Beloved Community in Multicultural Contexts: The Lived Theology of Pastor Miguel Balderas

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Abstract

This study is a hermeneutical ethnography focused on the lived theology of Pastor Miguel Balderas, a Latino Elder in the United Methodist Church, whose Maryland congregation is endeavoring to become multicultural. This research combines ethnographic methods with a set of hermeneutical tools, traditionally used to analyze ancient scriptural commentary, to examine enacted theological expression, specifically preaching, liturgical choices, and leadership models. The study demonstrates that through particular hermeneutical acts Pastor Miguel is attempting to rewrite cultural habits of the majority-white, English-speaking congregation. He does this by using scripture to develop multicultural habits and potentialities that are not governed by modes of assimilation, a process the author terms the "entextualization of Beloved Community." Through this process Pastor Miguel attempts to replace culturally ingrained values with those drawn from concepts of the Kingdom of God.

This study also offers an intimate glimpse into the culture of a mainline church, the membership of which is declining. The author provides a theological, hermeneutical, and ethnographic analysis of the types of logics, habits, and practices that impede multicultural community development, and which continue to reify the "narrative of decline." The narrative of decline is a term used within mainline Protestant discourse to indicate how leaders have described and responded to the sharp and continuous decrease in church membership on both the national and local level. This study demonstrates how this narrative shapes national church policy and in turn generates a form of multiculturalism that acts as a strategy to stave off or reverse the decline. This form of multiculturalism engenders an assimilationist approach to outreach—an approach whose telos is church growth through an increase in minority

membership without a concomitant change in church culture—found in the field site and is what Pastor Miguel attempts to transform through his scripture-shaped multicultural training program.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on multiracial congregations by offering a unique ethnographic perspective missing from the scholarship—an in-depth examination of a non-multicultural congregation's approach to developing multicultural ministries. Hermeneutical ethnography as it is applied in this study also offers a new method for Christian ethnographers, anthropologists, and other scholars interested in how scripture and Christian tradition function in contemporary religious communities, a method that takes seriously the role of texts within the process of lived theological expression.

For P

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing…
1 Cor. 1:18a (NRSV)

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Acknowledgements

Pastor Miguel always tells me, “Chipil, Dios te consiente” (Chipil, God spoils you). As the following statement will demonstrate, he’s absolutely right. Entonces hay que empezar una lista de agradecimientos dándole gracias a Dios por todas las personas que ha puesto en mi camino, para todas las experiencias—las luchas doloras y los tiempos felices, y para todo lo que he aprendido y que sigo aprendiendo.

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Peter Ochs offered an academic home for my curiosity about subject matters that do not fit neatly into established disciplines. As Kendall had told me—normally you study scripture *or* theology. However, I wanted to study both, specifically how they relate to one another in contemporary Christian contexts. The program Peter started—Scripture, Interpretation and Practice—is open to these kinds of questions. There were several professors and mentors who helped me start to answer them. Peter and Scott Yakimow introduced me to Charles Sanders Peirce, Hans Frei, and postliberal thought. Valerie Cooper opened up the world of African-American hermeneutics to me and helped me realize that the lament of postliberal theologians applies in large part to traditional white Western hermeneutic practices. It turns out that there are contemporary communities of scripture-readers who continue to live as if the scriptural world is the real world, albeit using hermeneutical strategies different from those of the ancient interpreters as they do so. From Elizabeth Shanks Alexander I learned how to read how others read their scriptures. The hermeneutical part of hermeneutical ethnography was developed after studying rabbinics with her and entering the complex matrix of assumptions, reading strategies, and meaning-making found through the study of rabbinic literature. For the ethnography part of the method I am indebted to Vanessa Ochs. She, like Pastor Miguel, has taught me how to see the reality in front of me, and pushed me to learn how to write about it in a way that will not put my readers to sleep (please note: this does not mean I have yet succeeded in this). Vanessa has both pushed me to produce my best and has been a source of wise counsel and encouragement who helped me to finish this project. Finally, I give thanks to Charles Marsh. He has been my mentor and advocate for nine years. He introduced me to the project that is Lived Theology,

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Introduction

Pastor Miguel nicknamed me *Chípil*. Chípil is word in Mexican Spanish that refers to a child that is “needy, spoiled, demanding of attention.”[1] By the time I first met Pastor Miguel, I had been in seminary for a year. We were participating in the same immersion experience in Nicaragua. On the trip, there were a few days that I did not feel well and ended up skipping one of the planned excursions. The next day I decided to join the group again, and we travelled to a village that welcomed us with demonstrations of folk dances, and one of the presenters extended his hand to me as an invitation to dance. When Pastor Miguel recounts the story, he teases me about my "miraculous recovery" as he witnessed the sick *gringa* jump up to dance "como si nada" ("just like that") “as if Jesus Himself had instantly cured you.” Chípil.

[1] “Chipil Translation,” Reverso English | Spanish Dictionary, 2017, http://dictionary.reverso.net/spanish-english/chipil.

Pastor Miguel began *using* my nickname a few years later, in 2004, when I was in pastoral training under his supervision at First United Methodist Church in Hyattsville, Maryland. With a few years of Christian activism at the Wesley Foundation (a United Methodist student ministry) at UC Berkeley under my belt, nine months of urban ministry work in New Orleans, a couple years of seminary, fluency in Spanish, and a brand-new Theology-Vocational School project called Future for Peru that I had co-founded with a Pentecostal pastor in Lima, I thought pretty highly of my own qualifications for ministering in a Hispanic congregation. It would not be long before I learned otherwise.

Early in my training, Pastor Miguel told me to lead a weekly Bible study at the home of one of the Latino families who lived near the church. This family did not regularly attend the weekly Spanish worship service, and I had never met them before. Their run-down apartment building was a three-story structure that stretched the length of a potholed parking lot. It was located in a part of town that was known to be a high-crime area. On the first visit Braulio, a member of the Latino community at First Church who worked closely with Pastor Miguel, accompanied me and introduced me to the family. The matriarch, Josefina, offered us orange soda as we sat in a circle of chairs in the living room of their two-bedroom apartment. At least five of the ten children and teenagers were present and listened respectfully as Braulio introduced me and I began explaining the Bible study plan. I felt the conversation was more of a monologue. Our exchanges were stilted and awkward but I was hopeful to connect through our shared study. I suppressed my fears of having to do this on my own the next week without Braulio's help; the lack of instant connection troubled me. However, I was determined to impress Pastor Miguel with my savvy intercultural Bible-teaching skills. After all, had I not just taught a

course in Spanish at the Future For Peru institute, which was located in the heart of San Martin de Porres, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Lima?

The next week I swallowed the fears and showed up for Bible study at the appointed time. I was ready. I had my flip charts, printouts, and probing liberation-theology-influenced exercises ready. Every week I showed up with the same approach and received the same response from the family. It seemed to me as if they were putting up with me. They dutifully answered my questions and participated in my prepared activities. However, I never felt convinced that they were engaged with the study.

After a month or so, Pastor Miguel met with me to see how the study was going. I explained all the lessons I had prepared and went through some of the exercises. He sat back in his chair and listened intently for about fifteen minutes. When I paused in my running narrative, he said, "Una pregunta. [pregnant pause] Ya sabes lo que necesitan?" (I have one question. After all this time, do you know what they need?) My heart sunk. I had no idea what he was talking about. As I stared at him, trying to figure out how to respond, he asked me if I had noticed if they had food, or if I had noticed if they needed new shoes or socks. Were the children and adults in good health? Did they have transportation to necessary appointments? What were their fears, desires, disappointments? Were all the family members accounted for? Were they worried about family members back in their home country? Did they have work? Did I know all their names? That moment remains with me, decisive in my theological formation, because it was one of the few times I had not received praise for a job well done. I felt like a failure.

When I spoke to Pastor Miguel about this experience recently, I called it a failure on my part. To this he responded, "No fallaste, pero no estabas lista para ver la realidad." (You did not fail, but you were not ready to see the reality of their lives.) I had approached the Bible study

with one goal in mind: to offer readings of scripture in light of liberation theology. Although I was good at developing lesson plans to explain various ways of reading scripture—at least this had been my impression—Pastor Miguel's first lesson for me was to teach me how to "see." He did this by throwing me into a Bible study that he knew was way over my head. The experience was a gift, in that I was given the opportunity drop the pretense that I knew what I was doing, and to ask for help. I began to position myself not as an expert in Hispanic ministries, but rather as a novice with a lot to learn.

Pastor Miguel changed my life. His approach to "discipleship" awakened me to my "white savior" mentality and helped me accept my own ignorance, so that I could in fact begin to "ver la realidad" and to be in ministry and relationship with the people around me. After that first intense year, I would work closely with Pastor Miguel for three-and-a-half years designing and implementing multicultural ministry programs at First United Methodist Church in Hyattsville. During these years I learned how to see the reality of the people with whom we ministered and to develop programs based on their context and the discernment of God's will.

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One of the theological sources Pastor Miguel pulled down from his shelf when I asked him about the influences on his approach to multiculturalism was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. This work was born out of Bonhoeffer's experience training seminarians as part of the Confessing Church movement that actively resisted Hitler's attempt to bring the Protestant church under state control. After the Nazis shut the seminary down, arresting twenty-seven students in 1937, Bonhoeffer continued training ministers and holding secret, illegal classes through an apprenticeship model until even this was repressed by the government. In the end, Bonhoeffer continued as an itinerant preacher and joined the resistance against Hitler as a

spy, even aiding in an assassination attempt. This led to his arrest in 1943 and death by hanging in the Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945.[2]

"Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace," writes Bonhoeffer.[3] When faced with this statement and the heroic choices made by Bonhoeffer and others of the Confessing Church movement, it seems easy to understand how deciding to follow Jesus Christ can be a costly sacrifice in that context: lives were lost, because oaths to Hitler were refused and scripture was taught. However, in the context of the United States—especially in the context of the majority-white mainline Church, this call to costly discipleship is difficult to make relevant since there is no overt political threat that is criminalizing basic Christian identity. If Christians are free to profess their beliefs without state repression, then are the concepts of costly grace and discipleship still needed?

Pastor Miguel believes that it is needed more than ever, and I think Bonhoeffer would agree. The concept of cheap grace is part of an institutional problem that Bonhoeffer traces back to the early expansion of Christianity and "the secularization of the church." As the world became Christianized, discipleship was rendered impotent, convenient, and comfortable—especially for those who benefit from the status quo.[4] "A Christianity that no longer took discipleship seriously remade the gospel into only the solace of cheap grace. Moreover, it drew no line between natural and Christian existence . . . [and is] unable to differentiate between a citizen's ordinary existence and Christian existence."[5]

[2] Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 260–62.
[3] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 43.
[4] Bonhoeffer, 4:46.
[5] Bonhoeffer, 4:86–87.

For Pastor Miguel, this type of institutional Christianity that is fueled by cheap grace is a stumbling block for the type of costly discipleship demanded by faith in Jesus Christ. His understanding of what this means becomes clearer when read in light of two other theologians that he pulled off the shelf: Elza Tamez and Luis G. Pedraja. In *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead*, Elza Tamez revisits the Epistle of James. In her reading, James communicates through this letter that "Christian communities, then, must avoid accommodation to this unjust world and not fall into the trap laid by its value system. . . The Christian communities should demonstrate the new values of justice, assisting the oppressed who are outcast from society."[6] For Pastor Miguel, working for justice for the oppressed—demonstrating alternative values vis-à-vis the outcasts of society—is a central practice of costly discipleship.

The idea of costly discipleship is in turn shaped by Pastor Miguel's understanding of the Kingdom of God. Of this divine, eschatological, social-political community structure Luis G. Pedraja states: "[T]he reign of God is not merely a portent of things to come; it is a call to action in the here and now. The reign of God comes about in our doing, its being depending upon our praxis. In loving one another as God loves us, we begin to bring forth God's reign upon earth by living in accordance to God's will for us. If we love one another, we will seek everyone's welfare. Instead of creating structures that see human beings as objects to be used for gain, we will work to promote the dignity of all creatures and seek equity and justice for all. We replace structures of death and violence, with structures that affirm life."[7] For Pastor Miguel, costly discipleship means living out God's Kingdom in the present day, even as Christians await the

[6] Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead*, trans. John Eagleson, Revised edition (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 51.
[7] Luis G. Pedraja, *Teología: An Introduction to Hispanic Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 195.

future, full establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. It means loving everyone—not theoretically, but through concrete actions and relationship development.

The one oasis of costly grace for Bonhoeffer was in the monastic communities, and this shaped how he designed the curriculum and life of his seminary at Finkenwalde. However, such an approach does not work for the majority of Christians, most of whom have jobs and family, and do not have the time or the means to retreat into monastic life. How then does one go about bridging the gap between cheap and costly grace in the mainline Church? How do you get people who benefit from their privilege, whose comfort depends on the status quo, to venture into a form of discipleship that calls them to sacrifice personal privilege and preference (at the very least) and perhaps their livelihoods or even lives?

I argue that Pastor Miguel has developed a comprehensive training program for privileged Christians, most of whom are not willing participants. His approach fits within a tradition in Christian activism and organizing that claimed the term "Beloved Community" to signal the living out of God's Kingdom in the present day. This use of the term in public discourse dates back to Martin Luther King, Jr. and his use of it in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. As I will go into greater depth in Chapter 1, King and others within this tradition worked directly with marginalized groups in an effort to make society more just, with the eventual hope that people in power would want a seat at what Fannie Lou Hamer called "the welcome table."[8] However, in most cases this never happened—those Christians who supported

[8] Charles Marsh states: "Fannie Lou Hamer, the SNCC leader from Ruleville, Mississippi, imagined the civil rights movement as a welcome table, the kind that might be found beside a rural Baptist church, where on special Sundays and dinners-on-the-ground, the abundant riches of southern cooking would be spread out for everyone to enjoy, even Governor Ross Barnett and Senator James O. Eastland, though they would need to learn some manners." Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 89; Marsh goes on to explain Fannie Lou Hamer's welcome table theology this way: "Mrs. Hamer embodied the conviction that the God of biblical faith is a liberating God; and those who would please him do so not for the sake of duty alone, but out of deep love and gratitude. Undoubtedly, she would look upon the deracinated [Rev. Douglas] Hudgins and the villainous [KKK Wizard Sam] Bowers with indignation and outrage.

segregation in the 1950s continued to do so even when the laws changed (as evidenced by the many churches that stepped in to provide spaces so that a private segregated school system could flourish and extract many white students from the public system). Although Pastor Miguel does not use the words "Beloved Community" frequently in his discourse, I demonstrate that his lived theological expressions are an iteration of this tradition that attempt to answer a question that the Beloved Community tradition has thus failed to answer: How does one convince people in power (in the case of Martin Luther King, the segregationists) to willingly enter into a community in which they must share power with those over whom they have held power? In his approach, Pastor Miguel emphasizes that all people, regardless of their status, culture, or ethnicity, be welcomed as full participants and that power is shared within the community through mutual decision-making. One major difficulty, therefore, is how to train people who have retained hegemonic power over church administration and ministry in the majority-white mainline churches for decades to truly welcome persons from different cultures and backgrounds in this way. Such a step would require this group to give up some control over the direction of these churches—to share power with persons who tend to lack power in society, for example, with non-English speaking immigrants.

I term Pastor Miguel's multicultural training program a form of "entextualization of Beloved Community." Entextualization is a term coined by Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban in their work *The Natural History of Discourse*. As anthropologists, they describe the process of entextualization as resulting in written texts that are produced through the activities and practices of enacted culture. However, this is not a static process, and texts that are produced from culture

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Yet her table would not be closed to them. These are men gone astray; but like all people, however hopelessly entrenched in their evils, Bowers and Hudgins remain God's children. . . . Her invitation to join the 'new Kingdom of God in Mississippi' reaches wide, bursting open the closed doors of the closed society." Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 193.

are constantly recontextualized back into the culture. These texts are both shaped by and are shaping the culture they are generated from.

> [T]his utility of texts is precisely what 'the natives' (including us) see as well. They engage in processes of entextualization to create a seemingly sharable, transmittable culture. They can, for example, take some fragment of discourse and quote it anew, making it seem to carry a meaning independent of its situation within two now distinct co(n)texts. Or they can transcribe a fragment of oral discourse, covering it into a seemingly durable and decontextualizable form that suggests to interpreters a decontextualizable meaning as well. **Or they can take such a durable text and reanimate it through a performance that, being a (mere) performance of the text, suggests various dimensions of contextualized 'interpretive meaning' added on to those seemingly inherent in the text**.[9]

Although Silverstein and Urban are especially interested in an ethnographer's interaction with the culture she studies and the ethnographic field notes as the cultural texts produced in the process of ethnographic study, I am more interested in their assertion that "natives" (which I interpret charitably to mean the participants in culture who are engaged with the texts produced by their own culture) reanimate their cultural texts by performing them. Moreover, by so doing, both the culture and the interpretive meaning of the text are shaped through this performance. In this study, I describe Pastor Miguel's practice of reanimating and recontextualizing Christian scriptures and traditions within the context of his congregation with the purpose of re-forming its culture with the values of these texts and traditions, as the entextualization of Beloved Community. In other words, Pastor Miguel is reanimating texts and theologies from the body of Christian tradition that he shares with his congregation. However, in this reanimation, he is specifically aiming to shape the present worshipping culture with the values and structures found

[9] Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2, emphasis mine.

therein. In Pastor Miguel's own words such new habits and values should be practiced "el domingo en un espacio seguro como debe ser la iglesia" (every Sunday in a safe space, as the church should be).[10]

This approach to entextualizing Beloved Community was not developed in one congregation, but rather is a culmination of Pastor Miguel's life and ministry experience in Mexico and the United States, covered in detail in Chapter 1. He first encountered multiculturalism in Washington, DC, when working with Latino populations made up of different nationalities. Subsequently he was placed in majority-white churches, all with growing immigrant populations in the neighborhoods that surrounded them. Therefore, this contextually developed theological approach is also inherently multicultural and has developed out of the need to equip privileged populations with the tools they need to choose costly grace and to live out a costly discipleship.

When I started this project, it struck me how difficult it would be to articulate Pastor Miguel's pedagogical approach without both a thick description of his habits and a close reading of the sources that he is drawing on from scripture and Christian tradition. His method of discipleship involves virtually no PowerPoint presentations, reading lists, or specified Bible study or training sessions. He rejects approaches that involve formulaic or programmatic paradigms that are "portable" from one context to another. Multicultural community is not something, Pastor Miguel believes and Paulo Freire might say, that can be taught in a traditional classroom in which a teacher provides conceptual content that the students are expected to memorize and learn. Multiculturalism can only be taught in the doing of multiculturalism.

[10] Miguel Balderas to Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases," August 15, 2015.

"Buenos Dias/Good Morning"

Pastor Miguel is tall, about six foot one, with chestnut-brown skin, dark brown eyes, salt-and-pepper hair, and a heavy build. As he stands in front of the congregation his white clerical robe drapes over the impressive girth of his waist, and a stole depicting children from a rainbow of cultures hangs down, wrapped around his neck. The participants at the 11:00 a.m. Sunday service at Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, or "Millian" as most of the members call it, are mostly white, English-speaking and elderly. There are, however, a few persons who are African, African-American, and Latino, and on a regular basis there are least twenty non-white children who attend as well. Right before worship begins, Pastor Miguel stands in front of the altar facing his gathering congregation. As he prepares himself for worship, he is not looking around to catch the eyes of his practitioners or staff or running around with last-minute instructions or greetings. Rather he is centering himself, separating himself from the chatter of the worship participants as they settle into their pews. This silent dignifying of the divine signals to his congregation the gravity of what is about to take place—the worship of God. Precisely at 11:00 a.m., his face breaks into a wide, friendly smile, and he calls out in greeting, "Buenos días!" "Buenos días," responds the congregation. He calls again, "Good morning!" and again, they respond in kind.

I first encountered Pastor Miguel's bilingual greeting at First United Methodist Church (called "First Church" by the congregants) in Hyattsville, Maryland in 2002. As a new pastoral intern, I had thought nothing of it. Then, one morning between Sunday services, Pastor Miguel pulled me aside and explained that greeting the congregation in both Spanish and English was an intentional practice he had developed for the multicultural setting at First Church. He told me that within months of adding the Spanish greeting, the congregation had grown accustomed to it—"Sin que se den cuenta, todos ya están hablando en Español." (Without realizing it, now

everyone is speaking Spanish.)[11] The new greeting became an anticipated marker of First Church's multicultural identity. As a normalized part of the weekly liturgical flow, eventually the practice was mimicked by others in the congregation—not only in the context of the primary greeting of the service, but anytime a good morning greeting was used. Before too long, greeting each other in two languages had become second nature. Pastor Miguel carried a modified form of this practice to his next church in 2008, Oxon Hill United Methodist Church, the first appointment where he served as a lead pastor in the United States. Oxon Hill was also a majority-white church, with a number of Filipino congregants as well. Therefore, every Sunday, Pastor Miguel greeted his congregation in Tagalog, Spanish, and English. Just as with First Church, this practice was eventually mimicked by other worship leaders who would greet the congregation during the worship service.

Bilingual salutation exemplifies a technique utilized by Pastor Miguel as he works with majority-white churches through a process of becoming multicultural. He takes an existing, culturally ingrained, habitual practice, and builds off it or changes it slightly without completely doing away with the original practice. Indeed, "Good Morning" remains an important part of the salutatory practice. Nevertheless, the habit has been transformed from the default greeting of a single culture into a bilingual habit that Pastor Miguel believes is not only better suited for a multicultural situation but is a means of manifesting the Kingdom of God.

When reflecting on the liturgical innovation of a bilingual salutation, Pastor Miguel states that he is teaching his congregation a number of things about how to live out God's Kingdom, "tan solo con este saludo" (just with this one greeting). Opening the worship service with a bilingual greeting, he performatively illustrates that the Kingdom of God is not monolingual: "Al

[11] Translations from Spanish into English are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

hacerlo bilingüe, que el reino de Dios no es tan solo en un solo idioma." (By making [the worship] bilingual, it shows that there is not only one language spoken in the Kingdom of God.)[12] This lesson serves two purposes. For the majority of Millian's congregants who only speak English, it is a reminder that God's Kingdom is not structured in the way that they might expect. This disruption of the monolingual status quo is not a direct confrontation, but an indirect declaration that English is not the official language spoken in the Kingdom of God. To those for whom English is not their first language, or who do not speak English at all, it is a sign of radical welcome and hospitality. According to Pastor Miguel, this informal greeting sends a message to these minorities that non-English-speaking people will not only be tolerated and accepted but are invited to be full participants in the conversation—in their own language.

Pastor Miguel characterizes it this way: "Para las minorías, decir buenos días es el comienzo de una conversación, no es un saludo formal, es mandar un mensaje para decirles, dialoguemos. Así que cuando comenzamos el culto con este saludo y continuamos con toda una liturgia, estamos dialogando. Así que sin decirlo estamos internalizando la posibilidad de no tan solo 'saludar' sino de 'interactuar,' de ser intencional 'estableciendo una relación' como parte normal del reino de Dios." (For the minorities, saying 'buenos días' is the beginning of a conversation, it is not a formal salutation, to do this is to send a message telling them, 'let's dialogue.' Therefore, when we begin the worship service with this greeting, and we continue with the whole liturgy, we are dialoguing. Therefore, without saying it, we are internalizing the possibility of not only 'greeting' each other, but also 'interacting' with each other, of being intentional in the act of 'establishing a relationship' as a normal part of the Kingdom of God.)[13] I

[12] Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases."
[13] Balderas to Figueroa-Ray.

am not claiming that this short, repeated phrase in and of itself has transformed congregations into Spanish-speaking, multiculturally minded communities. Rather, I use it to illustrate the extent of Pastor Miguel's approach to training: even a seemingly minuscule act like changing a morning greeting before worship is made with intention. As will be covered in Chapters 4 and 5, this is just one small example of the much larger training program that he has implemented at Millian, and it demonstrates how important each detail is to the development of new cultural practices and norms. With this short, repeated phrase, "Buenos dias," Pastor Miguel causes his congregation to develop new habits and values that are characteristic of God's Kingdom. Moreover, with this practice Pastor Miguel does not verbalize the structural shift, but rather operates as if the social structures of God's Kingdom already are the governing social structures at Millian. In this fake-it-til-you-make-it performance, Millian *is* a manifestation of God's Kingdom, where all persons are full participants alongside (not under the direction of) the native English speakers.

His innovation with the morning greeting is one of many rhetorical and performative strategies Pastor Miguel is employing in an attempt to transform Millian's congregation through the modeling of new discourses and behaviors that he considers constitutive of God's Kingdom. However, after two years of engaging in this bilingual salutary practice, I did not witness a consistent, across-the-board adoption of it by the lay worship leaders, as had occurred at First Church and Oxon Hill. Although the congregants do respond with "Buenos Dias" when greeted by Pastor Miguel, I take the fact that the long-term lay leadership had not picked up this practice as a sign of their ambivalence, and at times resistance, to the lived theology performed, modeled, and imposed by Pastor Miguel.

Pastor Miguel's Lived Theology: Beloved Community in Multicultural Contexts

What is lived theology? Lived theology for the purposes of this study refers to an approach born out of the work of Charles Marsh and co-collaborators involved with The Project on Lived Theology at the University of Virginia.[14] Participants in the project of lived theology are interested in bridging the philosophical study of theology with the role theological ideas play in human practice, especially practices that transform social realities, like the acts of resistance and civil disobedience that occurred during the civil rights movement. While the study of lived religion tends to center on the religion as a human phenomenon, Charles Marsh states that "Lived theology examines practices, objects, and beliefs in order to understand God's presence in human experience. . .Lived theology is an apt expression for the foregrounding of embodied particularity in theological narrative. Lived theology then pursues both a descriptive and edifying

[14] In the 1990s, after completing his doctorate and becoming a professor in philosophical theology, Charles Marsh became interested in researching his fundamentalist upbringing in the civil-rights era South. He states: "So it was on a morning in the summer of 1994, thirty years after the Freedoms Summer Project of 1964, that I headed south with a vague notion to understand the religious motivations of the civil rights movement." During this summer research project, he conducted interviews and did research in local archives. Marsh says: "In piecing together such a wide variety of sources, I confronted an irresistible challenge: how to integrate genres and disciplines, modes of inquiry, and scholarly methodologies with the intention of understanding the theological meanings enacted in lived experience." From Marsh's research experience and subsequent publications (God's Long Summer, 1997 and Beloved Community, 2005) led to the establishment of the Project on Lived Theology (PLT) in the summer of 2000 with a grant from the Lilly Endowment. PLT's "mission is to clarify the interconnection of theology and lived experience and by so doing, to offer academic resources to the pursuit of social justice and human flourishing." Since its founding PLT has brought together scholars and practitioners to collaborate on projects that center on the examination and expression of lived theology. After almost 18 years several publications have come out of these efforts including most recently: Peter Slade, Sarah Azaransky, and Charles Marsh, eds., *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017). This work reflects on the work of lived theology in the areas of method, how to write lived theology, and how to teach it. Other publications in the area of Lived Theology include (but are not limited to): Peter Slade, *Open Friendship in a Closed Society Mission Mississippi and a Theology of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Susan R. Holman, *God Knows There's Need: Christian Responses to Poverty*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sarah Azaransky, ed., *Religion and Politics in America's Borderlands* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013); Peter Slade, Charles Marsh, and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, eds., *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Russell Jeung and Gene Luen Yang, *At Home in Exile: Finding Jesus among My Ancestors and Refugee Neighbors* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); Jennifer M. McBride, *Radical Discipleship: A Liturgical Politics of the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); For more information about the Project on Lived Theology see: "Overview of the Project," The Project on Lived Theology, accessed March 1, 2018, http://www.livedtheology.org/overview/.

purpose: namely, that of keeping narrative space open to the actions of God in experience and understanding the social consequences of theological ideas."[15]

The subjects of scholarship in the study of lived theology include not only well-known persons of faith, like Martin Luther King, Jr., but also those whose contribution to their communities and society is theologically rich, but who tend to be overlooked by popular histories, like Fannie Lou Hamer and John Perkins. Lived theology is as interested in the lives of average practitioners as it is in the lives of household names. Pastor Miguel is unknown to all but those who have encountered him; this will be the first study with him as the subject. However, his approach to multicultural ministry is responsive to our current historical context in which, while segregation has been outlawed, de facto segregation persists, especially in church communities. It is an approach that is theologically rich and offers insights for those concerned with the challenges and possibilities for racial reconciliation in religious and secular spaces. A study of Pastor Miguel's lived theology, therefore, is an attempt to rearticulate, through close examination, how Pastor Miguel conceptualizes God's Kingdom and its implications for human community on earth. I argue that Pastor Miguel believes God's Kingdom to be multicultural and that it is a Christian mandate to witness to the future fulfillment of God's Kingdom through its manifestation on earth. It is Pastor Miguel's approach to carry out this mandate that is under examination in this study: his lived theology of building Beloved Community in multicultural contexts.

Although multiracial congregations make up a very small fraction of mainline churches, since the early 2000s, an increased focus on multiracial congregations has developed within the field of sociology. In these studies, "multiracial churches" are defined as "places where no one

[15] Slade, Azaransky, and Marsh, *Lived Theology*, 7.

racial group is 80 percent or more of the congregation."[16] One main purpose for studying congregations with desirable demographic breakdowns or diversity indexes is to figure out their shared characteristics, the factors that facilitate or hinder their existence, and most importantly to understand their impact on racial inequality in the United States more generally. In other words, these studies looked to multiracial congregations and posited that they might provide models for and even help racial reconciliation efforts in American society more broadly.[17] This "dream" has

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[16] Ryon J. Cobb, Samuel L. Perry, and Kevin D. Dougherty, "United by Faith? Race/Ethnicity, Congregational Diversity, and Explanations of Racial Inequality," *Sociology of Religion*, January 28, 2015, 183, https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru067; In a study from 2008, the authors note: "While Hispanic is an ethnicity not a race, the sociological literature on cultural diversity in congregations has come to favor the label 'multiracial' over 'multiethnic' or 'multicultural.' Hence we use the label 'multiracial' to distinguish congregations that include multiple races and/or persons of Hispanic origin," in Kevin D. Dougherty and Kimberly R. Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations: Organizational Identity and the Accommodation of Differences," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 40, note 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00390.x; Justification for this practice can be found in: George Yancey and Michael O. Emerson, "Integrated Sundays: An Exploratory Study into the Formation of Multiracial Churches," *Sociology Focus* 36 (2003): 115–18; Two approaches to the data are employed in this process: a straightforward binary analysis that distinguishes multiracial from non-multiracial congregations and more refined continuum approaches that take into account each racial group of a particular congregation, placing each one on an index between 0-1. A commonly used binary definition of a multiracial congregation is that "no one racial group comprises 80 percent or more of the people," while multiple index formulas are accepted depending on the rational of the particular scholar. See: Korie L. Edwards, Brad Christerson, and Michael O. Emerson, "Race, Religious Organizations, and Integration," *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2013): 213–15, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145636. The authors of this review of sociological literature on multiracial religious organizations present both approaches as valid and cite the "index of dissimilarity" and "a general heterogeneity index" as accepted methods to analyze a congregation's diversity on a continuum. In other studies (such as: Dougherty and Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations") scholars do not agree that a binary approach is sufficient for speaking to "the extent of diversity in U.S. congregations more broadly." This study offers yet another form analyzing the congregational data on using the entropy index to profile the diversity of U.S. congregations. For more information on this type of analysis, see p. 29-31 of this study.

[17] Many sociologists have focused in on multiracial religious organizations as possible "places of redemption" (to use Mary Fulkerson's phrase, see: Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]]) for racial inequality in the United States more generally. In the 2000s hopeful titles began appearing such as: Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds : The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York : New York University Press, 2005); Michael O Emerson and Rodney M Woo, *People of the Dream Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008); Kathleen Garces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide : The Multiethnic Church on a Mission* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2007), http://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u4497579; and Robert J Priest and Alvaro L Nieves, eds., *This Side of Heaven Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=415996; Although there has been no study able to measure the impact on racial inequality, ethnographic evidence from these works is compelling. See: "Interracial Churches," News Report, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* (Houston, TX: PBS, July 31, 2009), http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2009/07/31/july-31-2009-interracial-churches/1734/. This video was based on: Emerson and Woo, People of the Dream Multiracial Congregations in the United States and included

begun to die as scholars have uncovered a strong tendency in multiracial churches to "(1) influence minority attendees to embrace white racial frames and/or (2) select on minority attendees who already embrace such frames in the first place."[18] If it turns out that multiracial congregations not only fail to deliver on helping to end racial inequality in society, but actually promote assimilation to a culturally white worldview, isn't it time to abandon earlier scholars' optimistic belief that "[c]ongregations, when possible, should journey toward becoming integrated multiracial congregations"?[19] Pastor Miguel's answer is no, since abandoning this goal would mean abandoning God's will for the Church to be a manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth.

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interviews with scholars, pastors and lay people involved with the church in Houston. They talk of the struggles, yet overall benefits of worshiping in a multiracial church. In one touching story, an African-American man and former white supremacist talk about their friendship that was made possible by worshiping together at the church. There is a palpable desire to demonstrate the unique characteristics of multiracial congregations as places where odds are defied and connections across races are not only possible, but transformative. A newer study (Cobb, Perry, and Dougherty, "United by Faith?") reinforces previous evidence that multiracial churches are tools of assimilating non-white populations to white culture. Evidence "...suggest[s] that most multiracial congregations require an avoidance of discussions of racism, racial inequality, and politics and that members downplay their racial identity in favor of their religious identity in order to incorporate multiple racial groups into a single congregation. Similar forms of racial inequality that exist in society often arise in multiracial congregations as white leaders and members have an outsized influence on how the congregations are structured and organized. Thus, it appears that, on the whole, multiracial congregations are not increasing consciousness of racism and racial inequality. If anything, multiracial congregations are legitimating and reproducing racial inequality rather than challenging it." This study demonstrates the problem with assuming that all churches that meet the numeric criteria of the definition of multiracial used by sociologists contribute to racial equality both within their own communities and in society more broadly. It highlights the need to determine the form of ministry not just by the demographic data, but rather by how power is distributed and the forms of relationship and exchange that occur between the members of various races and ethnicities within one congregation. Indeed, monoracial congregations of color seem to have more potential for challenging racial inequality, evidenced in the well-documented role of African American congregations in political mobilization for greater equality and in the role of immigrant congregations to provide resources and social capital that facilitate upward mobility. Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson, "Race, Religious Organizations, and Integration," 224; Although many studies in sociology go into characteristics of such churches or factors that either hinder or facilitate their existence, none have been able to "capture the level of interaction between congregation participants or the distribution of power among cultural groups," in: Dougherty and Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations" However, both of these aspects are captured in Pastor Miguel's assessment tool. For Pastor Miguel, a multicultural congregation is defined by regular interaction between individuals through cross-cultural sharing as well as a transformation of power structures so that all members of the neighborhood community are represented, not as token, voiceless members of committees, but as part of a team of efficacious leaders.

[18] DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*, 195; Also see: Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[19] DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*, 180.

Multicultural churches have been categorized by ethnographic fieldwork such as that done by DeYoung et al in their work *United By Faith*. In their words, the ideal "integrated multicultural congregation" that all congregations should aspire to is rare. It is "the theological ideal [and] requires a *transformation* of congregational culture. . . [It] has developed a hybrid of the distinct cultures that have joined together in one church. Elements of different racial cultures are not incorporated to 'appease' diverse constituencies; rather, the new hybrid culture is an expression of the congregation's unified collective identity. The relationships among members of different races in the congregation are strictly egalitarian. There is no sense of 'us and 'them' according to race, but it is more 'us' as a congregation and 'them' outside our congregation."[20] These scholars acknowledge that they cannot identify any congregation within their study that has met this ideal. Rather, most fall in one of two categories: assimilated or pluralistic multicultural congregations. In the assimilated multicultural congregations, there is one dominant group whose culture determines most aspects of congregational life. In the pluralistic model, there is evidence of distinct cultural aspects of more than one culture, however there is little social interaction between the members of the different cultures.[21]

Pastor Miguel's definition of a multicultural congregation is closest to DeYoung et al.'s characterization of an integrated multicultural congregation and is based on two criteria of behavior. First, leaders must represent the demographics of the church and surrounding community, with power being shared through mutual exchanges within teamwork-based structures; second, "se come la comida de todos," which may be translated as: "one eats the food of all" or "everyone eats everyone else's food." To be clear, this is not an "International Day" model of sharing, in which one day is set aside specifically to learn about the various cultures

[20] DeYoung et al., 166.
[21] DeYoung et al., 164.

within a community, but rather a practice of eating food from all different regions—everyone eats everyone else's food—that is integrated into the fabric of everyday life as a standard practice.[22]

Pastor Miguel states that he intentionally uses the word "multicultural" instead of the standard sociological term "multiracial" because, for him, "multiracial" signals an assimilationist process, while the goal of a "multicultural" process, in his understanding, is the cultivation of a form of social organization structured to be a manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth. For Pastor Miguel, determining whether or not a community is multicultural means looking at *who* leads and *how* they lead, and he looks to see *who* eats together and *how* they eat together. This litmus test, which is based on structures of power (i.e. who is making decisions) and evidence of mutual exchange between people of different backgrounds, is helpful for distinguishing his model of multiculturalism from one that leads to assimilation or integration. The ultimate goal for Pastor Miguel is not to increase the numbers of minorities in the congregation, or even to fight structures of racial inequality, but rather to cultivate a community based on the social structure of God's Kingdom. To this end, when Pastor Miguel first began his ministry at Millian, he made a decision to focus on training the existing Millian members in how to be a multicultural community, before making any concerted effort to reach out to members of the surrounding community. Pastor Miguel judged that Millian's members were not ready to interact

[22] In a description that captures this "International Day" version of multiculturalism Korie states of one congregation in his study: "There were sometimes cultural practices and markers that represented racial minorities in these congregations, such as a gospel music selection, a display of flags from various countries around the world, or services translated into Spanish. Yet the diversity did not seem to affect the core culture and practices of the religious organizations. That is, the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases tended to be more consistent with those of the predominantly white churches I had observed. These churches exhibited many of the practices and beliefs common to white churches within their same religious affiliation, only with a few additional 'ethnic' practices or markers. It was like adding rainbow sprinkles to a dish of ice cream. In the end, you still have a dish of ice cream, only with a little extra color and sweetness," Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 8.

with people from other cultures in a way that would welcome the new persons into the congregation as full participants. He did not want to invite new members in just to have them serve the interests of the existing members. The training would take a minimum of three years and for the most part would occur within the context of the worship service.

In this study, I uncover two approaches to multicultural ministry that exist simultaneously within my field site at Millian—one that Pastor Miguel encountered when he began his ministry at Millian, and another one he has implemented since his arrival. As I will demonstrate in chapters 2-3, Millian's approach displays assimilationist tendencies, while, in chapters 4-5, I show that Pastor Miguel implements a nonassimilationist multicultural training program that mainly targets the majority-white, English-speaking members of Millian.

While Pastor Miguel's approach to the multicultural training of privileged populations is novel, Millian's situation as a church with declining membership is not. The United Methodist Church, along with other mainline Protestant Christian churches has been declining in membership since the 1970s in the United States.[23] There are many churches that are facing similar demographic changes within in their neighborhoods, or that simply are not attracting new populations of younger members, while the older members are dying. Therefore, through this study I also offer an intimate glimpse into the culture of one of these churches and provide a theological, hermeneutical, and ethnographic analysis of the types of logics, habits, and practices that impede multicultural community development and continue to reify a "narrative of decline" culture. The narrative of decline is a term used within mainline Protestant discourse to indicate how leaders have structured a discourse describing and responding to this sharp and continuous

[23] See graph in: Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 93.

decrease in church membership.[24] I demonstrate how this narrative—the way church leadership talks about declining church membership—actually shapes national church policy and in turn generates a form of multiculturalism that acts as a strategy to stave off or reverse the decline. It is this form of multiculturalism that has characterized Millian's assimilationist approach to outreach in the neighborhood, and that Pastor Miguel attempts to transform.

I embarked on this study of Pastor Miguel because his form of discipleship not only impacted my life but had also helped facilitate the formation of multicultural community both at First Church and at Oxon Hill United Methodist Church, where he served as Senior Pastor from 2008-2013. I focus on Pastor Miguel's multicultural training program as lived expression of his Christian theology within the context of Millian Memorial United Methodist Church. It explores Pastor Miguel's approach to ministry within the context of a majority-white, majority-elderly church of about 400 members, with an average attendance of about 126 at all weekly worship services, that has been declining in membership for the last few decades.[25] It is now located in a

[24] For example, Dr. David Scott uses the term "narrative of decline" in the following post and is specifically referencing the United Methodist Church in the United States: "American UMC Decline Is a White People Problem," March 9, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20171212041848/http://www.umglobal.org/2017/03/american-umc-decline-is-white-people.html; In another example, Ted Campbell stated the following in an article in Christian Century: "Martin Marty has written that the story of 'mainline decline' is so hackneyed by now that we should just reduce it to one word—mainlinedecline. It is a narrative that has dominated the interpretation of church life in America's older Protestant denominations since 1972, when Dean M. Kelley wrote Why Conservative Churches Are Growing," "Glory Days? The Myth of the Mainline," The Christian Century, accessed March 1, 2018, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-06/glory-days; In David P. Gushee's work, David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Mind: Definitive 3rd Edition of the Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBTQ Christians with Response to Critics*, 3 edition (S.l.: Read the Spirit Books, 2017), he explicates a "narrative of cultural, ecclesial, and moral decline" that is used by those who oppose anything but traditional Christian marriage (between a man and a woman) and see the rise of LBGTQ+ rights as contributing to decline in all these areas. While this highlights one side of this narrative, I will show that those in the mainline church who hold more liberal views, also use a version of the narrative of decline to promote their own ideas increasing of church vitality. In this blog post, the author provides a similar analysis to the one I will provide in the next chapter: Chaplain Mike, "The Myth of the Decline Narrative," internetmonk.com, February 15, 2017, http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/71832. Although he provides a breakdown of a form of narrative of decline, it is not specific to mainline narratives of decline.

