corte y Dios la usa para interceder por su pueblo. Malala se adentra en la educación y promociona la de todas las demás niñas de su pueblo y del mundo. Utiliza su inteligencia para que las cortes legislen a favor de su género. Ambas luchan por la dignidad y la vida de quienes representan; ambas arriesgan sus vidas en pos de la justicia y la equidad. Ester sale victoriosa. El rey revierte el decreto. Su enemigo perece en el mismo patíbulo que Amán preparó para su tío, cuya muerte iniciaría el exterminio en el que ella perecería también. Malala queda gravemente herida pero sobrevive y sigue en pie de lucha. Seguiría gritando aún si quedara sin voz. No la vencieron ni las balas ni el miedo. Y nosotros y nosotras, hermanos y hermanas queridas... ¿qué? ¿gritaremos? ¿nos arriesgaremos?

OPINIÓN JOVEN [Rocío Cardona]

Muchos cuando hablamos del personaje de Ester tenemos en nuestra cabeza un concurso al estilo Miss Universo y perdemos de perspectiva la historia y la enseñanza bíblica más allá. En una cultura donde se sobre valúa la belleza, podemos también caer en el error de devaluarla, de hacer sentir a las personas que nacieron con esa bendición como menos, en ocasiones tildándolos de brutos(as), insensibles o incluso superficiales. Podemos ser crueles

y perversos porque en el fondo, tal vez, deseamos poseer esos atributos. Las historias de Ester y de Malala (que todavía se continúa escribiendo) nos enseñan y nos llaman a reflexionar de cómo podemos utilizar nuestras circunstancias de vida, incluyendo nuestros atributos físicos, intelectuales, posición social, nuestra cultura, nuestras batallas de vida, entre otros para bendecir no sólo nuestra casa, sino nuestra nación y, ¿por qué no?, sanar la tierra.

Mientras releía el libro de Ester se quedó grabado en mi mente el versículo 6 del capítulo 8, “Porque ¿cómo podré yo ver el mal que alcanzará a mi pueblo? ¿cómo podré ver yo la destrucción de mi nación?”, esta fue la respuesta de Ester a su esposo. En medio de la crisis que vive nuestro país, la posición fácil es esperar que otro resuelva. Sin embargo, en las palabras de Mardoqueo a Ester, está lo que nos estremece “No creas que tu vida está a salvo en la casa del rey, más que la de cualquier otro judío.” Nuestra vida no está a salvo más que la de las niñas nigerianas secuestradas, más que los cientos de niños, hombres y mujeres en el mundo que son víctimas de explotación sexual y laboral, no estamos exentos del racismo, de la pobreza, el hambre, el crimen, las drogas, ni la violencia. Nuestras características físicas, intelectuales, morales, religiosas, no nos liberan de la maldad. El reto es pues, no luchar con lo que somos, sino como lo utilizamos para bendecir nuestra tierra.

MIND BREAKERS [para pensar]:

1. ¿Cómo vemos el rol de la mujer y el hombre en la iglesia hoy a la luz de este texto, y cómo compara con la época de Ester?
2. ¿Que semejanzas podemos identificar entre la época de Ester y de Daniel y el Puerto Rico del siglo XXI?

3. ¿Qué características definen la personalidad de Ester? ¿Cómo estas características definen su llamado?

MOISÉS: GAGO, INSEGURO, JUEZ Y PASTOR

“Con el correr del tiempo, el rey de Egipto murió. Los israelitas, sin embargo, seguían quejándose y lamentando su esclavitud. Entonces Dios escuchó sus lamentos y atendió sus quejas, acordándose de la alianza que había hecho con Abraham, Isaac y Jacob. Los vio Dios, y se dio cuenta de su condición.” Ex. 2:23-25

MATRIX TRILOGY

1. ¿Qué relación podemos encontrar, si alguna, entre la saga de Matrix y el texto citado del libro del Éxodo?
2. ¿Cómo podemos relacionar la situación del pueblo en Matrix con nuestra realidad actual?

NARRATIVA DEL LIBRO DEL ÉXODO, Capítulos 1-8 (Historia de Moisés)

El rey de Egipto, temiendo la Fortaleza de los hebreos mandó matar todos sus hijos varones al momento de su nacimiento. “17 Pero las parteras temieron a Dios, y no hicieron como les mandó el rey de Egipto, sino que preservaron la vida a los niños. Y Dios hizo bien a las parteras; y el pueblo se multiplicó y se fortaleció en gran manera.” (Ex 1: 17; 20-21) Un varón de la tribu de Leví fue tirado al río en un arca para tratar de salvar su vida. Cuando la hija de Faraón lo vio lo rescató y mandó a cuidar con una nodriza hebrea, siendo esta la madre del niño. Al crecer el niño, la nodriza lo entregó a la hija de faraón quien le dio por nombre Moisés, “porque de las aguas lo saqué” (2:10).

Habiéndose criado en la corte del Faraón con todos los privilegios de la realeza, Moisés veía las injusticias contra sus hermanos hebreos y no pudo resistir su deseo de

justicia, matando así a un soldado egipcio. Huyó de Egipto ante las amenazas de muerte de Faraón y estuvo en el desierto por 40 años donde presencié la injusticia de los pastores hacia las mujeres que se acercaban a sacar agua de los pozos. Nuevamente Moisés salió en defensa de quienes estaban en necesidad. Así conoció al sacerdote de Madián y se casó con una de sus hijas, Sefóra.

Después de morir el Faraón, “los hijos de Israel gemían a causa de la servidumbre, y clamaron”, “Y oyó Dios el gemido de ellos” (2:23-25). Moisés pastoreaba las ovejas de su suegro Jetro cuando vio un arbusto ardiendo que no se consumía y escuchó una voz decirle: “¡Moisés, Moisés! Y él respondió: Heme aquí”. “El clamor, pues, de los hijos de Israel ha venido delante de mí, y también he visto la opresión con que los egipcios los oprimen. Ven, por tanto, ahora, y te enviaré a Faraón, para que saques de Egipto a mi pueblo, los hijos de Israel. Entonces Moisés respondió a Dios: ¿Quién soy yo para que vaya a Faraón, y saque de Egipto a los hijos de Israel? Y él respondió: Ve, porque yo estaré contigo...”. Y dijo: Así dirás a los hijos de Israel: YO SOY me envió a vosotros” (3:9-14). “Entonces Moisés respondió diciendo: He aquí que ellos no me creerán, ni oirán mi voz; porque dirán: No te ha aparecido Jehová” (4:1). A lo que Jehová le mostró señales sobrenaturales para que el Faraón y el pueblo creyeran. ”Y Moisés respondió delante de Jehová: He aquí, yo soy torpe de labios; ¿cómo, pues, me ha de oír Faraón?” (6:30).

Respondió Jehová a Moisés: “Ahora pues, ve, y yo estaré con tu boca, y te enseñaré lo que hayas de hablar” Aun así Moisés dudó y “entonces Jehová se enojó contra Moisés” y lo envió a su hermano Aarón diciendo “Tú hablarás a él, y pondrás en su boca las palabras, y yo estaré con tu boca y con la suya, y os enseñaré lo que hayáis de hacer. Y él hablará por ti al pueblo; él te será a ti en lugar de boca, y tú serás para él en lugar de Dios. Y tomarás en tu

mano esta vara, con la cual harás las señales” (4:4-17). Fueron Moisés y Aarón a Egipto, hablaron al pueblo he hicieron las señales, el pueblo creyó que Jehová había escuchado su aflicción y postrándose adoraron.

