

# ONE WORLD, ONE CHURCH

## Conversations about Mission and Ecumenics in the Twenty-First Century

Through the generosity of PTS trustee emeritus Henry Luce III, Princeton Seminary has two chairs in mission and ecumenics: the Henry Winters Luce Chair in Missional and Ecumenical Theology, filled by Professor Darrell L. Guder, and the Henry Winters Luce Chair in Ecumenics and Mission, filled by Professor Luis Rivera-Pagán. Both Guder and Rivera-Pagán were appointed to their posts in 2002.

Henry Luce III is the son of the late Henry R. Luce, who began *Time*, Inc. and was editor-in-chief of *Time* magazine, and the grandson of the Reverend Dr. Henry Winters Luce (PTS Class of 1896) and Elizabeth Luce. His grandparents, in whose honor and for whose work the chairs are named, spent many years in China as Presbyterian missionaries.

*InSpire* is pleased to introduce Drs. Guder and Rivera-Pagán, and their work in mission and ecumenics, to our readers. Because his chair emphasizes theology and his position is in the Theology Department, Guder writes about the missional church and its theological seeds in the work of Karl Barth. Rivera-Pagán, whose chair falls within the ecumenics area of the History Department, talks about his experience with and commitment to ecumenical conversation and action, particularly in relation to the churches and people of his native Latin America.

## Listening to Latin American Voices

by Erika Marksbury

Luis Rivera-Pagán, PTS's visiting Mackay Professor of World Christianity during the 1999–2000 academic year, suspects he knows why he was invited to return to Princeton.

Now the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Ecumenics and Mission, Rivera-Pagán says, "They called me and said, 'Luis, we would like you to come back here on a more permanent basis.' I think the idea for having me comes from the fact that this institution used to play an important role in Latin America, and I think they'd lost that connection. Also, a Puerto Rican can contribute another dimension, because we can be both Latin American people and United States citizens."

But at the opening worship service of the Association of Latin/Hispanic American Students last fall, Rivera-Pagán challenged the notion that he was one of few Latin people on campus.

"When I was interviewed for this strange chair," he remembers, "I was told by one member of the search committee, 'Luis, we would like you to come, because we don't have too many Latinos or Hispanics here.' And I immediately replied, 'Oh, yes, you have lots of Hispanics and Latinos here. Manuel Alvarez, who cleans Stuart; Ricardo Sosa, who used to clean Adams House.... They are the people who cut the grass, who wash the dishes, who mop the floors.' I remember saying, 'They are your new *douloi*.'"

"They are not here tonight, but they are part of this community, and I am telling you, they want to converse with you. They want you to hear about their dreams, why they are here, what their hopes are. Have you talked to many of them?"

Rivera-Pagán can issue this challenge because he has spent time talking with them. He knows the stories of the women who work in the cafeteria—how they came to the United States in search of employment that would allow them to save for their children's education. He tells of the woman who cleans Brown Hall, and how her earnings help provide for her mother. The stories of their lives affect Rivera-Pagán's life and work; their "reconstruction" projects inspire his own.

In April, he dedicated his inaugural address to the memory of Richard Shaull (1919–2002), PTS's first professor to hold the chair he now occupies, and was honored by the presence of Shaull's widow at the lecture. That lecture testified to a main objective of not only Rivera-Pagán's preaching, but also of his scholarship: to draw attention to those whom history (and the present) have deemed less-than-human. He spoke about Bartolomé de las Casas (a 16th-century Spanish historian, theologian, and priest who championed the rights of native peoples of the Americas) and his prophetic last words to Spain, which condemn Spain's violence and inhumanity against those peoples. Rivera-Pagán's own prophetic call to study the stories of the past—particularly those that remain largely untold—was clear. His lecture also served as an uncomfortable reminder of history's tendency to repeat itself.

"My lecture had to do with the 16th century," he says, "and I would have given it even had there not been a war going on in Iraq.... But this war is a similar story—a powerful nation giving a beating to a weaker nation, gaining more power in the process and saying we're doing it to defend certain ideals...."

Rivera-Pagán is convinced that the naïveté most of us live with—that allows us to believe in the good intentions of acts such as war—is chosen. He wants to discourage, or even disallow, that sort of naïveté. His extensive and ongoing work on the themes of war and peace is one way he hopes to help students "not necessarily deny previous certainties, but rethink them, so as not to take anything for granted."