[25] UMCData.org, "Millian Memorial UMC - Statistical Data (1990-2016)," UMCDATA.com Table Output (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2016), Downloaded: http://www.umdata.org/ChurchProfile.aspx?ChurchID=170487; See the section on History and Demographics in:

neighborhood that has shifted from majority-white to majority-Latino immigrant populations. Unlike the previous two churches, it is unclear if the congregation at Millian will ultimately decide to engage in the transformation necessary in order to transform into a multicultural congregation. There are signs that long-term Millian leaders and other lay members are not interested in embracing Pastor Miguel's approach, but are preoccupied with priorities that had made Millian successful in the past—such as the traditional music program. There is also an ambivalence about the use of resources spent on events for neighborhood members, when, it is felt, a higher priority should be the care of the church members that provide those funds in the first place. Although previous versions of Pastor Miguel's training program were successful in encouraging multicultural congregational growth, the congregation at Millian will either embrace it and the community surrounding its church campus, or they will not.

Hermeneutical Ethnography: Examining Contemporary Christian Discourse & Actions as Forms of Scriptural Commentary

This study is an experiment in a methodological approach that I call hermeneutical ethnography. It is a method I employ in order to excavate and rearticulate lived theological expressions that are embedded or embodied in events of discourse and action. The goal of a hermeneutical ethnography is to both map deeper interpretive interactions and understand their expression in the discourse and action of a contemporary religious context. My method employs traditional ethnographic tools, such as participant observation, interviews, and thick description, and methods of close textual analysis that are inspired by scholarly approaches to the study of rabbinic literature.

MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future" (Millian Memorial UMC, 2011), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD.

As mentioned in the previous section, this study is using the lived theology approach to examining Pastor Miguel within the life of his current faith community at Millian Memorial United Methodist Church. Scholars of lived theology hope "to engage aspects of human experience resistant to theoretical formation, casting light on regions of experience that systematic or philosophical theologies often ignore."[26] Studying a community or individual's lived theology goes beyond an examination of their stated beliefs. Indeed, it requires an examination and presentation of their faith in practice, including the complexities and messiness that come with real life.[27] In line with the lived theology approach, I assume that any community of faith can be "read and written as a theological text."[28]

"How does one read enacted faith as a theological text?" asks Charles Marsh in the Introduction to the anthology *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy*.[29] My second assumption in the method of hermeneutical ethnography—that attempts to answer this question—comes from my experience with the scholarly study of rabbinic literature. This assumption is derived from Steven Fraade's idea that ancient rabbinic scriptural commentary, called midrash, could be characterized as the "literary face of an otherwise oral circulatory system of study and teaching by whose illocutionary force disciples became sages and sages became a class that could extend their teachings, practices, and view of the world into Jewish society more broadly."[30] In contrast to stark literalism, this understanding of textuality portrays the text of scriptural commentary as what Martin S. Jaffee calls a "freeze-frame" of the

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[26] Charles Marsh states: "As many of the following chapters demonstrate (4, 6, 13, and 14), lived theology pushes even further beyond familiar disciplinary partnerships—theology and social theory, theology and ethnography, theology and anthropology—by making space for life-narratives, testimonials, observed experience, and biography in the theological enterprise," Slade, Azaransky, and Marsh, *Lived Theology*.
[27] For an example of lived theology in the genre of biography see: Marsh, *Strange Glory*.
[28] Slade, Azaransky, and Marsh, *Lived Theology*, 12.
[29] Slade, Azaransky, and Marsh, 5.
[30] Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 19.

cultural production of tradition.[31] The words on the page do not directly indicate the meaning of the commentary, but rather act as a doorway into deeper study and engagement with the "oral circulatory system" that helped generate them. Ultimately, studying midrash initiates "disciples" into the way their tradition reads scripture so that they can read it as God's Word or revelation.

In hermeneutical ethnography, I broaden the idea of scriptural commentary from its use in rabbinic scholarship to include discourse and actions that have not been redacted together into a canon that is held sacred and authoritative by a religious tradition. Unlike rabbinic literature, which is a recognized canon of authoritative texts within the Jewish tradition, the subject matter of hermeneutical ethnography is found in the lived expressions of theology exhibited in discourse and actions of religious adherents. An assumption of this method, therefore, is that texts and events that are produced by actors within a contemporary Christian community are forms of scriptural commentary and that these experiential or embodied commentaries are formational. These readings of scripture as expressed in events of discourse and action enact and model how scripture should be read, engaged, and lived out within the religious community. For the most part, such readings teach through embodied experience, rather than through direct

[31] Jaffee states: "Rabbinic anthologies must be distinguished from those composed in cultures—such as that of early modern Western Europe and its inheritors—ascribing sovereign integrity to authored literary works. Similarly, they should not be viewed—like the scriptural canons of ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—as relatively immutable literary treasures. In distinction to both these models, rabbinic compilations are anthologies whose compilers had no hesitations in altering the form and content of the anthologized materials. Lemmata, apparently, continued to be transmitted with the intention of leaving them 'as told by the Masters.' But the larger collections of gathered material—thematically driven microforms, or even larger collections of the latter into diverse microforms—were never perceived as 'works' in their own right. They were, accordingly, malleable and adaptable to meet specific needs of local rabbinic communities. It would seem that the intermediate traditions were viewed by their literary handlers as elements in a larger kaleidoscope of tradition perceived as an authentic communal possession. The documentary compilation is a kind of freeze-frame of that tradition, temporarily stilled by the intervention of the compilation activity itself. But that activity was not conceived as the production of a finished 'work.' It was, at best, a 'work in progress,' finished only at the point—perhaps generations after the anthology had entered life as a physical object—at which the perceptions of its transmitters and users began to define the compilation as a text representing 'tradition' itself, rather than the ad hoc storage of tradition's remnants." Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33.

discussion of the formative dimensions. The formative dimensions of such readings need to be excavated through a close reading of underlying sources and analysis of their recontextualization within the discourse and action of contemporary practice. This type of analysis uncovers a matrix of texts and traditions that help generate contemporary practice and offers a way to critically engage with contemporary practice through the examination of its sources of motivation and discursive structures.

In the spirit of Fraade, therefore, when applying the method of hermeneutical ethnography such contemporary scriptural commentaries (or "texts" broadly defined) are assumed to represent the surface of a much more complex matrix of communal interpretive interaction. Excavating and rearticulating these deeper interactions involves at least three methodological modes that I will outline briefly, but that I will explore more completely later in the introduction. One moment involves participant observation within the field site that leads to the uncovering of specific examples of texts and related lived expressions of ministry action that will be analyzed further. The second moment involves close, separate readings of these texts as the community's contemporary forms of scriptural commentary. The third moment is the development of a thick description that involves an analysis of the relationship between these texts and events as they are recontextualized back into the lived context of the field site. Ultimately, hermeneutical ethnography excavates and rearticulates scriptural logics, formational dimensions, and theological convictions of particular religious communities. This deep reading of lived practice clarifies which sources shape discourse and the organizational structures of religious community, as well as the values that shape how religious communities operate in the world. Rather than taking religious organizations "at their word" in terms of their stated missions and visions, it analyzes how (or if) these are carried out in actual practice.

This method contributes to the sociological and ethnographic study of multiracial congregations. In terms of sociological studies, Kevin D. Doughtery and Kimberly R. Huyser state that "neither the entropy index nor the generalized heterogeneity scale captures the level of interaction between congregation participants or the distribution of power among cultural groups. We are unable to distinguish between racially diverse congregations that are assimilated, pluralist, or integrated as defined by DeYoung et al. [in *United By Faith* (2003)]. It is unfortunate that we cannot empirically contrast these congregation types."[32] This hermeneutical ethnography helps on a small scale to remedy this problem by providing a way to examine and analyze one congregation with multiple multicultural approaches occurring simultaneously, distinguishing between assimilationist and non-assimilationist tendencies through the close reading of texts produced within the field site. Although there is debate between scholars about the value of microstudies of multiracial congregations, I argue that microstudies such as this one can offer alternative ideas for datasets that sociologists may consider for future studies.[33] For example, based on Pastor Miguel's definition of multicultural congregations and the approach that is examined in this study, I argue that collecting the demographic breakdown of leaders in positions of power as well as the demographic breakdown and frequency of cross-cultural gatherings within multiracial congregations may be fruitful as a means of refining the definition of multiracial churches and developing comparisons of the types, either as defined by DeYoung et al. or newly defined types that are revealed though the macroanalysis of such data.

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[32] "The concept of organizational identity holds promise for such contrasts. Albert and Whetten (1985) point out that organizations may possess multiple identities. Organization identity or identities, can be contested. Assimilated and pluralist congregations might be seen as organizations in which a unified, multiracial identity is less clearly developed than in integrated congregations," Dougherty and Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations," 39. This ethnographic study offers to scholars of multiracial congregations a means of discovering alternative datasets (such as the demographics of specific leadership committees and demographics and frequency of fellowship gatherings) that then sociologists can begin to gather for macro-analysis of large numbers of congregation. It also provides an example of studying multiple multicultural approaches within the same context that are at work simultaneously.

[33] See: Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson, "Race, Religious Organizations, and Integration," 225.

Ethnographic studies of multicultural congregations have focused solely on those congregations that fit the sociological definition of a multiracial church. As mentioned before this definition limits the studies to those churches that have no one group that makes up 80% of the population. Millian does not fit this definition of a multiracial church. Therefore, this study offers a glimpse into a congregation that is attempting to become multicultural, which should be of interest to those who study multiracial churches generally.

For scholars of anthropology interested in the role of scripture in Christian churches, and for those who consider themselves part of the new genre of Christian ethnography, this study also offers a new approach to uncovering and examining how scripture texts function within a field site. It provides a complex and nuanced understanding of how scripture operates within the discourse, structures, and activities of a local church without solely depending on how informants report about scripture. Instead, attention is paid to the underlying logics of scripture that help shape discourse and action within the life of the congregation. Moreover, this study opens up new avenues of inquiry for Protestant theologians and biblical scholars, and should be of especial interest to those postliberal scholars who until now have sought such expressions of scriptural agency primarily within precritical interpretation.[34]

Why Is This New Ethnographic Approach Necessary?

[34] In the work of postcritical scholars, they often point out dyadic treatments of scripture (such as mediating theologies), the consequences of treating the scripture as such and offer modest triadic proposals. As demonstrated by Frei′s veneration of precritical hermeneutics (see: Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974]) often the models for reclaiming a triadic tendency of hermeneutics for modern scholarship are the early Church Fathers such as Augustine and the Rabbinic practices of midrash. In addition to these rich sources of scriptural reading habits, should be added both historic and current practices as manifested by certain triadic tendencies within, for example, African American hermeneutics and the modes of intertextuality that Pastor Miguel engages, as will be demonstrated in this study. It is my understanding that one criticism of much of the postcritical scholarship is that although scholars in this field desire to transform reading practices and therefore overall habits of the Christian church, it has remained mainly an academic endeavor. Perhaps if postcritical scholars began to study living communities with strong triadic tendencies, their reach would extend beyond the walls of the academy and into the dying white main-line churches here in the United States.

In the 1980s, the gaze of anthropological ethnographic inquiry began to expand beyond "preliterate," "virgin," and "exotic" non-Western cultures. Various disruptions in this discipline[35] opened up the field to new subjects of study— "a turn towards analyzing one's own culture,"[36] including that of scholars who study various forms of Christianity within the United States.[37] Many such ethnographies deal with the language, discourse, and/or literalism of the Bible, or the ritual practice of studying the Bible in groups. This phenomenon of ethnographic offerings within the Western-indigenous approach has been complemented by a move on the part of various other disciplines—such as sociology, Christian theology, and Christian Ethics—to appropriate ethnographic methods.[38]

Due to the central role of the Bible in Christian practice, as well as the pervasive literacy of its practitioners, the study of written texts and hyperliterate informants is a basic constituent of this new focus of ethnographic study and is of central importance for understanding Western Christianity. But what happens when a discipline such as anthropology, originally built around the study of "pre-literate" cultures, turns its gaze towards hyperliterate fields of study, such as Christian communities in the United States? This yields a tendency among scholars to ignore the

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[35] See: James Clifford and George E Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and see: Deborah A Gordon and Ruth Behar, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
[36] Marla Faye Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (University of California Press, 2003), 19.
[37] See the following: Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989); R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (University of California Press, 2000); Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Frederick, *Between Sundays*; Brian Malley, "Understanding the Bible's Influence," in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, ed. James S. Bielo, Signifying (on) Scriptures (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 194–204; James S. Bielo, ed., *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, Signifying (on) Scriptures (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); and T. M Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).
[38] See: Robert D Putnam and David E Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010); and Robert P. Jones, "Ethnography as Revelation: Witnessing in History, Faith, and Sin," in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum, 2011), 118–41.

written form of scripture in favor of informants' speech about scriptures.[39] This, perhaps, would not be a problem if researchers limited their claims and research findings to conclusions about what their informants report about scripture. But very often anthropologists' conclusions go beyond their informants' *conceptions* of scripture to make claims about scripture itself, and about its role in religious and daily life. This inadequate analysis of informants' engagement with written texts produces only surface insights into scripture and its role in Christian communities.[40] This phenomenon then contributes to misrepresentations of its role and how it functions both within Christian communities and more generally within cultures where these communities are found.[41]

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[39] One exception to this tendency is found not within ethnographies focusing on Christian practice, but rather on Jewish text study, such as Vanessa Ochs′s work: *Words on Fire: One Woman's Journey into the Sacred* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990). Ochs not only quotes from the texts she studies but offers a glimpse into traditional interpretive practice by engaging in such practice with commentary helpful to the uninitiated outsider (96-98). On a more general note, "scripture" is notoriously difficult to define. In this study, scripture refers specifically to the texts within Jewish tradition (including the Jewish biblical canon and classical rabbinical literature such as the Mishnah, various texts of midrash, and the Babylonian Talmud) and to the Western Christian biblical canon translated into the English language. Within Protestant Christian communities, there often is a favorite version of the Protestant Bible most often used (for example, the King James Version or the New Standard Revised Version), or a particular community might have a practice of consulting multiple translations. Even if informants are not directly quoting scripture from the written text, I still consider the biblical canon to be a possible source to examine with regard to their discourse—as a form of commentary on the biblical text as found in testimonies, sermons, bible study discussions, etc. To this end informants may refer to scripture in a number of ways besides reading the written word; they could recite it from memory, allude to or cite it in speech, use abstract terms such as "Gospel," or perform a liturgical action, etc.

[40] Mary McClintock Fulkerson is an example of a Christian ethnographer that deals with scripture in her ethnography. She devotes one chapter to it in her work, *Places of Redemption*, 160–81. This treatment of scripture falls in line with my critique of how the anthropological approach to Biblicism treats scripture. Her analysis of Bible study discussions deal with how the discussions are framed, based on Stanley Fish. This focus gives primacy to readers as subjective shapers of meaning that are bound by cultural and linguistic norms within particular communities. This theoretical construct gives little attention to the text′s role as agent in the making of meaning. The analysis of the discussion centers on examining "forms of discourse with a kind of nonlinear logic of their own, a logic characterized by the connecting communications, the resonances that help form community."

[41] For example, in: *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, Susan Friend Harding claims Falwell enacts biblical realism through a pre-critical form of typology used by ancient Church Fathers. Harding claims that Falwell′s "Jericho campaign," when interpreted from inside the Fundamentalist tradition, "enacts" Joshua′s marching around Jericho story by driving around Liberty Mountain once a day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day (121). Yet, when Falwell utilized a narrative of Joshua at Jericho, his version did not match this story′s narrative as found in the book of Joshua, a fact that Harding fails to note. This ethnographic work is important in that it demonstrates how Christian Fundamentalist discourse shapes its communities, but Harding′s conclusion that these leaders are shaping them with biblical narratives sets up an imprecise and unfounded claim that Falwell and other leaders use the narratives that come from the Bible. Her understanding of biblical realism relies on her misunderstanding of Hans

I argue that this tendency to label phenomena uncritically as "biblical," based on surface-level interpretations of what informants report, is rooted in a particular culture of reading. This culture emphasizes a reader's ability to understand a text, which is to say the reader is understood to be able to accurately and fluently interpret a text written in her native language. In my own Protestant Christian tradition, for example, it is commonplace for individuals (with or without specialized training) to pick up the Bible, read several chapters, and discuss its content and meaning within a group study a few days later. The words on the page, at the grammatical level, often are equated with the meaning of the text. This reading tendency is reflected in Hans Frei's observation regarding the first wave of writing on hermeneutics in post-Reformation Protestantism: "The Bible's inspiration came to mean the inspiration of the individual written words and thus the identity of the Word of God with the text. Among Lutherans, this stark literalism, which had its roots in Luther but was by no means Luther's full position, dominated from the first writing on hermeneutics."[42] This "stark literalism" remains a feature, although by no means the only feature, of the dominant Western reading culture. This is true not only in the Christian church, but in the academy as well, as mentioned in the discussion above regarding how a significant number of anthropologists approach the study Christian reading practices.

Exposure to the reading of rabbinic literature immersed me in an alternate reading culture.[43] To generate a reading of even a small piece of rabbinic text requires immediate access

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Frei's concept of "literal-realistic" precritical scriptural reading practices. For more on Frei's concept of "literal-realistic" precritical reading practices, see: Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.

[42] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 37.

[43] For those not familiar with the at times stark difference between the reading cultures of which I speak, I believe two examples of scriptural commentary will be illustrative. The following examples of contemporary commentary on Genesis demonstrate strong reading tendencies within the two cultures under discussion. Please note the profound difference in approach—one begins with intricate reflection on textual detail that moves to conceptual reflection, while the other moves directly to abstract structural and conceptual concerns. In the first example, found in Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 13. The author, a Jewish commentator, focuses on a textual detail of Genesis 1:16 that generates a theological reflection on "greatness." Zornberg writes: "Two things are called 'great' in the Biblical text: the lights ('God made

to and engagement with the complex and expansive collection of rabbinic and scriptural traditions. Rabbinic argument assumes a vast amount of unstated knowledge and is characterized by frequent ellipses. Often the most difficult challenge is to figure out what the rabbis are debating about and why; in this way, coming up with a reading of rabbinic commentary can be like cracking a difficult code. In this reading culture, all commentary on scripture is assumed to be opaque, rabbinic texts are dialogic and exhibit simultaneously synchronic and diachronic markers, and commentary therefore requires a process of deciphering in order to clarify a particular section of text's meaning.[44]

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the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the starts′ [1:16]) and the great sea monsters (1:21)... Responding to the apparent textual contradiction—both lights are great? Only one is great?—and the defective spelling of me′orot (lights), the midrash deciphers a hidden narrative: 'They were created equal, but the moon was diminished, because she complained, "It is impossible for two kings to wear one crown"' (Rashi, 1:16). The moon knows that inherent in the idea of greatness is singularity. Two cannot be called great, since to be great is by definition to dominate, to loom over, to see a world from a unique perspective. In Rashi′s source, therefore, God tells the moon, 'Diminish yourself.' Here is a voluntary act of self-diminishing, an acceptance of the small rather than the great role, which is compensated for by the many hosts of stars that will now accompany the moon."; In Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 30–31. The author, a Protestant Christian writer, does not even quote the scriptural text he is interpreting, and verse 16 is subsumed in a group of verses, 3-25. It is the genre, structure, and overall content of these verses that are the focus of Brueggemann′s conclusions: "The long section of the liturgy in 1:3-24 covers the first five days of creation. a. The structure of these verses is important, for it bears a part of the message: ...The structure is remarkably symmetrical. It moves in a careful sequence: time: 'there was evening and morning...' /command: God said, 'Let there be...' /execution: 'And it was so.'/assessment: 'God saw that it was good.'/time: 'there was evening and morning...' The time pattern of this liturgy itself comments upon the good order of the created world under the serene rule of God...Though expository attention tends to concentrate on the subsequent verses 26-32, verses 3-25 protest against an exclusively anthropocentric view of the world. The creator God is not totally preoccupied with human creatures. God has his own relation with the rest of creation." In Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 30–31.

[44] Elizabeth Shanks Alexander states: "Untrained readers often have difficulty grasping 'the point' of rabbinic texts, in part because such readers gloss over the seemingly trivial details on which productive interpretation turns. One can read a passage, whether in the original language or in translation, know what the word means and still be entirely unclear what the passage is about. The first task in any Rabbinics project, then, is to clarify what is significant or meaningful in a given passage. This task is often accomplished by paying attention to the multilayered character of rabbinic literature. Many rabbinic texts are structured as commentaries, so one degree of layering comes from the juxtaposition of the base text and the commentarial voice. Additional layering is achieved when materials composed by sages from distinct generations and geographical settings are put into conversation with each other in a single text. And finally, scholars have identified additional layering when earlier sources are reworked by later redactors, or when redactors combine earlier sources in ways that obscure the early meaning and replace them with new ones. Producing even a straightforward reading of rabbinic texts requires first recognizing the layers, second observing what is distinct in each and third discerning how later layers respond to earlier ones," Elizabeth Shanks Alexander and Beth Berkowitz, "Introduction," in *Rabbinics and Religious Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 14–15; For more information about the textuality of Rabbinic literature that leads to this type of opacity see:

Even though texts of Christian scriptural commentary differ substantially from rabbinic literature, I argue that there are strategies and features of Christian scriptural interpretation (including citations from other sections of scripture to illuminate the texts being interpreted, citations of earlier traditions, and the theological presuppositions held by the writers) that make even the most seemingly straightforward excerpt of Christian commentary a candidate for clarification of a text's surface meaning. Moreover, I have found that within the academic field of rabbinics, students are trained to cultivate, in Elizabeth Shanks Alexander's words, "reading with attention to difference among textual strata."[45] This training has provided a way for me to examine Christian scripture-reading practices in a way that addresses the lacuna I described

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James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 1983): 143–51; For diachronic and synchonic layers of Rabbinic texts see Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds : Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13. Hayes states: "Those who attend to these internal markers of diachronic complexity are responding to the redactor's careful efforts to undermine the impression of synchrony produced unavoidably by the juxtaposition of traditions from various persons and periods. These explicit diachronic markers call into question the suitability of a basically synchronic approach to rabbinic literature. Indeed, historical analysis of rabbinic texts would appear to be not precluded but mandated by the very nature of those texts. We shall see that in addition to the preservation of temporal sequencing in rabbinic literature, there is generally little evidence of a homogenization of earlier sources or of an attempt to replace the polyphony of the sources with the univocality of a single authorship (more on this later). The redactors of rabbinic texts actively preserved the diachrony of their sources, thus subverting the importance of the synchronic plane of the text with which (ironically) they were perforce concerned! Thus, rabbinic texts are fundamentally different from the biblical text. A diachronic method is inherent in the very composition of rabbinic texts, the redactors producing a text that is to be read not as a synchronic work but as a diachronic construction. In the case of the Torah and narrative books of the Hebrew Bible (Gen-2 Kings), however, we find signs of the reverse. Here, an implied author has leveled and smoothed his source materials through primarily narrative devices (e.g., the various legal codes are declared to have issued from Moses). Of course, the redactor slips at times, and the source critic can identify different diachronic layers within the text with the aid of Near Eastern parallels; grammatical, vocabulary, and syntactic analyses; and so on. Nevertheless, by definition the source critical study of the Bible reads the Bible against the grain— against the literary integrity and synchronic unity that a redactor has clearly attempted to impose upon these texts. Thus, in the case of the Bible the interpretive context provided for us by antiquity is indeed the final redacted form of the text. The various other historical contexts posited by the source critic, for all their sophistication and corroboration by parallels and linguistic studies, are at the epistemological level scholarly constructs. In rabbinic texts, however, we do not find a comparable consistent synchronic leveling by an implied author. Rabbinic texts consciously signal their diachronic construction, and thus it is the notion of a synchronic plane imposed by an author that is a scholarly construct in talmudic studies, a construct that violates the linguistic and literary norms of the texts."; For more about the textuality of Rabbinic literature and how it is read, also see: Barry W Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1984); Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996); and Martin S Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[45] Alexander and Berkowitz, "Introduction," 17.

above and offers a supplement to the insights garnered through other existing ethnographic approaches.

This form of analysis allows an examination of sources and their intertextual interplay that provides insight into how such hermeneutical interactions shape the community that is engaging in them. It allows for the possibility that scripture has a role in generating the meaning of the practitioners' enacted hermeneutics that transcends the "authorial intent."
These assumptions render this method distinctly hermeneutical, and not phenomenological or historical.[46]

The Methodological Frame of Hermeneutical Ethnography: Christian Ethnography as Emic Qualitative Research

In this study, although I employ traditional ethnographic methods such as interviewing and participant observation that yielded thick descriptions of events, rituals, and other experiences in the field site, I did this work with concerns and questions shaped by the discourses of Christian Ethnography. Although related (and often interrelated), Christian Ethnography differs markedly from the anthropological ethnography of Western Christianity. An anthropological approach to Christianity often offers an etic, or outsider, perspective on Western Christian traditions, concerned primarily with explicating the human production of rituals and meaning.[47] As I mentioned in the previous section, I argue that these methods have not adequately accounted for

[46] I want to emphasize that this method is not interested in clarifying any author's intentions or motivations. Rather, the focus is on revealing a hermeneutical process that that transcends "authorial intent." It is particularly hard within the analysis to make this distinction clear, since the very idea of interpretation seems to imply that the author is acting purposefully. Therefore, even when I state, for example: "Pastor Miguel makes a choice," I do so without claiming that he is doing so consciously. At the same time, that this analysis makes no claims regarding intent, motivation, and the general cognitive state of individuals also means that I do not deny intent on their part, either.
[47] Some examples of such works include: Griffith, *God's Daughters*; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*; Brian Malley, *How the Bible Works: An Anthropological Study of Evangelical Biblicism* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004); Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); James S. Bielo, *Words upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*.

scripture-reading practices of Western Christianity in part because of scholarly frameworks, such as that held by Stanley Fish, which understand all making of meaning to occur within the interpreting community, and so scholars have little incentive to engage the actual scriptural texts as part of understanding Christian reading practices.[48] Hermeneutical ethnography as a form of Christian ethnography provides a method that responds to this lacuna in the academic literature for those interested in understanding how scripture functions in Christian faith communities.

However, since Christian ethnography is a relatively new area that has been practiced in the disciplines of Christian Theology, Christian Ethics, and Missional Anthropology, it lacks a cohesive methodological categorization. The following is my attempt to categorize what I have discovered of this field, and then to limit hermeneutical ethnography to specific methodological parameters.

The three categories I have developed are: "missionary-activist research," "etic qualitative research," and "emic qualitative research." Missionary-activist research is carried out most often by researchers interested in furthering Christian conversion and fortifying existing missionary efforts by determining the practices that have worked best to further this goal. In an article dedicated to the life of Paul G. Hiebert, a world-renowned missiological anthropologist, Robert J. Priest states: "Anthropology historically played a key role in American mission-training structures. Under linguists and anthropologists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the American Bible Society (such as Jacob Loewen, Kenneth Pike, Eugene Nida, and William Smalley), thousands of American missionaries received training in linguistics and/or anthropology subsequent to the 1930s. Hundreds of undergraduates planning to be missionaries majored in anthropology at colleges like Wheaton, Bethel, and Biola, and thousands more picked

[48] See: Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

up a course or two on the subject. (The most famous such graduate is Billy Graham, who majored in anthropology at Wheaton)."[49] There are a number of relatively recent dissertations that fit into this category that are carried out in Christian colleges and seminaries.[50]

Within this category I also place the work of scholars seeking to target and demand change of religious law or institutions through evidence gathered in qualitative research efforts. In "The Listening Church: How Ethnography Can Transform Catholic Ethics," Emily Reimer-Barry offers the data from interviews with Catholic women living with HIV/AIDS in the United States and Kenya as an impetus for requiring "that the teachers of the Catholic church begin with empathetic listening and descriptive analysis instead of beginning first with normative claims," in this case, concerning Catholic teachings of contraception.[51] She argues that "ethnography is a valuable and underutilized methodology that has the potential to positively transform Catholic ethics precisely because it can bring new voices, especially marginalized voices, into the

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[49] In Robert J. Priest, "Paul Hiebert: A Life Remembered," *Books and Culture | Christianity Today*, 2007, http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2007/sepoct/9.9.html. Hiebert built up the programs in anthropology & missiology and intercultural studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He wrote both foundational and practical works in the field of missiological anthropology, including: ; Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1976); and Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1986).]. In the preface to the 2nd Edition, the authors state: "It is our purpose to introduce the reader to the discipline of cultural anthropology, not only as an academic discipline, but also as an effective tool for the missionary, pastor, and layman in their task of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. The principles that guided us as we worked on this project were our love for the Lord Jesus Christ, our conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and our commitment to the task of world evangelization. We wanted to prepare a text that would help present and prospective missionaries to better understand both their own culture and the culture in which they will minister and thus facilitate the crosscultural communication of the gospel."; To see another example of applying cultural anthropology to Christian mission, see: Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin Keene Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988].

[50] For examples of doctoral research in this field see the following dissertations: Ronald Paul Hood, "Nembi Worldview Themes: An Ethnosemantic Analysis" (Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1988); Tial Hlei Thanga, "Analysis of the Value of Myth and Story among the Mizo People in Myanmar" (Reformed Theological Seminary, 1993); Petr Cincala, "A Theoretical Proposal for Reaching Irreligious Czech People through a Mission Revitalization Movement" (Andrews University, 2003); and David L. Becker, "Leadership Theory in the Matrilineal Culture of the Bemba: Cultural Implications for Contextualized Leadership Development in the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Zambia" (Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, 2010).

[51] Emily Reimer-Barry, "The Listening Church: How Ethnography Can Transform Catholic Ethics," in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum, 2011), 112.

conversation."[52] This activist stance seeks out a certain group of informants (in this case Catholic women living with HIV/AIDS) in order to challenge aspects of the religious tradition that the researcher believes is causing harm or suffering. Scholars in both of these trajectories present clear missionary or activist goals that are explicit drivers of the research structure, including how informants are chosen and the types of questions they are asked.

Etic qualitative research exemplifies Christian ethnographers who research non-Christian, non-Western cultures or Christian traditions that differ radically from their own. For example, in "Whiteness Made Visible: A Theo-Critical Ethnography in Acoliland," Todd Whitmore locates himself as a white theologian doing ethnography from within his discipline among the Acoli in Uganda. He is interested how "whiteness operates in the global context," with a focus on the "Black-white divide" found in patronage systems in Africa.[53] He admits that he could not enter the field without his own biases and that the following ethical and theological questions shaped his project: "Is patronization intrinsically evil? Can one weigh consequences in assessing an act of patronage? Do the evil consequences always outweigh the good ones? Can two Christians relate as patron and client? Or do we add, 'There is no longer patron or client,' to Galatians 3.28?"[54] Whitmore went into the field with his theological and ethical views on the patronage system firmly in place. Tellingly, he does not ask: Is patronization intrinsically good? He even questions whether Christianity can exist where patronage exists, in spite of the fact that Christianity is growing in Africa at an exponential rate and patronage systems remain intact. Whitmore, a westerner, thinks he knows what is best for the Acoli, and instead of learning the

[52] Reimer-Barry, 98.
[53] Todd Whitmore, "Whiteness Made Visible: A Theo-Critical Ethnography in Acoliland," in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum, 2011), 188.
[54] Whitmore, 190.

system and its values, he judges the patronage system based on his own terms, throws up his hands in frustration, and then leaves the field in the hands of God. As this case study suggests, the potential value of Christian ethnography is lost in foreign, unfamiliar fields that are the subjects of more traditional ethnographic inquiry, since there is a tendency to use personal theological and cultural constructs to evaluate in some way the actions and values of the groups being studied.[55]

[55] The tone and style is self-reflexive and transparent. Whitmore is open about his participation in the patronage system and about his failings—he did not succeed in crossing the Black-white divide. Yet, Whitmore constructs his analysis by presenting the stories, dialogue, and narration in such a way that the reader is compelled to share in his frustration and impotence. By the end, the reader wants freedom from the patronage system for the informants, who cannot see what is best for themselves. In fact, "[t]hey want [Whitmore] to be a good patron." They keep badgering the despondent Whitmore for help, and if the reader buys into Whitmore's portrayal, she feels sorry for him, as if he has done all he possibly can to help these people. The reader shares in Whitmore's own implicit, paternalistic conclusion that these Africans have no idea what is good for their own well being and believes that his failure to save the Acoli is not his own, but rather that of the system Whitmore has no power to change. This message is intensified by his final statement that includes a description of an icon of the Holy Mother in a local Catholic church that he interprets in light of an eschatological hope of the final dismantling of the patronage system. He notes that the Holy Mother is white, but has African features and that "[t]he mural is not a request for patronage, but a protest and a sign of hope from whoever painted it: perhaps even Acoli can ascend to heaven" (p. 206). Although not his intent, Whitmore offers what I find to be his best insight—that in Acoliland he is powerless to cross the Black-white divide. Instead, as a white westerner he is forced to assume his "God-like" status within the patronage system, regardless of his "efforts at solidarity." His efforts at solidarity included living in camps, traveling in the back of pick-up trucks, and speaking the language. As I understand it, these are the basic activities of a participant-observer, so it is unclear to me how this value-laden concept of "solidarity" applies in his case (p.200). It is a brilliant portrayal of a western ethnographer's struggle to function within a patronage system, a reality with which all western ethnographers in similar situations must contend, though most researchers downplay the amount of monetary and gift exchange that they must engage in in order to simply do fieldwork (I have benefited greatly by my friendship with Kayla Kaufmann, an anthropologist who has done extensive fieldwork in Togo. My insights into fieldwork specifically with regard to African systems of patronage are in large part due to conversations with her). Whitmore's portrayal is refreshing in its transparency with regard to these transactions. Yet he is not satisfied with revealing this reality of fieldwork, nor does he care to focus on his own powerlessness to negate his God-like status. Instead, he seems discouraged that his personal theological and ethical insights, and the "efforts at solidarity" they engender, fail to help him "disrupt" the "evil" that is the patronage system. Whitmore writes this chapter in the style of a confession/prayer; he has failed to save the Acoli from the evils of patronage, but keeps hope alive that God will do so in the end. The importance of this ethnography as a case study for the approach of Christian ethnography lies in Whitmore's determination to depict the evilness of the patronage system of a culture that is foreign to him without raising any doubt with regard to his qualifications to do so. Moreover, it appears that he enters and leaves this foreign field theologically and ethically unchanged. There is a marked lack of any reexamination of his own theological and ethical approach, which blinds him to the potential lines of fruitful inquiry that presented themselves with regard to white visibility and impotence. See: Whitmore, "Whiteness Made Visible: A Theo-Critical Ethnography in Acoliland."

Emic qualitative research has its roots in a strand of anthropology termed "native anthropology,"[56] a method first coined in 1970 by Delmos Jones that focused on training non-Western informants to examine and report on their own culture.[57] Also in the 1970s, John L. Gwaltney, who was fed up with "settler anthropologists" (i.e. traditional, most often white anthropologists) romanticizing African-American culture in the United States decided to practice native anthropology by conducting field work within his own native culture, in this case African-American urban settings of the northeast of the United States.[58] Moreover, Gwaltney also suggests the importance of "settler" anthropologists beginning to study their own non-native, Western institutions:

> The concept of native anthropology is not only relevant to the native anthropologist working in native settings, but is especially germane to the non-native investigating non-native institutions. If the discipline is going to generate a new body of knowledge about new, previously under-investigated groups, it is imperative that these accounts proceed from veracity rather than wishful thinking.
>
> If the concept that settlers have a responsibility to investigate their own institutional and ethnic hierarchies is accepted, it is plain that much of traditional anthropology was a foreign adventure ploy and equally apparent that succeeding generations of settler anthropologists will be obliged to study their fathers, sisters, cousins and aunts. If we are to be spared a dreary and perhaps fatal repetition of the excesses which occasioned the unfortunate dichotomy between standard settler ethnology and the polyocular view, it is imperative that we do not repeat those failings of parochial chauvinism.[59]

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[56] Frederick, *Between Sundays*, 18–24.

[57] See: Delmos Jones, "Towards a Native Anthropology," *Human Organization* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 1970): 251–59, https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.29.4.717764244331m4qv.

[58] See: John L. Gwaltney, "On Going Home Again--Some Reflections of a Native Anthropologist," *Phylon (1960-)* 37, no. 3 (1976): 236–42, https://doi.org/10.2307/274452.

[59] Gwaltney, 241; A more recent example of "native anthropology" in the vein of Gwaltney is Frederick, *Between Sundays*. Frederick is an African-American Christian whose work inquires "into the spiritual lives of women in a deliberate effort to unpack the dynamics of lived experience that [she] had witnessed since childhood." She states: "Recent anthropology, largely informed by feminist and postcolonial critiques, has attempted to rewrite [the style of anthropology that studies remote and distant societies in order to produce scientific documentation of these societies' functioning] not only by altering the ethnographic form but also by raising questions about the very nature of anthropology's focus, 'remote' societies. One response has been a turn toward analyzing one's own culture and thus establishing a type of native anthropology," pp. 19-20.

In my opinion, this is the best posture for Christian ethnography to take, because it is most cautious of the pitfalls of actively applying one's normative religious beliefs to fieldwork. When Christian ethnography is limited to emic qualitative research, a type of native anthropology, researchers do not 1) structure fieldwork around an ultimate goal of evangelization or imposition of their own norms on field sites or institutions, as in the missionary-activist research or 2) impose upon unfamiliar cultures a lens of analysis and critique based on the researcher's normative Christian beliefs, as can happen in etic qualitative research. Rather, in emic qualitative forms of Christian ethnography Christian insiders turn the ethnographic eye on practices found within communities with which the researcher shares a common set of religious norms and beliefs. The purpose of such a native study would not be an attempt to fully describe the tradition in human terms or to finally get at its essence. Rather, it is an exercise in disclosing partial truths that are more readily apparent from an emic, or insider, perspective. Christian ethnographers who adopt this mode may seek to offer "a way to test out the truth of particular claims" of a religious community and offer "complex descriptions of how distinctive Christian identity and witness is formed within the community and the relationship to participation in outside institutions."[60]

For example, in "The Cost of Virtue: What Power in the Open Door Community Might Speak to Virtue Ethics," Peter R. Gathje demonstrates how the "insider knowledge" of a Christian researcher yields a theologically insightful analysis of the internal power dynamics found at the Open Door Community, an intentional Christian community in Atlanta, Georgia.[61]

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[60] Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011), 46.

[61] Gathje describes the community this way: "The Open Door Community is committed to a shared vision of life that is Gospel-centered. They see as integral to that life and vision the practices of hospitality to the poor and political action that offers resistance to policies that harm the poor. They seek in these practices and the structures of their communal life to affirm the dignity of every person as made in the image of God, and to reject domination based upon race, class, gender, or sexual orientation... Their intentional break from societal conventions was meant

Gathje knows the community well enough to trace power relations among different members of the community and through this process he develops a rich and thick description of a community engaged in ongoing theologically negotiated dialogue that leaves itself open to change. One informant describes it this way: "The difference [of the Open Door Community] is not in the presence or absence of sin and iniquity, but in our response to its presence and power in our lives. First comes confession… We repent. We commit our lives to being about the long, slow, error-prone process of undoing these sins… We often say to each other, 'There is no such thing as a stupid question. Ask, ask; keep on asking."[62]

I read Gathje's work in terms of James Clifford's observation that

> [m]uch ethnography, taking its distance from totalizing anthropology, seeks to evoke multiple (but not limitless) allegories. . . Such accounts may be complex and truthful; and they are, in principle, susceptible to refutation, assuming access to the same pool of cultural facts. But as written versions based on fieldwork, these accounts are clearly no longer the story, but a story among other stories.[63]

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to embody an alternative to the reigning social and political arrangements. So, the community not only engaged in protest against policies they saw as further dehumanizing and criminalizing homeless persons, they also welcomed into their community life people from the streets and those released from prison," Peter R Gathje, "The Cost of Virtue: What Power in the Open Door Community Might Speak to Virtue Ethics," in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum, 2011), 207; From their website: "The Open Door Community is a residential community in the Catholic Worker tradition (we're sometimes called a Protestant Catholic Worker House). We seek to dismantle racism, sexism and heterosexism, abolish the death penalty, and proclaim the Beloved Community through loving relationships with some of the most neglected and outcast of God's children: the homeless and our sisters and brothers who are in prison. We serve breakfasts and soup-kitchen lunches, provide showers and changes of clothes, staff a free medical clinic, conduct worship services and meetings for the clarification of thought, and provide a prison ministry, including monthly trips for families to visit loved ones at the Hardwick Prisons in central Georgia. We also advocate on behalf of the oppressed, homeless and prisoners through non-violent protests, grassroots organizing and the publication of our monthly newspaper, "Hospitality and Resistance in Metro Atlanta," The Open Door Community, accessed September 22, 2014, http://opendoorcommunity.org/.