Después de haber liberado al pueblo de Israel de la esclavitud egipcia, Jetro, sacerdote de Madián, suegro de Moisés vino a visitarle. Viendo a este atareado con el pueblo desde la mañana hasta la tarde le preguntó: “¿Qué es esto que haces tú con el pueblo?” (18:14). A lo que Moisés contestó: “Porque el pueblo viene a mí para consultar a Dios” (18:15). “Entonces el suegro de Moisés le dijo: No está bien lo que haces. Desfallecerás del todo, tú, y también este pueblo que está contigo... Oye ahora mi voz; yo te aconsejaré, y Dios estará contigo. Está tú por el pueblo delante de Dios, y somete tú los asuntos a Dios. Y enseña a ellos las ordenanzas y las leyes, y muéstrales el camino por donde deben andar, y lo que han de hacer. Además escoge tú de entre todo el pueblo varones de virtud, temerosos de Dios, varones de verdad, que aborrezcan la avaricia; y ponlos sobre el pueblo por jefes de millares, de centenas, de cincuenta y de diez... Así aliviarás la carga de sobre ti, y la llevarán ellos contigo. Si esto hicieres, y Dios te lo mandare, tú podrás sostenerte, y también todo este pueblo irá en paz a su lugar. Y oyó Moisés la voz de su suegro, e hizo todo lo que dijo” (8:17-24).

1. ¿Qué relación tienen Mandela y Neo con la historia de Moises?
2. ¿Qué problemas enfrenta nuestro país que necesitan de hombres y mujeres como Neo, Moisés y Mandela?
3. ¿Puede Dios usarte para ayudar ?

TRASFONDO DEL TEXTO [Ivelisse Valentín Vera, D.Min.(C)]

El libro del Éxodo enfatiza la intervención de Dios a favor del pueblo oprimido de Israel en manos del Faraón egipcio. Jehová, como protagonista de esta liberación la lleva a cabo a través de la mano y disposición de Moisés, hebreo criado en la corte de Faraón y exilado al desierto por asesinar un soldado egipcio. En este libro Dios se presenta al ser humano como uno que está identificado y en favor del débil y no de los reyes y poderosos. La tradición antigua otorgaba a reyes, faraones y emperadores relación intrínseca con la deidad de manera que los pueblos debían ser sumisos a ellos y adorarlos como dioses. El Dios de Israel da un giro total a esa costumbre, el Dios verdadero es el Dios de los pobres y oprimidos; ha venido a liberarlos, escogiendo un hombre común para guiarlos a esa salvación. Es así como Moisés se convierte en coprotagonista de esta gesta divina.

Aunque el evento del éxodo de acuerdo al texto bíblico puede ubicarse para el año 1200 a.C. durante la dinastía de Ramsés II, el texto da señales de haber sido escrito después del exilio de Israel a Babilonia durante el reinado de Ciro de Persia (entre 539 y 333 a.C.). Con los relatos de su historia de liberación y la fijación de estos en textos que pudieran ser leídos y releídos en las fiestas y asambleas, el pueblo que una vez más se encontraba oprimido podía aferrarse a esta historia de liberación para llenarse de esperanza.

El libro del Éxodo, al igual que el Génesis, contiene repeticiones de los mismo relatos en otros estilos y otros énfasis. Esto demuestra que el mismo no fue escrito por una sola mano sino que es una colección de relatos que conducen a un fin común, contar la revelación de Dios al ser humano en eventos de salvación y liberación que siempre privilegian aquellos que sufren. Ejemplo de esta diversidad de relatos que conocemos como voces Yavistas, Eloistas y Sacerdotales entre otras, encontramos las respuestas de Moisés al llamado de Dios

que se repiten en el capítulo 4 y el capítulo 6 del Éxodo. Esto nos permite acercarnos al texto reconociendo que el mismo no fue escrito de la mano de Moisés sino que el mismo es una colección de los relatos orales de los hechos de Dios a través de Moisés que testifican Su revelación a la humanidad. Esa revelación nos permite conocer los deseos de Dios, sus enseñanzas y su intervención en nuestra historia para salvarnos.

ANÁLISIS DEL TEXTO

Esta narrativa nos presenta en la vida de Moisés los momentos de encuentro con Dios que definen su personalidad, llamado y vocación. Como sucede en el siglo XXI donde la globalización nos permite crecer y desarrollarnos con la influencia de diversas culturas, idiomas y estilos de vida, así Moisés fue educado en un ambiente bicultural. Hijo de hebreos, criado en su temprana niñez por su propia madre pero educado desde su adolescencia como hijo de la corte egipcia. De esa misma forma la personalidad del joven y la joven puertorriqueña se desarrolla en medio de dos influencias culturales, la tradición hispana y la Estadounidense. La tradición religiosa de ambas culturas también refleja grandes diferencias. La herencia hispana privilegia el catolicismo y las religiones populares africanas, y la herencia norteamericana el protestantismo. De esta manera la vida de Moisés nos presenta un retrato muy parecido de nuestra realidad cultural y religiosa al momento de nuestro encuentro con Dios.

Al momento de su llamado, Moisés se encuentra en medio de un conflicto que reta su identidad y sus valores. Su vocación innata por la justicia en defensa de los débiles le lleva a tomar acciones en contra de la corte de Faraón donde se crió, pero en lugar de ganar la confianza de su propia gente ellos le temen. Ante el momento de encuentro con Dios,

Moisés, así como nosotros, se encontró frente a grandes encrucijadas que le hicieron dudar y preguntarse ¿quién soy? y ¿adónde voy? Moisés no fue premiado por Dios por haber asesinado un egipcio, sin embargo su vocación hacia la justicia fue vista por Dios como una característica necesaria para la misión. Nuestra personalidad desconectada de la voluntad de Dios puede llevarnos a vagar por los desierto de la duda, la culpa, el desconocimiento y el pecado.

Moisés, como nosotros, responde al llamado con resistencia e incertidumbre. ¿Quién soy y adónde voy? vuelven a tornarse en preguntas medulares para responder al llamado: no tengo autoridad, no me creerán, no hablo bien,¹ envía a otro. Sin embargo Moisés, así como nosotros, no podía ver el potencial escondido detrás de su personalidad. Entre otras cosas Dios veía en Moisés un hombre con una educación bicultural, podía hablar a Faraón pero también podía comunicarse con el pueblo hebreo. Había ejercido el oficio de pastor en el desierto así que conocía los caminos difíciles y sabía como conducir su rebaño y su familia a través de ellos, así mismo podría conducir al pueblo de Dios a la libertad.

En manos de Dios las características de la personalidad de Moisés florecieron en diversos oficios. De ser temeroso, inseguro, tartamudo o poco fluido en el idioma de su gente y fugitivo por asesinar a un egipcio, Moisés se convirtió en manos de Dios en:

- Negociador ante las autoridades (ante Faraón)
- Hacedor de milagros
- Experto en logística para transportar
- Mediador de pacto entre Dios y el pueblo

¹ Lengua pesada no significa necesariamente que Moisés sea tartamudo. El adjetivo hebreo para “pesada”(kaved) hebreo con el cual se describe, solo aparece en el texto cuando hace referencia al corazón del Faraón. Por lo tanto podría referirse a que Moisés hablaba con un fuerte acento egipcio como resultado de su crianza en la corte del Faraón. Desventaja ante los hebreos pero ventaja ante la corte egipcia.