Rivera-Pagán focuses much of his scholarship on theology and literature, having seen "two intellectual booms" in Latin America in the late '60s and early '70s: one in theology and one in literature. He has discovered some surprising convergences of themes—the sacraments, oppression, struggle, and hope—and realized that "these are two enterprises that can thoroughly dialogue with one another." Because the whole of history and faith is one immense, all-encompassing story for Rivera-Pagán, he works on bringing together literature and the narrative of Christianity. Letting the two speak to each other, he believes, will provide students with new, fuller understandings of both.

"The Old Testament," he says, "is a story of immense failure, and then in the New Testament, we have the failure of one guy, then a group of other persecuted failures—tragedy after tragedy—and with those stories, one can face the tragic destiny of human failure. We hold that despite the cruelty of human beings, there is some kind of hope in the Word... and that is how the dialogue works: everywhere the way of the cross, everywhere the hope of the resurrection."

While Rivera-Pagán enjoys his work with dialogues of the past—such as the 16th-century debates about the conquest and Christianization of the Americas—he also closely follows the more recent expressions of theology from Latin America, Latino/Hispanic, and Native American communities, theology informed by cultural diversity and ethnic identity. He works with the words of Roberto Guizueta, Justo González, Benjamín Valentín, Ada María Asasi-Díaz, María Pilar Aquino, Daisy Machado, Zaida Pérez, Orlando Espín, José David Rodríguez, and others who he says "are forging a refreshing new perspective, from the underside of the Leviathan, that might help shape the theologies of the 21st century."

It wasn't an easy decision for Rivera-Pagán to leave sunny Puerto Rico (a second time!), where he had been doing similar work on the faculties of the University of Puerto Rico and the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, for Princeton Seminary.

"Every academic enjoys Princeton's libraries—both Speer and Firestone [at Princeton University], that is, if you can find your way around! But I came for a year and went back home; I saw this as a one-year experience. I came the second time with some doubts, but I knew I was being asked to contribute something here. And if I take seriously my theological vocation as a Christian, then this decision is not only a matter of libraries, but of where I can be more useful—whether in Puerto Rico, where many do what I am doing, or here, where my contributions are more unique."

Ultimately, it was through a conversation with a friend, "who considers himself an unbeliever," that Rivera-Pagán believes God spoke to him and directed him back to PTS. Laughing, he says, "God can sometimes be very peculiar in the ways She acts."

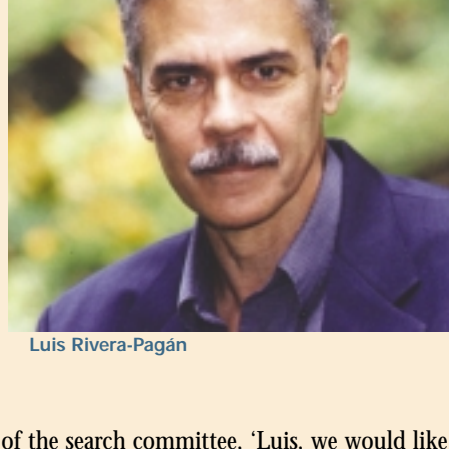
While Guder has led him far from home for now, Rivera-Pagán maintains ties to the land that nurtured his theological thought. This past year he returned to Puerto Rico to lecture, and also delivered addresses in Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Mexico. The travel keeps him connected, not only to his home, but also to expressions of Christianity that inform his field.

"During the 20th century, ecumenism and missions were closely intertwined," he explains. "Their intimate linkage was based on the utopian vision of one church in one world. At the dawn of this new century, the Christian faith finds itself more globally dispersed and fragmented than ever before. It is a global religion; it is also a highly divided and contentious faith. This dual reality presents new and exciting challenges that merit intense research and creative dialogue."

This fall, the three members of PTS's Missions, Ecumenics, and History of Religions faculty will be on campus together for the first time. Rivera-Pagán, Darrell Guder, and Richard Young have scheduled a series of meetings to discuss the interplay of their fields, and how to best strengthen this area's Ph.D. program, which attracts many students from outside the United States. Rivera-Pagán is excited about the possibilities ahead for the program, but admits with a sigh and a smile, "It is an immense field, and we are mortal human beings."

As such, he will simply continue doing what has made him beloved among students: to seek out the passion-filled, sometimes painful stories that yearn to be told—stories of faith and love and life—and to tell and teach those stories, let them shape his life, and offer them to students in hopes that their lives will also be changed. Because more often than not, they are. ■

Erika Marksbury is a 2003 PTS graduate and was one of Dr. Rivera-Pagán's students.