[62] Gathje, "The Cost of Virtue: What Power in the Open Door Community Might Speak to Virtue Ethics," 211.

[63] James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography : A School of American Research Advanced Seminar*, ed. James Clifford and George E Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 103, 109.

In his analysis, Gathje does not construct one monolithic theological description or judge the Open Door Community's process on the basis of theological precepts. Instead, he draws out the theological struggles had by various informants over time, at different levels of power within the community, as tensions arise and changes occur—evoking "multiple (but not limitless) allegories." He gives voice to all the players—to the "partners," or committed decision makers, and to the less committed "resident volunteers" and "houseguests" who hold less power and are not final decision makers—without slipping into easy dichotomies between the powerful and powerless. Instead he complicates the notion of living out one's convictions or beliefs and shows just how challenging it is for the Open Door Community to live out its "Gospel vision,"[64] a vision they continually struggle to articulate even as they struggle to embody it.[65]

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[64] Gathje, "The Cost of Virtue: What Power in the Open Door Community Might Speak to Virtue Ethics," 207–8. "...the story of the Open Door in relation to power shows how the structure and practice of power within an intentional Christian community with a Gospel vision of shared life will need constant reevaluation and renegotiation. The complexities of dynamics such as charisma, and differing experiences of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation require continual recognition, discussion, discernment, and experimentation with different forms of structuring power. How power is structured and practiced within a community reveals a great deal about how the community is living out its vision," pp.222–23.

[65] The second exemplar that I argue also "evoke[s] multiple (but not limitless) allegories" is Jones, "Ethnography as Revelation: Witnessing in History, Faith, and Sin." Although not technically an ethnography, Jones's "exemplary narratives" provide another method of demonstrating the complexities of lived theological situations. Jones interviewed thirty-one activists involved in the debate regarding Patient Assisted Suicide, and from these interviews emerged exemplary narratives or particular stories from informants that unveiled socio-economic differences between the various religious groups involved in the debate. Situating stories next to each other, especially stories that result in different theological belief and/or actions, helps draw out the multivocality of a particular situation. Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption* also falls into this category. Fulkerson, an associate professor of theology at Duke Divinity School, conducted her fieldwork in a local multicultural United Methodist Church. Fulkerson, as a white, privileged academic, positions herself as an outsider in the multiethnic setting that also included a number of members living with disabilities. Yet, as a Christian and expert in Christian theological tradition, she also functioned as an insider, familiar with the types of traditions and habits that would be found within this community. She begins her work with the story of her first encounter, her first bodied experience, with the church. The main characteristic of this encounter was her discomfort: "...I am surprised at my own response to all the dark skin in the room...Next I notice a think white man sitting twisted in a wheelchair, parked next to a short man who looks like he has Down syndrome. As I approach the man in the wheelchair, my body feels suddenly awkward and unnatural" (5). It is this experience that frames her entire analysis. Her own awkwardness she describes in terms of 'obliviousness' granted to her by being part of the dominant culture who normally inhabits what she terms 'white space' (86). 'Normalcy' of white space is threatened by increasing numbers of non-white people who are not in positions of subservience, the dominant society. In confronting her own obliviousness, Fulkerson describes Good Samaritan UMC as a place where the invisible (to the dominate society) become visible, or appear. This glimpse into a religious tradition (United Methodism) that is familiar to her along with the unfamiliar experience of worshiping with a multicultural

It is in this third category of Christian ethnography, emic qualitative research, that I situate my method of hermeneutical ethnography. Christian ethnographers who fall within all three categories above share the following: a qualitative over quantitative focus, a desire for their research to have a direct impact on their fieldwork site or on their own religious tradition more generally, and an understanding of ethnography as means of writing constructively within the fields of Christian theology and ethics. Therefore the type of field work and analysis they carry out should, as Deborah Gordon says, be done "among people who are culturally familiar enough with each other's backgrounds."[66] Gordon's insight is not about how much the researcher thinks he or she knows another culture, but rather, she speaks of a mutual understanding between informant and researcher, one that is not required by either the missionary-activist or etic qualitative research categories of Christian ethnography, but that is inherently characteristic of emic qualitative research. This is evident in Gathje's conclusion, when he explicitly asks and answers: "What does an analysis of the place and practice of power within the Open Door Community contribute to intentional Christian communities committed to a Gospel vision of life?" Notice, Gathje identifies the usefulness of his analysis for specific Christian groups whose values are similar to those of the Open Door Community. His analysis may or may not have broader impacts, but by grounding its usefulness in communities similar to the Open Door Community, Gathje is acknowledging the particularity of this work, and is refusing to abstract his findings into universal claims. Gathje's account of the Open Door Community's theologically complex reality in the midst of organizational power struggles discloses the multifaceted experiences of Christians; it provides insight into the fruits of various Christian

and variously abled groups of people, allows her offer analysis within her own tradition that both critiques it and opens it up to a wider academic audience interested in the phenomenon of multicultural congregations.

[66] Gordon and Behar, *Women Writing Culture*, 386.

traditions, not answers. I argue this is the strength of Christian ethnography: it has the power to give various Christian traditions a multiplicity of particular and lived stories—it gives Christian traditions the possibility to judge themselves by their own fruit.[67]

Hermeneutical ethnography, therefore, is a form of Christian ethnography, the main purpose of which is to describe, analyze, and critique contemporary Christian scripture-reading practices in a way that takes seriously the normative assumptions Christian traditions hold with regard to scripture. On the one hand, this is a method that provides Christian traditions a way to analyze and critique themselves based on their own stated belief systems. On the other hand, the type of data that is gathered and analyzed by the application of this method is useful beyond the religious tradition being studied. As outlined in the introduction to this section, the method of hermeneutical ethnography offers supplemental modes of inquiry, mines new types of data, and offers new insights to scholars in religious studies, theology, sociology, and anthropology who are interested in the way scripture and tradition function within the Christian church.

Three Modes of Hermeneutical Ethnography

I developed the method of hermeneutical ethnography during my ethnographic fieldwork and the subsequent analysis of its ethnographic data. The question I brought to my field site was regarding the role of scripture in shaping (or not shaping) Christian discourse and action. During the course of my fieldwork and analysis three moments or modes of this method emerged: the fieldwork mode, the close reading mode, and the thick description mode. These modes, which I

[67] "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits," Matthew 7:15-20 in Paul Achtemeier, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Rev. ed (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

explain in more detail below, are not sequential steps of a method, but rather three parts of the whole process, and could be engaged simultaneously at times.

Fieldwork Mode: Living the Lived Theology of a Field Site

The fieldwork mode of hermeneutical ethnography involves using the tools of participant observation in the life of the field site and conducting interviews of informants. Although the overarching research question involves the role of scripture, the main purpose of this mode does not necessarily include asking informants about their experience of scripture, nor does it involve attempting to gather specific scriptures that seem significant to the community. Rather, the goal of this mode is to be immersed in the religious community and listen to what they say about themselves and their beliefs, and to observe and participate in rituals and other ministry actions. In the case of my fieldwork, I already knew that Pastor Miguel had been sent to Millian to help them with their goal of becoming a multicultural community. Therefore, before my fieldwork started I had decided to center my inquiry and ethnographic observations on the discourse and actions concerned with developing a multicultural ministry at Millian. Therefore, the focus of my interview questions and the collection of interview data centered on texts and events that in some way expressed how community members and leaders talk about multicultural ministry and specific actions that demonstrated how multicultural ministry was carried out at my field site.

Another task of this mode is to choose from among the many possible texts and events, ones that will be the subject of further analysis. In choosing what to analyze, it is important to note that the events or texts do not need to seem particularly unique or special, but instead should be exemplary or routine, and indicative of the normal life of the community. This is because the purpose of the study is to examine logics and patterns of everyday discourse and actions, not to focus on the outlying events that may or may not be representative of the community's ongoing

culture. In my field work, for example, this included choosing to analyze a ministry plan outlining Millian's approach to ministry in the surrounding neighborhood.

Another important aspect of this decision is the choosing of texts and events that have some discernible relationship with one another. For example, the event I examined that relates to the ministry plan is an annual egg hunt event called the Easter Egg Roll. This event is mentioned in the ministry plan where it is portrayed as a successful event that that helps reach certain goals laid out in the plan. In examining Pastor Miguel's vision and form of instruction, however, I closely analyze three types of texts: a sermon, five phrases he repeats in the context of worship, and a hymn.

Close Reading Mode: Learning How to Read the Lived Theology of a Field Site

The first step for performing a close reading of texts extracted from the everyday life of a religious community is a hermeneutical analysis. Using this method, I treat all texts (e.g. strategic ministry plans, hymns, sermons, etc.) as contemporary forms of Christian biblical commentary that I submit to analysis under what I call a rabbinic microscope. This means that I engage approaches and assumptions usually reserved for the academic study of rabbinic literature, such as scholarly readings of midrash (i.e. rabbinic biblical commentary) and talmudic literature.

As I mentioned above, Steven Fraade's assumption that rabbinic literature is the "literary face" of a much more complex matrix of teaching and learning is one that I adopt and modify for the subject matter of contemporary Christian scriptural commentary. Also important is James Kugel's method of "reverse engineering" which he defines this way: "we examine a finished product, a text somewhere, and try to recreate the thinking that stands behind each and every one

of its components."[68] In his work, Kugel traces particular scriptural traditions or "exegetical motifs" across the various works of ancient literature in which they appear. He examines these motifs in light of their native context in scripture and in subsequent traditions to discern how later versions of these motifs developed. In the case of the following analysis, I adopt the general force of his methodology—to examine a text and to try to recreate how it was generated. However, instead of examining a biblical tradition across a body of literature, I break down various textual components of one piece of commentary and examine them as exemplary or not exemplary of the phenomenon Daniel Boyarin terms "intertextuality."[69]

For Boyarin, when scripture from other parts of the scriptural canon is cited within midrash, it is not simply a case of the midrashist relying on prooftexts to bolster a particular interpretation. Instead, scriptural citations within a midrashic passage are inextricably related to the commentary that is generated. He states:

> The texts cited (sometimes only alluded to) *are the generating force behind the elaboration of narrative or other types of textual expansion in the Mekilta's text.* . . . The so-called 'prooftexts' are to be read as intertexts and cotexts of the Torah's narrative, as subtexts of the midrashic interpretation. There is a tension between the meaning(s) of the quoted texts in its 'original' context and in its present context.[70]

Textual issues—usually apparent contradictions or troubling gaps in narratives—led the rabbis to introduce what Boyarin states are specific "intertexts" in relation to the *lemma* (the scriptural verse being commented upon). The choice of intertexts is not arbitrary because they are related to the lemma by identifiable textual issues—shared Hebrew roots, grammatical points, etc. The

[68] James L. Kugel, "Nine Theses," in *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 251.
[69] See: Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.
[70] Boyarin, 22–23.

interaction of these citations within the new context of commentary functions to resolve contradictions and fill in gaps not addressed in a lemma's original context. Boyarin argues that such intertextuality functions to preserve tradition, albeit through creative rabbinic innovation.

The reverse engineering of contemporary scriptural commentary reveals a variety of reading assumptions and strategies employed by interpreters when they engage scriptural texts and the resulting interpretation that is then recontextualized into and generative of the contemporary commentary—sometimes intertextual phenomena are revealed, while other times a form of prooftexting (for example) is more descriptive of the type of engagement with scripture that is occurring. Regardless of the hermeneutic strategies and assumptions that are at work in a particular contemporary commentary, all of the scriptural citations and allusions within a particular excerpt are examined both within their initial scriptural contexts and in their subsequent commentarial context. Reverse engineering then, displays and analyzes the "tension" between the meanings found in these two contexts, as described by Boyarin. Ultimately, this process will produce an account of an underlying reading practice (or process) that lies behind the "literary surface" of a particular text's scriptural commentary.

The second step of the close reading mode is a limited form of critical social discourse analysis in order to examine certain forms of social interaction that are promoted within the patterns of discourse.[71] My work has been most influenced by the approach found in Margaret

[71] Discourse studies emerged in the 1980s out of Marxist and Foucauldian philosophical approaches to language and discourse. The overarching concern of discourse analysis is to "address both 'how' and 'what' questions in relation to the construction of reality—how reality is constructed and the institutions, modes of representation and cultural/material discursive regimes which emerge as a result," Margaret Wetherell, "Debates in Discourse Research," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Simeon Yates, and Stephanie Taylor (London: SAGE, 2001), 393; Those who engage in discourse analysis (or what is sometimes called "critical discourse analysis") most often focus their inquiry specifically on discourse's role in the reproduction of "dominance" (defined as "the exercise of social powers by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial, and gender inequality.") Teun van Dijk states: "Note that although our first task is to systematically examine the many textual and contextual properties of the exercise of dominance for this example, and to provide explicit evidence for such an account, analysis is not—and cannot be—

Wetherell and Jonathan Potter's work, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation.*[72] For Wetherell and Potter, discourses within lay speech are an important nexus where ideologies generate meaning with social and psychological consequences (that in turn reshape local discourse). They study specific excerpts of lay speech in relationship to the context and manner in which they are utilized. They do not seek to evaluate abstract notions of specific ideologies, but instead analyze how such ideas are utilized "in situ" as practices that are not monolithic, but flexible. How such ideas are expressed in everyday lay discourse is variable in its force and meaning, both in how such ideas help constitute personal and social identities and how they determine how social systems and structures function. Ultimately, they employ discourse analysis to expose contradictions and underlying ideologies

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neutral. Indeed, the point of critical discourse analysis is to take a position," Van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Simeon Yates, and Stephanie Taylor (London: SAGE, 2001), 207; The distinctive aspect of this approach is its close attention to the actual text and speech found in everyday use. It is an approach that questions the "simple realist assumptions that language is neutral and transparent," and therefore assumes that discourse's lack of neutrality signifies its involvement in the shaping of human reality. Many methods of discourse analysis operate on the assumption that discourse is in some way involved in the process of "constituting reality for human beings," Wetherell, "Debates in Discourse Research," 392. The questions that preoccupy this field of study continue to be influenced by its philosophical predecessors. Therefore, scholarly inquiry tends to coalesce either around concerns of ideology (i.e. how dominance in society is reproduced through discursive practice) or tracing the genealogies of how constructs of power develop and function in relation to discourse. Then there are also some scholars whose work synthesizes both approaches. Discourse researchers are found in many disciplines, use different forms of textual data, and formulate different questions based on concerns within their own fields and their philosophical leanings (pp. 380-398).. .

[72] Wetherell and Potter offer a close analysis of interviews and political speeches that demonstrate how white middle-class Pākehā New Zealanders across the political spectrum utilize "interpretive resources"—a series of enlightenment-derived set of values or tropes—to maintain the often-oppressive status quo over the indigenous Māori people. Wetherell and Potter construct a methodology of discourse analysis that is both critically and constructively informed by academic methods in sociology and social psychology. From these starting points, Wetherell and Potter establish their operative assumption that discourse is an important part of a constitutive social and psychological process that helps define identity as well as structure society. They argue that such discourse can be mapped through patterns found in conversation with people in the general population (i.e. lay speech), the expression of which is not only fragmented, but also often unselfconsciously full of contradictions. They distance their approach from an emphasis on therapeutic and individualistic questions (which are the focus of their own field of social psychology), and instead assume that discourse is a social practice that is tied to the social, academic, and political structures that shape how society operates. They critique and build off of both Marxist ideas of ideology and Foucault's concept of normalization through rituals of power and attempt to "combine, alternate and intertwine genealogical and ideological modes of analysis," Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), 86.

within lay conversations. They argue that the patterns they uncover demonstrate one mechanism through which the status quo dominance of one group over another is maintained in broader societal structures.

I take from their approach the assumption that discourse is a constitutive factor in the development, maintenance, and structuring of interpersonal interactions. While Wetherell and Potter use the categories of subject positioning and social categorization to analyze conversational interviews and public speeches, I apply these categories to texts such as sermons, liturgies, ministry action plans, etc., that are written or spoken by contemporary Christians in ministry contexts. All of the texts I analyze were produced by persons in church leadership and contain discourse that is either reflective of the context of Millian or of Pastor Miguel's approach to ministry. Specifically, I examine (1) the "subject positioning" of the speaker or author of each text and (2) the "social categorization" used by the speaker or author to describe herself in relation to others.[73] "Subject positions," according to Wetherell, are "positions or slots in culturally recognized patterns of talk [that one speaks from and that] construct us as characters and give us psychology."[74] For example, in this project I speak as both an academic and an insider within the Christian tradition of United Methodism who has personally worked with Pastor Miguel for many years. This positioning, into which I will go in detail in the next section, has determined the subject matter of this project and has influenced its approach. Understanding the speaker's subject positioning helps readers gain insight about the concerns, motivations, and

[73] In the instance of the hymn, I examine the congregants' shifts in subject positioning and form of social categorization as they sing the hymn, instead of exploring these categories in relation to the hymn's original composers.

[74] Margaret Wetherell, "Themes in Discourse Research," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Simeon Yates, and Stephanie Taylor (London: SAGE, 2001), 23–24; Wetherell and Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism*, 133–35, for an example of Wetherell and Potter's analysis that focuses in on describing subject positions.

assumptions underlying her speech, and how these in turn relate the speaker to other groups of people. "Social categorization" results when "social interaction and the perception of others have to be organized, ordered and simplified, principally around a set of cognitive categories."[75] Analysis of the social categories that are present in texts helps give a sense of how the speaker or author constructs relationship to and division from other groups of people. At times, such divisions are communal constructions, such as nationality and race.[76] At other times speakers group persons by their choices and actions (such as grouping together those who attend worship on a particular Sunday).[77]

The analysis of social interactions within discourse goes hand in hand with the hermeneutical analysis of these same contemporary Christian texts. By closely examining the cited scriptures, it is possible to see what effect (if any) they have on subject positioning and social categorization when they are recontextualized within the contemporary scriptural commentaries. In this study, I map the discursive context Pastor Miguel encountered in Millian and the effects Pastor Miguel's scriptural discourse has on both the theological beliefs he declares and the practical liturgical and ministry actions he influences within the context of Millian Memorial United Methodist Church.

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[75] Wetherell and Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism*, 37. Also see Chapter 5 (pp. 117-148) "Constructing community: 'race', 'culture' and 'nation'" for an example of an examination of social categorization specifically focused on the constructed categories of "race, culture, and nation" (p. 118).

[76] See Chapter 5 in: Wetherell and Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism*.

[77] This study is not engaged in an exhaustive critical discourse analysis either of the Millian community or of the particular texts under examination. My findings do demonstrate specific ideological concerns related to white cultural norms and identifies their re-inscription of dominance within the text of the strategic outreach plan examined closely in Chapters 3-4, Van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," 307 However, my primary purpose is to examine how the discourse of these texts relates to contemporary church practice, such as the leadership and organization of ministry activities of the 2015 Easter Egg Roll and the 2015 Vacation Bible School. Therefore, I use this form of analysis to get a sense of how these tendencies are mimicked or not in the leadership and organizational structures of actual ministry events.

Thick Description Mode: Writing a Lived Theology of a Field Site

The first two modes feed into the third task, which is developing a thick description that includes events related to the texts that are analyzed. When discussing his approach to the method of thick description, Clifford Geertz states: "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior."[78] The purpose of the endeavor is not to "capture primitive facts" but rather to "clarify what goes on" in the specific field placement.[79] For Geertz this means to understand and translate for others an unfamiliar form of social discourse so as to be able to convey the meaning of events, not the events themselves.[80] The subject matter of the thick description are "microscopic" events, from which broader conclusions about the culture can be drawn. This mode of hermeneutical ethnography takes into consideration the first two modes (experiences of fieldwork and the data gathered from close readings of texts) in order to develop a thick description of particular events that occur in the community. The goal is to further refine the generation of thick descriptions of events that many in Western culture may regard as "familiar." Insights found by performing hermeneutical and social discourse analyses of contemporary scriptural commentaries that have been generated by the community itself open up thick descriptions of lived theology to an even deeper expanse of interpretive possibility. Suddenly what may be considered by many to be an insignificant act can provide a lens through which embedded community habits are uncovered and examined. For example, in the case of this study, through the lens of one Easter egg hunt understood in light of a close reading of the text of

[78] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 2017), sec. II.
[79] Geertz, sec. IV.
[80] Geertz, sec. V.

a strategic plan, I demonstrate how Millian exhibits tendencies to engage in assimilationist logics when attempting to develop multicultural community. The hermeneutical and social discourse analyses of texts help clarify which forms of logic are influencing the enacted and lived theology of the community, and which are not.

Mentor Under the Microscope: A Lived Theology by a Disciple-Ethnographer

My position as a United Methodist who has worked with Pastor Miguel in ministry before, and as a researcher within my tradition offers me unique insight that will be important to my study. I have had the opportunity not only to examine Pastor Miguel's approach as a scholar, but I also carry first-hand knowledge of fully participating in a faith community in two forms. As a lay person and member of his congregation, I was subject to an early, analogous form of Pastor Miguel's process of entextualizing Beloved Community within worship at FUMC in Hyattsville. As a student pastor and then lay leader under his supervision and direct training, I was involved in the planning and execution of ministry actions, and therefore privy to certain of Pastor Miguel's insights (such as the explanation of the bilingual greeting discussed at the beginning of this chapter).

However, this unique position carries with it drawbacks, including the challenge of maintaining a critical distance from my subject matter.[81] Even before working with Pastor

[81] Nancy Scheper-Hughes reflects on how she positioned herself as a researcher within Alto do Cruzeiro, Brazil, a town she had previously worked in with the Peace Corps as a Public Health worker. She notes the difficulty of dividing her time between field and community work, and the tensions inherent in being at the disposal of her informants to help expedite local community projects. However, she also argues that her "public" work brought her into spaces that her first approach had not. By demanding she resume aspects of her former role as a community activist, her informants pulled Scheper-Hughes "into the marketplace, to the prefeitura [city hall], to the ecclesiastical base community and rural syndicate meetings." In the end, she argues that the position she assumed as anthropologist-companheira led her into spaces she otherwise would have never had access to and that these very experiences enriched and expanded the scope of her understanding of the community and the theoretical implications of her work, see: Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Other examples of ethnographers that were positioned as insiders of the tradition they studied include: Jones, "Ethnography as Revelation: Witnessing in History, Faith,

Miguel, the United Methodist Church has been central to my life since my teens. In 1996, I began the process of becoming an ordained United Methodist Elder. This process led me to Wesley Theological Seminary, where I met Pastor Miguel in 2000. We were both in the Master of Divinity program and completed our immersion experience requirement together on a trip to Nicaragua in 2001. Ruth, his wife, gave me Spanish lessons before the trip. Then in 2003, I began a seminary practicum at First United Methodist Church in Hyattsville (First Church), Maryland where he was the associate pastor. There I interned under the supervision of the senior pastor, Rev. Vance P. Ross, and Pastor Miguel. In 2006, when I exited the ordination process, I stayed on as a layperson in leadership working directly with Pastor Miguel in Hispanic and multicultural ministries, until 2008 when I left Maryland to begin my graduate studies at the University of Virginia. It was my experience working in multicultural ministries at First Church that led me back into the academy with questions about the relationship between scripture and lived theology.

My fieldwork began in 2014, six years after I had stopped working directly with Pastor Miguel at First Church in Hyattsville, Maryland. Since I had maintained contact with him and his family, I still needed to negotiate the boundary between my roles as researcher and participant. I worshipped at Millian, participated in the community's many ministerial and administrative activities, and worked with Pastor Miguel and the ministerial staff, when I was asked.[82] I endeavored to be mindful of how new observations made in the context of my fieldwork and my past experiences working with Pastor Miguel informed my analysis.

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and Sin"; and Gathje, "The Cost of Virtue: What Power in the Open Door Community Might Speak to Virtue Ethics."

[82] For example, I was asked by the Music Director to play in the bell choir during Easter service, since the choir was short-handed.

Through my fieldwork, which in addition to participant observation included interviews of Millian members, I was introduced to another facet of Pastor Miguel's approach to multicultural ministry. Although developing multicultural congregations was never straightforward or easy, both First Church and Oxon Hill UMC made advances in terms of meeting Pastor Miguel's definition of multiculturalism: "Multiculutralismo tiene que ver con lo que es estar juntos en liderasgo, pero tambien demostrado cuando comen juntos de la comida de todos" (Multiculturalism has to do with everyone leading together, and also it is manifest when everyone eats the food of all).[83] Both First Church and Oxon Hill had persons in leadership that represented the demographic of the community surrounding these churches. Also, both hosted events that included meals of mutual food exchange between people of different cultures.

However, in 2015, after two and a half years with Pastor Miguel as the lead pastor, Millian was not following the same pattern. Moreover, the advances I did witness (for example the increasing diversity of the children who participated in Sunday School) went virtually unnoticed by many of the long-term members. Such advances were often dwarfed by their nostalgic visions of Millian's past and their continued ambivalence about the goal of multiculturalism itself. I realized that the work I had set out to do—to construct Pastor Miguel's lived theology of multicultural ministry—would not in fact make sense in the context of Millian. Instead, exposure to the contemporary context and my past experiences worked together to help me explore something I had not considered: Pastor Miguel's approach to multiculturalism in a relatively unsympathetic, unenthusiastic, and cynical environment. This meant giving as much weight and analysis to Millian's context (covered in Chapters 3-4) as I did to Pastor Miguel's approach (covered in Chapters 5-6). Instead of asking how Pastor Miguel engages scripture to

[83] Miguel Balderas, Phone Conversation, interview by Kelly Figueroa-Ray, phone conversation notes, October 3, 2017.

build multicultural communities, the primary question of my fieldwork became to understand Pastor Miguel's approach to multicultural ministry within a context that was not fully behind its own goal of becoming multicultural. Clearly my approach, specifically my focus on Pastor Miguel and his engagement with Christian scripture and tradition along with the particular biases that I inevitably bring to my research, signifies that this study and its conclusions provide only one lens through which to understand either Pastor Miguel or Millian Memorial United Methodist Church. Even so, the method of hermeneutical ethnography offers new sites of inquiry that have a tendency not to be considered by disciplines such as sociology or anthropology. Its application may be of interest to scholars in these disciplines who are interested in contemporary Christian scripture-reading practices.

My official fieldwork began in November 2014 with an initial site visit and interview with Pastor Miguel. From February to July 2015, I was a participant observer in the Millian community, where Pastor Miguel is the head pastor. I attended the monthly communion services, along with all services for Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost. As part of my fieldwork, I participated in Wednesday night services, bible studies, administrative meetings, and other church activities. I interviewed twenty-three persons including lay members, lay leaders, the two pastors and other staff. Through this fieldwork I gathered evidence that reflects both the culture Pastor Miguel encountered at Millian and his response to it. I undertook a close reading of this evidence and developed the thick description that follows in the chapters below.

Ultimately the method of hermeneutical ethnography allowed me to uncover, explicate, and analyze an organic multicultural training model that differs so radically from what is normally considered "multicultural training," and that it is often not identifiable by the persons who are going through it. Many of the long-term Millian members I conversed with remarked

that Pastor Miguel had done very little to train leaders in the process of becoming a multicultural church. Such persons were correct, if multicultural training is defined by concepts that are taught in a classroom format with PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, and small group sessions. Pastor Miguel, with a few exceptions, did not offer Millian any formalized training sessions of this type. Instead, he exemplified an entire approach that I term the entextualization of Beloved Community—one organic, all-encompassing multicultural training session. Millian congregants were exposed to new logics, embodied new values, and participated in new forms of leading together as part of the fabric of everyday faith and practice. This was the training Millian has received from Pastor Miguel, which he summarizes as follows:

> *Cuando gente de diferentes grupos étnicos dirigen, ustedes están en "training." Cuando la directora de VBS es Latina, ustedes están en "training." Cuando ahora la directora de Escuela Dominical es Latina y además mi esposa, ustedes están en "training." Cuando ahora los ayudantes de los profesores en Escuela Dominical no tan solo son blancos, sino también Latinos y Africanos, ustedes están en "training."*
>
> (When persons from different ethnic groups are leading, you all are in "training." When in VBS the director is Latina, you all are in "training." When the director of Sunday School is now Latina, and my wife, you all are in "training." When now that the teachers' assistants in Sunday School are not only white but also Latinos and Africans, you all are in "training.")[84]

Hermeneutical Ethnography has allowed me to articulate a form of multicultural training that to this point has only been experienced, practiced, and lived. This study has also shown that the fruit of applying this method to the workings of a local church congregation yields a more

[84] Miguel Balderas, Informal Interview - SPRC packet, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, field notes, March 30, 2015.

complex and nuanced understanding of how scripture works within its discourse, structures, and activities.

Structure of the Hermeneutical Ethnography

With this project description and method in mind, the following study is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One sets the scene of this hermeneutical ethnography by introducing Pastor Miguel and Millian, while Chapter Two lays out the streams of tradition that conjoin through their interaction—a tradition of multiculturalism generated as a solution within the narrative of decline and the lived theological tradition of Beloved Community. Chapters Three and Four offer a thick description of the culture Pastor Miguel encountered when he arrived at Millian that includes a close reading of the 2011 Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry plan and what that reading reveals about one particular event, the 2015 Easter Egg Roll. Chapters Five and Six offers a thick description of Pastor Miguel's response to this culture, his process of entextualizing Beloved Community. This includes a close reading of a sermon and liturgical components of worship that demonstrate Pastor Miguel's modes of instruction and training that are integral his approach to multiculturalism. These readings are then related to an event, the 2015 Vacation Bible School, that has been shaped by his approach. In the conclusion, I reflect on the two approaches to multiculturalism I distilled through this study and I offer thoughts on the "viability" of Pastor Miguel's approach of entextualizing Beloved Community.

Chapter 1: Bajo el Agua, Under the Surface of the Water: The Life and Ministry of Pastor Miguel Balderas

"Other players have low expectations about the skill of Hispanic competitors, even controlling for occupation, age, and performance during the game."
-Steven D. Levitt, "Testing Theories of Discrimination: Evidence from the Weakest Link" in *Freakonomics*[85]

When I first began working with Pastor Miguel at First Church in 2003, I thought I respected him, but in truth, I did not think I had much to learn from him. I considered him more of a peer than a pastoral authority with expertise in ministry. We had just graduated seminary around the same time and I had had experience with Latino populations in Peru and Central America. I was looking for experience in multicultural or Hispanic ministries in the United States to prepare myself for becoming the pastor of my own congregation. While there were aspects of ministry that I needed exposure to—such as the handling church finances, planning weekly services, and preaching regularly—I did not think I had to learn a whole new way of being a minister or even a Christian, for that matter.

[85] Steven D. Levitt and Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, Revised & expanded ed. (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2006), 447.

Since I came in with a posture of being experienced, I would sit in judgement of everything happening around me instead of learning from it. For example, I would sit in administrative meetings with Pastor Miguel and lay members, completely frustrated with the pace and inefficiency of these meetings. *I could do so much better*, I thought. One day, Pastor Miguel sent me to a committee meeting of the African members. The group met monthly, and the main purpose of this particular meeting was to prepare for the annual celebration they hosted. Members of the group would serve as worship leaders, which included directing the congregation in singing hymns in African languages and collecting the offering by dancing down the aisle instead of passing around the collection plates while the congregation remained seated. The group would host a lunch with foods from their native countries of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and others. When I went to the meeting the celebration was less than two weeks away, and I became anxious when nothing seemed to be getting done at the meeting. Everyone was talking, but no one was planning for the event. The meeting seemed chaotic and disorganized to me, and I had no idea how they would get everything planned on time. So I stepped in. I suggested lists be drawn up of who would lead the congregation in worship and who would cook for the lunch. By the end of the meeting, the group was well on the way to having the whole celebration and service planned out. I felt amazing. When I walked into Pastor Miguel's office to report, I told him what a great job I had done. He looked at me and shook his head. I had made a mistake. He explained that my purpose in the meeting was to offer pastoral support, not to take control and run the meeting. Since I was in an official capacity as a student pastor, the leaders of the African committee afforded me great respect and had allowed me to take over, submitting to my suggestions and planning. I had just replicated colonial logics—a white, educated Westerner telling African members how to organize their own service. If I wanted to work in multicultural

ministry, I would need to learn from this mistake, to understand that different cultures had different ways of organizing, and instead of stepping in I needed to observe and learn how things were done.

Pastor Miguel knew when I first began at First Church that I thought I knew what I was doing, but he never directly confronted me. Instead he allowed me to perform ministry in the way I thought best and then pointed out my mistakes in the process. At first I would justify my mistakes, rationalizing why I did what I did. *I know better than he does*, I would think. *What does he know about organizing a meeting? He just sits there silently, most of the time, while nothing is getting done*. One of the hardest lessons I learned was that I was constantly making mistakes—not that my way of doing things was wrong, but rather, imposing my way of doing things was. Most of my discipleship process entailed making mistakes, admitting them, learning from them, and moving on. It was not until I began to admit my mistakes—an incredibly painful process—that I began to learn how to engage in the form of multicultural ministry Pastor Miguel was training me in.

I share this story because I have seen Pastor Miguel repeat this pedagogical posture at Oxon Hill and now at Millian. He knows his parishioners may respect his office, but are prejudiced regarding his intellect and leadership ability, because he is Latino with a Mexican accent. He does not defend his methods, but rather allows people to think what they want. Since he does not offer traditional training sessions in multicultural ministry they doubt his expertise in the area. In interviews, members expressed this by saying that Pastor Miguel really loves everyone and means well, but he does not know how to navigate the challenges at Millian. He's doing the best he can, *bless his heart*.

Pastor Miguel has told me that he uses this ignorance to his advantage. If his congregation thinks he doesn't know what he is doing, then they will be less resistant to the form of training that he is implementing. In *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, the sociologist Gerardo Marti makes the point that research shows most people "left to their own choice and friendship networks remain within their own racial and ethnic groups."[86] Therefore, even in a congregation with the goal of becoming multicultural, "church leaders who desire to diversify their congregations are seeking to enact this without the consent of the congregation."[87] Marti goes on to argue that music, as a form of social control, can be used to "cultivate and even 'lure' people to experience diversity," and that "the actualization of diversity will be dependent on the level of social control achieved by organizational leaders to bring people into common fellowship, even if they would prefer not to have that diversity in their own lives."[88] The bulk of Pastor Miguel's training program, as will be shown in Chapters 5-6, occurs within the worship service, where he has almost total control over the structure and content of the weekly events. He sees his multicultural discipleship training as organic and embodied. He is giving his congregation new language and new habits, but he is stopping short of total control—he cannot force them to choose to be a multicultural community. In the end, what they will do with these new tools is up to the congregation. What is fascinating to me is how consistently people at Millian underestimate Pastor Miguel by discounting his intelligence and leadership experience. In talking with Lucy, Pastor Braulio's wife, who has known Pastor Miguel since he moved to the United

[86] Gerardo Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 231, note 40.
[87] Marti, 231, note 40.
[88] Marti, 231, note 40.

States, she says, “No saben quien esta parado enfrente de ellos” (they do not know who they have standing in front of them).[89]

If I hadn’t made the same mistake when I first met Pastor Miguel, this phenomenon would be hard for me to understand. I learned the following background after years of working with Pastor Miguel. In the beginning, I didn’t think to ask or learn more about him. The following account comes from over eight hours of interviews with Pastor Miguel during the year 2015. It focuses on the events that he portrays as particularly formative of his life and ministry.

Pastor Miguel’s Life and Theological Development in Mexico

Miguel Angel Balderas Bautista and his twin brother Juan Carlos were born on May 11, 1960 to Magdalena Bautista de Balderas and Cirenio Balderas Montaña in San Agustín Zapotlan, Hidalgo, Mexico. Cirenio, or Don Santos, as he was known, worked for the railroad for his entire life until he retired. Santos converted to Methodism when he decided to marry Magdalena, and she gave up her career as an elementary school teacher and took care of their home. Magdalena’s side of the family included Methodist revolutionaries, like her father, who had participated in the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent redistribution of lands to the general population that had been owned by elites and the Catholic Church. Their form of Methodism contained strong sentiments of social justice that were an early influence on Pastor Miguel’s developing theology.[90]

[89] Lucy Torres and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, July 30, 2015.
[90] The information from this section comes from formal interviews with Pastor Miguel in 2015. I also reviewed and double checked the information with him during a meeting on December 1, 2017 and through email exchanges to ensure the dates and events were correctly noted. The information from this paragraph can be found in: Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #1, 2pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, June 24, 2015, 00:00-13:37.

As a former elementary school teacher, Magdalena applied her skills in the raising of her twin boys.

[Juan Carlos & Miguel Angel]

Both Miguel Angel and Juan Carlos entered elementary school at age six in the third grade, skipping two grades ahead since they could already read and write. By their ninth-grade year, Magdalena insisted that the family move to Mexico City so that the twins would have a better education. To save money, the family lived for free in a metal train car in San Lazaro for five years. Magdalena died when the twins were just sixteen, in April of 1977. Her death was devastating to Miguel, who was able to find support in the church he had been attending since moving to San Lazaro, called "Zion" in Colonia Merced Balbuena.[91]

Pastor Miguel considers his time at the church in Balbuena as the formative years in his theological development. The leadership formed an adult Bible study class that included the twins, who were still teenagers at the time. It was in this class that Pastor Miguel says he learned about Methodism and discipleship, and began to form his own theological conceptions. After Magdalena died, Santos moved his family to San Rafael, Tlalnepantla, but Miguel continued to attend the church in Balbuena.[92]

[91] Balderas, 03:00-04:45 and 21:20-26:31; Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #2, 10pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, June 24, 2015, 04:00-05:00.
[92] Balderas, Formal Interview #2, 10pm, 00:00-00:53.

On March 24, 1980, a day after preaching a sermon over the national radio station pleading with soldiers to lay down their weapons and to help end the repression of ordinary citizens in El Salvador, Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero was assassinated in San Salvador while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence. Back in Mexico, the nineteen-year-old Balderas twins brought tough questions to their class leaders at the church in Balbuena. They asked, "What is the official position of the Methodist Church on Romero's assassination?" and "Are we going to do anything?" Their questions were met with a long silence. Eventually, one leader said that he hoped one day they would have the courage to do something, but that right now nothing would be done. The twins brought up the Methodist revolutionaries and the importance of social justice with the Methodist Church's history, asking, "Isn't this wrong? Why are we doing nothing? Is it because we can't or is this a personal decision?" The leader told them that the next week's class would begin with these questions. The next week the leaders gave their reason for doing nothing with regard to Romero's assassination: "Muchos tenemos miedo" (Many of us are afraid), and "Tenemos que ser prudente" (We need to be cautious).[93]

This incident left a strong impression on Pastor Miguel. After telling me the story he said, "Lo que más te detiene para hacer las cosas en la iglesia es el miedo" (Fear is the biggest obstacle to doing the right thing in the church). Instead, like the adults in Balbuena, many in the Methodist Church, both in Mexico and the United States, follow the advice "ser prudente" ("to be cautious"). For Pastor Miguel, this is one of the major stumbling blocks that comes between Christians and their ability to follow Jesus and participate in a costly (not cheap) form of dicipleship. Looking back, Pastor Miguel understands that doing the right thing may mean great

[93] Balderas, 00:00-02:63.

sacrifices—that there is a cost to speaking out against injustice; "pero después de todo vale la pena, porque eres consecuente con ti mismo" (but it is worth it after all, because you are consistent with yourself). However, "prudencia" (caution) often elevates fear over faith.[94]

Miguel graduated from college with a degree in economics and started a Master's program in International Project Administration. Miguel would commute from Mexico City by train on the weekends to San Agustin, his hometown. There he and his brother, who was also studying economics, became leaders in the National Methodist Conference of Mexico. They attracted youth groups from all over the denomination to meet in the small town of San Agustín. The twins rose in stature in the Methodist Church, and soon meetings of adult church members and bishops would occur around the table at their home which was under construction in town. During this time Miguel met Ruth Ogarita Wong Zuleta who was also in leadership on a national level.

[Ruth and Miguel while they were dating]

[94] Balderas, 02:26-3:15.

They organized and participated in what were called “Ligas Metodistas” (Methodist Leagues). Groups of young people from all over Mexico would get together to compete in a variety of activities (sports, bible trivia, etc.) and worship together.[95] These meetings would gather hundreds of youth and young adults together for fun, fellowship, and worship.

In 1985 tragedy struck Mexico City. On September 19th, a magnitude 8.0 earthquake killed over 5,000 people, including hundreds of workers in the garment district that were trapped in dilapidated buildings. The death toll and unmasking of deplorable working conditions resulted in the creation of the first union of women in Latin America, called the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de la Costura, Confección, Vestido, y Similares y Conexos 19 de Septiembre (Union of Workers in the Sewing, Clothing Production, Garment, and Similar or Related Industries 19 of September).

[Banner for the Union. It reads: “The big man seems big to us because we are on our knees, let us rise.”]

The first secretary of the union was Evangelina Corona Cadena, a Presbyterian woman from a rural area of Mexico with only an elementary school education.

[95] Balderas, 06:30-16:15.

[Evangelina Corona Cadena is the third woman from the left]

Both Miguel and Ruth were members of the Union, and in its first few years Miguel was its financial secretary advisor.