- Dador de la ley (abogado, juez, legislador)
- Comandante militar
- Profeta
- Pastor de ovejas y pastor de “hombres” (y mujeres)
- Pastor de pastores (nombraba sacerdotes y jueces)

Moisés comprendió que el llamado de Dios no persigue un fin egocéntrico o individualista, sino que, procura el beneficio de todos. El propósito es que la persona llamada se convierta en un instrumento para adelantar la causa de Dios en beneficio de los demás, y no de uno solo. El hombre y la mujer de la modernidad, con el advenimiento de la industrialización, la ciencia y el capitalismo, se sumergió en un estilo de vida individualizado que no existía en la antigüedad.

Dios nos llama desde nuestra realidad, nuestras virtudes y defectos a ponernos en sus manos para que nuestra vocación, tanto académica como ministerial se convierta en una vocación de servicio para el bienestar de otros. Como Moisés, podemos descubrir nuestras capacidades a los ojos de Dios y convertirnos en abogados/as, jueces, administradores, maestros/as, ingenieros, médicos o pastores, aun a pesar de nuestras dudas y temores.

OPINIÓN PASTORAL [Rvda. Ilka Esteva]

El trío Neo-Mandela-Moisés- puede ser emblemático de todos los procesos de liberación. Cercados entre los visibles e invisibles barrotes de la esclavitud, van tomando gradual conciencia de la indignidad en la que viven sometidos. Les sobreviene una crisis de identidad. Descubren quiénes en verdad son, cuales son sus más íntimos anhelos y cómo

harán para alcanzarlos. Se esclarecen sus mentes; se les ensancha el corazón y -en un magnánimo acto de solidaridad- se salen de sus causas para refrescar a aquellos que también sufren la sequía. ¡Ya nada puede detenerlos! Han aceptado el llamando; han reconocido su elección; les sigue el pueblo. Les espera la Patria, la Tierra Prometida y el reto de no transportar en las alas el germen destructivo de la deshumanización.

OPINIÓN JOVEN

Dios nos llama en los tiempos más extraños. Cuando Dios nos llama, usualmente no vemos la razón, no vemos las herramientas, y hasta inclusive, no le vemos el sentido. Es en este proceso en el cual nos vemos forzados a mirar hacia dentro. A mirarnos y preguntar: ¿qué está viendo Dios que yo no veo? Y más aún, ¿cómo Dios me ve? Neo, Mandela, Moisés y el mismo Jesús tuvieron que pasar por el momento de detenerse y repensar el rumbo de sus vidas. Así mismo nos pasa cuando recibimos el llamado de Dios. Gracias a estos espacios vamos descubriéndonos de acuerdo a lo que Dios ve y lo que ha depositado en nosotros y nosotras.

Cuando recibimos este llamado la reacción es siempre tener miedo y/o poner excusas. En todas las ocasiones que Dios llama, siempre nos asegura que Él estará con nosotros. El saber esto no necesariamente nos quita el miedo, pero sí nos da valentía para enfrentarlos. Entre la seguridad que nos puede brindar el ser respaldado por Dios y descubrir quienes somos según Él, tenemos nuevas herramientas y un nuevo sentido.

MIND BREAKERS [para pensar]:

1. ¿Qué características definen la personalidad de Moisés?
2. ¿Qué características definen tu personalidad? ¿Cuál crees que es tu vocación?
3. ¿Cómo los elementos de la personalidad de Moisés pudieron ayudarlo a identificar y ejercer su vocación?

MARÍA: ¿SUMISA o REBELDE, TÍMIDA o VALIENTE?

¿Cómo los personajes de esta historia de la vida real asumen roles parecidos a los de María y José en la niñez de Jesús ?

¿Puedes ver algunas características de María madre de Jesús en la protagonista de la película?



Illustration 17: Annunciation by He Qi

“Annunciation” por el pintor He Qi. He Qi, de nacionalidad china tuvo una experiencia de conversión al cristianismo al mirar una pintura de la María y el niño Jesús del Pintor español Rafael. Su niñez había sido traumática bajo el régimen del General Mao. Su madre había muerto como consecuencia de una condición mental ocasionada por el maltrato del

régimen. Al observar la pintura, la figura materna, el amor y la paz transmitida por la relación de Jesús y su madre le impulsaron a buscar en el cristianismo propósito, misión y vocación para su vida.

1. ¿Qué te llama la atención de esta pintura de la Anunciación?
2. ¿Cómo ésta anuncia la llegada de Dios a nuestra vida?

NARRATIVA DE MARÍA MADRE DE JESÚS (basada en Lucas 1-2)

Al sexto mes del embarazo milagroso de la anciana estéril Elizabeth, Dios envió al ángel Gabriel a Nazaret de Galilea, “a una virgen prometida a un hombre llamado José, de la familia de David; la virgen se llamaba María”. Este al verla le dijo: “¡Alégrate, llena de gracia! El Señor está contigo. María se turbó con estas palabras, y se preguntaba qué significaría aquel saludo. El ángel le dijo: “María, no tengas miedo, pues tú gozas del favor de Dios. Ahora vas a quedar encinta: tendrás un hijo, y le pondrás por nombre Jesús.” (Lc 1:26-31)

María, sorprendida le pregunta cómo será esto posible si no ha estado con ningún hombre, ante lo cual el ángel le contesta: “El Espíritu Santo vendrá sobre ti, y el poder del Altísimo te cubrirá con su sombra; por eso el santo Niño que nacerá será llamado Hijo de Dios. Y he aquí, tu parienta Elisabeth en su vejez también ha concebido un hijo; y este es el sexto mes para ella, la que llamaban estéril. Pues nada es imposible para Dios.” A lo que María contesta: “Yo soy la esclava del Señor: que se cumpla en mí tu palabra.” (Lc 1:35-37)

Ante la noticia, María se dirigió a un pueblo cercano a visitar a su pariente. Al verla, Elizabeth le dijo: “¿Quién soy yo para que me visite la madre de mi Señor? ¡Dichosa tú que creíste! Porque se cumplirá lo que el Señor te anunció.” Entonces María le dijo: “Engrandece mi alma al Señor; y mi espíritu se regocija en Dios mi Salvador. Porque ha puesto sus ojos en la pequeñez de su esclava, por eso desde ahora todas las generaciones me llamarán bienaventurada, porque ha hecho en mi favor cosas grandes el Poderoso, Santo es Su nombre y su misericordia alcanza de generación a generación a los que le temen. Hizo proezas con su brazo; esparció a los soberbios en el pensamiento de sus corazones. Quitó de los tronos a los poderosos, y exaltó a los humildes. A los hambrientos colmó de bienes, y a los ricos envió

vacíos. Socorrió a Israel su siervo, acordándose de la misericordia de la cual habló a nuestros padres, para con Abraham y su descendencia para siempre.” (Lc 1:43-55)

Pasaron los meses y María dio a luz a Jesús como profetizado por el ángel. Aun cuando le habían dicho que “una espada atravesaría su corazón” (Lc 2:35), María atesoraba en su corazón (Lc 2:19) todo lo que sucedía en la vida de su hijo. Los años pasaron y María continuaba firme y cercana; viajo de Galilea a Belén con su familia donde dio a luz en total escasez; huyeron a Egipto para proteger la vida de su hijo pasando por desiertos geográficos y los desiertos de necesidad, de sed y de incertidumbre. Ya en la adultez de Jesús, María le acompaña en su ministerio, cree en él y le pide su primer milagro conocido, la conversión del agua en vino en una fiesta de bodas en Caná de Galilea (Jn 2:1-12). Durante el camino de Jesús María le acompaña. El día de su muerte, al pie de la cruz estaba María (Juan 19.26-27), y así mismo perseveraba en oración junto a sus parientes y los discípulos de Jesús esperando su regreso en la persona del Espíritu Santo (Hc 1:14) el día de pentecostés.