Luis Rivera-Pagán

Photo: Beth Godfrey



Some Latino/a members of the PTS community

Photo: Beth Godfrey

### Selected publications by Luis Rivera-Pagán:

- Essays from the Diaspora*, 2002
- Fe y Cultura en Puerto Rico*, 2002
- Diálogos y Polifonías: Perspectivas y Reseñas*, 1999
- La Evangelización de los Pueblos Americanos: Algunas Reflexiones Históricas*, 1997
- Mito, Exilio y la Fe: El Dilema de América*, 1996
- Entre el Oro y la Fe: El Dilema de América*, 1995
- Los Sueños del Ciervo: Perspectivas Teológicas desde el Caribe*, 1995
- A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas*, 1992



Bartolomé de las Casas

## Encountering Barth As a Missional Theologian

by Darrell L. Guder

In the spring of 1999, my wife and I had the opportunity to devote part of our sabbatical to a semester at the University of Göttingen, in Germany. The attraction was the opportunity to work with Professor Eberhard Busch, the well-known Reformed theologian whose publications include the classic biography of Karl Barth. He held the chair in Reformed theology in Göttingen (he has since retired), the same chair Karl Barth initiated in the early 1920s.

The major emphasis of our sabbatical was a seminar that Busch invited me to coteach with him. The theme, which he suggested, was "missional church," and one of the textbooks was the book by that title that I had edited and that had just appeared the previous year. The other assigned readings for the seminar were large segments of the last full volume (IV/3) of the *Church Dogmatics*, especially the sections dealing with "The Being of the Christian as Witness" and "The Sending of the Community of the Holy Spirit." We were testing an idea I had been discussing with Busch for the last several years.

It had long intrigued me that David Bosch, in his magisterial text *Transforming Mission*, repeatedly refers to Barth's importance for the theology of mission. I don't come across many Barthians who speak of his work in that way. And yet, the major shift in missional thinking about the church in the 20th century is largely ascribed to Barth's influence. That shift is often summarized with the term *missio Dei*, the "mission of God." This theological consensus, now dominant in missiological thinking around the world, emphasizes that God is by his very nature the "God who sends," whose purpose is the healing of the world, and who sends his Son to carry out that purpose. God's way of bringing that healing "to the nations" is through the people that he calls, forms, and sends as his witness—Israel and the church engrafted upon that root. Thus, the theology of mission is placed in the center of the Trinitarian dynamic: God the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Triune God calls and sends the church to carry his gospel to all people.

This approach to mission results in a radical redefinition of the church. In the language of Vatican II, "The pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature." Mission, thus, is not *one* of the many good things the church does. Nor is the church itself the purpose of mission. The church is mission for the sake of God's purposes, and all that it does should focus on its calling to that task of witness.

This "missional" understanding of the church, emphasizing its "sentness," pervades the great discussion of the church in volume IV of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. As Bosch paraphrases Barth's emphasis, the church's "mission (its 'being sent') is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission." (*Transforming Mission*, p. 372) Thus, Johannes Aagard, the Danish missiologist, is not exaggerating when he describes Barth as "the decisive Protestant missiologist in this generation" (cited in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 373).

But I am discovering that this missional approach to the church was emerging in Barth's thought long before it found its classic expression in the last volume of the *Dogmatics*. The thinking that led to this broad consensus was first expressed in a lecture titled "Theology and Mission in the Present Day" that Barth delivered to the Brandenburg Mission Society in 1932.

Already in 1928, the prominent German missiologist Karl Hartenstein had published a provocative essay called "What Does Karl Barth's Theology Say to Mission?" I suspect that these themes, theology and mission, were developing in Barth's thinking in such a way that, by the time we get to the final volume of the *Dogmatics* it is possible to describe his work as "missional theology." That is the thesis I hope to investigate further during my remaining years at Princeton.

A missiologist must always pay attention to the context! My friend and PTS colleague Bruce McCormack examines in great detail the genesis of Barth's theology in terms of the philosophical, theological, and cultural context of the first four decades of the 20th century in his book *Karl Barth's Critical Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936*. One aspect of that contextual examination that particularly interests me is that, for Barth and many others, "Christendom" was over. The 17 centuries of this grand partnership of church, state, and culture, going back to Constantine's establishment of Christianity in the fourth century, had now reached their conclusion.