On the first anniversary of the earthquake in 1986, Evangelina and other social groups organized a march to the Presidential Palace in Mexico City to protest the working conditions of employees in the garment industry. Hand-in-hand, with Ruth on her left and Miguel on her right, Evangelina walked straight up to the soldiers who had appeared at the approach of the large crowd. The soldiers lifted their rifles, bayonets attached, and pointed them directly at the protestors. Pastor Miguel says that this was the first time in his life that he had confronted death, and he was extremely afraid. He wanted to grab Ruth and run, but Evangelina held his hand tight and said: "No corras, Hermanito. Si nos toca, nos vamos para al cielo. Tememos miedos, pero que no te controlan el miedo, Hermanito" (Don't run, Little Brother. If it is our turn to die, we will go straight to heaven. We have fears, but don't let them control you, Little Brother). They

stood their ground. It rained hard that day, and Eva, as they called her, said that God had given them a bath. Eva would attend Ruth and Miguel's wedding in December of that year.[96]

[Ruth, Evangelina, and Miguel at their wedding]

As the experience of Balbuena had given Pastor Miguel a sense of the power of fear to paralyze Christians into non-action, the experience of the September 1986 march on the Zócalo (the main square, officially called Plaza de la Constitución) in Mexico City showed him that he too had fears. What he learned at the march, from the help of a tiny, humble woman was that fear did not have to determine how one acted. Pastor Miguel says: "La Biblia no dice que no temas, pero que tengas más fe que miedo" (The Bible doesn't say not to be afraid, but to have more faith than fear).[97] Evangelina was voted into the Mexican government as a Federal Deputy in the House of Representatives as a member of the Partido de Revolución Democrático (PRD)(The Party of the Democratic Revolution), and in 1990 she asked Miguel to serve as her volunteer advisor.

[96] Balderas, 16:15-28:28.
[97] Balderas, 27:50-28:00.

At the same time that he was moving in political circles, Miguel was pulling away from the church. After the earthquake, he had been disillusioned by the way the Methodist Church in Mexico had positioned itself politically behind an Evangelical candidate. He left the church for three years and took up Eva's offer to be her volunteer advisor. He worked with her for three years, but when she encouraged him to enter politics, he knew he had to decide between working for the government and the church. Pastor Miguel reports that he struggled with this decision. When I asked him why he chose the church, he states that "Cada domingo era un infierno" (Every Sunday he was not in worship was hell). While the church was not perfect, his choice to be apart from the worship of God had tormented him.

In 1993, he went back to serve in the Methodist Church as a pastor. What he did not know was that his stand against the church's involvement in politics and presidential campaign in the late 1980s had led to his excommunication from the Methodist Conference. To get back into the good graces of the Methodist Church he would have to prove that he would submit to their authority. They sent him for one year to the city of Xalapa and then to the countryside that was known in the local Methodist Conference as "una desperdicio" (a waste/garbage). When Pastor Miguel and his family moved to San Andrés Mimiahuapan they slept in the one room that also served as the church office and for meetings. Within three years Methodist leaders, seeking Pastor Miguel's counsel, began holding conference meetings there, and the local community had come together to construct a sanctuary with no funding.

[The photo on top shows the construction of the church building in San Andrés, which is pictured finished in the bottom photo (1996).]

Pastor Miguel says of these experiences that "En México aprendí que la iglesia no es de los obispos ni de los superintendentes, es de Dios, que a pesar de ellos Dios te llama" (In Mexico I learned that the church belongs neither to the bishops nor to the superintendents [i.e. the church hierarchy], it belongs to God, and in spite of these persons, God calls you).[98]

In 1997, Pastor Miguel was moved to Los Reyes, a wealthy church in the countryside whose members were hardworking farmers and business people. That year, through a contact with a volunteer organization that helped in the construction of the church building in San

[98] Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #3, 7:45pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, August 1, 2015, 00:00-41:00.

Andres, Pastor Miguel was offered a scholarship to enter the Master of Divinity program at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. In 1998 Pastor Miguel and Ruth packed up their children, Magdalena (born 1989) and Ismael (born 1991), and four suitcases of belongings and moved to the United States.[99]

[Pastor Miguel, Ruth, Magdalena, and Ismael leave for the United States, Los Reyes 1998]

Pastor Miguel's Introduction to Multiculturalism & Ministry in the United States

When Pastor Miguel began his studies at Wesley Theological Seminary, he found himself surrounded by colleagues of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities. This experience changed his life:

> En México hay solo una cultura y más o menos sabia como actuaban o como reaccionaban; podía asumir, en términos seguros, aunque asumir nunca es bueno. Pero podía asumir casi al cien percento hacia donde iba la gente, que pensaba, creía, como se movían, cuáles eran las tradiciones. Cuando llego [a los EEUU] me encuentro en un terreno totalmente raro porque para empezar las cuestiones culturales eran

[99] Balderas, Formal Interview #2, 10pm28:50-33:40; Balderas, Formal Interview #3, 7:45pm; Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #4, 10pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, August 1, 2015.

> diferentes. Encontramos las horas de comida, encontramos el paradigma de los sesenta minutos en los cultos, encontramos la música variaba diferente a la cultura. . . . Si vamos con los Afro-Americanos era otro tipo de música, si nos vamos con los Latinos había otro tipo de música, si nos vamos con los asiáticos era otro tipo de música. Me encontré con una diversidad, me encontré que el Reino de Dios no tan solo era mexicanos. Eso no fue un choque, yo asumía que lo sabía, pero una cosa es saberlo, otra cosa es vivirlo.
>
> In Mexico, there is only one culture and more or less I knew how people acted and how they reacted to things; I could assume these things, in reliable ways, even though making assumptions is never good. However, I could assume almost one-hundred percent of the time about how the people would act, about what they thought, about what they believed, how they acted, [and about] what their traditions were. When I arrived [in the United States] I found a totally strange landscape, because, for starters, the cultural practices were different. We became acquainted with different mealtimes from that of Mexico, the paradigm of a sixty-minute worship service, and that music varied depending on the culture. . . . If we go with the African-Americans it was a different form of music, if we go with the Latinos is was another type of music, if we go with the Asians it was another type of music. I encountered diversity; I discovered that the Kingdom of God was not only made up of Mexicans. This was not a shock, I assumed that I had known this, but it is one thing to know it, it is another to live it.[100]

The diversity that Pastor Miguel discovered included the multicultural characteristic of Hispanic ministry in the United States. Of his first ministry setting, "Casa de Pueblo," a ministry focused on the Hispanic immigrant community of the Colombia Heights neighborhood in Washington DC, he states: "En Casa de Pueblo, había Latinos: salvadoreños, peruanos, nicaragüenses, bolivianos, y me encontré con que comían diferente, hablaban diferente. Tuve que aprender hablar español que no ofendiera a los nicaragüenses o los el salvadoreños y cosas por el estilo" (In Casa de Pueblo, there were Latinos: Salvadorans, Peruvians, Nicaraguans, Bolivians, and I

[100] Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, August 3, 201500:00-01:30.

found that they eat differently, they speak differently, and I had to learn to speak Spanish in a way that did not offend the Nicaraguans or the Salvadorians and things like that).[101]

When he moved into working in non-immigrant, majority-white American churches (First Church, Oxon Hill, and Millian), he found himself in the same situation: "Somos el Reino de Dios, pero que la diversidad es tan inmensa, pero Dios es uno" (We are the Kingdom of God, but that the diversity is so great, but God is one). He characterizes his personal change in identity this way: "Era mexicano, después era Latino, y ahora soy Pastor. Más allá de lo Latino, más allá de lo mexicano, soy un discípulo de Dios donde Dios me manda. Donde yo no tengo ningún problema si el culto tarda tres horas yo no tengo ningún problema si el culta tarda diez minutos, no tengo problema si es música viva o música muy sacra. Ninguno. Descubrí que Dios habla de diferentes maneras y que Dios está ahí. Aprendí que, si Dios se agrada en esa alabanza, ¿quién soy yo para cuestionarlo?" (I was Mexican, afterwards I was Latino, and now I am Pastor—beyond being Latino, beyond being Mexican, I am a disciple of God wherever God sends me. Where I do not have any problem if the worship service runs for three hours, I do not have any problem if the worship services runs for ten minutes. I do not have a problem if the music is vibrant or if it is sacred. None. I discovered that God speaks in different ways and that God is there. I learned that if God like a particular form of worship, who am I to question it?)[102]

Confronted with new cultural norms and the challenges of diversity when he first began ministry both at Casa del Pueblo at First Church, Pastor Miguel says "Aprendí estar callado, aprendí escuchar" (I learned to be quiet and listen).[103] After experience with the lived multiculturalism of ministry among Latino immigrant communities, Pastor Miguel was

[101] Balderas, 01:30-01:50.
[102] Balderas, 01:50-03:25.
[103] Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, August 3, 201555:45-55:50.

introduced to the concept of "multiculturalism" as a community identity during his time of ministry with the Rev. Dr. Vance P. Ross at First UMC in Hyattsville. First Church claimed to be a multicultural church, and Pastor Miguel realized early on that multiculturalism was often used as a tool of assimilation to the dominant culture. In discussions with Pastor Vance on this topic he would say: "Cuando ustedes hablan de asimilación significa que nosotros olvidamos de quienes somos, nuestra identidad se pierda y entonces pasamos a ser Latinos, pero realmente solamente somos una copia de lo que la cultura americana quiere que seamos. Tenemos que obvidarnos que comemos, lo que hablamos, nuestros valores y nuestra cultura" (When you speak about assimilation it means that we forget who we are, our identity is lost, and then we come across as Latinos, but really, we are only copies of what American culture wants us to be. We have to forget what we eat, how we speak, our values, and our culture).[104] For Pastor Miguel, any multiculturalism that involved assimilation or integration was not an acceptable approach to ministry.

In a turning point at First Church, Pastor Vance asked Pastor Miguel about whether it mattered or not if Pastor Vance attended the Spanish-speaking Latino service on Sunday evenings. Pastor Miguel told him that from his understanding of a multicultural perspective, if Pastor Vance did not attend the Spanish-speaking service, then he was sending a message to the Latinos that he was not their pastor, i.e. that he was the senior pastor of the whole church, except for the Latinos. When Pastor Vance began attending the Spanish-speaking service, the relationship between him and the congregation changed almost instantly. According to Pastor Miguel, the participants in the Latino service began to identify Pastor Vance as their senior pastor.[105]

[104] Balderas.
[105] Balderas.

[The Balderas family with Pastor Vance P. Ross at First United Methodist Church in Hyattsville, 2003]

He reports that the Latino ministry became not just another separate ministry, but part of the fabric of both Pastor Vance and Pastor Miguel's work together.[106]

By the time I arrived at First Church as an intern, evidence of this existed in the partnership between them as they coordinated activities together that were accessible to people who did not speak English as a first language. For example, the Bible study program called Discipleship, developed by the General Board of Discipleship, was offered in English and Spanish, and the summer Vacation Bible School program included adult classes offered in English and Spanish. Participants from the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking services would work together on an Immigration clinic and on Sundays when a joint service was held, representatives from all the worship times would act as worship leaders.

As the bonds developed between the two pastors and between the Latino members and Pastor Vance, First Church began to grow as a multicultural church and reach the community. As a pastoral intern during this time, I watched the church attendance and participation in Bible

[106] Balderas.

studies grow as the members of First Church embraced a multicultural identity. This did not mean that all of the sudden all conflict between the different cultures evaporated. For example, some white and African-American members did not understand why there had to be a separate service led in Spanish, and believed everyone should worship together (in English, in a liturgical form customary to the majority of the members). Towards the end of 2003, Pastor Vance decided to take a job on the national level with the General Board of Global Ministries, and Pastor Miguel was left as associate pastor for two subsequent lead pastoral transitions.

These transitions were very difficult for me, personally. The next two pastors did not build the same bond with Pastor Miguel, as he had had with Pastor Vance. Moreover, as often happens, the two subsequent pastors had different priorities, and did not handle multicultural and Hispanic ministries in the same way. They mentioned it less in worship and did not show up regularly to the Spanish-speaking service. I remember feeling that the work done to build up the multicultural community was going completely to waste. But Pastor Miguel took this time of transition differently. He told me that when you are in the position of the minority, when you do not hold the power, you just continue the work of God "bajo el agua" ("below the surface of the water"). In other words, even if the senior leadership was not interested in multicultural ministry, Pastor Miguel and his ministry team, of which I was a member, would continue their efforts. However, we would do so without calling attention to ourselves. This did not mean Pastor Miguel went against any directives from his senior leadership, quite the contrary. He worked within the bounds of what he had been tasked to do, in this case, to work with the youth, visitation, and Spanish-speaking service. Therefore, during this time he did not isolate himself and only work with Latinos but continued working with all congregants from the different cultures. Moreover, he supervised the implementation of a multicultural year-long confirmation

program for youth who were preparing to join First Church as full members, and the development of a multicultural visitation ministry that was carried out by and served members of the different demographics that made up the community of First Church.

He also took the opportunity during this transition to advance his own career in ministry. He focused on preparing for ordination in the UMC as an elder and then working on the Doctorate in Ministry that he eventually earned from Wesley Theological Seminary in 2007 in the area of multicultural and multiethnic ministry.[107] He co-wrote his thesis with his colleague Rene Knight, a pastor from Delaware who is originally from the Dominican Republic, entitled: "Responding to the implementation of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries: Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula Delaware Conferences."[108] While the thesis focused specifically on the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino ministries, it did so through the lens of multiculturalism. This lens underscores the fact that Latino populations in the United States are themselves multicultural, and Pastor Miguel wrote about his experience and analysis of an even broader form of multiculturalism that included all races and ethnicities of people.

Through this study Pastor Miguel reflects on a generous and prophetic form of multiculturalism in which he believes God calls all Christians to participate, and how such multiculturalism is biblically grounded in scripture, specifically in the story of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 in the New Testament. In the event of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit "filled" the disciples and they began to speak in "other languages as the Sprit gave them ability." All the Jews who had come from various countries back to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Pentecost heard what they were saying in their own languages (Acts 2:1-4). The co-authors state:

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[107] Balderas.

[108] Miguel Balderas and Rene Knight, "Responding to the Implementation of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries: Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula Delaware Conferences" (Wesley Theological Seminary, 2007).

"Pentecost is a clear representation of heaven, where your nationality, language, and color of skin do not matter but all of us will be together in a permanent fiesta. This fiesta begins here and now as an eschatological present. Here and now we can live the reality of the Kingdom of God that was inaugurated in the person of Jesus upon coming to be born as a man with all of the possibilities and limitations of a human being, even as we anxiously await the consummation of this kingdom."[109] The possibility of living out the Kingdom of God today opens up the possibility of changing unjust structures and oppressive realities that make up the daily life of many who live on the margins of society. For Pastors Miguel and Rene this is a personal experience: "As Hispanics/Latinos, we have received the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim to the four winds the good news of the Kingdom of God in this country that is so Christian. In the end, the name of God will be honored and glorified. We believe that God has empowered us. We have decided to believe God and not the system that exploits us, persecutes us, ignores us, and makes us invisible. We are not invisible; we have been here a long time, and God has heard our cries. We can live as disciples, loving and out of our own decision, choosing not to hate, seeking good even for those who seek the worst for us."[110]

In the thesis both pastors reflect on the implementation of multicultural ministries in their respective conferences. For multicultural ministries to be successful, people from different cultures need to learn how to listen to one another: "We must be open to learning new ways, new images, and new interpretations of the same truth. We must listen to the experiences of cultures that are other than our own."[111] Listening is not a passive activity, but one that leads to concrete changes in how people relate to one another, especially how relationships of power are

[109] Balderas and Knight, 48.
[110] Balderas and Knight, 49.
[111] Balderas and Knight, 27.

established. “It is not just the action of being together; we must intentionally empower people to make decisions together. Paternalistic behavior is very old. We must establish a dialogue and share the same table with every person and each group. As equals before God, we can do that. We do not ask for permission to do this in the name of Jesus.”[112] In other words, multiculturalism is a group project, where leaders from different backgrounds make decisions together.

In the thesis, Pastor Miguel reflects on some of the challenges of this work such as the lack of diversity in staffing, the racism of certain laypersons, and the widespread understanding that multiculturalism is synonymous with “multicolored.”[113] He also suggests that while there are plenty of resources, including the resources that come from the diverse communities themselves, the church often does not administer these resources well. Instead, churches default to more philanthropic and paternal ministries directed at communities outside of the church that are perceived as being in need and on some level helpless. “Perhaps some churches are talking about doing something in the community, and they are happy and feeling great about doing charity, but they are not ready to welcome all of the Africans, Latinos, and Asians into their buildings.”[114] He writes of the great potential there is for multicultural ministries to flourish, but that “as an institution (i.e. The United Methodist Church), we sometimes stop ministry rather than support it. Many times this is because other interests prevail in the decision.”[115] Pastor Miguel does not explicitly state in the thesis what these “interests” might be. However, in my experience of the transitions at First Church, I saw how the multicultural ministry was transformed when new

[112] Balderas and Knight, 27. Balderas and Knight cite Lovett Weems′s Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1999), 70, when writing about empowerment and Eric H. F. Law′s The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1993), 46, when writing about ideas of establishing dialogue so that people can make decisions together.
[113] Balderas and Knight, 22.
[114] Balderas and Knight, 23.
[115] Balderas and Knight, 23.

pastors with different priorities changed the direction of the church. These subsequent pastors had different interests, and in particular, did not build personal relationships with the Latino members of the congregation. On Pastor Miguel's last Sunday at First Church, church leaders, including the head pastor, lay ledership, and members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, all attended the Spanish-speaking service. Then, during Pastor Miguel's last meal with the Latino members, these leaders made a pitch to the members of the congregation to continue in ministry at First Church. But it was too little, too late. Less than a month after Pastor Miguel left First Church the Spanish-speaking service was removed from the list of services on the website.[116]

While there are many stumbling blocks to multiculturalism, Pastor Miguel firmly indicates in the thesis that "multiculturalism is the road that we have to help us confront the crisis of declining membership and numbers in our churches."[117] The way of multiculturalism he holds is not just about dealing with declining membership, but rather, it is a way to overcome the evil of legalized and then de facto segregation within the church: "Churches that are solely white, African American, Latino, or Asian are a thing of the past. It is not possible to believe that we can continue with old models when reality has corrected us. Thinking or wanting to think that only members of one certain ethnic group can or should direct this movement in addition to being naïve is simply evil."[118] The work of multiculturalism in the church is prophetic and radically inclusive: "We are no longer in times where we tolerate someone, but now, we must embrace and welcome all people regardless of the color of their skin, age, gender, or sexual

[116] Example of First Church's website with the Spanish worship service: First United Methodist Church of Hyattsville, "Worship Services," September 3, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20060903005152/http://fumchy.org:80/services_time.htm; This is the website in August of 2008, one month after Pastor Miguel left. The Spanish-speaking service has been taken off the website: First United Methodist Church of Hyattsville, "Worship Services," August 3, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20080803023759/http://www.fumchy.org:80/services_time.htm.
[117] Balderas and Knight, "Responding to the Implementation of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries," 28.
[118] Balderas and Knight, 28.

preference. As United Methodists, we say that we have 'open hearts, open minds, open doors.'"[119] This act of embracing is not simply about welcoming to church persons who have historically been marginalized, but also means standing in solidarity with these groups and taking up the realities they deal with on a daily basis as one's own. He states: "Our responsibility is to respond affirmatively and creatively to the call of God. We cannot cover up the sun with one finger, and in the same way, we cannot deny the economic, political, and social situation of the community in which we live. God has already heard the pain of God's people, and even as God sent Moses, God sends us now."[120]

Pastor Miguel allows in his thesis that "multiculturalism" is just a word and that another fad would soon replace it. At the time he was moving through seminary in the 2000s, multiculturalism was a popular strategy that many had hoped would help overcome the decline in church membership. Pastor Miguel has ever been invested in multiculturalism as a strategy, but rather "the message of love that Jesus left" with the world and that is greater purpose the inclusion of everyone in the life of the church: "we are talking about empowering everyone in the name of Jesus our Lord."[121]

It is this greater purpose that Pastor Miguel believes God is calling everyone to participate in, but not everyone will choose to do so. "With or without our participation, the Lord continues working. The words of the gospel say that if we do not speak, the very rocks will cry out. (Luke 19:40b) Affirming our identity in diversity, we can be one in Christ. Because of this, we can say that we are proud to be Latino, Mexican, and Dominican, and we do not apologize for speaking Spanish. However, we are called by God to be able to join together and develop

[119] Balderas and Knight, 28.
[120] Balderas and Knight, 29.
[121] Balderas and Knight, 29, 22.

with people of other cultures and other languages, and we are capable of doing so."[122] In the end, even when Christians fail to act, God acts. This is one of the reasons Pastor Miguel is not disappointed when his parishioners do not embrace his approach to multicultural ministry. His job is to preach, teach, and train congregations to be God's church— a multicultural community that embraces everybody/every body. It is not his job to control the response of those who hear the message. Pastor Miguel believes that each person must decide whether or not to follow Jesus—each person has the "option of being together at the same table,"[123] or not.

[On the left is a picture of Pastor Miguel's ordination as an Elder in the United Methodist Church. On the right is a picture from the graduation ceremony where he earned his Doctorate in Ministry degree]

In 2008, Pastor Miguel was appointed the senior pastor of Oxon Hill United Methodist Church in Maryland. The church was made up of a majority English-speaking, white population, but there were also around thirty people from Filipino immigrant families attending weekly services, many of whom who spoke English as a second language, while their children were fully

[122] Balderas and Knight, 29.
[123] Balderas and Knight, 27 Pastor Miguel cites Brian K. Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, Editors, Making Room at the Table (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), ix, when writing about this option being at the same table.

bilingual. When he arrived at Oxon Hill, white church leaders expressed frustration at their failed attempts to include the Filipino participants into the wider Oxon Hill community: "We invite them to events, but they don't come. What should we do?" These leaders were at a loss and felt that they had been welcoming, but the Filipino participants were not responding. Pastor Miguel's first question was if they knew the names of the Filipino congregants or where they lived. They did not.[124] While the leaders had made general, broad invitations, they had not done the work of building one-one-one relationships with people in the Filipino community. Moreover, he discovered that these leaders had not visited the Filipino members when they were sick, nor had the white leadership invited the Filipino participants to give their input into the direction of the church.

Pastor Miguel decided it was important to model how to bring the Filipino members of the community into full participation in the life of the church within the context of worship. Therefore, beginning the first Sunday of his appointment, Pastor Miguel opened up worship with a trilingual, call-and-response greeting: Good Morning, Buenos Dios, Magandang Umaga Po (the formal good morning greeting in Tagalog). After a few months, just as had occurred at First Church, this greeting became a normal part of the liturgy. Another example of bringing both the Filipino and Hispanic community into visibility in worship included displaying important symbols from these two minority communities. In anticipation of Christmas, he put three symbols on display—a Christmas tree, a Piñata, and a Filipino Christmas Star.[125]

[124] Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm.
[125] Information from the second part of this paragraph comes from my recollection of conversations with Pastor Miguel when he was the lead pastor of Oxon Hill and from my experiences of attending worship there during that time.

[This picture was taken in 2012 at Oxon Hill UMC as Pastor Miguel and Ruth renewed their vows after 25 years of marriage. The three Christmas symbols are present: Piñata (upper left), the Filipino Star (upper right), and the Christmas Tree (center).]

Pastor Miguel reports that when the star went up the Filipino members of the congregation were very happy. It reminded them of home and made them feel part of the Christmas celebration in a way they had never experienced before. However, this was not the case for everyone. This act was scandalous for many members who had only been used to seeing a Christmas Tree in the

sanctuary. Pastor Miguel addressed this concern by pointing out that the Christmas Tree had been a pagan symbol that was taken up by Christians in the celebration of Jesus's birth. The Christmas Tree is not necessary for the celebration of Jesus, it is a material symbol considered sacred by a particular culture that points to the celebration of Jesus. These symbols are not bad, in fact they are good and necessary, however they are also not universal. Each culture has their own sacred symbols. Displaying multiple symbols not only allows other people from different cultures to have a connection to the worship through their own cultural symbols, but it also reminds the whole congregation that the symbols are secondary. What is primary is what these symbols point to: the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both of these actions initially caused discomfort to the white members and leaders within the congregation. However, once the habits began to develop the congregation embraced these practices. This included all the leaders visiting all of the sick, even when they did not necessarily speak the same language as the person they visited. The numbers of Filipinos in the congregation grew, and a retired pastor from the Filipino community started a Bible study that became popular, often celebrating communion alongside Pastor Miguel. These practices were some of the ways Pastor Miguel signaled from the very beginning that the Filipino persons in the congregation were full participants in the Oxon Hill community.

Pastor Miguel began his appointment at Oxon Hill with a three-point plan: to heal broken relationships, to introduce the concept of discipleship, and to encourage diverse representation in church leadership. By the end of four years, Pastor Miguel and the congregation of Oxon Hill had struggled together through the discomfort of learning new relational habits and had managed to begin to meet the litmus test Pastor Miguel had set for a multicultural community. First, the leadership included both white and Filipino members who were making hard decisions together

as a team. Second, every week congregants were participating in a weekly meal in which food from the different cultures in the church was shared.[126]

When the district superintendent called Pastor Miguel in 2012 to discuss whether he would be willing to make a move to Millian Memorial United Methodist Church in the next year, Pastor Miguel said he would rather stay at Oxon Hill.[127] The work of building a multicultural community had taken four years and was just beginning to bear fruit. He wanted to stay so that he could carry this ministry forward beyond its fledgling start. The district superintendent called again; Millian Memorial United Methodist Church needed his expertise to help transition to a multicultural model, and the Baltimore-Washington Conference wanted Pastor Miguel to take the appointment. A second time, Pastor Miguel said no. The third time the district superintendent called, it was in the name of the bishop. Again, Pastor Miguel said it was not his desire to go, but if the bishop asked him to do so he would obey the call and make the move.

[126] Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm.

[127] The United Methodist Church structure is an episcopacy that is connectional across the denomination. Unlike a congregational system, pastors are appointed to churches to serve until the bishop of their designated geographical area, called a Conference, decides to move them. This is an itinerant system, in which the pastors must move and submit to new appointments at the direction of the bishop. There is not one designated leader of the United Methodist Church that would be considered similar to the pope in the Catholic Church, rather all the bishops are members of the Council of Bishops. Both pastors and the local church have input into these decisions, but in the end it is the bishop who makes the final decision. Appointments are made on a yearly basis, however, on average pastors remain in one church for three to seven years. In the United States is broken up into five geographical Jurisdictions, each one of which is divided up into several Conferences, and each Conference is divided into several districts. Each Conference is led by a bishop along with several district superintendents who oversee the churches within their appointed district. Every four years selected laypersons and pastors come together for a legislative meeting called General Conference. It is at this conference that legislation is brought forward and changes to the Book of Discipline, the book of church law for the United Methodist Church is amended. These decisions are voted on by both clergy and laity. For more about the United Methodist Church structure, see: United Methodist Communications, "Organization: The Church as Connection," The United Methodist Church, accessed March 7, 2018, http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/organization-church-as-connection.

[Picture of the church marque with a farewell message for Pastor Miguel and his family]

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I began this section on Pastor Miguel with an epigraph that is a quote from *Freakonomics*. The authors of *Freakonomics* examine various data sets and mine them for insights for which they were not first gathered. One data set examined by Steven D. Levitt recorded decisions by contestants on the gameshow *The Weakest Link*, a team trivia show in which a group of random strangers were put together as a team. After each round a contestant would be voted off the team. Initially, Levitt was interested in seeing if even after the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s bias against women and African Americans would manifest itself in how the contestants voted on this publicly televised gameshow. The evidence uncovered no bias against either women or African Americans—in other words, women and African Americans were voted off or retained depending on their performance in the game. However, Levitt found this was not the case for two groups—Hispanics and elderly players. Levitt concluded that absent the public pressure afforded by the revolutionary social movements (e.g.

the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s and women's liberation in the 1970s), public displays of discrimination continued to be enacted against Hispanics and the elderly. In the case of the Hispanic players, other contestants judged them to be incompetent: "even controlling for occupation, age, and performance during the game."[128] As I think of Pastor Miguel carrying all of his experience into Millian from his past ministry, education, and political work in Mexico, along with his training and expertise in multicultural ministry in the United States, I cannot help think of the insights from Levitt's analysis of the Weakest Link data. Just as I had thought I was smarter than Pastor Miguel when I first began working as a student intern under his supervision, many in leadership at Millian did not think they had anything to learn from him. This tendency of Millian leadership to understand themselves as superior to Pastor Miguel began before he even stepped foot on Millian's ample campus.

La Bienvenida: The Facebook Welcome

Back in the spring of 2013, Pastor Miguel called me. He had just heard from the district superintendent (DS), because the bishop had received an angry letter from a member at Millian Memorial United Methodist Church where Pastor Miguel was set to start as lead pastor on July 1 of that year. The letter demanded that the bishop reconsider the appointment of Pastor Miguel to their church. The letter claimed Pastor Miguel was unfit and included a photograph that had been posted on Facebook as primary evidence for this argument.

Pastor Miguel had the DS describe the photograph. The DS reported that it was of Pastor Miguel sitting on a couch, shirtless, and draped in a pink robe, with butterfly clips and a tiara in his hair and a somewhat startled look on his face. As Pastor Miguel told me about the call, I remembered the exact photo—it was hard to forget:

[128] Levitt and Dubner, *Freakonomics*, 447.

I remembered commenting on this photo myself on Facebook back in 2011, and I also remembered that it was not even a picture of Pastor Miguel, but of his twin, Juan Carlos.

[A recent picture of Juan Carlos and Pastor Miguel]

Pastor Miguel told me that in response to the DS, he had said, "Well, first of all, the person in the photo is not me, but my twin brother, Juan Carlos." He explained that Juan's teenage daughter had dressed him up as a joke. "But secondly," he had said, "even if it were me—why would it matter? It's a family photo and none of the church's business." I asked him how he felt about it and he said that he and Ruth had had a good laugh about it that night.

I forgot about this incident until I began interviewing Millian members two years later in the spring of 2015, when a member brought it up, remarking that I had probably heard the story in the course of my research. The interviewee spoke quickly in what struck me as a confessional tone about the incident and recounted that the lay person who had posted the picture, and was a leader in the congregation, had done so after researching Pastor Miguel's "style" and making a "hasty" judgment that Pastor Miguel was not the right pastor for Millian. However, the interviewee also spoke in the leader's defense by stating that the person did not do it because Pastor Miguel was Latino. Even though we had not been speaking about race the interviewee felt it necessary to argue that racial prejudice was not a motivation for the leader's actions. When I asked the interviewee how this person would know Pastor Miguel's "style" since he had not yet begun his ministry there, the interviewee thought that maybe the person had gone to his church or talked to other people, but she was not sure.[129]

The interviewee acknowledged that the photo made Pastor Miguel's transition to MMUMC much more difficult and was amazed at how Pastor Miguel had handled the incident: "He truly loved this person that would be his adversary." He attempted to include this person as a leader and did not mention anything in public that would show any disrespect. The interviewee

[129] MMUMC Member D and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 22, 2015, 44:50-48:50. I have replaced the pronouns in this citation with "this person" to protect the identity of the leader who submitted the letter.

went on to say, "I'm sure he was hurt, terribly hurt, but that is what I have seen in him—he practices what he preaches."[130]

Not surprisingly, the attempt to reverse the bishop's decision to appoint Pastor Miguel to MMUMC failed. Yet the fact remains that a decontextualized photo of a half-naked man in a tiara and a pink robe was the first impression some Millian members had of their incoming pastor.

Pastor Miguel's Newest Training Ground for Beloved Community: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church

To understand the offense launched against Pastor Miguel by this leader in the congregation, along with how Millian is responding to its current situation as a small, declining, majority-white church in the middle of a majority-immigrant neighborhood, it is important to understand Millian's history and the identity it has cultivated since its establishment in the early 1950s. In 1952, Dr. John C. Millian, a district superintendent of the Baltimore Annual Conference drove through the almost empty, but rapidly developing suburbs of Washington DC, called Rockville and Wheaton, and decided to establish a church in an area that would soon be populated with young, mostly white families.[131] The congregation began meeting on March 2, 1952 in the movie theater in the Viers Mills Village Mall with Rev. Harold Bell Wright as their first senior pastor; in three years they moved into what is now the chapel building, on the corner of Parkland Drive and Grenoble Drive.[132]

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[130] MMUMC Member D and Figueroa-Ray, 49:45-51:04.
[131] The Baltimore Annual Conference has since merged with the Washington Conference to become the current Baltimore-Washington Conference.
[132] Some of the information in this section comes from the video made for Millian's 50th anniversary: Wesley Paulson, *"This Is My Story" Millian Church*, DVD, 2002; Information was also gathered from Millian's website. The website has recently been updated, but the previous version that I used for this section can be accessed here: "About Us | Church History," Organization, Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20160208193401/https://www.millianchurch.org/church-history.html.

At its peak in 1961, Millian's Sunday School enrolled approximately 1,200 students in twenty-six classes during two sessions. Don Allen was hired as choir director that same year, heading up Millian's music program for twenty-nine years, and in 1964 the main sanctuary was completed. In the 1970s, however, membership began its decline in numbers. Then between 1990-2013, Millian went from 1,059 to 448 professing members and worship attendance dropped from an average of 249 to 121.[133] Much of this loss can be attributed to the changing demographics in the early twenty-first century as "the Hispanic share of population rose in all 100 suburban areas of the largest metro areas during the 2000s." As Hispanic populations increased, The Brookings Institution, a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC, reports that white populations in these same suburban areas decreased from 29% growth in the 1990s to only 9% in the 2000s.[134]

There remain current members of Millian who were part of the church when it first began in the movie theater. A number of members lived through the church's growth, its peak, and have seen it decline over the past three to four decades. One long-term member I interviewed walked me nostalgically through Millian's past by recounting how the church had been the center of the surrounding community with many people regularly gathering together in fellowship separate from official church activities. There were hundreds of children, multiple choirs (vocal and bell).

[133] UMCData.org, "Millian Memorial UMC - Statistical Data (1990-2016)."
[134] William H. Frey, "Melting Pot Cities and Suburbs: Racial and Ethnic Change in Metro America in the 2000s," State of Metropolitan America | Race & Ethnicity (Brookings, May 2011), 4–5; In news report in 2011 states that in Montgomery County, where Millian is located, "whites were largely replaced by Hispanics, a Washington Post analysis of the detailed census statistics shows... Barely 49 percent of Montgomery's 972,000 residents are non-Hispanic whites, down from almost 60 percent in 2000 and 72 percent a decade before that. Hispanics rose by two-thirds and make up about 17 percent of the county's population," Carol Morello and Dan Keating, "Minorities Are Majority Population in Montgomery County," February 10, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/09/AR2011020904310.html.

As another former member stated in the 50th anniversary video, "Millian did large church very well."[135]

The strong nostalgia for the former glory that once was Millian contrasts markedly with members' attitudes regarding the community's current situation.[136] Although long-term members acknowledge that reaching persons in the community is necessary for the church to survive, I found through my participant-observation and in the interviews that many congregants do not embrace the multicultural mission. Rather, they are skeptical of this strategy that, they feel, the church hierarchy in the Baltimore-Washington Conference has imposed upon them. There were long-term members I interviewed who felt that everything possible had been done to reach the surrounding community that is overwhelmingly made up of non-English-speaking Hispanic immigrants. They had given them food, clothes, fun entertainment, and yet none of the outreach had yielded significant numbers of new members from the community. Language is cited as a barrier to reaching the community.[137] One member thinks most Hispanics are Catholics and therefore would not consider joining Millian.[138] One member repeatedly told me that they would leave the church if there was a morning Sunday service that was delivered in Spanish with English translation.[139] As Michael O. Emerson states, mandated multiracial congregations tend to be at higher risk of instability since members resist the change that is being imposed upon them from outside the congregation.[140] In the case of Millian, although the decision to become

[135] Paulson, *"This Is My Story" Millian Church*, 37:19.
[136] MMUMC Member L and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #1, audio recording, June 24, 2015; MMUMC Member L and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #2, audio recording, June 24, 2015.
[137] MMUMC Member C and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 22, 2015.
[138] MMUMC Member S and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #1, audio recording, July 29, 2015.
[139] MMUMC Member B and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, April 6, 2015, 01:01:00-01:05:00.
[140] Emerson and Woo, *People of the Dream Multiracial Congregations in the United States*, 60–61.

multicultural was made through a process that involved input and approval from lay church leaders who represented the congregation as a whole, in 2015 there was still a perception that this decision had been imposed upon Millian by the church hierarchy. The resistance and ambivalence I witnessed in my field work seems to suggest that most long-term members were not embracing the changes becoming a multicultural community would entail.

When Pastor Miguel arrived in 2013, he saw potential—Millian had resources and an impressive campus, the preschool was successful, and the neighborhood was full of young families. As he did when he began at Oxon Hill, Pastor Miguel entered Millian with a plan. He would listen and learn for six months while he dealt with any administrative issue that would impede the ministry, such as updating Millian's copier and telephone systems. He would then study the team dynamics and based on his assessment develop a three-year intentional preaching plan. During this period, Pastor Miguel focused on training his congregation to eventually decide for themselves whether or not to become multicultural. It is this process, the entextualization of Beloved Community, that is the main focus of this study.

Chapter 2: Situating Pastor Miguel Between Two Sources of Multicultural Ministry

"Cuando ustedes hablan de asimilación significa que nosotros olvidamos de quienes somos, nuestra identidad se pierda y entonces pasamos a ser Latinos, pero realmente solamente somos una copia de lo que la cultura americana quiere que seamos. Tenemos que obvidarnos lo que comemos, lo que hablamos, nuestros valores y nuestra cultura" (When you speak about assimilation it means that we forget who we are, our identity is lost, and then we come across as Latinos, but really, we are only copies of what American culture wants us to be. We have to forget what we eat, how we speak, our values, and our culture).[141]

I situate Pastor Miguel's approach to multicultural ministry within the theological and activist tradition of Beloved Community. This tradition, which I will explore in the first section of this chapter, began with Josiah Royce in the early 20th century and became a lived theology that, according to Charles Marsh, was practiced by several actors in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s and was carried on afterwards by practitioners such as John Perkins. What united all members of the Beloved Community tradition is a belief, as Luis G. Pedraja states, that: "the reign of God is not merely a portent of things to come; it is a call to action in the here and now." Moreover, all would contend, as Pedraja again states, that the purpose of the work of Beloved Community is "to promote the dignity of all creatures and seek equity and justice for all . . .

[141] Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm.

[i]nstead of creating structures that see human beings as objects to be used for gain."[142] I am not arguing that Pastor Miguel necessarily directly draws from the Beloved Community tradition for his approach to multicultural ministry, although he may do so, but rather that his approach is another iteration of it. His practice of lived theology is generative of Beloved Community in ways analogous to that of the practitioners and activists that will be covered in the next section.

Pastor Miguel developed his approach within the majority-white and English-speaking context of the United Methodist Church in the United States. Within this context, an assimilationist tradition of multiculturalism, that I will cover in the second section of this chapter, developed as a response to sharp declines in white membership in the United States since the 1970s. This means that 1) Pastor Miguel's approach has developed in response to this tradition as intentionally non-assimilationist, and 2) that he has applied his approach in churches made up of persons from the dominant culture (white and English-speaking) rather than in churches made up of persons that are marginalized by society, such as Latinos or other immigrant populations.

As the first section will show, actors in the Beloved Community tradition typically work with those who are marginalized by society, with the hope that people of the dominant culture will eventually join in the community. However, the fact that Pastor Miguel applies his approach most directly to those who make up the dominant, English-speaking culture in his congregations makes his iteration of the Beloved Community tradition particularly unique.

Tradition 1: Beloved Community

From Royce to Perkins: Tracing a Theological Tradition

[142] Pedraja, *Teologia*, 195.

The concept of "Beloved Community" was first introduced by philosopher Josiah Royce in the early 20th century, who believed that it was the purpose of all religions to work together to build the universal community of unity and love, an existing yet invisible reality that underlies all creation. He states: "The office of religion is to aim towards the creation on earth of the Beloved Community, the future task of religion is the task of inventing and applying the arts which shall win men over to unity, and which shall overcome their original hatefulness by the gracious love, not of mere individuals, but of communities. Now such arts are still to be discovered. Judge every social device, every proposed reform, every national and every local enterprise by one test: *Does this help towards the coming of the universal community*."[143] Influenced by C.S. Peirce's philosophy of science, in 1918 Royce published a set of lectures he had given five years earlier at Manchester College, Oxford, entitled *The Problem of Christianity,* that feature Beloved Community as the source and locus of salvation for all humankind. In this work, Royce does not claim to be dealing with Christianity's history, but rather that he has a desire "simply to expound the essence of the Christian doctrine of life, and the relation of the Christian ideas to the real world."[144] For Royce, it is the ethical obligation of religion (as a general category, not any particular tradition) to create Beloved Community and to make it visible on earth—all activities of particular religious organizations should meet the test of working towards the manifestation of the universal and unified community.