TRASFONDO DEL TEXTO [Ivelisse Valentín Vera, D.Min.(C)]

El evangelio de Lucas es parte de dos tomos de relatos investigativos sobre la vida y obra de Jesús realizado probablemente por encargo. El evangelista escribe a una comunidad cristiana-helenista entre los años 80-85 d.C. Conocedor del hebreo y sus costumbres pero su dominio es sobre el griego, y la educación helénica. Es por eso que el detalle de la narrativa es tan importante, validar el cumplimiento de la promesa adaptando la historia del lenguaje y las costumbres judías a un estilo y lenguaje que los gentiles convertidos pudieran entender.

Es así como llegamos a las narrativas del anuncio y nacimiento de Jesús y la importancia de las figuras femeninas en dicho relato. No es de sorprender el énfasis en la

figura femenina porque de la misma manera que el evangelista lo hace con María así mismo nos presenta otras figuras significativas para la historia salvífica desde hasta llegar a la tumba luego de su resurrección. Son las mujeres que aceptan valientemente la misión, encarnan la profecía e inician con sus historias la proclamación de la buena nueva. El evangelista enfatiza el rol de la mujer en la gestión salvífica de Jesús aun a pesar de que la sociedad de la época designaba a las mujeres como ciudadanas de segunda, sin voz ni autoridad, propiedad de sus maridos o de sus hermanos o hijos varones en caso de ser solteras o viudas.

Sin embargo Dios se revela a María como lo ha hecho a través de los siglos a otros enviados y profetas. En la anunciación del Ángel podemos observar la estructura bíblica que valida los llamados divinos, así como lo hemos visto antes en Moisés:

Aparición del mensajero

Turbación de la persona

Entrega del mensaje

Argumentos de la persona visitada

Confirmación del mensaje por un signo

El anuncio del ángel se da en medio de la cotidianidad, María una joven pobre, de unos 14 años, sin esposo ni hijos que la validen en sociedad nos revela la línea de pensamiento que reinará a través de todo el evangelio: Dios cambia paradójicamente la historia, de ahora en adelante su intervención en la humanidad será a través de los pobres, de los que no tienen voz, en las circunstancias más comunes de la sociedad; los pobres serán exaltados. Serán las mujeres, los niños, los enfermos, los pobres, pastores y pescadores quienes serán la voz, manos y pies de la buena noticia de salvación en un mundo donde la

jerarquía religiosa (sacerdotes/templo), política (romanos) e intelectual (helenismo) reinan de manera opresora.

Aunque muchas personas a través de los siglos han dudado y cuestionado la veracidad de la historia de la encarnación, sobre todo por solo haber sido contada en uno de los evangelios, lo importante no es si estos pueden ser probados o no, sino el significado de los mismos. Como ha pasado a través de la historia con otros relatos de llamado y milagros, entre otros la aparición de Dios a Moisés en la Zarza, es en el resultado como obra salvífica que se demuestra la veracidad de los mismos. Moisés llevó al pueblo a la libertad y María dio a luz al retentor de Israel cuya historia, hechos y milagro trascenderían “todas las generaciones”.

En el relato encontramos el dialogo entre María e Isabel madre de Juan el Bautista. Este dialogo se convierte en un cántico que se conoce como el Magnificat. Dicho poema es una formula común en el judaísmo. El primero que encontramos es el cántico de Miriam hermana de Moisés en Éxodo 15, también celebrando la intervención de Dios para salvar a su pueblo. El segundo es el cántico de Ana en 1ra de Samuel 2, quien como María, se regocija en el Dios que miró su pequeñez y su deshonra y la exaltó con la llegada de un hijo dentro de circunstancias milagrosas para el ser humano.

Estos cánticos, así como los salmos, no son cuentos o ficción, ni simples composiciones poéticas. Seguramente como Miriam o Ana, María no había respondido a Isabel de esa forma poética. Sin embargo el escritor del evangelio o la tradición oral habían compuesto este cántico como recursos litúrgicos para relatar los hechos de Dios. Des esta forma podían ser aprendidos, contados, cantados y utilizados en las fiestas y asambleas de creyentes para exaltar y adorar a Dios contando lo que ha hecho por su pueblo.

ANALISIS DEL TEXTO

Nos hemos acostumbrado a escuchar una descripción de María sumisa y tímida que se nombra a sí misma sierva del Señor, entregada a hacer su voluntad. Aun cuando esto es totalmente cierto no puede desligarse del significado social, político y religioso del cántico del Magnificat y sus repercusiones para nuestra vida en el Siglo XXI. La María que se turbó al recibir la visitación del ángel, no se resiste sino que presenta sus argumentos racionalmente ante la imposibilidad humana de quedar embarazada sin conocer marido. El enviado le relata la historia de milagros de su pariente Elizabeth para dejarle conocer las proezas de Dios de manera que ella pueda creer en lo que Dios hará en ella por lo que ya ha hecho. De esa misma manera hoy debemos ser increpados/as por el texto para creer a Dios por lo que conocemos que ya ha hecho.

María es llamada por el ángel “llena de gracias”, y se reconoce a sí misma como “Bienaventurada”, término que se introduce en el evangelio por primera vez y que proviene del griego “makaria” utilizado para los reyes y poderosos. Es aquí donde vemos la anticipación de las Bienaventuranzas proclamadas por Jesús, en las que los pobres e indefensos serán exaltados y el orden social revertido. Dios se ha revelado Dios de los pobres y humildes y los poderosos de ahora en adelante deben estar al servicio estos.

Esta joven pudo encontrar en la visitación de Dios la importancia que tienen los acontecimientos que ella ha de protagonizar y se manifiesta gozosa y confiada; humilde pero de una enorme fuerza interior, con una autoestima saludable y una fe explosiva. María se declara a través del Magnificat, en lugar de sumisa, rebelde, porque ha sido capaz de nombrar las proezas de liberación que hizo Dios “quitando de los tronos a los poderosos, y exaltando a los humildes”, en medio de la dominación romana. Demostró también ser valiente en lugar

de tímida porque no dudo en cantar los favores de Dios sobre ella para que toda las generaciones la llamen “dichosa”. Tampoco temió al acecho de los religiosos o el abandono de su prometido, mucho menos cuestionó las condiciones adversas y de peligros que le podría sobrevenir; confió en la palabra de Dios y camino con fe firme.

Este cántico de gozo, de victoria y humildad nació del corazón de esa joven como podría nacer de ti, porque a pesar de su corta edad, de las condiciones sociales, políticas y religiosas adversas, ella pudo celebrar anticipadamente el triunfo de Dios. Así como hizo Dios con la descendencia de Abrahán lo había hecho con ella y esa bendición individual tendría repercusiones universales.