For Barth, the project ended with the Kaiser's declaration of war in 1914. By the early 1920s, the theologian was commenting to a friend: "The idols were tottering." In essays published in the 1920s and the early 1930s in the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* (significantly translated "Between the Times"), and Barth and many like-minded friends explored the implications of this startling paradigm shift. The radical change in the context of Christian Europe made it necessary to start talking about "post-Christian Europe." The challenge to the church was profound, going to its very roots.

The church could not be faithful to her Lord while devoting all her energies to maintaining what she had once been.

The concern for the evangelical integrity and faithfulness of the church's proclamation in a post-Christendom world is, I think, a driving force in Barth's theology. By naming his great work the "church" dogmatics, rather than calling it a "systematic theology," or even a "Reformed dogmatics," he makes it clear that his focus is the church, her faith, her witness, her "active knowledge"...her mission.

The church in the West faces a great challenge in a world that has become a difficult mission field. The task of theology is to think through the faith in light of the church's calling to be the witness and herald to the gospel. Theology must take the context of the post-Christendom West seriously, but it dare not reframe the gospel to fit that context comfortably. Indeed, for Barth this has been the fatal problem of much Western theology over the centuries: he fears compromise with context can dilute the gospel and restrict its power and its claim on human lives.

It is both the privilege and the responsibility of the church of Jesus Christ to make the gospel hearable and visible in every context. This is what Barth's theology seeks to do: to equip the church to think about and understand the gospel lucidly in such a way that it can translate the gospel lucidly in a post-Christian world.

It seems, then, that our reading of Barth may be too narrow if we see his theology only as a break with liberalism or the Enlightenment. That break is, of course, an essential part of his theological revolution. But by the time we get to the later volumes of the *Dogmatics*, his polemic is embedded in a larger conversation with the end of Christendom in general.

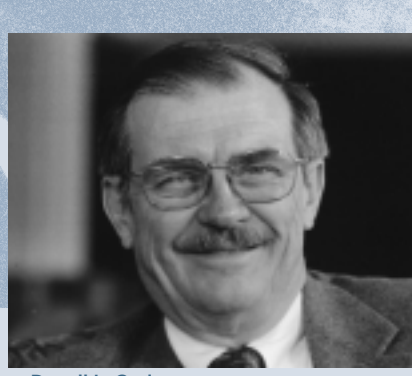
Barth's way of carrying out that confrontation is instructive. He takes the legacy very seriously. He explores the theology of Christendom in great detail (much of it in those notorious small-type sections), demonstrating over and over again how a dialectical approach works. We learn with him to say both "yes" and "no" to the Christendom tradition. We recognize God's faithfulness in all those centuries of the project. But we also recognize our human sinfulness at work in the reductions and adaptations of the radical gospel in order to fit a particular context more smoothly.

News about the "end of Christendom" is only slowly getting through to our congregations in North America. Although the evidence of this paradigm shift is persuasive and often unsettling, there is both willful avoidance of the facts as well as many efforts to turn the wheel back and to restore Christendom. Barth is an uncomfortable conversation partner for anyone beholden to either option. His radical insistence on the event character of the gospel, on the centrality of Jesus Christ, on the formative power of Scripture, on the certainty of God's faithfulness, on the sinfulness of all human attempts to replace the gospel with our religions—all of this is essential for the nurture of a missional church in a post-Christian world.

It may well be time to set aside some of the unhelpful generalizations about Barth that emerged in the first wave of encounter with his theology—and in the process to set aside that unhelpful word "neo-orthodoxy." For Barth, the good news of God's love-made-history in Jesus is the gift that becomes the task of the church. It is not a gospel to be hoarded, or that focuses on the believer's salvation in isolation. It is the "power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16) that empowers the community's witness and heralds the fact that God's good reign is already breaking in. ■

### Selected publications by Darrell Guder:

- Unlikely Ambassadors: Clay Jar Christians in God's Service*, 2002
- Ser Testigos de Jesucristo: La misión de la Iglesia, su mensaje y sus mensajeros*, 2000
- The Continuing Conversion of the Church: Evangelization As the Heart of Ministry*, 2000
- The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 1999
- Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 1998
- Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers*, 1985



Darrell L. Guder

Photo: Edfelle Nebelhan

For other related material on this subject:  
<http://guweb2.gonzaga.edu/faculty/campbell/enl310/casas.htm>  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=13682>  
<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/framework.pdf>