This invisible reality of Beloved Community, for Royce, is a reality much like (or even identical to) the reality that is uncovered by the scientific method. The reality disclosed by scientific discovery, in Royce's view, is only revealed through the persistent formulation, testing, and verification of new hypotheses. "Man's gradual adjustment to his natural environment may

[143] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 404–5.
[144] Royce, 46.

well explain his skill as artisan, or as mere collector and arranger of natural facts, but cannot explain the origin of his power to invent, as often and as wonderfully as he has invented, scientific hypotheses about nature which bear the test of experience."[145] For Royce, this mysterious power to hypothesize is a sign of the nature of how humankind interacts with the whole of reality—as a Community of Interpretation. Rather than viewing science or history as a process of inevitable progression, he believed that the "teleological process . . . appears to illustrate a spiritual process which, in its wholeness, interprets at once the endless whole of time."[146] The success of humanity's ability to invent, test, and perfect new hypotheses (or to generally have a knack for interpreting the whole of reality) was a sign for Royce that Beloved Community was a goal that could be pursued in a similar process by religion. Royce's concluding plea of his book illustrates this well:

> *Does this help towards the coming of the universal community*. If you have a church, judge your own church by this standard; and if your church does not yet fully meet this standard, aid towards reforming your church accordingly. If, like myself, you hold the true church to be invisible, require all whom you can influence to help render it visible. . . . Aid toward the coming of the universal community by helping to make the work of religion not only as catholic as is already the true spirit of loyalty, but as inventive of new social arts, as progressive as is now natural science. . . . We can look forward, then, to no final form, either of Christianity or of any other special religion. But we can look forward to a time when the work and the insight of religion can become as progressive as is now the work of science.[147]

Royce's language of Beloved Community was picked up and further secularized by leftist intellectuals like Randolph Bourne at the beginning of the twentieth century who held a

[145] Royce, 398–99.
[146] Royce, 400.
[147] Royce, 404–5.

"communitarian vision of self-realization through participation in democratic culture."[148] However, it wasn't until 1956 that the idea of Beloved Community was introduced into the public discourse by Martin Luther King, Jr. In speeches given in 1956, after the first court victory won by the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the federal district court, Dr. King held that the true goal of the struggle against segregation is not the retaliation for past wrongs; instead "the end of the struggle is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of beloved community." [149] King's characterization of Beloved Community, which he would repeat in sermons and speeches over the next ten years, seems to suggest a community grounded in the Christian Church that stretches out beyond itself into the public sphere. In *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*, Charles Marsh describes King's concept of Beloved Community as "a new social space of reconciliation introduced into history by the Church, empowered by the 'great event on Calvary.'"[150] Marsh grounds King's expression of Beloved Community in King's theology of the cross. For King,

[148] Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2. See pp. 117-118 for a discussion of Bourne's adoption of "Beloved Community" from Josiah Royce. For a discussion on the way in which Bourne adopted the concept of Beloved Community from Royce see: Iris Dorreboom, *"The Challenge of Our Time": Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Croly, Randolph Bourne and the Making of Modern America*, vol. 1, Amsterdam Monographs in American Studies (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 156, note 236; In his article, "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1916, Bourne writes about the problem with assimilationist views of the Americanization of immigrants within society. He argues against the melting-pot model and for allowing immigrant populations to have a share in the shaping of American politics and society. He concludes the article saying, "All our idealisms must be those of future social goals in which all can participate, the good life of personality lived in the environment of the Beloved Community." No religious significance or motivation is mentioned in relation to this concept of Beloved Community, but rather it seems to echo the form proposed by Joyce Royce-an underlying reality that should be manifest, in this case by a form of democracy that allows all peoples to participate.

[149] Ralph E. Luker says that King only referred to "beloved community" after the favorable federal district court ruling, and he did so in two major addresses. The first was to his Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity on August 11, 1956, and the other was at the Montgomery Improvement Association on December 3, 1956. Found in: Ralph Luker, "The Kingdom of God and Beloved Community in the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.," in *The Role of Ideas in the Civil Rights South: Essays*, ed. Anthony J. Badger and Ted Ownby (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 43; Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. Stewart Burns et al., vol. III: Birth of a New Age December 1955-December 1956 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 458.

[150] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 50.

this theology both defines and enables the practices of nonviolent resistance taken up by the civil rights movement, and moreover "activates the mission of the church," by making space for redemptive community in this present world.[151] Beloved Community was a contemporary possibility, distinct from the future promise of the Kingdom of God that is an eschatological hope, only to be fully realized with Christ's future return. It turned out that what Royce thought would bog down the pursuit of Beloved Community—a robust tradition of Christology—actually fueled this idea's powerful role in the prophetic imagination of the civil rights movement. According to Marsh, "King did not so much strike a balance between prophetic religion and the American dream as he imagined democratic possibilities from the perspective of Biblical hope . . . in [his] hands, the idea of beloved community was invigorated with theological vitality and moral urgency, so that the prospects of social progress came to look less like an evolutionary development and more like a divine gift."[152] It was Martin Luther King Jr.'s identification of Beloved Community within the particularity of the Christian gospel story that offered a glimpse of a what a redemptive community—structured by reconciliation—could be.

King had hoped that once civil rights laws had passed a change in the heart of the supporters of segregation would occur, and the Beloved Community would fully encompass those who had been oppressors and the ones who had been oppressed by them. As the historian Ralph Luker notes in "The Kingdom of God and Beloved Community in the Thought of Martin Luther King, JR.," King "did not live to see the prodigal sons of racism transformed into repentant children of righteousness."[153] According to Luker, this fact, along with the increased splintering of the movement after 1964, led King to drop the concept from his discourse a few

[151] Marsh, 45.
[152] Marsh, 50.
[153] Luker, "The Kingdom of God and Beloved Community in the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.," 54.

years before his death, in favor of the Kingdom of God.[154] The vision of Beloved Community, although strengthened and seemingly graspable through its grounding in the Gospel, did not hold sway for King in the last years of his life.

Others nonetheless took up this tradition and worked to create redemptive spaces of reconciliation in different forms. Clarence Jordan, a contemporary of Dr. King during the civil rights movement, modeled a different approach to resisting Jim Crow laws in the South. Instead of engaging in acts of civil disobedience or directly fighting for legal changes, Jordan launched what he termed "a demonstration plot for the Kingdom" called Koinonia Farm. "At Koinonia, Christian radicals in pursuit of racial reconciliation lived in total community, taking vows of poverty and practicing a common purse." This, for Jordan, was an act of "incarnational evangelism," a demonstration of the type of community that was structured on Kingdom values.[155] For Jordan, this approach was the only way to change society—by structuring and living every day in a community based on principles of racial reconciliation. Jordan's experiment in racial reconciliation focused specifically on how to change people's hearts and offers a glimpse into the difficulties, challenges, failures, and complexities of committing to live out values of racial reconciliation on a day-to-day basis.

Civil rights leader Victoria Gray Adams described the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as "the enfleshed church."[156] This idea of the church in the midst of the

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[154] Richard Lischer, in his work Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), also makes this point saying, "As King's social idealism was succeded by more realistic appraisals from his sermons, their place taken by the theological symbol 'the Kingdom of God.' On the basis of King's pubilshed writings and utterances, scholars have debated the question of the kingdom's this-worldly as opposed to other-worldly character, but they have not commented on the radical conversion implicit in the shift from the humanism of the 'Community' to the theology of the 'Kingdom'. The former carries overtones of utopian idealism; the latter acknowledges God's cliam upon all human achievements," p. 234.

[155] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 56.

[156] Marsh, 89.

people, living and organizing with them, offers another vision of Beloved Community. Unlike the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) or the intentional community in Koinonia, the leadership in SNCC was less centralized. Its field organizers were scattered all over the South, living as members of the communities they served. SNCC brought together an eclectic group of people including a number of white liberals from the north and deeply religious African-American Christians from the South. Fannie Lou Hamer, one of the founding African-American members of SNCC, and others were "unapologetically Christian," but also "equally generous to non-Christian fellow travelers."[157] Marsh states: "Fannie Lou Hamer, the SNCC leader from Rueville, Mississippi, imagined the civil rights movement as a welcome table, the kind that might be found beside a rural Baptist church, where on special Sundays and dinners-on-the-ground, the abundant riches of southern cooking would be spread out for everyone to enjoy, even Governor Ross Barnett and Senator James O. Eastland,[158] though they would need to learn some manners."[159] As was the case with the previous iterations, the model of Beloved Community cultivated by SNCC succeeded in certain efforts to forward racial equality and reconciliation between whites and African-Americans. For a number of years it united whites and African-Americans in working against Jim Crow laws; however, in the late 1960s, with the waning of the civil rights movement and the rise of Black Power, the cross-racial work that had been a marker of SNCC ended when whites were expelled from the group and racial reconciliation was no longer a central tenet of the group's identity.

Although there are others, the final example I will offer of the Beloved Community tradition is illustrated in the life and work of Rev. John M. Perkins. John Perkins was born in

[157] Marsh, 89.
[158] Prominent segregationists from Mississippi.
[159] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 89.

1930 in Simpson County, Mississippi to an African-American family of sharecroppers. In the late 1940s Perkins left for California after his brother Clyde, who had just returned with a Purple Heart and other commendations after serving in WWII, was shot twice in the stomach by a white marshal over an argument in the street. Clyde died that night in the hospital in Jackson, and Perkins's family urged him to find a safer place to live. In California, Perkins became an Evangelical Christian and later felt called by God to return to Mississippi; he returned to Mississippi in 1960 after he had vowed never to return.[160] "Evangelism seemed the best solution to the problem of southern segregation. Perkins's plan was to reach poor blacks and supply them with biblical literacy and sound doctrine in hopes that the spiritual changes would inspire the skills and disciplines they needed to be independent."[161] As Charles Marsh observes: "Perkins thought of himself as a certain kind of fundamentalist Christian, a premillennial dispensationalist," less concerned with the social order and more concerned with individual salvation.[162] Yet, as Perkins's Bible ministries got off the ground, transforming the spiritual lives of poor blacks was not helping to throw the yoke of segregation of the Jim Crow South off of their backs, a reality that became increasing clear as the civil rights movement picked up momentum in 1964.

After a few years, he realized that without an approach that encompassed the needs of the whole person, Christianity was useless in helping African-Americans overcome the poverty that

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[160] John Perkins, *A Quiet Revolution: Meeting Human Needs Today: A Biblical Challenge to Christians* (St. Louis, MO: Urban Family Publications with Network Unlimited International, 1976), 15–24; Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 160–61.

[161] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 165. Perkins did not leave Mississippi a Christian; in fact, he disparaged "black Christians as sort of inferior people whose religion was keeping them oppressed by making them submissive to an oppressive structure... [Christianity] was part of a system that helped dehumanize and destroy black people" (Perkins 1976, 17). Eventually it would be his son's persistent invitation to church and subsequently Perkins's growing fascination with the Bible that would turn him to Christian faith. "The Bible spoke to his longings for dignity and respect and gave him a new perspective on his purpose in life," p. 163.

[162] Marsh, 167.

resulted from the economic and social barriers inherent in de facto segregation. In 1973, after being beaten almost to the point of death by white police officers for his leadership in a local boycott of white businesses in his hometown, Perkins committed himself to the tenets of racial reconciliation.

Perkins's early experiences leading the Voice of Calvary ministries and his commitment to racial reconciliation eventually led him to found the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), based on a foundation of his Three Rs of Community Development: Relocation, Reconciliation, and Redistribution. Perkins describes the Three Rs this way: "When men and women in the body of Christ are visibly present and living among the poor (relocation), and when people are intentionally loving their neighbor and their neighbor's family the way a person loves him or herself and family (reconciliation), the result is redistribution, or a just distribution of resources [redistribution]."[163] Since the late 1980s, the CCDA has worked to convince more privileged and often younger white Christians to relocate to more impoverished areas. Perkins's model has had mixed results. On the one hand, the CCDA and other related organizations continue to organize and work on social justice issues, and the numbers of diverse Christian Evangelicals are increasing. On the other hand, there are very few examples of privileged Christians committing to permanently relocate to less privileged areas and engaging in activities to redistribute resources equally.[164]

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[163] Found under the heading "Redistribution" on: "About | Philosophy," Christian Community Development Association, accessed March 11, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20180311145844/https://ccda.org/about/philosophy/.

[164] Jennifer Harvey argues that in fact, reconciliation without reparations is untenable. For her, of the examples described above, John Perkins comes closest to this model through the first two Rs in his community development model-however, as noted, these first two tenets often go unfulfilled and have not been taken up into the concept of "reconciliation" held by Evangelicals generally. "Unfortunately, the evidentiary record in reading evangelicals'' understanding of reconciliation suggests how easily and often it is decoupled from the other two 'R's.' Harper provides a crisp analysis of what such decoupling looks like when she contrasts the Promise Keepers' emphasis on racial reconciliation-which ignored relocation and redistribution-and reconciliation's failure among this group,"

In summing up the line of tradition that flows through all these figures, Marsh states:

> Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the "spiritual movement in Montgomery," Clarence Jordan of the "God-movement" in southeast Georgia, Fannie Lou Hamer of the "New Kingdom in Mississippi," John Perkins of the "quiet revolution" of Christian community building . . . together these Christians point us to the reality that stands behind beloved community and gives purpose to the lifetimes spent in service to the poor and excluded people, the reality that cuts through all these human movements as their hidden sense and motor.[165]

In other words, although Royce provided the concept of Beloved Community, when he insisted on divorcing it from Christian tradition he rendered it less effective as an organizing principle. It was in the hands of those such as King, Jordan, Fannie Lou Hamer, and John Perkins that the first experiments of making Beloved Community visible on earth started yielding results, albeit imperfect ones.

Situating Pastor Miguel in the Tradition of Beloved Community: Entextualizing a Pentecost-shaped Beloved Community in Unsympathetic, Majority-White Spaces

I argue that Pastor Miguel Balderas is moving this tradition forward with an experiment of his own—the entextualization of Beloved Community in often unsympathetic or ambivalent, majority-white spaces located in the midst of multicultural contexts. As noted in the four approaches to manifesting Beloved Community above, all of these aspire for full reconciliation between those who are considered to be "oppressed" by mainstream society and those whose role in society is best characterized as "the oppressors." As it turned out, some privileged people did embrace a beloved community theology, however, there was not a large-scale rush of white people to find a seat at the welcome table. The work of John Perkins within the white

found in: "Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 81–85.

[165] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 206.

Evangelical church has come the closest to reaching such populations and involving them in ministries of reconciliation, by targeting younger generations. As Peter Slade states:

> Over the years John Perkins has found enough churches that will give him a hearing to enable him to ply his most subversive role: a pied piper. Starting in the late 1960s, congregations across the country have trusted this African American Bible preacher with their children. . . . Over the years thousands of these young white people have been challenged by Perkins's three Rs of Christian community development, they have participated in transforming the shape of the evangelical church in America.[166]

However, there still remains the majority of white Christians who choose not to be involved with any type of racial reconciliation that demands systemic changes to society and actively works to manifest Beloved Community in the present day social order.

Pastor Miguel's experiment in Beloved Community has been primarily among such communities. Specifically, Pastor Miguel has served two churches, Oxon Hill and Millian, as the lead pastor in the United States after his experience as associate pastor of First Church in Hyattsville. Both of these congregations 1) are located in neighborhoods inhabited by non-white majority populations; 2) had experienced a numeric decline of white members due in part to demographic changes in the neighborhood and elderly members dying; and 3) had been introduced to and officially adopted the strategy of multiculturalism as a way to deal with the new demographic reality that surrounded their church before Pastor Miguel arrived.

What he found in these majority-white settings was a culture tailored to what Korie L. Edwards calls the "religio-cultural preferences of whites."[167] Such preferences are considered "common sense" by those of the dominant culture and therefore understood to be unchangeable.

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[166] Peter Slade, "A Quiet Revolution and the Culture Wars," in *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins*, ed. Peter Slade, Charles Marsh, and Peter Goodwin Heltzel (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 70.
[167] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 120–21.

Included in these "common sense" preferences are ideas about the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases."[168] For Pastor Miguel, the goal of Christian discipleship is to follow Jesus and proclaim God's coming kingdom by actually manifesting it on earth. This means that rather than the church and its ministry being constrained by the cultural preferences of one ethnic or racial group, it should instead be structured around the values of the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus in the Gospel and manifest in the actions of the Holy Spirit in the events of Pentecost as described in Acts 2. Based on his reading of Acts 2, the Kingdom of God is multicultural and multilingual. In the story, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples after the crucifixion of Jesus and they begin speaking in different languages, all the pilgrims from different countries understand what is being said in their own languages. Therefore, according to Pastor Miguel, developing multicultural and multilingual church communities rises to a theological mandate. It is a means of repentance for the evils of segregation and worship based on human preference rather than on the God of all humanity.

However, even though the desegregation of the church is so very necessary, it if it implemented in a way that forces assimilation of minorities to a dominant culture, Pastor Miguel believes the project should be left undone. As I mentioned in the introduction, Pastor Miguel states that he intentionally uses the word "multicultural" instead of the standard sociological term "multiracial" because, for him, "multiracial" signals an assimilationist process, where only the number of minorities in a particular community is taken into consideration when determining if a congregation is multicultural or not, i.e. a multicolored approach. He wants to distance himself from communities that consider themselves to be multiracial, when in fact minorities have little

[168] Edwards, 8.

power in decision-making processes, and more often than not, participate in a form of patronizing tokenism. The sin of reinscribing colonial patterns of domination within the church is much greater than the current segregation that is characteristic of most churches. This is demonstrated in his current church context of Millian. Although he has been there since 2013, his entire process of training has been focused on cultivating the language and habits within the dominant culture necessary "to promote the dignity of all creatures and seek equity and justice for all. . . . [i]nstead of creating structures that see human beings as objects to be used for gain."[169] As will be shown in Chapters 5-6, by declaring what they can be in worship—through sermons, liturgical choices, and demonstrations of servant-leadership—Pastor Miguel is entextualizing Beloved Community by training them in new forms of language and habits that are shaped by scriptural traditions of the Kingdom of God so that one day they may decide to become multicultural and truly welcome the persons who live right outside their door as full participants into the church family.

Tradition 2: Multiculturalism & the Narrative of Decline in Mainline Protestant Churches

In order to fully understand Pastor Miguel's multicultural ministry approach among persons who belong to the dominant culture, it is important to sketch out the assimilationist form of multiculturalism found within the context of the United Methodist Church in the United States. This is important because it is in response to this approach that Pastor Miguel developed his non-assimilationist training program for promoting multicultural ministry. The assimilationist form of mainline Protestant multiculturalism, in part, was generated as a reaction to both stark declines in white membership since the 1970s and the increasing demographic diversity of society in the

[169] Pedraja, *Teologia*, 195.

United States. I argue that this assimilationist form of multiculturalism was shaped by the pervasive "narrative of decline" that is a form of rhetoric used to describe, account for, and provide solutions for the perceived crisis of decline in many mainline Protestant churches.

Mapping "The Narrative of Decline" in the United Methodist Church

In a blog entitled "American UMC Decline is a White People Problem," Dr. David W. Scott, the Director of Mission Theology for the UMC General Board of Global Ministries, states: "The narrative of decline is and has been for years one of the strongest narratives in The United Methodist Church in the US."[170] While the UMC has seen a major decline in white members, the percentage of non-white persons in the denomination has been increasing in the United States since 1996.[171] However, the rate of decline of whites has not been compensated for by the increasing numbers of non-whites. Therefore, the overall decline of membership in the U.S. and the hyperfocus on this decline by many in the UMC has overshadowed the increasing membership of non-white populations in the UMC. In Scott's words, "It is fair to say that the UMC in the US does not have a problem with numeric decline. It has a problem with *white* numeric decline."[172]

Scott zeros in on a prevalent and powerful discursive trend in the UMC that can likely be found within mainline Churches more generally. I refer not to the trend of numeric decline itself, but to the discourse that surrounds it, "the narrative of decline." For many years, United Methodists have discussed, debated, theologized, explicated, and strategized about the steady decline of membership that began in the 1960s, which will be compounded by the wave of elderly members' deaths that is quickly approaching. Rev. Lovett Weems, director of the Lewis

[170] Scott, "American UMC Decline Is a White People Problem."
[171] Scott.
[172] Scott.

Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary, named this impending event the "death tsunami" and in 2007 predicted that from 2018 to 2050 much of the United Methodist Church would be wiped out by a staggering number of deaths of whites and African Americans, who constitute the majority UMC membership.[173] I argue that over the past several decades, a rhetorical response to this reality has developed called "the narrative of decline" and that it has become part of United Methodist (and other mainline Protestant denominations') discourse and identity in the United States. Moreover, the narrative of decline is taken up into the lived theology (albeit not its stated theological positions) of national church vision, polity, and programming.[174] This includes how programs and goals concerned with multiculturalism have been envisioned and implemented, as will explicated in the following section.

It is important to acknowledge that this narrative is not confined to one theological or ideological faction within the UMC.[175] In fact, across lines of internal division—often labeled as conservative/traditionalist versus liberal/moderate—United Methodists agree that the UMC is in decline and have embraced the narrative of decline both as a warning and as a means of mobilizing for change. The difference between expressions of the narrative come out in the

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[173] Lovett H. Weems: It is not enough to be right, interview by Duke Divinity, Faith & Leadership, October 10, 2011, http://web.archive.org/web/20160930124459/https://www.faithandleadership.com/qa/lovett-h-weems-it-not-enough-be-right.

[174] The "narrative of decline" was referenced in an official study commissioned by the United Methodist Church that is still being finalized. Once in its final form, this study will be presented to the 2020 General Conference. Regarding the narrative of decline, the study states in the introduction: "In places where United Methodism finds itself numbered among the mainline (or 'old-line') Protestant denominations, the 'narrative of decline' has held us in its sway, often with encouragement from adherents of avowedly rival forms of (or, in some cases, substitutes for) Christianity-some of which may not in fact be in the best health themselves." However, there is no definition of this decline. In contradiction to this statement, the argument I am laying out identifies the narrative as part of the UMC's identity in practice for many years. See: Committee Communications on Faith and Order, "Wonder, Love and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church" (The United Methodist Church), https://web.archive.org/web/20171212043418/http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/wonder-love-and-praise-sharing-a-vision-of-the-church-english, accessed April 17, 2017, http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/council-of-bishops/committee-faith-order/documents/wonder-love-and-praise-full-en.pdf.

[175] Currently, the UMC is characterized by a heightened divisiveness as recent events in the general church have caused many in the UMC to believe that the church may split over the issue of human sexuality.

reasons for the decline and solutions or strategies for how to reverse it. For example, one faction, often labeled as "conservative," "Evangelical," or "traditionalist," understands the reasons for decline to center on the UMC's adoption of liberal theological and social stances that stray from what they consider to be orthodox Christian doctrine (such as supporting LGBQ+ ordination and marriage). In their view, a return to conservative theological and social standards will reverse the decline.[176] Another faction, often labeled "moderate," "liberal," or "progressive," tends to focus on the UMC's inability to adapt to the changing context of the United States. Solutions and strategies from this faction's narratives encourage congregations to change their internal cultures and to learn how to embrace the changing demographics and society that surrounds them. These two positions do not offer an exhaustive representation of the various perspectives within the UMC; however, they illustrate that those who represent often oppositional positions within the UMC harness the components of the same narrative of decline in order to advance their own positions.

I compared both liberal and conservative versions of writings that included the narrative of decline in an attempt to distill its basic components.[177] Although this is not an exhaustive

[176] See: Albert Mohler, "When Will They Ever Learn? Mainline Decline in Perspective," *AlbertMohler.Com* (blog), December 14, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20140907235907/http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/12/14/when-will-they-ever-learn-mainline-decline-in-perspective/; and Mark Tooley, "Fifty Years Since Methodism Grew in America," *Juicy Ecumenism* (blog), January 28, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20170410233449/https://juicyecumenism.com/2015/01/28/fifty-years-since-methodism-grew-in-america/.

[177] This is not a comprehensive examination, but rather only a beginning of what could be a much larger project. These components are what I've distilled from my readings of the following works, among others: Mohler, "When Will They Ever Learn?"; Tooley, "Fifty Years Since Methodism Grew in America"; Jason S Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1–2, 49, 63 and 86; Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1977), 1–16; Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Focus: The Real Challenges That Face The United Methodist Church* (Abingdon Press, 2012); Sharon Brown Christopher, "Introduction," in *The Future of the United Methodist Church: 7 Vision Pathways*, ed. Scott J. Jones and Bishop Bruce Ough (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010); Heather Hahn, "Economist: Church in Crisis but Hope Remains," News, *The United Methodist Church* (blog), May 20, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20171213022219/http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/economist-united-methodist-church-in-crisis.

examination, I propose that the structure of typical instances of the UMC narrative of decline includes five basic components, usually, but not always, in this order:

1) A declaration of the numerical decline of church membership

2) Threat of the consequences if the decline is allowed to continue

3) Reasons that the decline is happening

4) A call to change and stated confidence/hope that the decline indeed can be reversed

5) Solutions or strategies to reverse the decline[178]

In chapter 4, I offer a close reading, the second mode of hermeneutical ethnography discussed in the Introduction, of an excerpt from Bishop Robert Schnase's *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, because this work was used by the leadership of Millian when they were crafting the strategic ministry plan that I will examine in Chapters 3-4. As I examined Schnase's work, I realized that he engaged the basic five components of narrative of decline within his writing on church renewal. His book is a resource to help churches cultivate "fundamental practices [that are] critical to the success of congregations."[179] This work continues to be a reference for churches attempting to change behaviors that encourage church growth.[180]

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[178] Different writings on the state of the church that engage the narrative of decline often have more components than the basic five that I have distilled across both conservative and liberal versions of this narrative. Moreover, variations differ in the amount of time spent on each component and the order they are discussed, and there are examples of abridged versions that lack certain components from the five I have listed. In more elaborate versions, the audience might be reminded that the UMC is worth saving. This is done either by connecting the UMC to a long Methodist tradition of offering hope to a suffering world and/or offering Jesus Christ as a means of eternal salvation to the world. This is then often followed up by particular anecdotes of how the United Methodist Church is making a difference even in the midst of decline, often including a church that has defied decline through innovative, radical forms of discipleship, see: Christopher, "Introduction"; At times the fact that the United Methodist Church is growing internationally in Africa and Asia is also brought up. This is either as a side note clarification (Christopher), or this is brought up as part of a future strategy of how the UMC will avoid decline, see: Tooley, "Fifty Years Since Methodism Grew in America."

[179] Citation is from the book description on the backcover of: Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).

[180] Ten years since after was published it remains in the top 150 bestsellers list in the category of "Churches & Church Leadership > Church Institutions & Organizations" on Amazon. See: "Five Practices of Fruitful

I will now walk through how these components are displayed in Schnase's work. The purpose of this exercise is to illustrate a typical use of the narrative of decline and also to highlight this rhetoric within a work that was central to determining Millian's form of multiculturalism and approach to ministry with Latinos in the surrounding neighborhood.

Schnase states: "If yours is like most congregations in mainline denominations, it is declining in numbers, increasing in expenses, and aging in membership at an accelerating rate with each passing year."[181] This statement exemplifies the first component, specifically making a declaration about *widespread numerical membership decline* in the church, and indicating that a majority of mainline congregations (including the UMC) are all experiencing this same, shared crisis. In his version, he also couples numerical decline with other related factors and supports his claims with statistics from his home state: "Over the last forty years the number of United Methodists in Missouri has declined by over 80,000 people while the state population has increased by close to 30 percent during the same period."[182] The second component, *the threat of the consequences*, can be observed in the following statement: "Something must change. United Methodist congregations cannot continue to do what they have been doing and expect downward trends to turn around."[183] In other words, if the UMC does not change its behavior then it will continue to decline into insignificance. He references Edwards Deming's views of management that if organizations continue to do things in the same way, they will get the same results, to make his arguments.[184]

Congregations: Robert Schnase: 9780687645404: Amazon.Com: Books," accessed December 12, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20171212173544/https://www.amazon.com/Practices-Fruitful-Congregations-Robert-Schnase/dp/0687645409.

[181] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 27.

[182] Schnase, 129.

[183] Schnase, 129.

[184] Schnase, 27.

Schnase's argument then utilizes the third component, *reasons for the decline*, by first refuting what he considers erroneous: "The most substantial threats to the church's mission do not come from the seminaries, the bishops, the general boards, the complexity of the ordination process, the apportionment system, the guaranteed appointment, or the conflicts between conservatives and liberals."[185] Instead, the reason for decline is "the failure to perform the basic activities of congregational ministry in an exemplary way."[186] As stated above, the narrative of decline is harnessed for a variety of ideological ends. In this case, Schnase first counters what would be considered a more traditionalist view that points to the progressive theological and social stances of the church as the reasons behind church decline, before presenting his own.[187] He states that his own reasoning about the decline is not about a theological problem in the church, but rather a systems or organizational problem. He declares: "Taking Jesus seriously changes congregational behavior"—adjusting congregation behavior is the way to revitalize the church and reverse its decline.[188]

Then, as with most versions of this narrative, he engages the fourth component by *affirming that the church can change in such a way that will reverse the decline* by stating: "Churches can change. By the grace of God, churches can step out in faith in radical new

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[185] Schnase, 130.
[186] Schnase, 130.
[187] In his case, for example, he counters the statement of United Methodist Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), who puts the blame squarely on liberalism found in the seminaries. Mark Tooley states: "Why did Methodist decline start 50 years ago? Here's my theory. Methodism's official seminaries were all captured by liberalism by the 1920s. Most clergy weren't seminary trained until mid-century, but the course of study materials for non-seminary trained clergy closely followed seminary curricula. By the 1960s nearly all of the clergy would have been trained in theological modernism, denying or minimizing the supernatural and personal salvation in favor of Social Gospel and therapeutic themes. A 1967 survey found 60 percent of Methodist clergy disbelieving the Virgin Birth and 50 percent disbelieving the Resurrection. The impact on membership was predictable. Absent the imperative for soul-saving and confidence in Christian doctrine, gaining new adherents became more of a sociological exercise or a bid for institutional preservation. Neither inspires great zeal." The IRD was founded in 1981 to be "a voice for transparency, for renewal, and for Christian orthodoxy," in Tooley, "Fifty Years Since Methodism Grew in America."
[188] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 13.

directions. They can chart a future that is different from the recent past."[189] He supports this by engaging the fifth component, which offers a set of *strategies to reverse the decline*. He states: "Radical Hospitality. Passionate Worship. Intentional Faith Development. Risk-Taking Mission and Service. Extravagant Generosity. These five practices are so critical to the success of congregations that failure to perform them in an exemplary way leads to the deterioration of the church's mission."[190] In other words, churches that engage in his "Five Practices" are successful, while those that do not fail. This form of the narrative communicates to its audience that the ability to succeed rests on a congregation's ability to adopt these practices and that they must change their organizational and social structure in order to do so.

Regardless of the expression—traditionalist, progressive, or otherwise—the narrative of decline is a powerful form of rhetoric, based on the threat of the inevitable demise of the UMC unless some radical course of action is taken to reverse the trend, that shapes actual lived practice and polity in the UMC. For example, in 2010, a report commissioned by the Council of Bishops called "Call to Action," introduced its section on Key Recommendations this way (boldface, underlining, and italics are part of the original document): "***We believe that (1) stronger, courageous, collaborative leaders and (2) emphatically directing the flow of attention and resources to assure congregational vitality are essential, adaptive challenges for The United Methodist Church to be effective in its mission and to change the path of decline.***"[191] The Call to Action initiative led to an increased focus on developing and maintaining "vital congregations" with nationwide implications for congregations in the United Methodist

[189] Schnase, 130.
[190] Schnase, 130.
[191] Call to Action Steering Team, "Call to Action Steering Team Report" (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Church, 2010), 20, https://web.archive.org/web/20171213014149/http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/connectional-table/documents/call-to-action-steering-team-report.pdf.

denomination in the United States, including, as we will see in Chapter 3, Millian's multicultural and outreach ministries.[192]

As demonstrated by the ubiquitous expression of it by United Methodist national programs, scholars, professionals, official news reports, etc., the narrative of decline is constitutive of the current lived identity of the United Methodist Church in the United States. In the next section I will explicate and analyze a form of assimilationist multiculturalism that has developed within this United Methodist culture in part due to the influence of the denomination's embrace and propagation of the narrative of decline.

Multiculturalism within the United Methodist Church's narrative of decline culture

Rev. Lovett Weems, former director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary, articulates a version of the narrative of decline, that demonstrates the logics that underlie multiculturalism as a strategy to end decline, which I argue was adopted by certain leadership in the UMC and some congregations like Oxon Hill and Millian. In 2007, Rev. Weems said in an official statement to the UMC Council of Bishops: "The United Methodist Church in the United States has a future only to the extent that it can find ways to reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people."[193] Weems directly links the need for attention to diversity with a concern that did come out of the 2007 State of the Church report—the failure to attract youth to the church. Weems articulated his concern even more dramatically in an interview four years later that appeared on Duke Divinity's blog, *Faith & Leadership*. He

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[192] For more information about the Call to Action initiative see: "Call To Action – The United Methodist Church," United Methodist Church, accessed March 11, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20180311154320/http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/call-to-action.

[193] Lovett H. Weems, Jr., "Ten Provocative Questions Inspired by the 2007 State of the Church Report," November 5, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20160305232808/http://www.churchleadership.com/pdfs/State%20of%20the%20Church%20Response%20to%20COB%2007a.pdf.

projected that death rates among white and African-American members of the United Methodist Church would sharply increase beginning in 2018. "The death rate will be higher than at any time in the history of the country since antibiotics were introduced . . . when this death tsunami, as I call it, washes over the United Methodist Church between 2018 and 2050, it could very well wipe out the United Methodist witness in vast portions of some states."[194]

I argue that Weems's version of the narrative of decline helped shape the form of multiculturalism and the strategies associated with multiculturalism that are found in the United Methodist Church. He indicates that the approaching "death tsunami" (*widespread numerical membership decline*) is a threat to the future existence of the United Methodist Church (*the threat of the consequences*). He states that the reason for this decline is because the UMC has failed to adjust to a changing demographic which is younger and more diverse (*reasons for the decline*). He argues that UMC must change (*affirming that the church can change in such a way that will reverse the decline*) and focus on strategies to reach "more people, more young people, more diverse people" (*strategies to reverse the decline*).

For Millian and Oxon Hill, both majority-white churches located in neighborhoods with majority-non-white, majority-immigrant populations, long-term members resigned themselves to believing that a multicultural model was the only way for them to survive as a congregation. In these cases, the local church decides to attempt a multicultural model through a mix of external pressure from ecclesial authorities and by making what Emerson would call a "resource calculation," based in part on this nationwide narrative shaped by fear of the demise of the UMC.[195] However, as Emerson argues, a utilitarian reason for implementing a multicultural

[194] Weems, Jr., Lovett H. Weems: It is not enough to be right.
[195] Emerson and Woo, *People of the Dream Multiracial Congregations in the United States*, 53–63. Michael O. Emerson presents a typology for the primary impetus that may motivate a congregation to become multiracial including: mission, resource calculation, and external authority. If congregations choose to become multiracial based

strategy (i.e. to avoid church closure) does not offer the necessary resources for a church body to engage in the radical cultural changes necessary to move from a monocultural to a multicultural model.[196] This type of multiculturalism may be clothed in the trappings of "mission" or "scripture," however as strategy it is extremely hard to extricate from its ultimate goals—i.e. increasing church membership and fostering financial stability.

It is this utilitarian motivation that I claim is catalyzed by a version of the narrative of decline like the one Weems propagates. Utilitarianism is also characteristic of the form of multiculturalism, encouraged by the hierarchy of the UMC, that is often engaged on the local congregational level. In this scenario, the success of a multicultural strategy is measured (1) by visible features that indicate "multiculturalism" as a value of the existing congregation, and (2) by the numbers of non-white people attending. In this form, success is not measured by the frequency of engagement of people from different backgrounds or by how power is shared between various groups. Instead, as Korie Edwards says, many such churches demonstrate the following tendencies:

> There were sometimes cultural practices and markers that represented racial minorities in these congregations, such as a gospel music selection, a display of flags from various countries around the world, or services translated into Spanish. Yet the diversity did not seem to affect the core culture and practices of the religious organizations. That is, the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases tended to be more consistent with those of the predominantly white churches I had observed. These churches exhibited many of the practices and beliefs common to white churches within their same religious affiliation, only with a few additional "ethnic" practices or markers.

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on mission or resource calculation, then the motivation tends to be internal, while a demand from external authority comes from an outside source. In the United Methodist Church, external authorities, such as the Bishop, Superintendent, or even a newly appointed pastor, often make top-down decisions that affect the life of individual congregations. However, the rhetoric of the narrative of decline also shapes local congregational leadership and the strategic decisions they make. As is the case for Millian, both leadership structures external and internal to many local congregations are focused on avoiding closure and reversing membership decline.

[196] Emerson and Woo, 60–61.

> It was like adding rainbow sprinkles to a dish of ice cream. In the end, you still have a dish of ice cream, only with a little extra color and sweetness.[197]

Pastor Miguel understands this approach to be assimilationist. New persons are welcomed into membership, but not as full participants in shaping the culture or mission of the church.[198] Instead, the majority-white group retains control of how the community functions and the values it espouses, while historically marginalized groups are left out of the decision-making processes.

While this is a prevalent form of multiculturalism, it is not the only form found within the United Methodist Church. As Emerson and Fulkerson show, there are churches that become multicultural based on mission, grounded in a response to Christian scripture and tradition.[199] However, where the narrative of decline continues to captivate the imaginations of so many, it is important to single out this form, not only to understand the culture Pastor Miguel encountered at Millian, but also how he responded to it—with what I argue is the entextualization of Beloved Community.

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[197] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 8.

[198] Our findings suggest that multiracial congregations may (1) influence minority attendees to embrace dominant white racial frames and/or (2) select on minority attendees who already embrace such frames in the first place," in Cobb, Perry, and Dougherty, "United by Faith?," 195. As a sociological study, the multiracial churches examined qualified as multiracial if 20% of the population was non-white, suggesting that many multiracial churches defined as such, i.e. simply by their demographic makeup, are characterized by assimilationist tendencies.

[199] See: Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*; and Emerson and Woo, *People of the Dream Multiracial Congregations in the United States*.

Chapter 3: "We hope to be, we want to be, we seek to be"

"We hope to be, we want to be, we seek to be a multitude from every tribe and nation and people and tongue." Concluding statement of the "Theological Framework" section in the 2011 H/LSMP

On April 6, Easter Monday 2015 at a few minutes before 1 p.m., over fifty people, kids and their guardians from the mostly Latino immigrant community surrounding Millian, were ushered into the sanctuary to begin the popular, annual Easter Egg Roll event.[200] The event's organizer gave a three-minute presentation including instructions about the three egg hunts for different age

[200] This number comes from photographs I took at the opening assembly. More children and families came later, but an exact count was not reported in the newsletter update did not report an exact count: "A beautiful day! 29 volunteers provided an Easter Egg Hunt and 13 crafts and games to a very large group of children..." found in: MMUMC Staff, "Millian Newsletter, Volume 11, Issue 7," May 2015, 7, Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD; The US Census Bureau reported that in Aspen Hill, Maryland (the unincorporated CDP, or census-designated place, where MMUMC Memorial is located in Montgomery County) approximately 28% of the population is Hispanic and 2011-2014 reporting estimates that just over 50% of persons over the age of five report a "language other than English spoken at home," while just over 40% are foreign born. Nationally the percentages are approximately 16% (Hispanic population), 20% (language other than English in the home), and 13% (foreign born). See under the heading "Family Living Arrangements" and "Population Characteristics" in: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates (V2015) - United States and Aspen Hill CDP, Maryland Stats," U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, July 1, 2015, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00,2402825.

groups, table activities, prizes, and an introduction of the pastors. Except for the greeting from the pastors, which was delivered in Spanish and English, all of the instructions in the brief meeting were provided in English without any translation.[201] Many children and families had also arrived who had not entered into the sanctuary for the brief meeting that ended at 1 p.m. (when the event had been advertised to begin). When I exited the sanctuary, by 1:02pm, the egg hunt on the front lawn was almost over. I did not notice anyone outside directing the event. The hunt that was supposed to be for first to third graders actually had been done by children of all ages. All the eggs on the front lawn were picked up by 1:03 p.m.

Within the next few minutes, a decision apparently had been made by the organizer to forgo the second round of egg hunts that had been noted on the flyer advertising the event. Instead, youth volunteers were tasked with distributing the extra eggs to the children. I witnessed as one teenager walked around with a cardboard box full of plastic eggs. He began tossing them on the lawn around 1:07 p.m. Once participants in the egg hunt realized what was going on, they began to follow him. At one point, he was overwhelmed by the crowd gathered around him and he walked off the lawn to avoid the crowds.

Then, around 2:30 p.m., a mother and her son, a toddler, arrived at the Easter Egg Roll. This mother is a member of Millian; she and her son are both white. The flyer for the event had advertised that the Pre-K hunt would begin at 2:30 p.m. However, all the hunts had been conducted simultaneously at 1p.m., the second and third sets of hunts had been cancelled, and

[201] I also observed children translating the English instructions into Spanish. This phenomenon is supported by the Pew Research Center 2011 National Survey of Latinos Dataset that reports Spanish as the dominant language for a majority of 1st generation (foreign-born) immigrants, while the majority of their children are bilingual. The report on this dataset states: "Which language is more dominant is a function of immigrant generation. Among immigrant Hispanics, the majority (61%) are Spanish dominant, one-third (33%) are bilingual and just 6% are English dominant. By contrast, among second-generation Hispanics, Spanish dominance falls to 8%, but the share who are bilingual rises to 53% and the share English dominant increases to 40%," in: Paul Taylor et al., "IV. Language Use among Latinos | When Labels Don't Fit: Hispanics and Their Views of Identity," April 4, 2012, http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/04/iv-language-use-among-latinos/.

the plastic eggs already distributed. I observed the mother seek out the organizer of the Egg Roll event to express her disappointment that her son had missed the egg hunt, even though they had come at the time stipulated on the flyer. At that point, the coordinator decided to hold a private, mini-egg hunt for the woman's son. I saw the coordinator restuffing a set of eggs specifically for this hunt. It was held off to the side near the Education Building, out of the way of most of the activity. However, it was noticed by at least one Latina participant, who, when pointing it out to others, expressed indignation that the private hunt was being held for a white family. I witnessed her speaking in upset tones with some of the other women nearby. When I checked in with Pastor Miguel later, it turned out she also had approached Pastor Miguel, let him know what was going on, and asked if the child was receiving special treatment because he was white: "¿Es porque son blancos, verdad?" (It's because they are white, right?). Since the hunt for older kids had been cancelled and no more egg hunts were expected to take place that day, it appeared to these Latina women as if this family was receiving special treatment. Pastor Miguel noted and affirmed her concern but did not intervene in the mini-hunt or offer any other concessions in return (such as a mini-hunt for her children).