OPINIÓN PASTORAL

Todos y todas podemos mirar en María el ejemplo de una juventud que puede llamarse a sí misma bienaventurada cuando puede reconocer las proezas que Dios ha hecho en el pasado y cómo éste les ha elegido para ser voz que proclame con gozo los hechos redentores de Dios. Miles de mujeres que deciden tener sus hijos entre condiciones adversas, adoptar, defender sus embarazos, levantar sus familias sin el apoyo de un esposo o de una estructura familiar, social o económica, son las Marías de este siglo. Jóvenes que deciden estudiar y desafiar el sistema que les augura fracasos son los y las Marías que traen esperanza salvífica a nuestra sociedad. Todos y todas los que reconocen su vocación y dicen “hágase en mi según tu palabra” se convierten en vientres como el de María; engendran y encarnan la voluntad salvadora de Dios a través de la Buena Noticia de Jesucristo, todavía en este siglo.

SOY LA ESPERANZA DE MI FAMILIA²

Mónica Navarro, joven de 19 años, quien cuidaba de sus hermanos menores; residente del Residencial Manuel A. Pérez en Río Piedras ha escuchado decir toda su vida, “Tú no vas a llegar a ser na’... Yo te veo a ti en el punto (de drogas)”. Hoy, (24, Mayo, 2014) después de ser aceptada en la UPR-Cayey, puede decir, “Soy la primera que va a la universidad... En mi casa es como un nuevo rumbo diferente que todo el mundo como que no sabe que hacer.” “Yo soy como la esperanza de la familia”.

OPINIÓN JOVEN

Es interesante ver como personajes de la Biblia cobran nuevo significado cuando los miramos a la luz de unas nuevas realidades. Este es el caso de María en esta lección. Muchas veces vemos en María una mujer especial, cuasi-perfecta, mayor de lo que realmente era; que sólo existió una vez de lo especial que fue y que por eso recibió una encomienda enormemente especial. Que debía tener una conexión con Dios, distinta, quizás hasta sobrenatural y que por eso Dios le dio esa tarea. Pero, cuando analizamos bien su realidad nos podemos dar cuenta que de verdad María era una chica muy joven, con un enorme reto en sus manos. Que, como cualquiera de nosotros, debió haber sentido miedo; debió haberse sentido confundida y tener momentos de sentirse incapaz de hacerlo, pero ella aún así aceptó. Es una actitud desafiante. Pero María tenía fe en el Dios que le dio la vida y era capaz de crear vida en ella, y es por esa fe que decide enfrentar al mundo.

En situaciones donde recibimos algo de parte del Señor -un don, un llamado, una palabra- nos puede invadir la duda, como ya es normal en todo ser humano y hemos visto a

² Periódico Primera Hora.

lo largo de estas lecciones. Sin embargo, el saber quién es Dios, el tener fe en Dios significa que confiamos en la presencia del Señor en nuestras vidas. Todos y todas hoy nos encontramos en lugares con poca esperanza y a todos nos toca la encomienda de devolver la esperanza a nuestra familia, entre nuestras amistades, en nuestros lugares de estudio o trabajo, y en nuestra iglesia. Lo que tenemos que hacer es aferrarnos a lo que Dios haya puesto en nuestro corazón y cuando tengamos dudas, miedo al que dirán o a no poder cumplir, demos gracias a Dios por poner sus ojos en nosotros, en nuestra pequeñez. Caminemos seguros porque caminamos en la fe de aquel nos ha llamado.

MIND BREAKERS [para pensar]:

1. ¿Qué características definen la personalidad de María?
2. ¿Qué características de la personalidad de María identificas en ti o desearías cultivar?
3. ¿Cómo los elementos de la personalidad de María pudieron ayudarla a identificar y ejercer su vocación?

PEDRO: ¿HÉROES o DISCÍPULOS?

1. ¿Con cual personaje bíblico identificas a Xavier y/o a Wolverine?
2. ¿Por qué eran importante las diferentes características de los personajes para formar el equipo X-Men?
3. ¿Cuan importante es la diferencia de personalidad entre los discípulos de Jesús y/o los personajes bíblicos?

TEXTO BÍBLICO [Mateo 14: 22-33]

Y luego Jesús hizo á sus discípulos entrar en el barco, é ir delante de él á la otra parte del lago, entre tanto que él despedía á las gentes. Y despedidas las gentes, subió al monte, apartado, á orar: y como fué la tarde del día, estaba allí solo. Y ya el barco estaba en medio de la mar, atormentado de las ondas; porque el viento era contrario. Mas á la cuarta vela de la noche, Jesús fué á ellos andando sobre la mar. Y los discípulos, viéndole andar sobre la mar, se turbaron, diciendo: Fantasma es. Y dieron voces de miedo. Mas luego Jesús les habló, diciendo: Confíad, yo soy; no tengáis miedo. Entonces le respondió Pedro, y dijo: Señor, si tú eres, manda que yo vaya á ti sobre las aguas. Y él dijo: Ven. Y descendiendo Pedro del barco, andaba sobre las aguas para ir á Jesús. Mas viendo el viento fuerte, tuvo miedo; y comenzándose á hundir, dió voces, diciendo: Señor, sálvame. Y luego Jesús, extendiendo la mano, trabó de él, y le dice: Oh hombre de poca fe, ¿por qué dudaste? Y como ellos entraron en el barco, sosegóse el viento. Entonces los que estaban en el barco, vinieron y le adoraron, diciendo: Verdaderamente eres Hijo de Dios.

TRASFONDO DEL TEXTO

El libro de Mateo nos remonta a una comunidad judeo-cristiana-helenizada (o sea, una comunidad de educación griega, con diversas influencias culturales) que vive bajo el rechazo del judaísmo y que han sido echados de las sinagogas. Por eso la importancia de organizarse bajo la figura de un Jesús que ha dado cumplimiento a las escrituras y que claramente es declarado Hijo de Dios (14:33; 16:16). Contrario al Jesús del evangelio de Marcos, en Mateo Jesús es más bien un educador, así como en Lucas. En Mateo se presenta majestuoso y heroico; va revelando su identidad de Señor, de Hijo de Dios, a través de portentos sobrenaturales. El dominio sobre el mar, la multiplicación de los alimentos que se relatan antes y después de calmar la tempestad y el evento de la transfiguración en el capítulo 17, donde su rostro y sus ropas cambiaron y se escuchó la voz de Dios, nos revelan la verdadera identidad de Jesús, su divinidad. A través de lo que han visto, los discípulos reconocen esa identidad profunda de Jesús y le llaman Hijo de Dios. Son estos acontecimientos los que preparan a sus discípulos para acompañar a Jesús a Jerusalén donde ejercerá un ministerio mayormente de enseñanza a través de parábolas hasta su pasión y muerte. Un Jesús seguro de su propia identidad, validado por el Padre, no solo hace portentos y maravillas, sino que inspira confianza en los que le siguen.