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The Easter Egg Roll is an annual event hosted by Millian for the surrounding community as part of implementing the multicultural and community-minded mission and vision that were proposed within the 2011 Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan (2011 H/LSMP) and then were adopted later that year by the congregation as a whole. The 2011 H/LSMP offers insight into Millian's approach to ministry in the surrounding neighborhood and a vision of its own future transformation into a multicultural congregation. This draft plan is representative of the

second tradition of multiculturalism, generated in the UMC's narrative of decline culture explicated in Chapter 2.

A Close Reading: The 2011 Hispanic / Latino Ministry Strategic Plan as an Example of a Tradition of Multiculturalism Shaped by the Narrative of Decline

"We know that unless we change quickly and decisively our beloved church will slowly die and we shall be remembered as the pallbearers of Millian Memorial United Methodist Church."
- 2011 Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan

The 2011 H/LSMP represents a snapshot of Millian's lived theological context, which Pastor Miguel encountered when he arrived in 2013, and is representative of a type of multiculturalism born from the narrative of decline. The 2011 H/LSMP had two audiences: the wider Millian congregation and the UMC hierarchy in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. This draft plan was developed by a group of church leaders and then distributed to the wider congregation for feedback and to committees for refinement. In 2012, this plan was restructured and officially adopted by Millian as part of Bishop Schol's Call to Action, the initiative (mentioned in Chapter 2) that called on churches to set goals that focused on "developing and maintaining 'vital congregations.'"[202]

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[202] Mission and Vision Council, "2011 Annual Report of the Mission and Vision Council," Annual Report, Charge Conference (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, September 13, 2011). The report states: "The events reflected in last year's annual report of this council resulted by year end in the drafting of a Hispanic/Latino Strategic Ministry Plan for Millian, submitted to the Conference in response to that body's support for such a ministry at Millian. Following distribution of that plan to our congregation and its review by our Administrative Church Council, the latter body referred it to the Mission and Vision Council for further refinement, as necessary, and implementation as part of Millian's strategic ministry planning. Accordingly, the Mission and Vision Council devoted the first half of this year to that task, one result of which was a revision of Millian's statements of vision and mission. Approved by the Administrative Church Council in June of this year, they are: Vision: We see Millian Memorial United Methodist Church as a dynamic, spirit-filled, multi-cultural, multi-generational church, numbering in the thousands, impacting our neighborhood, our nation, and our world through radically inclusive community building. Mission: Reaching new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Jesus Christ."; Another example of how the 2011 H/LSMP influenced the Call to Action implementation can be seen in: MMUMC Staff, "A Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Founding of Millian Memorial United Methodist Church" (Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, September 9, 2012), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD. In this booklet there is a history of the church that notes the 2012 adoption of the Call to Action Plan: "2012 - Francis Asbury/National Korean Church use Millian's Campus; Strategic Action /Call

The last line of the opening section of the plan reads: "We know that unless we change quickly and decisively our beloved church will slowly die and we shall be remembered as the pallbearers of Millian Church." In order to persuade congregants, the plan's first audience, the plan's writers turn to Millian's own impeding death tsunami to instigate members into accepting radical change in Millian's ministerial focus as the solution to reversing its declining membership numbers. This language also was directed at the second audience, the UMC hierarchy in the Baltimore-Washington Conference (see note 3). The plan presents the possibility of a radical shift in ministry, one that would need funding and support from the church hierarchy in the form of program and salary funding, for which Millian applied and was granted in 2011.

As is found in the tradition of multiculturalism generated by the UMC's narrative of decline culture, the 2011 H/LSMP contains all five components of a "narrative of decline." The first component, a *declaration of numerical decline*, is found in the first section, "A Case for Action," in the statement: "We are alarmed that our church has been losing members every year for the last 41 years, having peaked in 1969 with 2400 members." As in other narratives of decline, specific numerical loss is mentioned—Millian has lost approximately 2000 members since 1969. The second component, a *threat of the consequences* if the decline is allowed to continue, comes at the end of that first section: "We know that unless we change quickly and

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to Action Plan begins; New mission statement: 'Reaching new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Christ.'; New mission statement: 'Reaching new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Christ'; New vision statement: 'to be a dynamic, spirit-filled, multicultural, multigenerational church, numbering in the thousands, impacting our neighborhood, nation, and world through radically inclusive community building.' Community Outreach: Food Pantry, Smart Sacks, Angel Tree, Tutoring, ESOL, Easter Egg Roll, Halloween Event, St. Nicholas Breakfast, Martin Luther King Day of Service Lunch Box Ministry, Door-knocking Campaign." It also lists the community outreach activities as if to demonstrate the objectives that were already being met. Many of these listed also came from the original 2011 H/LSMP, such as the Easter Egg Roll and other activities that provide services and host events for the community. As outlined in the previous section, the entire enterprise of the "Call to Action" was shaped by the narrative of decline, and Millian's own implementation of a strategic plan is a concrete instance of how the narrative of decline has been adopted by UMC polity, administrative structures, and ministry actions. This instance is an example of how the narrative of decline influences and shapes the lived practices and theology of a singular community of faith-Millian Memorial UMC.

decisively our beloved church will slowly die." The consequences of Millian's decline in membership is understood to be the closure of the church. The third component, *reasons that the decline is happening*, is found in the first section and in the "History and Demographics" section and indicates that Millian is in decline because the congregation has not adapted to the changing demographics of the neighborhood. This lack of connection with new members of the surrounding community, and the fourth component of the narrative of decline, a call to change and a *belief that the decline can be reversed*, is displayed in the following excerpt:

> We can see that the demographics of those attending the church do not reflect the demographics of the neighborhood. There is a gap in age, gender and ethnicity. Younger people are underrepresented in the church; males are underrepresented in the church; and all races other than "white" are underrepresented in the church, particularly Hispanic / Latino persons, which is the fastest growing population in the neighborhood. This gap highlights our failures in reaching all parts of the community, but it also provides an exciting glimpse of the opportunities around us.[203]

In this excerpt, there is an honest assessment that the members of Millian do not reflect the demographics of the majority of the people who live in the neighborhood. However, their "failures in reaching all parts of the community" also offers hope in new opportunities for ministry. The last component of the narrative of decline, *strategies to reverse the decline*, is found most easily in the "Goals, Objectives and Strategies" section, however, it is also found in language that encourages Millian as a congregation to adopt a new mission statement that is inspired by a version of Lovett Weems's statement to the 2007 Council of Bishops:

> Our church mission today reads: "To praise God, teach and serve according to Christ." This mission statement has guided MMUMC extremely well for many years, leading the church to focus energy on worship, education and service

[203] MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 6.

> and not be distracted by extraneous priorities. The church has done this well. However, at this point this Mission Statement may be more descriptive of our present reality and less representative of our hearts' desires and our conscience as guided by Christ. . . .
>
> Here in our home in Aspen Hill / Wheaton Woods, in a neighborhood of diversity in age and cultures that is not reflected in the ages and diversity of the congregation, we might do well to be inspired by the mission statement of the Oklahoma Conference:
>
> "We want to reach more new people, different people, and young people for Jesus Christ." [204]

Eventually, in connection with the final version of this plan's implementation, Millian's mission statement became: "To reach new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Jesus Christ," a version of Weem's original statement ("to reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people"). The tie to multiculturalism is made explicit in the vision statement contained within the plan, which was also officially adopted by the congregation in 2011: "We see the Millian Memorial United Methodist Church as a dynamic, spirit-filled, **multi-cultural**, multi-generational church, numbering in the thousands, impacting our neighborhood, our nation and our world through radically inclusive community building."[205] Although this version of the document did not end up as the finalized strategic plan, it made the case for major strategic change and was key for the development of the new mission and vision statements for Millian.

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[204] MMUMC Staff, 7.

[205] MMUMC Staff, 9, emphasis mine. See: Mission and Vision Council, "A Call to Action at Millian," *Millain Newsletter*, October 2011, Vol. 1, Issue 2 edition, Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD. The article states: "During the past few months, representatives of Millian′s Mission and Vision Council and Administrative Church Council leadership have worked closely with our pastors to develop Millian′s Call to Action Plan, a plan to guide our ministries over the next 5 years. A year ago, we drafted a strategic plan for Hispanic/Latino ministries at Millian, a plan that earlier this year was shared with the congregation and subsequently was fleshed out with a new vision and mission statement for Millian and proposed ministry initiatives in support of those goals. The new vision and mission statements for Millian were noted in last month′s newsletter as well. All of this earlier work became a framework for our more recent drafting of Millian′s Call to Action Plan, reviewed by the Administrative Church Council at its recent meeting on September 19, 2011, in anticipation that it be presented to our District Superintendent at our Charge Conference meeting on October 8, 2011.

The analysis of this document, therefore, offers not only a snapshot of Millian's culture, but provides insight into the factors that shaped and motivated Millians's effort to strategically reorient itself by actively reaching out to the Hispanic immigrant population in the neighborhood surrounding their campus and working to become a multicultural congregation.

The rest of this chapter will focus the close reading on an excerpt from the "Theological Framework" section of the 2011 H/LSMP. In the next chapter, I will continue with a close reading of the plan, but with a focus on an excerpt from its "Goals, Objectives and Strategies" section. By the end of Chapter 4, I will demonstrate that the 2011 H/LSMP sets up a vision within the Theological Framework that is then contradicted by language that dictates how this vision is to be carried out. The Easter Egg Roll event described at the beginning of this chapter exemplifies the way the contradiction is manifested as a lived expression of the plan.

The Narrow Door Remains Open: The Theological Framework Under a Rabbinic Microscope

The "Theological Framework" begins with the following: "All the ministries supported by and through the MMUMC are grounded in our Christian faith, our United Methodist roots and the particular theological understandings of this worshipping community."[206] Based on this statement, the Theological Framework would seem to contain arguments that undergird and shape "all ministries" at Millian, including those outlined in the rest of the plan. However, this turns out not to be the case. I characterize this section as the "stated vision" of the 2011 H/LSMP. In spite of the section's title, it does not function as a framework for the plan, but instead lends the plan theological and scriptural authority; it is a persuasive tool that adds legitimacy to the

[206] MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 3.

strategic plan. I show how the Theological Framework functions as an authoritative prooftext for the rest of the plan instead of its "framework."

To examine the Theological Framework under a rabbinic microscope, I will be treating it as scriptural commentary that in the words of Fraade is a "literary face of an otherwise oral circulatory system of study and teaching." As I explain more fully in the Introduction, in order to examine this text, I will be employing a version of Kugel's process of reverse engineering in an attempt to get at the hermeneutical moves that were required to generate the excerpt. The purpose is to examine the sources from which it draws meaning, beyond, but not necessarily excluding, the intent of the authors. I will be paying special attention to how scripture functions with a particular focus on the presence (or lack) of the hermeneutical strategy of intertextuality within the excerpt. This process will unlock meanings in the text that are inaccessible to a surface reading of the excerpt. Moreover, it will provide a mapping of the influence of scripture (or lack thereof) on the meaning of the excerpt and allow for an examination of the coherency of the 2011 H/LMSP as a whole when compared to similar examinations of other excerpts from the plan.

The Theological Framework section of Millian's 2011 Strategic Plan can be divided into three parts: 1) a list of theologically influential sources;[207] 2) five statements "descriptive of the theology" of Millian; 3) an expansion of the fifth statement, "We believe that diversity is central to the reality of the Kingdom of God," in the form of a quote from Rev. Dr. Justo González; and

[207] Part 1 states that all ministries at Millian are grounded in Christian faith, United Methodist heritage, and local, contextual, theological concerns. Christian faith is identified with Luke 10:27: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." United Methodist heritage is represented by what contemporary United Methodists call the Wesley Quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience). For a basic definition of the Wesley Quadrilateral see: United Methodist Communications, "Wesleyan Quadrilateral," The United Methodist Church, accessed December 18, 2017, http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/wesleyan-quadrilateral. Finally, the local theological concerns of Millian are: "being an integral part of our local community, giving of our resources to help those who have less than we do and providing worship and educational space for all in the community to develop and deepen a relationship with God."

4) the concluding statement: "The MMUMC is growing keenly aware of and embracing the vision of John. We hope to be, we want to be, we seek to be a multitude from every tribe and nation and people and tongue."[208] A complete textual analysis would include a close reading of all these sections, but this is beyond the scope of this study. Instead I am focusing on parts 3 and 4 of this section because these are tied specifically to the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism, central concerns of the overall 2011 H/LSPM.

I have divided parts 3 and 4 of the Theological Framework into three sections that are highlighted below in green: a Theological Statement; an Authoritative Teaching; and an Application. The Theological Statement is one of the descriptive statements Millian claims as part of their localized theology in section 2 of the Theological Framework. The Authoritative Teaching signifies an interpretive statement generated by a recognized teacher or sage within a particular tradition. In this case, the Authoritative Teaching is an excerpt from the keynote address at the 2003 National Summit of Hispanic Religious Leaders given by Rev. Dr. Justo González. Rev. González is a Cuban-American United Methodist theologian and Church historian who is widely recognized as a contributor to the development of Hispanic/Latino theology, especially within the United Methodist Church and other mainline Protestant churches in the United States.[209] As is indicated by the yellow highlighting, the Authoritative Teaching is further divided into two more parts that will be explained below. The Application is a specific

[208] MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 4.

[209] Rev. Dr. Justo González is the author the two-volume set: Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, 2nd edition (New York: HarperOne, 2010); and Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 2: The Reformation to the Present Day*, 2nd edition (New York: HarperOne, 2010), which are used as textbooks in colleges and seminaries. He is the author of Justo González, "The Hispanic Creed," in *Mil Voces Para Celebrar: Himnario Metodista*, ed. Raquel Mora Martínez (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), 69–70, which is found alongside the more traditional creeds in the Spanish language version of the United Methodist Hymnal.

statement that restates the Theological Statement in a way that is expanded and clarified by the Authoritative Teaching. The text of the excerpt I will be analyzing is as follows:

> [Theological Statement] We believe that diversity is central to the reality of the Kingdom of God.
>
> [Authoritative Teaching] The Rev. Dr. Justo González addressed this last bullet in a keynote speech to a group of ministry professionals who gathered to discuss the issues of Hispanic/Latino outreach in churches. In his words:
>
> [Narrative of Decline Vision of Hispanic Ministry] *As we come to this consultation, many people are concerned that if we do not respond to the presence of Hispanics in our communities, our churches will lose ground. Some feel guilty that their churches have not been inclusive enough, and now wish to make amends. Most of us represent churches where people see the Latino presence in the United States, and also the growing ethnic and cultural multiplicity of the nation, as a challenge.*
>
> *Committees are appointed to deal with the challenge. Strategies are developed to deal with the challenge. Resources are invested to deal with the challenge. All of this is an indication that, finally, and in some cases, much against its will, the Church has begun to learn [that] to survive as a viable agent of mission, the Church must be bilingual ... For if we are to be in mission to the twenty-first century… [i]t will be necessary to move across the various cultural divides in our emerging society, and to witness to Christ in myriad different contexts.*
>
> [Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministry] *But I submit to you that as Christians this is an insufficient way to look at what is happening around us. Indeed, we may see it as a challenge ... [W]e must see not just the pragmatic necessity of crossing cultural boundaries, but also and even more the evangelical necessity of giving witness to a hope that goes beyond all the hatreds that divide us today…[I]n our growing need to be multicultural and cross-cultural we must also see a glimpse of the evangelical promise that* [lemma: allusion to Luke 13:29] *they will come from the east and the west, and from the north and south, and sit at table with the Lord.*

> *Today, as seldom before in the history of Christianity, God is giving us a renewed glimpse of* [intertext: citation of Rev. 7:9] *John's vision of old, of a multitude that no one could count, out of every tribe, and nation, and people, and tongue ... We may be pragmatic and take it as a challenge. But I am convinced that God is calling us to be prophetic and take it as a vision and a promise. May God grant that we shall grasp the vision! May God grant that we may live the promise!*
>
> [Application] The MMUMC is growing keenly aware of and embracing the vision of John. We hope to be, we want to be, we seek to be a multitude from every tribe and nation and people and tongue.[210]

Originally, Rev. González's remarks found in the Authoritative Teaching were part of a full-length presentation addressed to Hispanic religious leaders from across nineteen Christian denominations.[211] In this excerpt, Rev. González lays out two different visions of Hispanic ministry in the United States. I have named these visions (highlighted above in yellow) a "Narrative of Decline Vision of Hispanic Ministry" and a "Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministries." Rev. González states: "Many people are concerned that if we do not respond to the presence of Hispanics in our communities, our churches will lose ground." Although he does not rehearse the Narrative of Decline within this excerpt he is signaling that the fear of decline held by "many people" is motivating their increased attention to Hispanic ministries. According to Rev. González, those who hold this Narrative of Decline Vision of Hispanic Ministry tend to characterize the increasing multicultural diversity in the United States, especially the growing Hispanic population, as "challenging" to many Christian communities of faith. There is a sense of despair and desperation on the part of these communities. On the one hand is the failure to

[210] MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 4.
[211] Millian's 2011 Strategic Plan cites a report published in 2005 by Pulpit and Pew as the source of González's excerpt: Edwin I. Hernandez, *Strengthening Hispanic Ministry across Denominations: A Call to Action*, Pulpit and Pew Research Reports (Durham, N.C: Duke Divinity School, 2005).

attract Hispanics to become members of their churches, and on the other hand is the realization that if they are unable to count the growing number of Hispanics as part of their membership, their churches will continue to decline: "All of this is an indication that, finally, and in some cases, much against its will, the Church has begun to learn [that] to survive as a viable agent of mission, the Church must be bilingual." Yet for Rev. González, this Narrative of Decline Vision of Hispanic Ministry is "insufficient" as a lens through which to view not just Hispanic ministries, but the work of the Christian Church more broadly. Although he grants that there is a certain number of positive outcomes of this way of looking at Hispanic Ministries (i.e. that churches now are interested in reaching Hispanic populations), he abandons this Narrative of Decline Vision as a structural framework in favor of one shaped by the language of scripture, which he terms a "vision and a promise."

Rev. González generates what I term the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministries through an intertextual interpretation of two scriptures that speak of God's surprising inclusion of foreigners in the Kingdom of God. Within their original scriptural contexts, both of these texts are eschatological visions depicting groups of people from foreign lands who will be granted special entrance into the Kingdom of God. As I have labeled in the excerpt above, the lemma[212] is Luke 13:29, "Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God," and the intertext is Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands." These designations are based on evidence I will explicate below that Luke 13:29

[212] The lemma is the scriptural text that is the focus of a particular hermeneutical interpretation. For more information on the technical terms of rabbinic scholarship being utilized in the textual analyses, please see the Introduction.

(the lemma) is being recontextualized in Rev. González's commentary through its relationship to Revelation 7:9 (the intertext).

In its original scriptural context in Luke, the lemma is found within a response Jesus gives to someone who asks him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?"

> [22]Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. [23]Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He said to them, [24]"Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. [25]When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.' [26]Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' [27]But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!' [28]There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. **[The lemma] [29]Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.** [30]Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Jesus confirms that "many" will not be able to enter "the narrow door" that signifies the way to salvation, which in this case is understood in terms of entering a house, a metaphor for the Kingdom of God. The door to this house eventually will be shut—leaving the questioner and many others outside, looking in. Those left outside will protest and appeal to previous encounters with the owner, but to no avail. The owner (i.e. Jesus/God) insists that he does not know where they have come from. Jesus as narrator then describes the great mourning of those who had thought they would be granted entrance but are left out: "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The lemma immediately follows this scene of active mourning, and Jesus as narrator breaks away from the house metaphor to speak directly about entrance into the kingdom of God: "Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of

God." Unexpectedly, before the eyes of those who thought they deserved entrance into the kingdom of God, peoples from all four directions of the Earth begin to stream inside and eat at the Lord's table.

On its face, this devastating vision is a response to the rejection of Jesus by his own Jewish people. It depicts these excluded Jews as "religious insiders" who had trusted in their hereditary connection to Abraham to give them entrance into God's Kingdom. Yet when they attempt to enter into the Lord's house, they are thrown out, unrecognized.[213] The welcoming of people from the four directions indicates that these foreigners were not only Jews in the diaspora, but also Gentiles reached by missionary efforts: "Here the owner recognizes these pilgrims of the last hour, these converts, the fruit of the Christian mission. They can come from far off; they can arrive the very last; they do not know Hebrew; and they probably do not physically belong to Abraham's race."[214] In the end, the "religious outsiders" are the ones who gain entrance in large numbers to God's Kingdom. This vision is not only a descriptive response to the Jewish rejection of Jesus but is also a warning to the Christians of Luke's time who may feel entitled to salvation, yet their "knowledge of the gospel . . . is not followed up on by its application."[215] Religious insiders who rest on their laurels will watch from outside as the unexpected foreign masses take what had been their seats at the Lord's table.

Rev. 7:9 (the intertext) is found at the beginning of a narrative interlude, Revelation 7:9-17, that occurs between John's vision of the opening of the sixth and seventh seals:

> **[9]After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches**

[213] François Bovon, Donald S Deer, and Helmut Koester, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 2013, 314.
[214] Bovon, Deer, and Koester, 315.
[215] Bovon, Deer, and Koester, 314.

in their hands. [10]They cried out in a loud voice, saying,
"Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb!"

[11]And all the angels stood around the throne and around the
elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their
faces before the throne and worshipped God, [12]singing,
"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

[13]Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are
these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" [14]I
said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said
to me, "These are they who have come out of the great
ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white
in the blood of the Lamb.

[15]For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.
[16]They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;
[17]for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their
shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Brian Blount argues that John's visions within Revelation are not in response to a large-scale persecution of Christians; rather the author of Revelation is encouraging Christians of his time to be less accommodating to Roman social and religious structures. The visions are meant to encourage Christians to begin to stand their ground, to refuse to participate in the pagan culture, and therefore to put their own lives at risk. This vision (the first verse of which is the intertext) is part of a sequence of eschatological visions of God's wrath and judgment unleashed as the Lamb opens the seven seals of the scroll in chapters 5-8.[216] This vision offers a reprieve after the

[216] Brain Blount states: "John hammers home his single message by rearticulating it in a variety of ways. The message is simple: God will execute a cosmic verdict that will judge those who have set themselves up as lord and

horrors of the sixth seal. First there is a "marking" of the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel who are to be protected from the destruction. Following this there is a flash-forward beyond future judgment to view the masses of people, "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages," who are allowed entry into God's Kingdom.

This universal, diverse crowd of people recalls God's promise to Abraham in Genesis—that through his numerous offspring, all the nations would be blessed.[217] The people in the crowd have endured great hardship and possibly even gave their lives in witness to the Lord. This future vision is a celebration of final victory and a vindication of this multitude and their suffering. Yet for the Christian audience of this text, the placement of this vision serves as a reprieve from visions of God's wrath. This has the effect of softening the finality of the impending judgment and offering this audience the possibility of being counted as part of the victorious multitude. As Brian Blount argues, "This futuristic, spiritual vision ends up having a real-time social and political discipleship effect: it encourages the members of the seven churches to resist relationship with Rome."[218] Unlike the very narrow view of salvation found in Luke, the message of Revelation is crafted to inspire the Christians of John's day to sacrifice the comforts and security of accommodating the surrounding society, and to stand firm in Christian belief through risky, non-conforming, anti-status quo practices. Although the risks would mostly likely be deadly in this world, the rewards would be great in God's Kingdom:

> [16]They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
> the sun will not strike them,
> nor any scorching heat;
> [17]for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their
> shepherd,
> and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,

save those who have witnessed to the alternative lordship of God′s Lamb-like Christ,″ Brian K Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
[217] See: Genesis 22:17-18 and Blount, 150.
[218] Blount, 149.

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

I argue that Rev. González's Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministries is generated by his reading of Luke 13:29, the lemma, in relation to the intertext, Rev. 7:9. As stated above, the connection between these two texts is thematic—they both depict eschatological scenes of masses of people streaming into the Kingdom of God from all parts of the world. Yet when they are read within their scriptural contexts, a tension between these two texts emerges—their seemingly divergent views on salvation. In Luke, the news is bleak for religious insiders as only a few will gain entry into the Kingdom of God, while foreign outsiders are welcomed in droves and without question. The force of the story is the exclusion of those who expected to enter and their surprising realization that in fact unknown foreigners would be entering instead.

Revelation's text lacks this divisiveness and explicit exclusion of a particular category of people. Rather the great multitude—which is made up of an incredibly diverse group "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages"—are all saved and enter into the Kingdom of God together; exclusion is not absent, but only implied. All the people present are said to have passed through some sort of trial, but the text fails to mention who are excluded. Moreover, the implication of exclusion within the Revelation text is not linked to a particular group of people (Jews v. Gentiles or religious insiders v. religious outsiders), but to a particular set of actions (i.e. standing up in faith v. accommodating the status quo).

Reading Luke 13:29 in light of Rev. 7:9 closes down a strictly narrow view of salvation that could be argued if the Lukan text were read on its own and also directs the interpretive attention away from divisiveness between groups of persons (religious insiders v. outsiders) to action-based judgement (standing in faith vs. not standing in faith). Rev. González reads the lemma in light of the non-divisive vision found in Revelation and ties the implication of the

possibility of universal salvation to it. Salvation is available to anyone—from any tribe, tongue, or nation—whether they are religious insiders or not. Yet it must be emphasized that this possible avenue opened up by the intertext is one of great and possibly mortal sacrifice. John's vision encourages the Christians of his day to stand up against the status quo and refuse to participate in socio-economic, religious, and political acts that will cause them to accommodate and blend in with Roman society. He is basically encouraging them to martyrdom—to give up everything for the sake of Christ's gospel.

Although Rev. González's exposition points away from divisiveness, the inclusion of Luke provides a subtle reminder of the reality that many Christians choose not stand up to the status quo of the surrounding society. In this sense, Luke can be understood as the flip side to John's vision in Revelation, focusing as much on the condemned as on the saved, and it thereby restrains John's vision so that it remains hopeful, but not idyllic or utopic.

Although it does not imply mortal danger, Rev. González's reading of these texts does require those who embrace it to be at odds with the laws and norms of society in the United States. He portrays this vision as a call to all Christians to see people of all races and nationalities as a sign of God's promise. This vision is hopeful, yet also comes with a price. The price of challenging the status quo, of challenging the social mores of the majority-white and English-speaking culture will likely be too high for many Christians.

From Hispanic Outsiders to Fellow Christians: Shifting Subject Positions & Social Categorizations in Rev. González scriptural exposition

The Narrative of Decline Vision of Hispanic Ministry that Rev. González describes in the first half of the excerpt notably lacks scriptural allusions or citations, and so is not susceptible to the type of analysis used on the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministry. Instead I will situate it in relation to the Scriptural Vision by analyzing the whole excerpt using tools of discourse analysis,

specifically focusing on the various subject positions of Rev. González and the forms of social categorizations used throughout the entire excerpt. This analysis will also demonstrate how language structures systems of action including the roles and responsibilities of various actors.

Rev. González's subject position in the exposition below is as a Hispanic Christian leader who represents faith communities that are struggling to reach Hispanic and multicultural populations generally: "Most of us represent churches where people see the Latino presence in the United States, and also the growing ethnic and cultural multiplicity of the nation, as a challenge." His audience in the original presentation, we recall, are other Hispanic religious leaders from a number of Christian denominations, and he numbers himself among them. Yet he does not position himself alongside all Church members generally. He distances himself from those who hold that Hispanic ministry is "a challenge" In the following excerpt, the bolded text indicates groups and actions with which Rev. González does not indicate a strong affiliation, while the underlined text indicates his subject position.

> As we come to this consultation, **many people are concerned** that if we do not respond to the presence of Hispanics in our communities, our churches will lose ground. **Some feel guilty** that **their churches** have not been inclusive enough, and now wish to make amends. Most of us represent churches **where people see** the Latino presence in the United States, and also the growing ethnic and cultural multiplicity of the nation, as a challenge.
>
> **Committees are appointed** to deal with the challenge. **Strategies are developed** to deal with the challenge. **Resources are invested** to deal with the challenge.

In this excerpt, "we" refers specifically to the Hispanic religious leaders present at the consultation. Rev. González communicates that the responsibility of responding to "the presence of Hispanics" has been given to Hispanic religious leaders by church people who "are concerned" and "feel guilty" about this issue. Through this language Rev. González and the other

leaders in attendance are set apart from those "many/some people" who see Hispanic and multicultural populations as "a challenge." Moreover, he describes the actions taken in response to viewing Hispanic ministry as a challenge in the passive voice: "Committees are appointed," "Strategies are developed," and "Resources are invested." It is therefore unstated who exactly are taking these types of leadership actions, and by using this form of rhetoric he does not indicate these are actions he performs, and instead he implies that "others" carry out such actions. Then, in the next line Rev. González switches from passive to active voice, with "the Church" as the active subject:

> All of this is an indication that, finally, and in some cases, much against **its** will, **the Church has begun to learn** [that] to survive as a viable agent of mission, **the Church must be** bilingual … **For if we are to be** in mission to the twenty-first century… [i]t will be necessary to move across the various cultural divides in our emerging society, and to witness to Christ in myriad different contexts.

At this point in the excerpt, it is not yet clear that he in fact includes himself and his audience members in this new, abstract subject. It is not until the phrase "for if we" (that I have both bolded and underlined) that he clearly reveals his subject position as within "the Church."

This last excerpt represents the transition into the Scriptural Vision for Hispanic Ministry, which begins: "But I submit to you that **as Christians** this is an insufficient way to look at what is happening **around us**." At this point, Rev. González fully inhabits his subject position within the Church and enrolls his listeners, the Hispanic leaders, in it as well. They are all fellow Christians, along with the many people who operate out of the Narrative of Decline View of Hispanic Ministry upon which he has just expounded. Beginning with "for if we," Rev. González no longer singles out others, but rather linguistically unites both those who hold the Narrative of Decline Vision of Hispanic ministry and the Hispanic religious leaders he is addressing "as

Christians" facing the reality of the Church's situation together, and this linguistic unity continues through the rest of the excerpt.

Rev. González's primary subject position has shifted from being one of a few Hispanic religious leaders charged with helping the Church face "the challenge" of "the Hispanic presence" to being one of the many "Christians," all of whom are responsible for this challenge. This shift allows him to speak not just to those who have gathered at the consultation but to all who claim the Christian faith and spreads the responsibility for this challenge to all Christians, not just Hispanic religious leadership. It is standing in this authority, speaking to all Christians, that Rev. González offers the alternative scriptural vision for Hispanic Ministry analyzed above.

This shift in Rev. Gonzalez's own subject positioning is mirrored by the changing social categorization in the excerpt. Take, for example, this statement from the Narrative of Decline Vision section: "Most of us represent churches where people see the Latino presence in the United States, and also the growing ethnic and cultural multiplicity of the nation, as a challenge." He mentions three categories of people—Hispanic church leaders, the people in the churches they represent, and Latinos in the United States. The leaders are characterized as separate from the people of the churches they represent. The people in the churches are the actors in this sentence. They "see" the Latinos in the United States, in two senses: they "observe" them as a phenomenon and "judge" this phenomenon to be "a challenge." Alternately, the Latinos in the United States in this sentence do not act but are only acted upon—observed and judged by those in the church.

When Rev. González moves into the exposition on the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministry, his language of social categorization changes. For example, he states: "[I]n **our growing need** to be multicultural and cross-cultural **we must also see** a glimpse of the

evangelical promise that **they will come** from the east and the west, and from the north and south, and sit at table with the Lord." At this point in the excerpt, the specific social category of "Latinos in the United States/Hispanics" has dropped out completely. Instead of observing and judging one ethnic group as a challenge, Christians are encouraged to look at a more generalized situation of changing, diversifying demographics. He encourages all Christians "to look at what is happening **around us**," and does not direct their gaze specifically at "the Latino presence." Moreover, he uses scripture to capture the phenomenon of "what is happening," and these texts refrain from grouping people by specific ethnicities. Rather, when read together these texts offer a picture of a multicultural, multinational, multilingual, multitribal group—a group united not by ethnicity but by the fact that its members are granted salvation, welcomed at the Lord's table and into the Kingdom of God based on their shared faithful action. This group are not simply the subjects of the people's observation and judgment, but rather moving bodies with agency ("they will come"). They are the subject of God's promise and an important part of the vision of the Kingdom laid out in scripture.

"We hope to be, we want to be, we seek to be": Recontextualizing the Scriptural Vision for Hispanic Ministries into the 2011 H/LMSP

Rev. González's intertextual reading of Luke and Revelation facilitates the shift in discourse from the Narrative of Decline Vision to the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministries, as well as two transformations in the excerpt—one of social categorization and the other a reorientation of perceived reality. Specifically, social categorizations based on human heritage, culture, and ethnicity are dropped, and a broader category of "Christians/the Church" is adopted along with scriptural language about the diverse makeup of those who will enter the Kingdom of God. The reorientation of reality is related to the change in social categorization: the perspective shifts

from the eyes of "many people" in contemporary church congregations to the perspective of God's vision, generated through the intertextual reading of Luke and Revelation. By the end of the excerpt the "many people" observing and judging the "the presence of Hispanics" as "a challenge" are no longer determining the perceived reality, and instead, reality is governed by God's vision of a diverse multitude, united not by social categories, but rather by a common form of action that testifies to the supremacy of God's Kingdom and its norms over those of human society.

Moreover, by moving from the position of a Hispanic religious leader to that of a Christian among Christians, Rev. González performs the vision and promise that he is simultaneously declaring. He does not stand apart, judging people and their views of Hispanic ministry, but stands alongside them as he redirects their focus towards God's vision and the universal call set out before all Christians. In this sense, it is not only Rev. González's form of social categorization that is transformed by the intertextual reading, but he himself is literally subjected by it. In doing so, he takes on the responsibility to respond to God's vision along with every other Christian.

With this clarification about the role of scripture and tradition *internal to* Rev. González's excerpt, the next question is what work does Rev. González's excerpt do when recontextualized as part of the Theological Framework of the 2011 H/LSMP? Having examined Rev. González's excerpt on its own terms, I conclude by turning to this excerpt's function as an Authoritative Teaching within the 2011 strategic plan.

Rev. González's excerpt elaborates on one of the five theological statements given in the plan: "We believe that diversity is central to the reality of the Kingdom of God." Before he is cited, the writers of the plan present Rev. González as a trustworthy authority on the subject of

Hispanic Ministries, stating that he spoke these words to "ministry professionals who gathered to discuss the issue of Hispanic/Latino outreach in churches."

There are at least three things accomplished within the plan by using Rev. González's excerpt to clarify the meaning of Millian's theological statement on diversity. First, the plan is narrowing the scope of "diversity" to specifically refer to Hispanics. Second, as an expert, Rev. González's words lend authority to the plan. His words and teachings are being used as authoritative encouragement for Millian to adopt the position that diversity is central to God's Kingdom. Third, Rev. González's more expansive scriptural vision is explicitly claimed by the plan as the operative theology behind their statement on diversity. In other words, the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministry fills out the ambiguities in Millian's theological statement: "We believe that diversity is central to the reality of the Kingdom of God."

Citing this exposition as central to the "Theological Foundations" of the 2011 H/LMSP functions as a means of persuading Millian congregants to accept the change in the church's mission and vision. Diversity in Rev. González's exposition is not a theoretical, utopian characteristic of a future reality, but one of the constitutive and demonstrative characteristics of the Kingdom of God that can be manifest in present reality. Therefore, when the concluding Application within the Theological Framework states, "The MMUMC is growing keenly aware of and embracing the vision of John. We hope to be, we want to be, we seek to be a multitude from every tribe and nation and people and tongue," the plan is not just asking Millian congregants to believe that diversity is central to the Kingdom of God, but to do something to change its current community, specifically by working to change the current demographics of Millian to reflect the diversity of the Kingdom. Rev. González's exposition is being used not only as an authoritative take on Hispanic Ministries, but also as the theological force to justify

why Millian should adopt this plan and to move forward with its suggested goals, programs, spending, and events.

While this is the work that Rev. González's exposition is doing for the plan, the plan treats it not as a true theological framework, but rather as a theological prooftext. This means that the meaning generated by it serves not to undergird the rest of the plan, but rather solely as a decorative theological justification to persuade congregants to adopt the plan. In the next chapter, I continue the close reading of the 2011 H/LSMP but shift my focus to an excerpt from the "Goals, Objectives and Strategies" section. Specifically, I will analyze the goal of "Radical Hospitality" and the objectives and strategies listed in order to reach it. As I will demonstrate, the function of Rev. González's exposition within the Theological Framework is used within the plan primarily as a rhetorical tool, while the basis for action within the plan rests on concepts found within Bishop Schnase's work, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, a work that I have indicated in Chapter 2 (and will continue to demonstrate in Chapter 4) is found within the tradition of the narrative of decline and the possible responses to it. The analysis will show how it is Schnase's work rather than Gonzalez's scriptural approach to Hispanic Ministries that ends up shaping how the 2015 Easter Egg Roll, described at the beginning of this chapter, was carried out.

Chapter 4: "So that they find a spiritual home"

"Our goal is to 'invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.'" First Goal of the 2011 H/LSMP

Although the 2011 H/LSMP explicitly states that the Theological Framework and Rev. González's scriptural vision of Hispanic Ministries function as the "grounding" for all the ministry goals outlined in the rest of the plan, this is not the case. As this chapter will show, the forms of scriptural discourse, subject positioning, and social categorization found in the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministries are absent in other portions of the plan. Rather, the forms of subject positioning and social categorization are characteristic of those forms found within discourses shaped by a narrative of decline, and the Scriptural Vision of Hispanic Ministries serves merely as the theological justification for the plan, a type of prooftext that lends authority to the plan's contents.

To demonstrate how the plan purports to be grounded in one set of values, but actually is structured by another, in this chapter I closely examine the language used in the goals,

objectives, and strategies of the plan. To do this I will put the goal of "Radical Hospitality" under the rabbinic microscope and then offer an analysis of its discourse, focusing again on the subject position of the authors and the type of social categorization they engage within the text. I will conclude this chapter with by revisiting the 2015 Easter Egg Roll to discuss the relationship between the plan and the ministry shaped by it that is carried out at Millian.

Jesus says, "I was a young single mom as a first-time visitor at your church and you welcomed me.": The Goal of "Radical Hospitality" Under a Rabbinic Microscope

In the 2011 H/LSMP, under the heading of "Radical Hospitality," it reads:

> Our goal is to 'invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ. Radical describes that which is drastically different from ordinary practices, outside the normal, that which exceeds expectations and goes the second mile.'[219]
> **Our objectives are:**
> - Get on a first name basis with our neighbors
> - Increase the handicap accessibility of our campus
> - Involve the Hispanic / Latino community in planning our ministries
> - Encourage Hispanic / Latino community people to become leaders of our ministries
> **Our strategies are**:
> - Open the doors of the church to a variety of community programs and events
> - Have fiestas on a quarterly basis
> - Host events for the community
> - Invite the community to neighbor exchanges where they can tell us what they need[220]

The language cited in the definition of "Radical Hospitality" comes from "Chapter One: The Practice of Radical Hospitality" of Schnase's *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, the

[219] The plan cites: Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 11 and 21. The definitions for all the goals in this plan come from this work.
[220] MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 10.

church revitalization work that I earlier categorized as one that displays and responds to the narrative of decline.

In order to better understand scripture's role in the generation of Schnase's definition of Radical Hospitality, I will examine an excerpt from Chapter One that cites Deuteronomy 10:19, Matthew 25:35, and 25:40 after stating "Hospitality streams through scripture." The implication of this statement is that his definition and the form of hospitality he is presenting in this chapter are also found within scripture.[221] As the following analysis will show, this is not the case; scripture's concept of hospitality is markedly different from the concept put forth by Schnase in his book.

The excerpt from Bishop Schnase's work that I will reverse engineer as an example of contemporary scriptural commentary follows his brief introduction to the practice of Radical Hospitality. This introduction includes his definition of Christian hospitality as "the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ."[222] Schnase characterizes hospitality as "a mark of Christian discipleship" and "a quality of Christian community," and then begins a two-page reflection that includes the majority of the scripture citations found in the chapter.

The excerpt I analyze comes from the beginning of this scripture-filled section. I have labeled features of this except I will discuss in my analysis below in blue. They are: Citations 1,

[221] All the scripture citations in Chapter One of *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* are in sections 1-2 and 5 of the chapter (no scripture is cited in sections 3-4) and are as follows: Romans 15:7 (quote under the heading of chapter - repeated within the chapter once more on page 14); Matthew 20:28, Deut 10:19, Matthew 25:35, Matthew 25:40, Matthew 18:5, Matthew 22:8-9, and Hebrews 13:2 (pgs. 12-14); 1 Timothy 6:19 (pg. 19); "come and see" from John 1:39 is repeated at the end of the chapter three times (pgs.29-30). I chose this section because it portrays a "stranger" or "strangers" as the recipient(s) of hospitality, as does the goal within the Strategic Plan.
[222] Schnase, 11.

2, and 3; Applications 1 and 2; Case Study; and a Teaching Vehicle. I have also highlighted all the scripture citations in yellow.

> Hospitality streams through Scripture. In Deuteronomy, God reminds the people of Israel to welcome the stranger, the sojourner, the wanderer. Why? **[Citation 1]** "For you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19).
>
> **[Application 1:]** We, too, were once strangers to the faith, residing outside the community where we now find rich resources of meaning, grace, hope, friendship, and service. We belong to the Body of Christ because of someone's hospitality. Someone invited us, encouraged us, received us, and helped us feel welcome—a parent, a spouse, a friend, a pastor, or even a stranger. By someone's love, we were engrafted onto the Body of Christ. If we had not felt welcomed and supported in some measure, we would not have stayed.
>
> **[Citation 2]** Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). [**Citation 3**] "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). **[Teaching Vehicle]** We would change our behaviors toward strangers if we lived as if we really believed this!
>
> **[Case Study]** A scenario at any church might look like this: a young single mom stands awkwardly in the foyer with her toddler, looking around at all the people she does not know on her first visit to a church. An acquaintance at work casually mentioned how she loved the music at her church and invited her to visit, but now she is not so sure this was a good idea. She is wondering about child care, self-conscious about the fussiness of her little one, unsure where the bathroom is, too timid to ask directions, doubting whether this is the right worship service for her, or whether this is even the right church. Where is she to sit, what is it going to feel like to sit alone with her child, and what if her little one makes too much noise? She feels the need of prayer; for some connection to others; and for something to lift her above the daily grind of her job, the unending bills, the conflicts with her ex-husband, and her worries for her child.
>
> **[Teaching Vehicle]** Now, imagine what would happen if people took Jesus' words seriously. **[Application 2]** They would look at this woman and the whole bundle of hopes and anxiety and desires and discomforts that she carries and think, "This is a member of Jesus' family, and Jesus wants us to treat her as we would treat Jesus

> himself were here." With this in mind, what would be the quality of the welcome, the efforts to ease awkwardness? What would be the enthusiasm to help, to serve, to graciously receive and support and encourage? **[Teaching Vehicle]** Taking Jesus seriously changes congregational behavior.[223]

Citation 1 is the second half of Deuteronomy 10:19. The full verse reads: "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." It is a part of a speech Moses gives to the Israelites about what their God requires of them. This section reflects a consistent theme in Deuteronomy that "interior dispositions—loving, clinging to, and fearing Yahweh—also walking in Yahweh's way, serving Yahweh, and expressing gratitude to Yahweh, show themselves, according to Deuteronomy, in doing the commandments."[224]

The Hebrew word for "stranger" that appears in verse 19 refers to "a resident alien who does not have the same status as an Israelite, but in Deuteronomy is accorded benefits because of his dependent status."[225] The scripture gives two reasons for Israelites to obey the commandment, "You shall also love the stranger." The first is because God "loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing" (v. 18), and the second is because the Israelites had the experience of being vulnerable resident aliens in Egypt.

Both Citations 2 and 3 come from chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. In Matthew 25:35, a "stranger" is someone who should be welcomed. Matthew 25:40 expresses the precarious status of the type of stranger referred to in this text by grouping this designation together with other social categories (hungry, naked, sick, in prison) as "the least of these who are members of my family." The wider scriptural context of these verses is found in chapters 24-25, where Jesus gives his farewell discourse the end of his public ministry. These

[223] Schnase, 11–12.
[224] Jack R Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 2013, 70.
[225] Lundbom, 286.

chapters are immediately followed by Jesus's passion narrative. Jesus's farewell discourse is not public speech, but one given privately to the disciples. [226] Citations 2 and 3 come from the end of the section (25:31-46) that scholars characterize as a "depiction" or "story" of great judgment:[227]

> 31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with
> him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will
> be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from
> another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he
> will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then
> the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are
> blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the
> foundation of the world; **35for I was hungry and you gave me food,**
> **I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a**
> **stranger and you welcomed me,** 36I was naked and you gave me
> clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you
> visited me.' 37Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was
> it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave
> you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a
> stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And
> when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'
> **40And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you**
> **did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,**
> **you did it to me.'** 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You
> that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for
> the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no
> food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a
> stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give
> me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44Then
> they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry
> or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take
> care of you?' 45Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as
> you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'
> 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous
> into eternal life."

[226] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, vol. 3, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 9.

[227] Luz, 3:264. According to Luz: "Many people still refer to the text (Matt 25:31-46) as 'the parable of the judgment of the world.' However, in the usual sense of the term it is not a parable. Only vv. 32b-33 are a brief parable. The main part of the text is composed of the two major 'judgement dialogues' (v. 34-40, 41-45). A way out of the dilemma might be to call [it] a 'depiction of judgment.' It is neither an apocalypse, since it offers no vision, nor a 'judgement parenesis' since not once does it directly address the readers."

The core teaching of Jesus's speech about last judgement mimics the theme introduced by Citation 1 (Deuteronomy 10:19): demonstrating love to God is done by following God's commandments, a theme central to Matthean theology generally. As Luz states: "The apex of Matthean theology is . . . that an authentic confession of the Lord can only consist of obedience to his commandments."[228] In this story of judgment, Jesus lists six acts of charity that are the standard of universal judgment over "all the nations" (v.35-36 and 42-43):

1. I was hungry and you gave me food;
2. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink;
3. I was a stranger and you welcomed me;
4. I was naked and you gave me clothing;
5. I was sick and you took care of me;
6. I was in prison and you visited me.

There are two groups who are being judged, those at his "right hand" who have performed these six acts for the Lord, and those at his "left hand" who have not. Citations 2 and 3 (bolded above within the scripture excerpt) are found in the first dialogue between the Son of Man (also referred to as king) and those at his right hand who have completed these acts. The back and forth between the king and the accused on both sides reveals that neither side knew that they were acting with charity (or not) towards the king and the revelation that both sides were judged not based on how they treated the king directly, but on how they treated others who were vulnerable: "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (v.40).

[228] Luz, 3:21–28, 289.

Citation 2, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," therefore, is one of six standards of action that led those who did it to "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (34b) and those who did not to depart from the king "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (41b). Citation 3, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me," reveals that hospitality to the foreigner, along with the other five acts of charity done to the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and imprisoned, is a concrete action toward "the least of these who are members of my family." The judgments pronounced by the king against the accused are decisive and final; whether one receives eternal life or eternal punishment depends on how one acts.

It is clear from this analysis that Citations 1, 2, and 3 all demand action on behalf of the stranger. However, the form of action a reader of these texts should take remains ambiguous. What does it mean to "welcome" or "love" a stranger? Bishop Schnase fills out these ambiguities through the use of the Teaching Vehicle, two Applications, and a Case Study.

Although the Teaching Vehicle does not appear until after all the scriptural citations in the excerpt, I mention it first, before the Applications and Case Study, because it appears (with some variation) three times in this excerpt and provides the lens through which readers of Schnase's text are encouraged to interpret the scripture citations. After quoting Citations 2 and 3, Schnase exclaims: "We would change our behaviors towards strangers if we lived as if we truly believed this!" This exclamation suggests that the words of scripture and that the type of action they require is clear. This is underscored by the fact that although all three scripture citations threaten readers with divine judgement, this consequence of not acting in accordance with God's commandments is absent from Schnase's excerpt. Instead, Deut 10:19 is a "reminder," while Matthew 25:35 and 40 offer an opportunity to connect with others; neither are portrayed as

threats of eternal condemnation. Instead, every time the Teaching Vehicle is invoked, it enjoins its reader to take Jesus seriously and to believe his words, focusing on the idea that if Christians would literally treat strangers as if they were Jesus, then "congregational behavior" toward strangers would radically change. In other words, Christians treating strangers as if the strangers were Jesus is explicitly an opportunity for congregational transformation, and implicitly a way to encourage strangers to become members. It is implied that if these sorts of "hospitable" actions towards "strangers" become congregational habits, they could lead to a reversal of decline and to congregational growth.

This lens—hospitality as a means of congregational growth—is further supported by evidence found in the Applications and Case Study in the remaining parts of the excerpt. Application 1 is shaped by Schnase's concept of "stranger." He defines strangers as "others who are not yet a part of the faith community," "those [who are] not yet known [by the members of a church]," and "not our own" community members.[229] In Application 1, Schnase equates himself and his audience with the category of "stranger" introduced into the text by Deuteronomy 10:19 and Matthew 25:35 by stating: "We, too, were once strangers to the faith, residing outside the community where we now find rich resources of meaning, grace, hope, friendship, and service." For Schnase, a stranger is anyone who is not a member (or participant) in one's Christian faith community, but (and this is key) has the potential to become a member. In other words, a stranger is someone who has the potential to be "grafted on to the Body of Christ." This Application enrolls Schnase's audience into the experience of a stranger who is welcomed and loved, while attaching the idea of membership in the community as an outcome of this hospitable act. The members of the audience were strangers, "residing outside the community." The acts of

[229] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 11–12.

welcome on the part of insiders of the community made it a place where audience members are also now members and "find rich resources of meaning, grace, hope, friendship, and service." It took someone to reach out, love, and welcome them (i.e. be hospitable to them) so that they could become members of the group.

Schnase's Case Study helps flesh out who a stranger might be for the readers of his book. It does not use a scriptural example, but rather an extra-textual illustration that describes the difficult, first-time visit of a single mother with her child. She "feels the need of prayer; for some connection to others; and for something to lift her above the daily grind of her job, the unending bills, the conflicts with her ex-husband, and her worries for her child." This hypothetical example of a newcomer to a church service builds upon the examples given in Schnase's Application 1. In Application 1, he and his audience are characterized as having been strangers before they were "engrafted onto the Body of Christ" through the hospitality of someone in their lives. Now in the Case Study, Schnase sketches a portrait of someone else who has the potential to be engrafted onto the Body of Christ.

In this way, "the least of these who are members of my family," from Matthew 24:40, becomes equated with people such as a single mother visiting church for the first time. In this way Schnase transforms scripture to read: Jesus says: "I was a young single mom as a first-time visitor at your church and you welcomed me."

This idea of a "stranger" potentially becoming a member of the community who welcomes the stranger is not found in scripture. The status of the stranger is not addressed in Deuteronomy or Matthew. Rather, these texts concern themselves with the actions and attitudes of persons (specifically Israelites in Deuteronomy and any member of "all the nations" in Matthew) towards strangers. Neither text concerns itself with the immediate consequences of

these encounters. In both texts the only consequences stipulated are in regard to the hospitable (or non-hospitable) person's relationship to the divine, in Matthew this resulting in their own eternal life or damnation.

Even though scripture does not generate the meaning of "stranger" in Schnase's reflection, by utilizing these texts, Schnase characterizes his own conception of "stranger" as biblical. Quoting scripture in this instance lends authority to Schnase's reflection. The iconic, authoritative images in Deuteronomy and Matthew—the Israelites as strangers in Egypt and Jesus being welcomed when he was a stranger—are reframed and fleshed out through Schnase's extra-biblical characterization of a stranger as a person who is not yet a member of a Christian faith community. In effect, within Citations 1 and 2 the term is emptied of scriptural meaning and instead takes on the meaning put forth by Schnase in his reflection. In this excerpt, therefore, "stranger" (both within the scripture citations and in the applications) is not specifically limited to a foreigner or newcomer with a vulnerable outsider status, rather the idea of stranger is both broadened to include anyone (vulnerable or not) and narrowed to mean those who have not committed to participate in the life of a Christian church.[230]

Moreover, as mentioned before, the scriptural context of final, eternal, and universal judgment is not included this excerpt. Although Schnase is encouraging his readers to be welcoming to strangers, he declines to detail any final or eternal consequences for failing to do so. He does not describe such hospitality as a commandment (as it is described in Deut 10:19),

[230] Hans Frei might characterize this type of extra-textual filling in of ambiguous (yet seemingly easy to understand) scriptural terms as a consequence of the reversal in biblical interpretation that occurred as a consequence of the 17th -18th century Enlightenment period in Europe. Before this shift, "[b]iblical interpretation became an imperative need, but its direction was that of incorporating extra-biblical thought, experience, and reality into the one real world detailed and made accessible by the biblical story." After the shift, "[m]any of those inquiring into the basic religious meaning of the biblical stories were determined to show that they harmonized with and illuminated extra-biblical experiences and concepts, as well as independent apprehensions of reality . . . the direction of interpretation now became the reverse of earlier days," Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 3 and 5.

nor does he tie the readers' actions to eternal life or damnation. Rather, an unwelcomed stranger is framed as a missed opportunity to encounter Jesus. "This [single mother first-time visitor] is a member of Jesus' family, and Jesus wants us to treat her as we would treat Jesus himself if he were here."[231] Moreover, as touched on above, Schnase's characterization of "stranger" lacks any of the socioeconomic and/or political vulnerability conveyed by Deuteronomy and Matthew.[232] Although Schnase uses the image of a single mother with real struggles, he omits the word "least" in his application of scripture to the Case Study, stating, "This is a member of Jesus' family, and Jesus wants us to treat her as we would treat Jesus himself if he were here."[233] In this way he signals a shift away from the gospel's focus on the poor and outcast, favoring a broader definition of stranger that includes anyone who is not yet a member or participant in a church community.

Although Schnase is ostensibly describing the practices of churches that are already "fruitful" (meaning they are not in decline, but actually growing in number of members), this excerpt has the effect of reducing the practice of hospitality to outreach strategies that target people who are not yet attending a church. In this way, hospitality to strangers reads as an instrument of church growth. In her comprehensive study on hospitality in the Christian tradition, Christine Pohl cautions against such instrumental uses of hospitality: "Concerned pastors are challenged to adopt a comprehensive 'hospitality program' as a means to church growth. Hospitality seems little more than a marketing tool. To view hospitality as a means to an

[231] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 13.
[232] Schnase takes up a universal interpretation of Matthew 25:40, which interprets that the "family of Jesus" is equated with all of humankind. According to Luz, this interpretation has been a tradition since the 19th century and became especially important for the Social Gospel movement at the turn of the 20th century. Yet in this tradition of interpretation the focus primarily is performing acts of charity for "the least of these" - those who are poor and vulnerable, including those who are in prison. See: Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 3:266–71.
[233] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 13.

end, to use it instrumentally, is antithetical to seeing it as a way of life, as a tangible expression of love. There is probably no better context for sharing the gospel than in a setting of warm welcome, and people will come in increasing numbers to a church that take hospitality seriously. But when we use occasional hospitality as a tool, we distort it, and the people we 'welcome' know quickly that they are being used."[234] Pohl, whose work is focused on re-examining and renewing the moral valence of hospitality for the contemporary church, argues that from the early church until the 18th century, the practice of "[h]ospitality to the least, without the expectation of benefit or repayment, remained the normative commitment."[235] This lack of expectation of material benefit is reflected both in Deuteronomy and Matthew. The reasons offered by scripture for practicing hospitality to the stranger are based in divine will and commandments. The idea that hospitality, although a commandment to be followed, was not to be carried out for the material benefit or concrete gain of the host was carried from scripture into the practices of the early church: "Christians offered hospitality in grateful response to God's generosity and as an expression of welcome to Christ."[236]

To be clear, I am not arguing that there is no scriptural basis for welcoming a stranger in the way set forth by Schnase. What I am arguing is that in this excerpt Schnase is not using the cited scriptural texts to structure his description of hospitality and the actions that stem from it. Instead Citations 1, 2, and 3 provide atomized words that, with the help of the Teaching Vehicle, are redefined with extra-textual concepts and illustrations of "a stranger" found in the introduction to this chapter and his Case Study. Through this process, an extra-textual form of instrumentality and the expected material consequences of a congregation's hospitable actions

[234] Christine D Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 144–45.
[235] Pohl, 35–36.
[236] Pohl, 33.

are introduced and ultimately shape the meaning of the scriptural citations for those who understand Schnase's words to be trustworthy or authoritative.

Our Ministries/Their Needs: Reifying Positions & Social Categories in the objectives and strategies of "Radical Hospitality

Now that I have demonstrated that scripture's role is the authoritative ground for but *not* generative of Schnase's definition of "Radical Hospitality," I return to the goal of "Radical Hospitality" as it is found in the 2011 H/LSMP and closely examine the discourse structuring its language. The full text of the goal of "Radical Hospitality" found within the 2011 Strategic Plan is cited below. The underlined text reflects the subject positioning and self-social categorization of the creators of the plan. The bolded text indicates social categorization of groups that are separate from the creators of the plan.

> Our goal is to 'invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are **strangers** so that **they find a spiritual home** and **discover for themselves** the unending richness of life in Christ. Radical describes that which is drastically different from ordinary practices, outside the normal, that which exceeds expectations and goes the second mile.'[237]
>
> Our objectives are:
> - Get on a first name basis with our neighbors
> - Increase the handicap accessibility of our campus
> - Involve the **Hispanic / Latino community** in planning our ministries
> - Encourage **Hispanic / Latino community people** to become leaders of our ministries
>
> Our strategies are:
> - Open the doors of the church to a variety of community programs and events
> - Have fiestas on a quarterly basis
> - Host events for **the community**
> - Invite **the community** to neighbor exchanges where **they can tell** us what **they need**

[237] Cited from: Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 11 and 21.

The plan conveys a hope to convince the Millian congregation (most obviously through the "A Case for Action" section) to adopt the new direction of ministry, including the change in the mission and vision statements. This plan also had as its purpose the securing grants and other support from the church hierarchy. The subject position of its creators was a group of Millian leaders, concerned with Millian's decline in membership, who believed the solution was to increase membership through outreach to the surrounding Hispanic community. In the section on the history and demographics of MMUMC it states:

> In the last decade or two, as the neighborhood grew more and more Hispanic/Latino, these faithful folks found themselves unable to bridge the cultural and language gap. In response to the changes around us, the church has become more about sustaining those inside the walls than being a church for the neighborhood. The church has declined from serving over a thousand on a Sunday to serving less than 200. The current leadership is ready to reclaim its [the church's] place in the neighborhood. We are beginning to recognize that as the body of Christ, our arms are always open to all those around us, even when we don't speak the same languages.[238]

The "faithful folks" referred to in this passage indicates the white, elderly, long-term membership of Millian. "Church" refers to the institution made up of such "faithful folks," but it is also made up of the current leadership. The "we" in the last sentence refers to "the current leadership." It is also possible to read the "we" as including the "faithful folks" (i.e. who continue to be part of the church) as part of the effort "to reclaim [the church's] place in the neighborhood." This ambiguous rhetoric suggests that the plan's primary audience, i.e. the "faithful folks," would adopt the plan as their own words. The plan reads as if it comes from one

[238] MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 5.

united voice of Millian Memorial UMC—a voice composed of both the current leadership *and* the faithful folks.

The authors have positioned themselves as the entire congregation. This portrayal blurs the lines of power between clergy, lay leadership, and lay persons. By speaking as the whole congregation, the plan suggests that everyone in the congregation supports the plan and its execution. No dissenting voices are evident.

Although the vision and a version of the mission put forth were eventually adopted by the congregation, there is evidence, both within the language of the plan itself and in my interview data, that not all persons at Millian felt that the plan represented their positions. Exemplary of this tension in the plan is the section titled "Challenges We Face," in which a number of the challenges have to do with need to overcome a resistance to any changes on the part of the current church membership.[239] In other words, though MMUMC seems unified in the voice of the plan, in reality the congregation is fragmented. These challenges are reflected in my interviews and fieldwork experience as discussed in Chapter 2. Further proof of this disconnect was illuminated by the Readiness 360 report that was sent out to the congregation on June 30, 2016. This was a result of an anonymous survey that had been filled out by ninety-six people from Millian. In the analysis of the survey results under the section on "Missional Alignment," I have underlined evidence of ambivalence regarding Millian's chosen multicultural direction and bolded evidence that indicates a clear understanding of Millian's multicultural mission and vision to show the disconnect revealed by the congregational report:

> Many folks at your church have a good sense of where God is calling you to go, but others are not aligned with this point of view. . . . To this end your church has: <u>a low priority for</u>

[239] For example, "Overcoming doing things 'our' way" ("our way" being the religio-cultural preferences of whites, etc.); "Tradition vs. change" (overcoming resistance to change), and "Apathy of many in congregation," MMUMC Staff, 9.

> reaching new people; **alignment to a clear direction**; fear of backlash if the church makes decisions that are in line with its mission as opposed to pleasing people or maintaining the status quo; uncertainty about the church's ability to start ministries that thrive; **clarity about the core principles of the church's faith**; and mixed feelings or confusion about the church's direction."[240]

There seems to be a clear direction and mission that many agree on, but it is not embraced by all congregants, and there are those who might embrace it but do not want to lose current traditions. Although the subject positioning of the creators of this plan was represented as the voice of the entire Millian congregation, their actual subject position is as the 2011 leadership, whose voice is speaking for (not as) the Millian congregation.

In part due to the author's ambivalence in subject positioning, the language of the plan instantiates the social categories that divide the MMUMC congregation from the surrounding community. Taking up the voice of the congregation (but in reality, speaking *for* them), the creators of the plan hold all of the agency within the goal of Radical Hospitality. They "invite," "welcome," "receive," "care," "get," "increase," "involve," etc. There are twelve action verbs (most are in the imperative mood) tied to those who are carrying out this goal, i.e. the Millian congregation, while only four verbs are associated with other groups mentioned within the excerpt (i.e. strangers, the Hispanic/Latino community, and the community). In other words, the force of agency resides with the Millian congregation. Moreover, the first person plural possessive pronoun "our" is used seven times: "Our goal," "Our objectives," "our neighbors," "our campus," "our ministries" (twice), and "Our strategies." This indicates that the subject position is one of ownership and possession of the church, its campus, and its ministries, in

[240] The Baltimore-Washington Conference, "Annotated Readiness 360 Report" (Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, June 8, 2016), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD.

addition to attempting to unite the whole congregation in the plan by including the whole MMUMC congregation in these uses of "our" in relation to the goal, objectives, and strategies.

The other groups—strangers, the Hispanic/Latino community, and the community—are characterized in terms that demonstrate that they have no ownership of the church, its ministries, its campus or the plan's goal, or of the objectives and strategies. Also, the plan characterizes these groups as having much less agency than the Millian congregation. The domain is described as "the community," which is outside of Millian's campus. In fact, within the language of the goal itself, the actions of the Millian are what will finally cause the "strangers" to act. The strangers' actions of finding "a spiritual home" and discovering Christ are dependent on the actions of the Millian congregation (inviting, welcoming, etc.). The only other actions carried out by the community are at meetings organized by the Millian congregation "where *they* [the community] can tell *us* [the MMUMC congregation] what *they* [the community] need" (emphasis added).

A Theological Contradiction: Reading Schnase in relationship to Gonzalez within the context of the Strategic Plan

When the analyses of the goal of "Radical Hospitality" and the "Theological Foundation" are read next to each other, they reveal a disconnect within the 2011 H/LSMP. In the Theological Framework, Rev. Gonzalez's excerpted speech is characterized as "addressing" what Millian means by their belief that "diversity is central to the reality of the Kingdom of God." Rev. Gonzalez's exposition demonstrates a shift in his subject position, the form of social categorization, and the perceived reality that is influenced by scripture-shaped discourse. He moves from being an influential outsider, to standing alongside all Christians including the ones he distanced himself from in the first part of the excerpt. The social categorizations based on human designations of culture and status are dropped in favor of broader

categories of "Christians" and "the Church," and the perceived reality shifts as the point-of-view changes from that of "many people" to that of God. Scripture's influence on these shifts is evident in that the language of scripture takes the place of social categories, and the adoption of scripture's point-of-view, i.e. God's vision of reality.

As the analysis of the text of the goal of Radical Hospitality in this chapter demonstrates, there is no trace of scripture-shaped discourse. Bishop Schnase's definition of hospitality, which was used for the language of the goal in the strategic plan, had not been generated by the cited scriptural texts within the chapter on Radical Hospitality. Instead, he atomizes scripture passages that contain the word "stranger" and then redefines this word with extra-textual concepts and illustrations created by Schnase himself, thereby, drawing authority from scripture for his definition and conception of "stranger" simply by citing scripture texts with the word "stranger." He uses scripture as an object of authority that in practice validates his own conceptions as scriptural, when in fact they are not.

Moreover, goal of Radical Hospitality does not mimic the subject positioning and the form of social categorization in the Scriptural View of Hispanic Ministries portion of the Theological Framework. As was shown, the creators of the plan project a different position (i.e. the MMUMC congregation) than they actually occupied (i.e. the 2011 MMUMC leadership). Moreover, partly due to this attempt to portray the unified voice of "the MMUMC congregation" as their subject position, the leadership instantiates clearly defined, binary social categories divided between the MMUMC congregation and those who are not part of that group: strangers/the Hispanic/Latino community/the community. This point was brought home by the fact that the first person plural possessive pronoun, "our," was used seven times in relation to Millian spaces and ministries, and that twelve of sixteen of the active verbs were associated with the subject position of the creators of the plan.

This contradiction within the plan between language found in conceptual vision statements and practical goals is manifested in the lived theological expression of Millian's approach to outreach in the surrounding community, as for example in the Easter Egg Roll event described at the beginning of Chapter 3.

"I wish they would come to Sunday School": The 2015 Easter Egg Roll as a Lived Expression of Millian's Us/Them Instrumental Approach to Community Outreach

MMUMC Member A: "I don't know where all these kids come from." MMUMC Member B: "Well, I wish they would come to Sunday School." Conversation overheard after the 2015 Egg Roll Event

The 2011 H/LSMP lists the annual Easter Egg Roll under the heading "Things We Believe We Have Done Well," and makes a point to state "over 100 children" attended this event in 2010.[241] The Easter Egg Roll is an annual event, traditionally held on the Monday after Easter Sunday. Although Millian had held Easter egg hunts for its own members, this was the first one advertised as a free event that was open to the surrounding community. The report to the congregation about the 2010 event reads:

> Monday, April 5 was a glorious spring day that attracted more than 100 children and their parents to our first Easter Egg Roll. The children participated in games, crafts, stories, Easter Egg Hunt and Egg Roll. We were blessed with 30 energetic middle and high school youth from 15 different schools along with 20 adult volunteers and Millian staff. Children received a book about Easter in Spanish and English and commemorative MMUMC wooden Easter egg.[242]

[241] Moreover, under the strategies for reaching the Radical Hospitality goal, the plan lists "Host events for the community," which supports the continuation of the Egg Roll and implementation of other programs like it, see: MMUMC Staff, "Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan: Using the Tools of Our Past to Build Hope for the Future," 10.

[242] "Teaching and Learning Committee Report" in: MMUMC Staff, "Charge Conference Report 2010," Annual Report, Charge Conference (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2010).

Millian's Outreach Leadership Model: Autocratic & Lacking in Intercultural Competency

In 2015, the Outreach Team, which coordinates "outreach to the church, community, and global ministries," sponsored the Easter Egg Roll. While the Outreach Team as a whole is responsible for this activity, in practice its leadership structure is autocratic.[243] The Easter Egg Roll was organized by one person who coordinated a group of volunteers to prepare for and carry out the event. The organizer independently planned event activities (including table activities and the egg hunts), took care of advertising for the event, handled the recruiting of volunteers, and donated the majority of the materials for arts and crafts and other table activities. The only public requests made by the organizer of others in the congregation were to volunteer the day of the event at the activity tables and to donate plastic eggs, small toys, and candy for the egg hunts. The organizer recruited and worked with youth volunteers prior to the event. These volunteers stuffed eggs and helped complete the packets for the activity tables. In exchange for their labor, youth volunteers were granted community service hours that count toward requirements they have at their local public school. There were no advertised planning meetings, pre-event surveys, or post-event evaluations that encouraged opportunities for input or feedback from either church or community participants regarding the event. Moreover, neither Pastor Miguel nor Pastor Braulio were consulted about how the event should be organized and carried out. Both of these pastors are Latino and were appointed by the Baltimore-Washington Conference specifically for their experience in both Hispanic and multicultural ministries. They had cultivated relationships

[243] Although this event continued to be coordinated by the same person, responsibility for this event shifted out of the committee focused on Christian education (Teaching and Learning, then renamed Faith Development in 2012) and was added to the responsibilities of the committee called the "Outreach Team" in 2013. In 2012, the Outreach Team had been devoted to global outreach and missions, however in 2013 the committee's efforts expanded to include local community events, such as the Egg Roll, and outreach also to Millian's own members; this committee performs "outreach to the church, community, and global ministries." See "Outreach Team Report: in: MMUMC Staff, "Charge Conference Report 2013," Annual Report, Charge Conference (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2013), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD.

with members of the community, as evidenced by the various casual conversations with community participants that they had during the event. The fact that they were not approached for their input about the Easter Egg Roll indicates a disconnect between the purported goal of this event—to demonstrate "Radical Hospitality" to the surrounding community, a majority of whom are Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants—and the way it was carried out.

Indeed, those responsible for event, the Outreach Committee and its lead organizer, demonstrated a lack of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence "accounts for the ability to step beyond one's own cultural conditioning and function effectively and appropriately with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds."[244] Those with such competence "must know how to negotiate and respect meanings of cultural symbols and norms that are changing during interactions."[245] This includes attempting to mediate the difficulties of not speaking the primary language and making efforts to intentionally navigate different cultural perceptions and beliefs. When dealing with a group that includes a majority of Spanish-speaking immigrants this might mean ensuring there is bilingual instruction and an effort to recruit Latino volunteer staff that could make the participants feel welcome and that their demographic is included in the activity's leadership.

Although there were a few bilingual youth volunteers staffing the table activities, overall the event exhibited a lack of linguistic and cultural sensitivity to the majority-Spanish speaking immigrant population of community participants. For example, at the brief meeting right before the event all instructions were given in English, but not in Spanish, even though a majority of the

[244] Alex Matveev, *Intercultural Competence in Organizations: A Guide for Leaders, Educators and Team Players*, 1st ed. 2017 edition (New York, NY: Springer, 2016), 8.
[245] Matveev, 8. The author cites a paper given by V. P. Collier & W.P Thomas at the American Educational Association in 1988 and Y. Y. Kim's "Interethnic communication: The context and the behavior" in Communication yearbook (Sage, 1994).

participants in the sanctuary spoke Spanish as their primary, if not only language. Moreover, most of the activity tables were run by white, English-speaking adult volunteers. Although many children in these families are bilingual and often translate for the adults who do not speak English, the lack of Spanish translation is a sign that community members are expected to conform to Millan's language and culture. The most glaring example of the lack intercultural competency occurred when the organizer decided to hold a private egg hunt for a white family from Millian. It is possible that other families had missed the hunt or had been disappointed that the second hunt had been cancelled, and carrying out a private hunt reinforced a perception among community participants that at Millian white people are afforded special treatment.

Although the community members viewed this as a racial issue, I think the white family's membership at Millian also was an important factor in the organizer's decision to conduct the hunt. Cancellation of the event was excused based on the reasoning that the event was free. If a community participant inquired about the later egg hunt, they were informed it had been cancelled and then were directed to the table activities. Why did a church family's complaint cause the organizer to choose to hold a private egg hunt? I posit that it has to do with a feeling of obligation to church members that is lacking in relation to community participants. Church members contribute to the church and there is an expectation that members, therefore, should benefit from the church's resources.

Evidence for this belief is also found in the reasoning behind why the Outreach Team shifted in 2013 from a committee focused only on supporting international ministries to "outreach to the church, community, and global ministries." The inclusion of "outreach to the church" was in part due to complaints by Millan members. The 2014 Outreach Team report to Charge Conference states: "The murmur of the congregation was heard and attention was given

to outreach to Millian" due to Millian members' perception that an "inordinate amount of resources of the Outreach Team is spent in the community."[246] In other words, Millian members tend to act from the belief that they deserve priority with regard to the use of the church building and Millian's resources more generally.

With this understanding of how resources are viewed by Millian, it makes more sense why when faced with the scheduling mistake, the organizer chose to prepare a private egg hunt for a Millian church member. Millian members are understood as shareholders, part owners of the church's resources, since they have paid into those resources through tithes, offerings, and other donations, while nonmembers are viewed as having no claim on the church's resources even if Millian does not deliver on what was promised to the community. In other words, when the community participants complained about the schedule change, the change was justified due to a "beggars can't be choosers" mentality and were directed to other activities. However, once a Millian member complained about the change, a private egg hunt was organized.

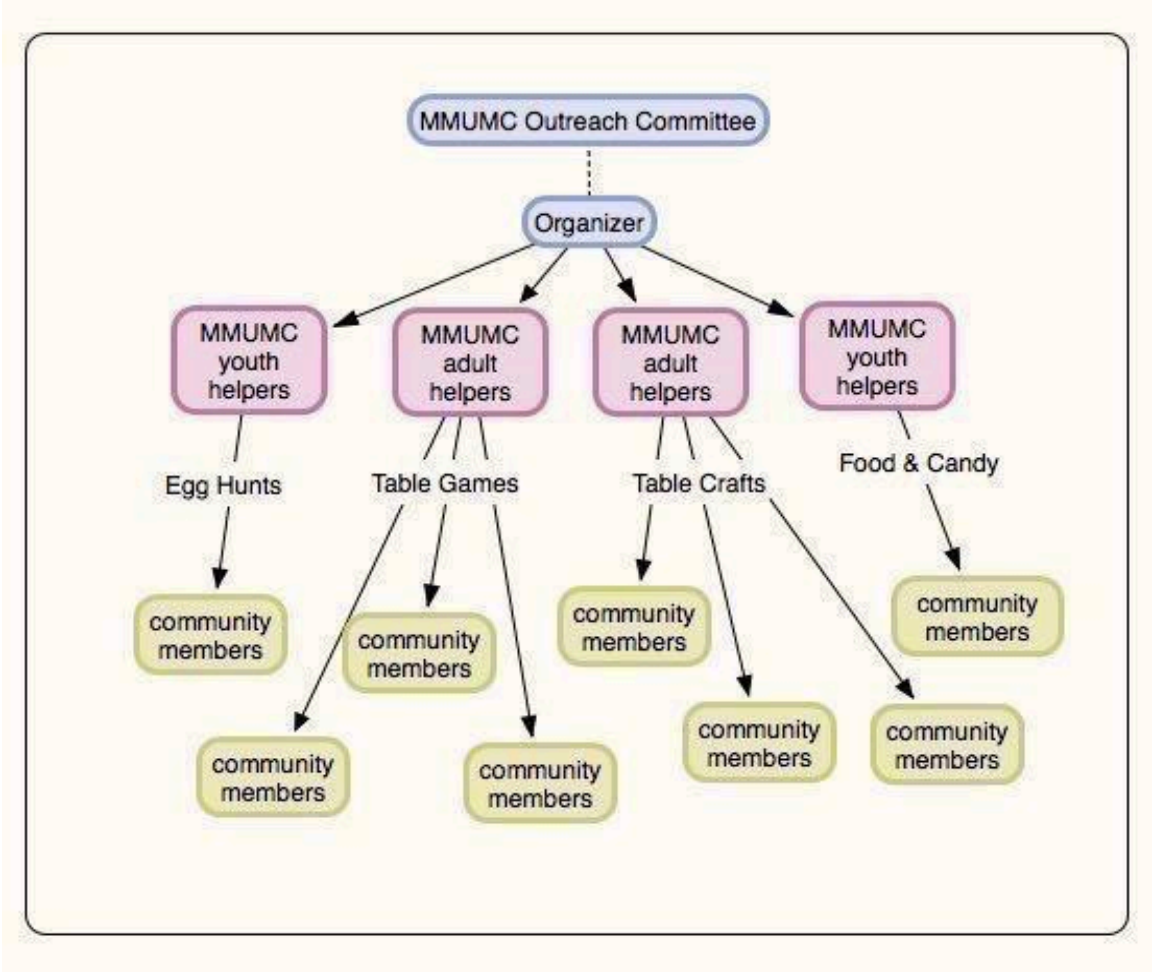
With this public performance of a private egg hunt for a white family, the Outreach leadership sent two messages to the community participants. First, nonmembers should be grateful for what MMUMC does for the community and not complain. Second, this rule does not apply to Millian members, who contribute with their resources to the church and therefore deserve special treatment. In multicultural situations, public deference to one group (members of Millian) over another group (nonmembers) demonstrates a lack of cultural competency that encourages further divisions. In this case, for participants who noticed the private egg hunt, their ideas regarding racial divisions—i.e. that whites are given special treatment—were reaffirmed.

[246] See "Outreach Team Report" in: MMUMC Staff, "Charge Conference Report 2014," Annual Report, Charge Conference (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, October 3, 2014), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD.

Additionally, the lack of translation into Spanish during the event communicated expectations that community participants need to conform to the language and culture of Millian in order to participate in the church's activities. Although the Easter Egg Roll is represented as an event that benefits the community, in its performance it actually signals to the community participants that Millian expects uncritical gratitude for the resources that they are giving away to them. Such acts may contribute to the reasons why community members are reluctant to come to worship services and/or Sunday school at Millian.

Outreach Organization: Top-Down, Patronizing Charity Event

The organizational diagram below illustrates two features of the 2015 Easter Egg Roll event. First, it displays the top-down structure of the event, which is organized by the Outreach committee and run with the help of volunteers. Second, it shows the flow of material goods and entertainment from the Millian congregation to the community members:



The community members provide nothing except their presence at the event. All of the work is carried out by Millian volunteers, and most of the consumption is done by the community members (along with some Millian families with children). There was a clear division between Millian congregants and the community members during the Egg Roll event. The Millian congregation enacts a role in this event of being powerful, unified, having abundant resources to give, and with the agency to carry it out the event, while the community participants passively benefit from the event. Therefore, this event enacts the us/them instrumental model of community outreach proposed by the 2011 Strategic Plan within the goal of Radical Hospitality.

Moreover, there was little opportunity for relationships to form between Millian members and the community participants during the event. For the most part, congregants and community

members socialized within their respective groups. In interviews and church meetings, when Millian members are pressed about relationship building with members of the surrounding community, they bring up the Spanish-language barrier that prevents them (English-speaking only members) from communicating. Although this is a practical issue that makes it more of a challenge to form relationships, there is also a general unwillingness to use the resources that they already have—in this case two Hispanic pastors—to help navigate how to tailor such events to this particular demographic.

"How did things go today?": Measuring the Easter Egg Roll against the Goal of Radical Hospitality

The 2015 Egg Roll was successful in that it attracted a large number of participants to Millian's campus. However, a conversation I heard right after the event signaled a frustration with the annual event as failing to attract new members to Millian. The conversation opened with a positive tone. Member 1 said, "How did things go today [at the 2015 Egg Roll event]?" and Member 2 responded, "Wonderful!" Member 2 was enthusiastic about the 2015 Easter Egg Roll event that had just occurred and the number of children that had attended. However, when Member 1 commented, "Well, I wish they would come to Sunday School," there was an awkward pause and a shift in tone. Member 2 was put in a defensive position. Through this comment Member 1 was signaling to Member 2 that the successful efforts of that day's events were in fact a failure. The fact that Member 2 stated this on the same day of the event demonstrates Member 2's frustration that this event (and other programs like it) does not help meet the actual, unstated goal: increased attendance in MMUMC's Sunday School and worship. Member 2's response was given in a tone of defeat: "I don't know, we've tried."[247] As this

[247] Conversation occurred during the following interview, when another member entered the office where the interview was being held: MMUMC Member B and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview.

conversation illustrates, there is a desire to reconcile the success of this event in attracting large numbers of community participants with the fact that most of them do not end up participating in more traditional church events such as Sunday School or worship. For some congregants, the only way to measure the true success of the 2015 Easter Egg Roll would be to count any members of the Latino worshiping community or Sunday School classes who joined because of their experience at the event. This reveals that for many Millian members, the true goal of "Radical Hospitality" is indeed church growth, not obedience to scriptural mandates.

"So that they find a spiritual home": Multiculturalism as a Strategy to Stave off Decline

Organizational Theory: Text and Cases states that "an organization that pursues revolutionary change [as opposed to evolutionary change] adopts a top-down approach to change strategy. The organization waits until it believes that the costs of not changing exceed the costs of overcoming organization inertia and then introduces a master plan for change."[248] As membership numbers continued to decline steeply in the late 2000s, Millian's leadership, with financial support from the UMC hierarchy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, attempted a revolutionary change, a last-ditch effort to save Millian and reverse its decline. The revolutionary change was to begin aggressively reaching out to the Spanish-speaking populations that surround their campus, and it was first presented to the congregation in the form of the 2011 Hispanic/Latino Strategic Ministry Plan. The compelling Theological Framework, analyzed in Chapter 3, functioned as a prooftext for the plan, or as its façade. The sacred words of Revelation as interpreted by Rev. Justo Gonzalez lent justification for the existence of the plan itself and helped to persuade its audiences of its legitimacy—both the hierarchy of the UMC, which provided funding to Millian

[248] Gareth R. Jones, *Organizational Theory: Text and Cases* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 488.

based on it, and the congregants of Millian, who were asked to participate in the ministries outlined within it.

This top-down, revolutionary approach was grounded in a narrative of decline culture, which affected the form of multiculturalism that is generated from its logics. The form of multiculturalism encouraged by the 2011 H/LSMP and manifested in the lived expression of the Easter Egg Roll is a "discourse of domination and essentialism."[249] There was no care to welcome the cultures and languages of non-white persons into Millian as full participants. Rather the Millian members acted as benevolent patrons, offering entertainment and treats as charity to the community members, in an attempt to gain their loyalty with stuffed eggs and cookie decorating.