ANALISIS DE TEXTO

Mientras los discípulos van reconociendo la identidad divina de Jesús, su propia identidad ministerial se va formando. Sus temores afloran, titubean, fallan pero Jesús los

rescata. Hoy día Jesús podría ser considerado un héroe, un ser humano con poderes sobrenaturales que encarna (hace humanamente real) todos nuestros sueños, anhelos y deseos de justicia, desde lo natural hasta lo sobrenatural; alguien que pueda salvarnos del mal, guiarnos a una vida mejor y enseñarnos a desarrollar nuestros propios dones, capacidades y talentos. Pedro, por su personalidad sanguínea, impulsivo, franco, a veces egoísta y fanfarrón; explosivo, pero noble y dispuesto, fue voz de los discípulos representando sus debilidades y fortalezas. Su impetuosidad, franqueza, falta de reflexión y disponibilidad le llevaron a increpar a Jesús: “Señor, si tú eres, manda que yo vaya á ti sobre las aguas”, sin embargo tan pronto ve la tempestad teme y se hunde. Es en ese momento cuando la identidad de los discípulos es revelada, “hombres de poca fe”. No es que no tengan fe, sino que su fe no es suficiente. Necesitan de Jesús quien revela su propia identidad divina en lo sobrenatural, salva a Pedro y calma la tempestad. Ante eventos como estos se va definiendo la personalidad de los discípulos, ¿quiénes son y adónde van?

OPINIÓN PASTORAL

A través de la historia el ser humano ha creado historias de dioses y héroes, desde Zeus el dios griego del Olimpo, hasta los héroes, semi-dioses, hijos de un dios y de un ser humano como lo son Aquiles y Perseo. Hoy no debe extrañarnos que el ser humano continúe creando historias de superheroes para ver realizados sus sueños. Jesús pudo haber pasado a la historia como un héroe de poderes sobrenaturales puestos a favor de los demás, pero lo que hizo la diferencia es que al ser Hijo de Dios, no solo podía transformar el exterior de manera momentánea, sino que podía transformar el interior de la gente, cambiar sus temores por paz y confianza, salvarlos de sus angustias existenciales y cambiar la historia de la humanidad

para la eternidad. Eso es lo que hace la diferencia en la vida de Pedro y los demás, de pensar que podrían recibir de Jesús sus mismo poderes y que tenían el poder de negociar con él: “prueba que tu eres, manda que yo camine sobre las aguas”, Pedro comprenderá la diferencia entre ser héroe o ser discípulo.

El héroe, muchas veces como Wolverine, camina solo, hace su voluntad y le responde a su propia fuerza. Se resiste a voces como la de Xavier porque sabe que tiene el talento, la capacidad y los dones necesarios para triunfar, la necesidad de ser reconocido, así como el coraje, la ira o los deseos de venganza. Se piensa indestructible, más sin embargo está siempre en peligro de muerte. El discípulo camina con el Maestro, aprende de él, duda, teme, cae y se deja levantar por Dios. Aunque muera, triunfará porque no es su nombre, fama o inmortalidad la que importan, sino el propósito que los impulsó y el nombre de quién los envía. Uno actúa en favor de los demás desde sus propios talentos o capacidades, pero el discípulo actúa en nombre de quien lo ha enviado y los resultados de sus actos tendrán efectos para la eternidad: “Mas Pedro dijo: No tengo plata ni oro, pero lo que tengo te doy; en el nombre de Jesucristo de Nazaret, levántate y anda. Y tomándole por la mano derecha le levantó; y al momento se le afirmaron los pies y tobillos; y saltando, se puso en pie y anduvo; y entró con ellos en el templo, andando, y saltando, y alabando a Dios.” (Hc 3:6-8)

¿Tu qué quieres ser, héroe o discípulo?

OPINION JOVEN

Hay momentos en nuestra vida en los que creemos que la juventud es un súper poder, que nos hace conocedores de todo, con fuerzas inagotables y que nuestras energías no se

acabarán. En ese mismo pensar tergiversamos un poco el texto bíblico cuando dice “ninguno tenga en poco tu juventud” y hacemos alarde de esta siendo a su vez un poco fanfarrones, explosivos e impulsivos como Pedro. Es ahí, cuando todo lo anterior se une y le decimos a Dios “Señor, si tu eres, manda que yo...” Perdemos de perspectiva las implicaciones que tiene ese reto que le lanzamos a Dios, quien si es súper poderoso. Se nos olvida que cuando Dios nos manda a hacer algo es porque el capacita, acompaña y sostiene, sin dejar de exigir conforme a lo que se nos ha dado. En el proceso al enfrentarnos ante los retos, que son las manos del Gran Alfarero formándonos para encaminarnos a nuestra vocación, sentimos temores y titubeamos como Pedro. Al igual que este clamamos a Dios, reconocemos que no somos auto-suficientes y que nuestras fuerzas dependen de EL.

Como jóvenes cristianos no debemos aspirar a ser superhéroes o heroínas ni a pensar que tenemos súper poderes. Debemos imitar a Pedro, ser nobles y estar dispuestos a representar tanto las debilidades como las fortalezas de un pueblo. Aspiremos a caminar de la mano de Jesús, a ser sus discípulos y de su mano descubrir el camino que debemos seguir conforme a su voluntad para nuestras vidas.

MINDBREAKERS [para pensar]:

1. ¿Qué características definen la personalidad de Pedro?
2. ¿Qué características de la personalidad de Pedro identificas en ti o desearías cultivar?
3. ¿Cómo los elementos de la personalidad de Pedro pudieron ayudarla a identificar y ejercer su vocación?

JESÚS: ¿QUIÉN CREES QUE SOY?

(Mt. 16:15)

Mateo 16: 13-17 13 Cuando Jesús llegó a la región de Cesarea de Filipo, preguntó a sus discípulos: —¿Quién dice la gente que es el Hijo del hombre? 14 Ellos contestaron: — Algunos dicen que Juan el Bautista; otros dicen que Elías, y otros dicen que Jeremías o algún otro profeta. 15 —Y ustedes, ¿quién dicen que soy? —les preguntó. 16 Simón Pedro le respondió: —Tú eres el Mesías, el Hijo del Dios viviente. 17 Entonces Jesús le dijo: — Dichoso tú, Simón, hijo de Jonás, porque esto no lo conociste por medios humanos, sino porque te lo reveló mi Padre que está en el cielo.

MINDBREAKERS [para pensar]

1. ¿Quién influye a quién; el texto bíblico al cine y la cultura o la cultura a nuestra experiencia de fe?
2. ¿Cómo podemos conectar el texto con los “movie trailers” y las imágenes de Jesús?

TRASFONDO DEL TEXTO [Ivelisse Valentín Vera, D.Min.(C)]

El libro de Marcos nos remonta a una comunidad judeo-cristiana-helenizada que vive bajo el rechazo del judaísmo y que han sido echados de las sinagogas. Por eso la importancia de organizarse bajo la figura de un Jesús que ha dado cumplimiento a las escrituras y que claramente es declarado Hijo de Dios (14:33; 16:16). Al llamarse a sí mismo “Hijo del Hombre” Jesús reconoce su misión mesiánica y abre la puerta para que los discípulos le

validen. La tradición judía esperaba al Mesías que vendría a salvarles de los poderes imperiales y le atribuía el título de Hijo de Hombre basado en las profecías apocalípticas del libro de Daniel. Contrario al Jesús del evangelio de Marcos, en Mateo Jesús es menos espontáneo y más didáctico (educador), así como el evangelio de Lucas. Su función como maestro se hace evidente en la manera de dirigirse a los discípulos a través de parábolas o de preguntas abiertas y reflexivas que les invitan a compartir sus impresiones y arribar a conclusiones basadas en la experiencia más que en el conocimiento; siempre apuntando hacia un significado más profundo y trascendente aun a través de imágenes o sucesos cotidianos. Reconocer en Jesús al Mesías y no a un profeta conllevaba un grado de subversión porque significaba que los poderes políticos e imperiales serían retados. Es por eso que la reacción de Pedro tiene un significado tan profundo. Jesús es el Hijo del Dios vivo, que ha llegado a salvarnos y esa salvación viene acompañada de retos y peligros, pero también de la certeza de la compañía de Dios Padre quien ha sido la fuente de dicha revelación.

ANALISIS DEL TEXTO:

Este texto encierra una gran complejidad, sin embargo puede resumirse en dos aspectos fundamentales: (1) qué piensa la gente de Jesús desde la perspectiva del observador distante y de la tradición, y (2) qué piensan los que le han conocido y tienen una experiencia personal con él. El Jesús de Mateo, como gran educador no utiliza las estrategias tradicionales de enseñanza, no les dice qué deben creer, sino que da paso a una experiencia participativa, por eso pregunta ¿quién dicen que soy? De esta manera abre paso para que cada uno responda desde su experiencia personal. Es ahí donde se da la revelación de Dios, en la experiencia personal con Dios a través de Jesucristo. A través de su propia experiencia Pedro

pudo decir que había conocido al Mesías, al Hijo del Dios vivo, mientras que los demás lo veían como un personaje de la historia que regresa o como profeta que denuncia.

Sin la experiencia personal Jesús es solo un personaje histórico, una figura como Mahatma Gandhi o Martin Luther King; un súper héroe, una persona capaz de entregar su vida por una causa justa para provocar una transformación social. Sin embargo, a través de la experiencia personal y la revelación de Dios, Jesús se devela ante nosotros como la Esperanza, la Vida y la Salvación; como el Hijo del Dios Vivo que durante su vida derrumbó paradigmas y promovió cambios en la sociedad de la época que aun perduran, pero que a través de Su muerte y resurrección ha venido a darnos vida abundante (Jn. 10:10) y vida eternal.

OPINION PASTORAL [Rvda. Marielis Barreto]

Yo soy...no es tan sólo una expresión que sirve para hablar de mi persona, sino que también evocan palabras de Dios y dichas por Jesús al referirse a sí mismo. Si Dios se presenta como Yo Soy y Jesús usa estas palabras para igualar su naturaleza a la de Dios, ¿será posible que cuando comience a decir lo que yo soy, esté haciendo referencia a los atributos divinos que hay en mí? Para tratar de acercarme a esta respuesta, hago referencia al diálogo de Jesús con sus discípulos, acerca de su identidad: “¿Quién dice la gente que es el Hijo del hombre?” Menos interesado en la opinión pública y más en acentuar lo inclusivo de su ministerio, Jesús acude a hacer preguntas, en espera de respuestas. Esto me ayuda a decir que Jesús es como el ser humano y que el ser humano es como Jesús (cf. Juan 1), que tengo su oportunidad para manifestarme como él y que él se manifiesta por medio de la humanidad (cf. Filipenses 2:5-11).

“Y ustedes, ¿quién dicen que soy?” Ya fueran respuestas basadas en opiniones ajenas o propias, la pregunta de Jesús para sus discípulos debía tener matices de transformación, que son vigentes hoy. Esa transformación se da a partir del entendimiento de que Jesús es la encarnación del amor, la misericordia y la gracia de Dios. Es por esto que a la pregunta ¿quién crees que soy?, también puedo ofrecer una respuesta. Soy hija del Dios que vive en mí y que incluye a la humanidad en sus planes (cf. Jeremías 29:11), soy como Jesús y él es como yo. Mientras más son las representaciones de esta certeza basada en la fe, de que Jesús es como yo y yo soy como él, mayores oportunidades de comprenderlo, vivirlo, expresarlo y compartirlo. Que así sea.

OPINIÓN JOVEN [Kirialis Cardona]

“WOW! Un loco, un rebelde, radical y defensor de la humanidad. Para mí, es una imagen de Jesús sin ponerle el nombre para aumentar ventas y trucos publicitarios. Al igual que Jesús, en el caso de Man of Steel son enviados al mundo por sus padres para que haya esperanza y un ejemplo a seguir. En los dos trailers la figura central es un poco radical y rebelde, y es así como me imagino a Jesús, un rebelde, que rompía los esquemas sociales para cumplir su propósito y llevar Su mensaje a la humanidad. Por otra parte, y pensando que fuimos creados a imagen y semejanza de Dios, esos personajes podemos ser nosotros mismos, poniendo en práctica los talentos y mandamientos que se nos fueron dados, defendiendo la causa del pobre y el menesteroso y llevando a su vez un mensaje de esperanza a quien lo necesite.”

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APPENDIX 2

SERMÓN: ¿Quién soy? ¿A dónde voy?

Por: Krystal Rivera

Durante estas últimas seis semanas los jóvenes de la iglesia nos hemos estado reuniendo para escudriñar más a fondo la vida y las acciones de varios personajes bíblicos. Estos fueron: Daniel, Ester, Moisés, María y Pedro. Estos personajes a través de su vida enfrentaron los mandatos que Dios puso delante ellos. Cada uno de estos personajes tiene unas características peculiares y únicas que lo distinguen de los demás. Por ejemplo Daniel era valiente y muy confiado, sin importar lo que el rey ordenara, si él pensaba que esta acción iba a deshonar el nombre de Dios, simplemente Daniel no lo hacía, llegando a terminar en el foso de los leones por adorar a Dios cuando el rey había ordenado que nadie demandara petición alguna a cualquier dios u hombre que no fuera él.

Ester era fiel e inteligente, de tal forma que supo cómo acercarse al rey, corriéndose el riesgo de muerte al acercarse al rey sin ser llamada, ella supo cómo organizarle no tan solo uno, sino dos banquetes, donde básicamente delató al hombre, la mano derecha del rey, que había sentenciado su pueblo a muerte, logrando así el mandato que Dios había puesto en ella. Moisés, a pesar de que se muestra como un hombre con mucha resignación para volver a Egipto, era un hombre con muchos dones para servir al Señor, pero dentro de todo era justo, tanto así como para poder defender a un israelita de los mismos egipcios. Las características que definen a María son: sumisa y valiente, ya que ella enfrentó la misión corriéndose el riesgo de que la apedrearán hasta la muerte por estar embarazada sin esposo. Pedro era

dispuesto y hablador en el sentido de que cualquier duda que tuvieran los discípulos, era el quien hacía la pregunta, como fue él quien le pidió a Jesús caminar sobre las aguas para probar que en realidad Jesús era el Hijo de Dios.

Sin embargo, hay una cualidad que todos tienen en común: el temor. En algún momento Dios les tuvo que haber dejado saber lo que para nosotros es el Salmo 27:1 – Jehová es mi luz y mi salvación; ¿de quién temeré? Jehová es la fortaleza de mi vida, ¿de quién he de atemorizarme? Aunque no se muestra que Daniel tenga temor alguno, podemos concluir que algún tipo de miedo debió haber sentido, porque si a ustedes les dicen que lo van a meter en un foso con leones, en algún momento sin importar cuán grande sea su fe un poco de miedo le va a dar. Ester llegó a tener temor en el momento que su tío le dijo inicialmente que abogara por su pueblo, que si no se enfrentaba al rey ella también podía morir aunque estuviese en el palacio fingiendo no ser una de ellos. El temor de Moisés era enfrentarse al faraón, ya que él sentía que él no era capaz de defender a su pueblo, no simplemente porque era tartamudo, sino porque no conocía bien el idioma de su pueblo y él pensaba que ¿cómo iba a defenderlos si a penas se podía comunicar con ellos? Se puede decir que la misión de María fue la más difícil de todas, saber desde antes que tu hijo nazca que viene a la tierra a morir por los demás, no es una tarea fácil de sobrellevar. Ella tuvo que enfrentar el miedo de que su prometido José no le creyera la revelación del ángel. También tuvo que vivir todos los días con la agonía de saber que en algún momento tendría que enfrentarse con la noticia de haber perdido a su hijo. Pedro tuvo el temor de seguir y ser un discípulo de Jesús, ya que cuando se conocieron, Pedro no creía que Jesús fuera el Hijo de Dios, hasta que un día después de haber intentado pescar sin tener resultados, llegó Jesús y dijo que metieron las redes en el agua con las condiciones menos favorables para la pesca y

teniendo un resultado que desbordaban los peces en las redes, llenó un barco y necesitaron otro porque aún las redes estaban llenas.

Todos y cada uno de ellos enfrentó sus temores. Ahora pónganse a pensar todas las cosas que han dejado de hacer por temor. Como mudarse a Estados Unidos, aceptar un nuevo empleo, estudiar, defender lo que tu piensas y tus ideales o algo tan simple como viajar. Para algunos de nosotros someternos a un tratamiento médico o a algún tipo de cirugía puede ser de gran temor, el lidiar con lo desconocido y con las ciencias que a veces es tan incierta. Como también es difícil perder a una pareja o enfrentarse a un divorcio, ya sea por los niños, por el que dirán o porque pensemos que no vamos a ser dignos de agradar a Dios por no haber tenido un solo matrimonio hasta que la muerte los separe. Por otra parte, le tenemos mucho temor a enfrentar la pérdida de un ser querido, ya sea por el no poder mirarlo o escuchar las palabras de aliento que esa persona siempre tenía para ti o el no oír lo chistes que alegraban tu día.

Debemos pensar todos los días que Dios tiene un propósito para cada uno de nosotros y que a veces para alcanzar ese propósito en la vida debemos enfrentar nuestros temores con coraje y valentía como lo hicieron cada uno de estos personajes, con la fuerza y el valor que Dios representaba en cada uno de ellos, nosotros tenemos que también representarlo en cada uno de nuestros hechos y decisiones, representarlo con valentía enfrentando cada uno de nuestros temores. Y pensando en el Salmo 46:1 – Dios es nuestro amparo y fortaleza, nuestro pronto auxilio en las tribulaciones y siempre tener la mirada fija en el Señor, no como Pedro que desvió la mirada de Jesús y el temor a la tempestad le hizo hundirse. No fue la duda sino el temor el que le impidió llegar donde estaba Jesús. El temor a veces nos limita y nos cambia el rumbo para lograr nuestro propósito o nuestra meta.

El estar aquí parada, hablando frente a tantas personas, estoy enfrentando uno de mis más grandes temores, pero yo sé que para lograr los propósitos que Dios tiene en mi vida debo enfrentarme a mis temores y lo hago confiada porque sé que Él va a estar conmigo. Ahora, si yo he podido enfrentar mis temores, ¿por qué ustedes no pueden hacerlo también? Es el mismo Dios, que tiene muchas características únicas, Él es médico por excelencia, consolador, misericordioso, justo, entre muchas otras virtudes. Sin importar cuán grande y cuán difícil sea su situación, yo les aseguro que mi Dios es más grande que cualquier problema. Les pido que mediten y reflexionen en Romanos 8:31 - ¿Qué, pues, diremos a esto? Si Dios es por nosotros, ¿quién contra nosotros.?

APPENDIX 3

ORDEN DE CULTO

I. Liturgia de la palabra

• **Saludo o Invocación:**

(texto corto—uno o dos versos— que acompañe el saludo)

2 Pedro 1:2, 2 Cor 13:14, Romanos 15:5-6, Sal 133, Filipenses 4:4-5, Salmo 34:3, Romanos 15:13, 1 Cor. 1:9, Salmo 105:3-4, Heb 10:22-23, Col. 3:15-16, Sal 79:13, Mt 18:20, Sal 133, Hab 2:20

• **Llamado a la adoración:**

- Lectura (alternar de manera que se lea un Salmo una lectura del AT, una Epístola y un Evangelio): Is 55:1-3, 6; Sal 95:1-3, 6-7; Sal 96:1, 3-5, 7-10; Sal 122; Sal 29; Hab 2:20; Sal 117, Sal 150, Sal 8, Sal 15

- Oración de acción de gracias o de Afirmación de la presencia del Señor

• **Confesión de Pecados**

- Lectura (alternar de manera que se lea un Salmo una lectura del AT, una Epístola y un Evangelio)

1 Juan 1:8-9; Is 30:18; 1 Cor 11:26-28; Miqueas 6:8; Lc 6:36-38; Miqueas 7:18-19

• **Seguridad de Perdón:**

- Afirmación de Perdón a través de una frase o verso bíblico. Ej: *Ahora que hemos confesado nuestra culpa nos sentimos perdonados, preparamos nuestros corazones para dar a Dios en agradecimiento por lo que hemos recibido de él.* (Rom 6:8-11; Is

54:10; Is 40:1-2; Jer 31:3; Is 44:22; 1 Jn 1:9; Is 43:25; Rom 6:22)

- Ofertorio

- Lectura: 2 Cor 9:7; Mt 10:8; Hch 20:35; Sal 41:1; Heb 13:16; Dt 16:16-17; 1 Ti 6:7

- Momentos de Mayordomía

II. Proclamación de la Palabra

- Oración de Iluminación

- Lecturas Bíblicas

- Mensaje o Sermón

III. Respuesta a la Palabra

- Llamado

- Oración

IV. Liturgia de la Eucaristía

- Oración por los elementos

- Palabras de Institución:

- Partimiento del Pan

- Comunión

- Oración de Acción de Gracias

V. Liturgia de Despedida

- Bendición Pastoral

- Doxología

- Num 6:24-26; Heb 13:20-21; Hch 20:32; 2 Cor 13:14; Fil 4:7; Rom 15:5-6; 1 Tes

- 5:23; Rom 15:13

APPENDIX 4

Phase One

Attendance: 13

Ages: 18-24

Topics suggested:

- Life styles
- Conflict Management
- Vocation
- Commitment
- Temptations
- The unavoidable
- Book of Revelations
- Love
- Wisdom
- Engagement
- Decision making
- Family
- Friendship
- Personality
- Methods to study the bible
- Empathy
- Church history
- Heal relationships with other church members
- Spiritual Strength
- Forgiveness
- Prayer
- Relationship with God
- God
- World Religions
- Culture and Religion
- Divorce
- Matrimony
- Spiritual Gifts

Teaching aids:

- Reflections
- Visuals
- Videos
- Movies
- Music
- Road Trips
- Recreational activities
- NO Power Point Presentations
- Internet
- Group Work
- Challenges

Where: In and out of church

When: Fridays and Saturdays

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