Instead, this form of assimilationist multiculturalism succeeded in maintaining and even deepening divisions between people based on demographic categories and membership status. Rather than being an enactment of Rev. Gonzalez's scriptural vision of Hispanic Ministry, which requires solidarity, sacrifice, and vulnerability on the part of those in power, it is a lived expression of the fifth component of the narrative of decline—it is an instrumental strategy enacted to *reverse Millian's decline*. Therefore, although each time this event draws a large crowd of community participants, it has never been recognized as a full success. "Well, I wish they would come to Sunday School," laments Member 1. "Sometimes I guess I feel they are coming only because we are giving [material goods] to them," states a member remarking on how few Hispanics come to church services.[250]

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[249] Henry Giroux, "Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy," in *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling, A Critical Reader* (Boulder, CO: Routledge, 1997), 246.
[250] MMUMC Member B and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 16:40.

Why Didn't Pastor Miguel Intervene?

The fact that neither Hispanic pastor was approached for their advice about how to conduct this event—or even if this event should be conducted at all—left me with another question: Why didn't Pastor Miguel simply step in and run the event? Why didn't he intervene or try to influence its planning and organization, or attempt to cancel the event altogether? He did not take it upon himself to translate the brief meeting at the beginning of the Egg Roll into Spanish, nor did he confront the organizer about the private egg hunt held for the white Millian member.

Pastor Miguel states that if at all possible, he avoids direct confrontation when trying to redirect or change certain types of beliefs and behaviors. Instead, he chooses to model the type of respect for leadership that he wants others to emulate. If there is a committee or individual that the church has put in charge of an event, Pastor Miguel defers to their leadership with regard to that event and will not intervene unless invited to do so. Instead of a top-down strategy for change, Pastor Miguel's approach could be categorized as an evolutionary, bottom-up change strategy. An incremental form of change in which "managers make adjustments to their strategy and structure" based on continuous evaluation of the context.[251] Pastor Miguel's response to Millian's assimilationist approach to multicultural ministry did not come in the form of direct confrontation of outreach leadership or by taking over their ministries, but rather a slow process of habit re-formation that occurs mainly in the worship setting and through tiny steps that have restructured leadership and organizational structures. His approach, the entextualization of Beloved Community, while incremental, is also disruptive of dominant cultural structures. It is this approach that is the subject of explication and analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study.

[251] Jones, *Organizational Theory*, 489.

Chapter 5: "A veces la situación es tan urgente que hay que ir lentamente"

"Sometimes the situation is so urgent, that one needs to go slowly"

"My brothers and sisters, nobody can tell us it's impossible to change this world; it's possible! Why? Because the Holy Spirit is leading us." Pastor Miguel 2014 Pentecost Sermon

Three Latinos (Lucy Torres, Pastor Braulio, and Ruth Balderas), four elderly white members, and I sat around a short, rectangular children's activity table in one of Millian's Sunday school rooms on March 1, 2015. A special meeting of the Faith Development committee had been called to make a decision about the time of day Vacation Bible School (VBS) would be held in the summer. Director Lucy Torres, the first Latina to be in charge of this annual event, which has a long history at Millian, presented the results of her community survey. She had called thirty-five families who had participated in VBS the year before but had not been able to reach everyone. Of the people she had been able to reach, children would be available to attend either in the morning or in the evening. She had found two parents from the community who would be able to volunteer in the evening. Moreover, she found that there was an interest in an evening

adult class taught in Spanish. Lucy also presented two lists of volunteers, one group who had agreed to teach in the morning and one in the evening, and a plan for evening meals that involved inviting different committees from the church to cook and serve a meal one night of the week during VBS. Lucy reported that she was able to find more volunteers for the evening timeframe. Some had volunteered before and some were people who had never been able to volunteer before due to their work schedules. She finished by stating that the decision was up to the committee, and that she would move forward with the planning for whichever timeframe they approved.[252]

Once Lucy finished presenting there was a pause. Then, one white committee member asked what her recommendation was after having done the survey. Lucy stated that she recommended the evening time. She based this recommendation on the fact that there was a significant number of kids who would be able to come, it would give an opportunity for new people to volunteer, and it would also be a model that would involve the children's families since there was interest in an adult class in the evening.[253] Again there was a pause in the conversation. Tension set in between the two sides of the table, while I sat typing away on my laptop right in the middle of the exchange.

When it was signaled a second time, this time by Pastor Braulio, that the committee would need to make a decision, the reaction from one of the white members was to try and put the decision off until more members were present, but after discussing it realized that only two members of the committee were missing. At that point, Ruth, the third Latino member of the group, broke into the discussion and pointed out that Lucy deserved a decision from the

[252] Kelly Figueroa-Ray, "Faith Development Meeting Notes," March 1, 2015.
[253] Figueroa-Ray.

committee that day so she could prepare for VBS that was three-and-a-half months away. Everyone agreed on this point, but clearly the white members were hesitating.[254]

The white members seemed to be resisting the need to make a final decision by returning to the same two issues that Lucy had already addressed through the results of her survey: the number of students and volunteers that would participate in an evening session of VBS. In yet another round of discussion, Lucy was asked again to confirm that there would be enough volunteers available in the evenings, since former volunteers might not want to drive at night and since some had voiced strong opposition to the change. One of the Latino members came up with the idea of a carpool for the more elderly members who wanted to participate but did not want to drive, saying, "We can make an effort of working together."[255]

Then a white member said that there would be children and volunteers who would not participate if this change was made and he followed up this assertion: "The old church, as it was, does not have any children left."[256] These words would come back to me when I was interviewing another church member, a former volunteer teacher for VBS. I had shown pictures of the children who had been part of the 2015 VBS session to her, and she admitted it was a sizable group but was disheartened that very few of the children were white.[257] Once this belief about "the old church" not having any children was voiced in the meeting, this same white member agreed to move forward with the vote. In accordance with Lucy's recommendation, the committee voted that VBS would be held in the evening.[258]

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[254] Figueroa-Ray.
[255] Figueroa-Ray.
[256] Figueroa-Ray.
[257] Notes from just before: MMUMC Member L and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #1.
[258] Figueroa-Ray, "Faith Development Meeting Notes."

Vacation Bible School is an annual Christian Education event hosted by Millian for its own members and children of the surrounding community. Like the Easter Egg Roll, it is an activity that is noted within the 2011 Hispanic / Latino Strategic Ministry Plan (2011 H/LSMP) and is seen as part of this plan's implementation. Unlike the Easter Egg Roll, which is viewed as an Outreach Team activity, VBS, falls under the responsibility of the Faith Development Committee, which is in charge of Christian Education activities at Millian. While Pastor Miguel did not attempt to influence the Outreach Team and their activities, from early on he focused on transforming Christian Education at Millian by influencing changes in its leadership, strategic planning, and priorities. The decision made in the meeting described above was key, since it was the first time a contentious decision had been made by Latino and white congregants together. Lucy did not attempt to impose her view, but rather presented her evidenced-based recommendations and asked the committee as a whole to make the decision. She did not strong-arm or shame the other committee members into adopting her position, but rather modeled team-based decision-making between members of multicultural groups. This meeting and its unanimous decision to back a Latina's recommendation was a small disruption to what had been the hegemonic culture of decision-making within the Faith Development committee. I argue that this disruptive act is a lived theological expression of Pastor Miguel's approach to multicultural ministry more generally.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I offered a close examination of Millian's strategy of multiculturalism. Chapters 5 and 6 are a close examination of Pastor Miguel's response to this strategy. After briefly outlining this overall approach, I will look at one mode of it closely in this chapter—his sermonic curriculum.

A Church Divided Against Itself

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Pastor Miguel had been appointed by the UMC Baltimore-Washington Conference to Millian for the purpose of helping the church grow as a multicultural congregation through outreach to the surrounding community. However, after attending a number of "Home Group Meetings" hosted by various members of Millian, Pastor Miguel decided that Millian would need to resolve certain issues as part of the process of becoming a multicultural church.[259] Through his interactions in these small groups he picked up on deep internal divisions within the church and ambivalence towards the reality of the changing demographics of their neighborhood. In Pastor Miguel's judgement, if these issues were not resolved, any attempt to reach out to the surrounding community would fail.

What Pastor Miguel gathered from his experience of the Home Group Meetings and his first few months as lead pastor was that Millian did not identify in practice as one, united church. Instead, the Sunday worship services functioned as three separate congregations: 1) the smaller 9:30 a.m., or "Asbury" service; 2) the larger 11:00 a.m. "Millian" service; and 3) a then-defunct 2:00 p.m. Spanish language service that members had told him was for "your people."[260] Although it is not explicitly clear what was meant by this designation, Pastor Miguel interpreted it as a racist sentiment, and that members at Millian thought he would only be the pastor of Hispanic members. The generally dismissive attitude toward the Spanish-speaking service and the idea that he could only pastor Spanish-speaking people were both aspects of working in majority-white congregations that Pastor Miguel had dealt with before. The challenge he did not

[259] The Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church strongly recommends these encounters as a way for the pastor and congregants to get to know each other and for the pastor to begin to identify the values and leaders of the congregation. See: "Getting to Know New Pastors: Home Group Meetings," Religious Organization, *BWC Toolbox: A Resource of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church* (blog), April 27, 2015, http://web.archive.org/web/20160227234054/http://bwcumc.org/toolbox/small-group-meetings/.

[260] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 41:43 & 52:20.

expect was the deep division between the majority-white, English-speaking participants of the 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services.

Issues between the two services began recently, in 2012. In 2011, Francis Asbury United Methodist, another historically majority-white Church, was growing. Its Korean population had grown so significantly that the Baltimore-Washington Conference had appointed a Korean pastor and the church was undergoing renovations to accommodate the new and younger membership. While renovations were underway, Asbury rented space from Millian. Once the renovations were completed in 2012, the members of Asbury returned to their church, except for a group about ten to twelve elderly, long-term members who remained behind and joined Millian.[261] Those who stayed behind did so after feeling slowly ousted by the new Korean population. Things at Asbury had worked for them as long as the long-term members had total control; however, when the Korean members of the congregation started bringing in more money and expected to have more say in the decision-making of the church, the conflicts began. In an interview a former Asbury member said of the experience, "We welcomed the infusion of money that we got each month from them. But over a period of time the tail started to wag the dog. They were making demands that sometimes we had problems with. We had other cultural differences. Linguistic issues. We loved many of their people, because they were just wonderful folks, but it just got intolerable for us."[262] In the Home Group Meetings at Millian held for Pastor Miguel, these former members of Francis Asbury UMC, who all worshipped at the 9:30 a.m. service, expressed fear that he and the associate pastor, Braulio Torres, who is also Mexican, were there to repeat the pattern they had experienced at Asbury. Their fear was that instead of transitioning to a Korean church, Millian

[261] See "Report of the Pastor" in: MMUMC Staff, "Charge Conference Report 2012," Annual Report, Charge Conference (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2012); MMUMC Members J & K and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 24, 2015, 4:05.
[262] MMUMC Members J & K and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 02:09-03:14.

would eventually become a Latino church.[263] At the same time, Pastor Miguel heard that the newer Asbury members felt alienated from the long-term Millian membership who mainly worshipped at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning. One Asbury member told me in an interview that the 9:30 service had been labeled from the very beginning "the Asbury service" since all the new members worshiped at that time.[264] Both Pastor Miguel and the former Asbury members reported that the Asbury members continue to feel like outsiders and not fully welcome even after becoming official members, spearheading various ministries, and feeling devoted to their new church home.

In light of these findings, Pastor Miguel judged that Millian's stated mission and vision were not fully supported in practice by a significant portion of the active members at Millian. Again, the mission and vision of MMUMC when he first arrived were as follows:

> **Our Mission:** Reaching new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Christ.
>
> **Our Vision:** To be a dynamic, spirit-filled, multicultural, multigenerational, church numbering in the thousands, impacting our neighborhood, nation and world through radically inclusive community building.

Pastor Miguel said he learned from those first meetings that Millian members were fixated on "insiders" and "outsiders" and resurrecting a glorious, homogeneous (majority-white) past with thousands of members and well-attended ministries and activities.[265] Unlike the culturally diverse vision with its expectation of direct engagement with the surrounding neighborhood, in Pastor Miguel's estimation the elderly members of Millian were working out of a nostalgic, homogenous family model that Pastor Miguel characterizes as a "social-club" mentality that

[263] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 45:40-46:22.
[264] MMUMC Members J & K and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 40:30-41:30.
[265] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 42:20 & 49:20.

precludes the diversity that the Kingdom of God espouses. Of this social-club concept of family, Pastor Miguel states:

> El concepto de familia era volver a rebuscar lo que hubo el pasado. Lo mismo, sueñan en esos años, los 60s, los 50s donde la familia toda venía a la iglesia, los niños venían a la escuela dominical, donde los jóvenes venían a la iglesia a jugar. y era el centro, no había club social - no había un centro comunitario - era la iglesia.
>
> Ahora, ya no saben que pedir. Porque la iglesia, así como en la escuela todo es tan diverso que no saben porque sus hijos están allí o porque sus nietos van a esas escuelas. Lo que dijo un viejito "porque mi nieto tiene que comer en lugar de hot dogs y chips, tiene que comer pupusas—porque la gran mayoría de los alumnos son este salvadoreños? Y ellos deben decidir? No! deben decidir los Americanos!"
>
> The concept of family was to go back and find what was in the past. It's always the same, they dream about the past years, the 60s, the 50s, where the whole family came to church, the children went to Sunday School, where the teenagers came to church to play. And [the church] was the center of everything. There was not a social club or community center—it was the church.
>
> Now they don't know what to ask for, because the church, just like in the schools, is so diverse that they do not know why their children are there or why their grandchildren go to those schools. An elderly man said: "why does my grandson have to eat pupusas instead of hot dogs and chips—because the majority of the students are Salvadorans, and they should decide? No! The Americans should decide.[266]

Since its establishment in the 1950s, Millian has been characterized by its homogenous white culture, and it is difficult for members of this culture to consider anyone that does not conform to it as being a part of their family. Instead, when people of other cultures are engaged by Millian, it is through transactional relationships such as the one described by the former Asbury member above. As an elderly, white church in decline, the long-term majority-white members of Asbury appreciated the influx of members and money that helped keep their church open but sharing

[266] Balderas, 49:20-51:09.

decision-making power with the Koreans was "intolerable." In the view of these two former members of Asbury, one culture, the Korean culture, began to dominate and push out the other dying one, the majority-white, English-speaking culture. This view of family that is based in monocultural gathering and power, is what Pastor Miguel refers to as a "social-club" mentality.

In Pastor Miguel's estimation, even today the social-club mentality is deeply embedded at Millian. The congregation is looking for Latinos in the neighborhood to provide an influx of members and money, however they fear a cultural takeover like the one they understood to have happened at Asbury. Millian is in a situation in which they do not really know what they want.[267] They do not want their church to close due to a lack of membership, however long-term members want to retain control of church culture, spending, and decision-making. When Pastor Miguel arrived, he judged that Millian members were not prepared for any significant change to their current church culture and many were not ready for an influx of Hispanic participants that would likely effect such change. Even though, as demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, Millian had turned toward the Hispanic community, their instrumental, us/them approach encouraged only assimilationist forms of outreach. Millian wanted more Hispanic members, but only set out to reach them in ways that ensured Millian's culture would remain the same. In other words, Hispanics were welcome as long as they conformed to set structures and/or were assimilated into Millian's dominant white culture.

In her work studying churches that meet the sociological definition of multiracial (no more than any one race or ethnic group makes up more than 80% of the congregation), the sociologist Korie Edwards argues that most remain culturally white:

> There were sometimes cultural practices and markers that represented racial minorities in these congregations, such as a gospel music selection, a display of flags from various countries around the

[267] Balderas, 49:48.

> world, or services translated into Spanish. Yet the diversity did not seem to affect the core culture and practices of the religious organizations. That is, the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases tended to be more consistent with those of the predominantly white churches I had observed. These churches exhibited many of the practices and beliefs common to white churches within their same religious affiliation, only with a few additional 'ethnic' practices or markers. It was like adding rainbow sprinkles to a dish of ice cream. In the end, you still have a dish of ice cream, only with a little extra color and sweetness.[268]

The social-club mentality at Millian exists not only in relation to divisions between Millian and the external community, but also between the two groups of worship—labeled the "Asbury" and "Millian" services. Pastor Miguel judged that the participants in these two services operated as two different congregations, each with their own culture. In this case, those who attended the 11a.m. "Millian" service were the "insiders," while those who attended the 9:30 a.m. "Asbury" service considered themselves the "outsiders." A former Asbury member reports that long-term Millian members refused to participate in ministries run by former Asbury members. Moreover, the interviewee reported that when a member from the 9:30 a.m. service once attempted to serve themselves from "a big spread" laid out for coffee hour, a long-term Millian member reprimanded her saying: "That is for the 11:00 service—don't touch."[269]

"We are One Millian, I am the pastor of One Millian."

Once he began to understand Millian's context, Pastor Miguel's first priority—before attempting to encourage community participation in Millian's ministries—was to unite the current

[268] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 8. Edward's ethnographic observations have been corroborated by broader study that demonstrates a tendency for minorities in multiracial congregations to conform to white cultural models explaining persistent poverty as a problem of the individual rather than a systematic problem, which tends to be the understanding of minorities that worship in African-American and Hispanic churches that are monocultural. Cobb, Perry, and Dougherty, "United by Faith?"

[269] MMUMC Members J & K and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 40:39-41:29.

congregation under the umbrella of "One Millian." He began publicly declaring, repeatedly in worship and through other pastor communications, "We are One Millian" and "I am the pastor of One Millian." The purpose of this statement was to make it clear that he is the pastor of everyone at Millian.[270] He claimed the pastoral authority and pastoral responsibility for all members and participants at Millian that are afforded to him by his appointment by the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He hoped to discourage any perception that he was only there to be the pastor for Latinos or Hispanics or that he did not actually have pastoral authority over the white members.

Within the first few months of his time at Millian, Pastor Miguel decided that for the foreseeable future he would be focusing most of his energy on the internal spiritual health of the current population worshipping at Millian, to help unite them as one church. Within six months he merged two youth groups—one involving Hispanic teens from the neighborhood, called Teen Café, which met on Fridays, and Millian's Youth Group, which met on Sundays—into one group with two weekly meetings, one on Friday and one on Sunday. He also established the monthly One Worship Service, where the congregants of all three services would worship together once a month. Then, through a long-term strategy, which included a sermonic curriculum (discussed in this chapter), instituting administrative order (including the development of official church policies), reforms in Christian Education (analysis of this in Chapter 6), and the eventual recruitment of a more diverse set of leadership, he set out to overcome internal divisions so that the congregants of Millian could begin to make decisions together, as one, diverse family.[271] This entire long-term plan, which he estimated would take about three years, constituted the first step toward developing a multicultural community at Millian.

[270] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 53:01-53:29.
[271] Balderas, 1:00:55-1:01:48.

While a similar approach had had success at his previous church, Oxon Hill, Pastor Miguel was unsure if it would work in a congregation whose internal divisions were so entrenched and that was so demographically homogeneous (over 95% of its members are white). Without a committed minority group of significant size (like the Filipino population at Oxon Hill) to help train the white population in how to engage in fellowship and lead with those of other cultures, Pastor Miguel, Pastor Braulio, and their families, who have all had experience working in multicultural settings, would have to do most of this difficult training work themselves.

Pastor Miguel also refused to put new, potential members into situations that he believed would subject them to racist, assimilationist, or patronizing white leadership who had not yet been trained in how to engage in multicultural group decision-making and fellowship with persons from other cultures as equal participants. As Eric Law, one of Pastor Miguel's former professors, states: "The church needs to teach the white middle and upper class to listen. The church needs to encourage those who are perceived as powerful to practice the spirituality of choosing the cross. The instinct for the powerful is to act, control, and command. The church should challenge the powerful to go against that instinct. The church should invite them to get out of the 'doing' mode and enter into a 'being' mode of listening. The Gospel challenges them to give up and redistribute their power to the powerless."[272] Pastor Miguel was concerned with protecting potential new Hispanic members, who may be vulnerable because of their economic insecurity, from being manipulated by those in more powerful positions. In his experience, powerful people have a tendency to use gifts or favors as a means of causing someone less powerful to be indebted to them. In Pastor Miguel's experience, members who are gained from

[272] Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993), 49.

such approaches do not end up as full participants in the life and leadership of the church. Rather, they are relegated to roles in the church that maintain the comfort and culture of the majority group. Pastor Miguel reports that this often means that new members who are not white and do not speak English as their first and primary language feel that they need to carry out the work dictated by the white, English-speaking members in order to continue to receive financial help or resources from the church. In one interview with a long-term white member from MMUMC, when I asked about multiculturalism, he gave an example of a Hispanic woman helping him in the kitchen for a past event as his ideal image of how people from different cultures could work together:

> It was a hot night and everyone wanted drinks. I wanted to put ice in every cup but the line overtook me and there was [a Hispanic member of Millian], and she was putting ice in the cups, and I was pouring, and I'd run out of lemonade, and she'd take the pitcher back, and she stayed for the whole serving and then she cleaned up. And the next thing she's at the sink washing the utensils we used. Beautiful lady . . . really, really nice.[273]

Although the idea of Hispanic people filling stereotypical roles like the kitchen help is likely not the explicit expectation of all Millian members, this wistful interview response offers evidence that Pastor Miguel's misgivings about subjecting a vulnerable population (such as Hispanic immigrants) to a community that is unaware of its own cultural chauvinism are not unreasonable. He feels the need to protect this such vulnerable communities from structures that inherently encourage those in power to take advantage of them by offering them resources in exchange for their presence.[274]

[273] MMUMC Member R and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 26, 2015, 56:50-57:10.
[274] Miguel Balderas and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm, audio recording, August 3, 2015, 8, 09:00-10:31.

Therefore, instead of launching any major initiatives to encourage members of the surrounding community to start coming to Millian, Pastor Miguel focused his attention on training the members who were already present. He began with a three-year program focused almost exclusively on the members who attended the 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. services. Pastor Miguel's goal for worship was for it to be a training ground where they would be taught how to love, how to be a family, and how to be disciples together. As I will demonstrate below, these themes of love, family, and discipleship are tied to his conceptions of the Kingdom of God, specifically as seen through the event of Pentecost. Pastor Miguel believed that if the training was successful the congregation would gain the tools and the language needed to make a decision together about their future in the community—whether or not to in fact become multicultural. It was a decision that had been made for them by previous Millian and Conference leadership (see Chapter 4); it had not been a local decision, made by Millian's congregation. Pastor Miguel got to know the Hispanic community in other ways while dedicating himself to healing Millian's internal divisions and slowly modeling alternative forms of outreach to the community.[275] For Pastor Miguel's multicultural community model to work, it would need to have broad-based practical (not just theoretical) support from a significant number of Millian members.

[275] Along with this process, Pastor Miguel was engaged in an overhaul of Millian's administrative and financial system. He called in an auditor from the Baltimore-Washington Conference to help bring Millian's financial management in line with the United Methodist Church Discipline, which contains rules agreed upon by the denomination about all things related to church life, including how to administrate a church community. Moreover, he brought a team together of Millian members to develop the official policies and procedures of the church, which is a requirement of the Discipline, but had never been done before at Millian. These procedures outline Millian's particular rules regarding how to handle finances, procedures related to building use, and guidelines about childcare (called Safe Sanctuaries), among other topics related to administration at Millian. Although this administrative restructuring process is part of Pastor Miguel's integral approach, I limited this study to his scriptural discourse in worship and chose only one case study of its lived expression in his ministry within the Vacation Bible School program. His approach to administration would be yet another fruitful source in another exploration of his lived theology and the expressions of his entextualization of Beloved Community.

Pastor Miguel rejects any forms of multiculturalism that are based on instrumental approaches that exhibit assimilationist, paternalistic, or manipulative tendencies. Therefore in order to move towards multicultural ministry, Pastor Miguel resolved to first address the problematic aspects of the social-club mentality expressed at Millian, which included self-segregating behavior, power struggles between competing factions, and the importance of an individual being based upon merit or wealth.[276] Often this third characteristic manifests through a congregational priority to publicly praise and recognize those who financially support Millian and those members who participate in various ministries, including for their "good works" vis-a-vis the immigrant inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhood and other outreach and charitable ministries. It is this last point that undergirds many Millian members' understanding that the church building and its resources as their own, instead of belonging to the church in common or to God. Pastor Miguel states that when Millian congregants engage in outreach, for the most part they do not build relationships with the members of the community who participate. Instead these church members expect the debt for charitable acts to be repaid by community members through community members' participation in worship and Sunday School. Pastor Miguel believes it is this paternalistic approach to outreach that in fact keeps members of the community from joining the church.[277]

Entextualizing Beloved Community at Millian through worship

For Pastor Miguel, worship is a vision-setting and culture-forming pedagogical task. He articulates his pastoral approach to Millan as a slow process of working to reshape these problematic aspects of Millian's congregational culture through worship. He uses both

[276] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm; Balderas and Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm.
[277] Balderas and Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm.

proclamation and the crafting of liturgical structures to provide Millian with a different, scriptural narrative that they can aspire to claim as their own and to allow them space and time to practice living out that narrative in the safe space of worship—Pastor Miguel believes retraining his congregation to love, be family, and be disciples will give them the tools they need to both discern God's will for Millian and to decide whether or not to follow it together as a community.

Pastor Miguel crafts what I call his "sermonic curriculum" with attention to both long-term thematic pedagogical concerns and to the day-to-day life of the church community. In what follows, I discuss his approach in general. Then in Chapter 6, I closely examine an example of each—(1) his choice of "One Bread, One Body" as the Closing Hymn for the One Worship Service and (2) his 2014 Pentecost Sermon entitled "What Does This Mean?"—as a means of illustrating concrete examples of Pastor Miguel's process of entextualization.

Liturjía viva, not a "perfect liturgy"

At first, Pastor Miguel challenged my assertion that he engages liturgy as a tool of communal transformation. He rejected what he called "perfect liturgy," an end unto itself that revolves around cultural concerns, rather than the worship of God, wherein the ritual must be carried out "correctly" in order for it to be efficacious. In other words, salvation, eternal life, and relationship with God depend on carrying out the liturgy in the right way. While he rejects this understanding of liturgy, Pastor Miguel neither holds the anti-liturgical perspective characteristic of certain veins of Protestantism, nor argues against the sacramental stance of the United Methodist Church in favor of treating rituals as ordinances. Instead he is concerned with liturgy's character; it should serve the greater purpose of worship and not be an end unto itself.

Rather than interecclesial debates about "correct" worship practice based on "correct" theological understanding, within Pastor Miguel's characterization of "perfect liturgy" is a

critique of what Edwards calls the "religio-cultural preferences of whites" that are considered "common sense" and therefore unchangeable by those in the dominant white culture. Included in these "common sense" preferences are set ideas about worship style including: "the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, [and] dress codes."[278] In Millian's case there are members who believe the worship service should be kept to a sixty-minute time limit and who demonstrate resistance to any changes in the form or order of worship. These two aspects of liturgical structure are grounded in a "common sense" understanding of what "decent and orderly" worship looks like. It is not that "decent and orderly" worship is not scriptural; in fact, the concept is derived from an interpretation of 1 Corinthians. The problem for Pastor Miguel occurs when assumed "common sense" understandings of what "decent and orderly" worship looks like liturgically are imposed and required as the "perfect liturgy" to the exclusion of other possible cultural expressions. Moreover, based on his own observations, Pastor Miguel believes that many of his congregants assume that attendance and participation in the liturgy of the Sunday morning worship service is all that is needed for an efficacious Christian life.[279] This observed behavior falls in line with results of the 2014 Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Center that finds minimal involvement of mainline Protestants beyond worship services.[280] For Pastor Miguel, therefore, the idea of a "perfect liturgy" based on one culture's "common sense" practices is highly problematic. He considers this form of liturgy to be a false

[278] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 120 and 8.
[279] Miguel Balderas and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Phone Interview, field notes, October 6, 2015.
[280] The study states: "Mainline Protestants and Catholics are least involved in their congregations. Just 20% of mainline Protestants are highly involved. And among Catholics, 16% are highly involved, according to our measure, while a solid majority (70%) have a 'medium' level of involvement. Indeed, most mainline Protestants and Catholics fall into this medium level of engagement in part because while many of their members attend religious services, they do not participate in a prayer or Scripture group on a weekly or monthly basis," Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study | Mainline Protestants," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

idol that offers the assurance of salvation and eternal life when in fact it is an empty cultural practice that keeps people from a full relationship with God.

Pastor Miguel takes the liturgy, the one religious act that he has judged that his parishioners value most, and harnesses its ritual power as a mode of communal transformation. Pastor Miguel characterizes this process as slow and as requiring "una liturjía viva" (living liturgy). In this view, the liturgy is a tool, and not an end unto itself. Therefore, the liturgy can and should be modified in order to emphasize and support long term pedagogical goals such as the three-year thematically structured sermonic curriculum.

Pastor Miguel's Process of Developing a Sermonic Curriculum

Pastor Miguel's development and implementation of his sermonic curriculum do not resemble the form of the neighborhood outreach plan, 2011 H/LSMP. Pastor Miguel develops "un plan de predicación que es intencional" (an intentional preaching plan) specific to the congregation's needs[281] through a set of six practices, which he has utilized in multiple congregational settings, but which I am recording systematically for the first time. I term his intentional preaching plan a sermonic curriculum because it functions on at least three calendrical levels that I have pieced together through our various conversations together: a three-year plan, quarterly plans, and individual weekly sermons.[282] The practices are as follows: (1) He sets out a three-year thematic, overarching, curricular structure that determines the lens through which each sermon is prepared. (2) For each theme, Pastor Miguel employs a repeated phrase that encapsulates, symbolizes, and at times, models the values of the theme he is focusing on for that year. For example, for the year

[281] Miguel Balderas, Informal Interview following One Worship Service, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, field notes, November 2, 2014.
[282] Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm; Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm; Balderas and Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm; Kelly Figueroa-Ray, "2015 Summer Fieldnotes," 2015, entry for August 8, 2015.

that he focuses on love, he introduces the declaration: "I love you and there is nothing you can do about." These declarative phrases eventually become a recognizable part of the weekly liturgy, as the congregation anticipates them and often responds to them in ritualistic ways, making them a form of localized liturgy. (3) He prepares each particular sermonic curriculum three months in advance of preaching. (4) In order to prepare his sermonic curriculum, he reads through three months of scriptures contained in the Common Lectionary.[283] (5) In light of that particular year's theme he chooses the main scripture he will focus on for each of the weeks of the three-month period, often using that scripture (or a portion of it) as the sermon title. He often chooses the scriptures such that the messages can be linked from week to week, so that he can both refer to previous sermons and point to future messages. (6) He writes each individual sermon one to two weeks before they are delivered. Practices 1-5 demonstrate that Pastor Miguel has a long-view approach to preaching, with the intent of affecting deep structural change.

Practice (1) begins when Pastor Miguel is first introduced to the congregation and is given the chance to get to know their values and concerns through initial small group meetings and in the day-to-day happenings of the first few months he is pastoring at his new church. By the end of the first few months with the congregation, Pastor Miguel determines overarching, yearly themes that will serve as the lens through which he preaches each consecutive year. Practice (2) is the development and implementation of liturgical declarations that accompany each thematic year. Each statement that he employs has a particular origin story that he shared with me, but each statement is adapted to new contexts as necessary. I will go into each of the

[283] This ecumenical publication rotates through much of the Old and New Testaments over the course of three years and is used by the Catholic Church and most mainline Protestant Churches. Each Sunday, the Common Lectionary includes four scriptures that (for most Sundays of the church calendar) include selections from the Old and New Testament writings. Often, these four scripture texts express similar themes or reference the same events, however at other times, it is hard to discern a connection between them.

thematic phrases he employed within the first three-year sermonic cycle below.[284] Practices 3-5 occur on a quarterly basis, based on the scriptures determined by the Common Lectionary. Since the various scriptures are on some level predetermined, this discourages a form of prooftexting in which pastors choose scripture texts that in some way back up the message they intend to deliver. In Pastor Miguel's belief system, the Holy Spirit was involved in the development of the Common Lectionary. Therefore, by choosing to be limited to the texts listed in the Common Lectionary Pastor Miguel is able to engage with the Holy Spirit and submit to God's will in terms of the messages that will be proclaimed to the congregation. This, in his understanding, ensures that his sermons are not only written in reaction to current events, but guided by the will of the Holy Spirit. As he reads through all three-months' worth of lectionary texts, Pastor Miguel develops a three-month sermonic curriculum through the lens of the current yearly theme (ex. love, family, discipleship) that he has set for the congregation, and chooses one principle text per week out of the four listed for each of the Sundays. Often, a verse or portion of a verse from this text will stand as the title for the future sermon that will be written at a later date, as indicated by Practice (6). Pastor Miguel says that although his approach involves long-term thematic lenses and a three-month plan for particular sermonic direction, he waits to write individual sermons in their entirety so that can respond to the current context of his congregation. This process, in other words, remains organic, holistic, and dynamic because individual sermons are written in relation to the current and specific context that his congregation is experiencing, without sermons turning

[284] Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases." People in the congregation anticipate these declarations and when he begins to speak them, some people say them along with him. In fact, with the second declaration, "We are a great family, not perfect, but a great family," he usually lengthens it by declaring in jest that there is only one perfect person in the church-"and that is the pastor," which elicits laughter from the congregation as he takes it back, smiling as he says: "no, no es cierto (trans: no, that's not true), no one is perfect." These declarations provide an opportunity to see how Pastor Miguel repeatedly positions himself in relation to his congregation and the types of social categories he uses when making declarations about Millian's identity. This will also give an opportunity to explore the relationship between Pastor Miguel's scriptural discourse and his portrayal of Millian's identity in these declarative statements.

into reactionary responses to day-to-day events and concerns. In this way, no singular event can derail or determine the overall curriculum. Instead such events and contextual particularities are incorporated into an already determined sermonic structure that remains, for the most part, steady in the face of daily circumstances.[285]

As will be demonstrated through the close reading of an excerpt of his sermon in Chapter 6, the genre that Pastor Miguel tends to exhibit in his sermons is that of scriptural commentary, which he shapes for the homiletic form. This means that he offers a line-by-line commentary on the chosen scripture that weaves together contextual observations and intertexts—often brought in from one of the three other scriptures from the set of weekly Common Lectionary readings. His teaching focuses on one particular point that often concludes in an exhortation of the congregation to mimic such teachings and practices within their own lives outside of worship.

MMUMC's Sermonic Curriculum 2013-2015: Love, Family, and Discipleship

In the fall of 2013, Pastor Miguel chose three themes that structured his sermonic curriculum for Millian: Year 1: love, Year 2: family, Year 3: discipleship. He decided on these themes within the first five months based on his evaluation of Millian's most pressing spiritual needs—to heal internal divisions and reform their "social-club" mentality. For Pastor Miguel, the scriptural and theological teachings that come with these three themes work to dismantle personal beliefs and ministry structures based on a social-club mentality, paving the way for a new church culture based on the values of Beloved Community. Moreover, he chose these particular themes in particular to address the internal divisions and conflict that he uncovered during the Home Group Meetings and other early experiences with them. The timeframe for these themes is not on the Julian calendar, but the Western liturgical calendar; for example, the 2014 Pentecost sermon I

[285] Figueroa-Ray, "2015 Summer Fieldnotes."

analyze in the next chapter was delivered at the end of the first year (theme: love), and the beginning of the second (theme: family).[286]

According to Pastor Miguel, these themes operate not as progressive building blocks, but rather promote a process of organic growth in spiritual understanding and practice. Therefore, he did not abandon the theme of love once he began the theme of family, but rather the theme of family grew out of the theme of love, and the theme of love has continued to be emphasized in his sermons and teachings beyond the first year.[287] To understand the overarching structure of Pastor Miguel's sermonic curriculum from 2013-2015 is to understand Pastor Miguel's themes and their basis in scripture and Christian tradition. To do this I will provide a brief analysis of each of the repeated declarations that are associated with each yearly theme. These serve as a dynamic, yet foundational type of scaffolding that links the overarching thematic structure to its contextual expression in individual sermons. The discussion will help clarify what Beloved Community values Pastor Miguel is attempting to entextualize at MMUMC over this three-year period.

Year 1, Theme of Love: "I love you and there is nothing you can do about it."

Pastor Miguel reports that regardless of the context he always starts off Year 1 with the scriptural concept of "love." On its own, love is a common, vague term that can be made meaningful in a

[286] Except for the first theme, love, that was introduced after his appointment to MMUMC in July of 2013, each new theme was introduced during Lent—the 40-day ritual celebration of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem that ends with his death by crucifixion, which in the United Methodist tradition begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Holy Saturday, the day before Jesus's resurrection on Easter Sunday. It is during Holy Week, which includes the last week of Lent before Easter Sunday, that Pastor Miguel fully transitions into the focus of the new theme.

[287] At his previous church, Oxon Hill UMC, Pastor Miguel also employed this thematic approach to preaching, but the themes had been different. Oxon Hill′s minority population made up a significant portion of congregation and the majority of the participants had embraced their congregation′s identity as multicultural. Although much work had to be done to equalize the power dynamics and to move minority members into positions of power, according to Pastor Miguel, the Oxon Hill congregation did not exhibit the stark internal divisions he found upon arriving at Millian. See: Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm.

multiplicity of ways. Pastor Miguel chooses to narrowly define the concept of love through his interpretation of Christian scripture and tradition. Although this takes many forms throughout the course of his preaching, the base definition of love for Pastor Miguel is grounded in terms of God's choice to love the world and offer salvation to all people. However, it is not only through God's work in Jesus Christ, celebrated in his birth, death, and resurrection, but also through the continued power and action of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Miguel teaches through this theme that 1) love is a particular type of choice and 2) choosing to love can affect and change the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.[288]

During this first year, Pastor Miguel introduced the declarative statement "I love you and there is nothing you can do about it," and through its consistent repetition in the context of worship, it eventually became a recognized, liturgical statement by the congregation. He first encountered this statement during his time at First UMC in Hyattsville, Maryland. His colleague Pastor Vance P. Ross would bellow it out every Sunday worship service as a way to initiate the Passing of the Peace—the point in the liturgy where the worshippers turn to one another and offer each other signs of the peace of Christ. To this self-proclaimed multicultural congregation, Pastor Ross would say, "Tell your neighbor: I love you and there is nothing you can do about it." During my fieldwork at MMUMC, Pastor Miguel would make this declaration himself, directly to his congregation, thereby both emphasizing and modeling the importance of love as a decision that each person makes. He writes that this statement:

> tiene una intención muy específica, en mi caso es RECORDAR, y afirmar que LA DECISION DE AMAR es parte de nuestra liturgia, de nuestro ministerio como discípulos. De hecho la parte central de nuestro ministerio basado en el amor. Y practicarlo el domingo en un espacio seguro como lo debe ser la iglesia. Una práctica sencillita

[288] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm.

> para los que no se atreven a amar porque nunca les ensenaron.
>
> has a very specific intention. In my case the intention of using this statement in worship is TO REMEMBER and affirm that THE DECISION TO LOVE is part of our liturgy, that it is part of our ministry as disciples. And the intention is to practice making this decision each Sunday in a safe space like church (that should be a safe space). It is a simple practice for those who do not dare to love, because they had never been taught how to decide to love.[289]

Through this self-declaration, Pastor Miguel is teaching by example; he is modeling the process of making a decision to love by declaring that he loves everyone sitting before him regardless of how they have treated or will treat him.

Year 2, Theme of Family: "We are a great family, not perfect, but a great family."

The theme of love, meaning to choose to love as God has done, feeds into Pastor Miguel's second-year theme of "family." Choosing to love in Millian's context means that the worshippers who attend different services needed to realize that they were all one family or "One Millian" as discussed above—not three separate congregations.[290]

The phrase he uses—at almost every worship service—to shape and constantly remind the congregation of this is: "We are a great family, we are not perfect, but a great family." This phrase he first developed first at Oxon Hill to help reinforce the unity between the various ethnic and racial groups, but Pastor Miguel reports that this phrase has come into its own more fully at Millian where the teaching about family is sorely needed. Of this statement he writes:

> Así como en esa iglesia, en todas las iglesias, hay mucha gente que creyéndose perfectos, no pueden admitir que como familia somos gran familia, pues en su "perfección" los demás están mal y ellos bien. Así que esta declaración es también la opción de recuperar el sentido de familia en

[289] Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases."
[290] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm.

> contra de la tendencial individualista de este país, no somos islas, sino que vivimos en comunidad. Además que la vida de discipulado y la vida en el reino de Dios es una vida comunitaria.
>
> As is the case in [Millian], in all churches, there are many people who believe themselves to be perfect and cannot admit that as family, we are a great family. This is because, while those who consider themselves to be perfect believe in their own "perfection," they believe everyone else around them to be in the wrong or bad while those who consider themselves to be perfect judge themselves to be blameless or good. Therefore, through the liturgical reiteration of this statement, this declaration is also offering an option to recuperate the feeling of family over and against the tendency of individualism found in the United States. We are not islands, on the contrary we live in community. Moreover, the life of discipleship and in the Kingdom of God is a life lived in community.[291]

Learning how to decide to love as God has loved leads the members of Millian to another choice: whether or not to love each other as family, whether to begin to live life as a community and not as a group of individuals. By declaring that Millian—One Millian—is a great family, Pastor Miguel is providing a relational framework distinct from the one that Millian had been operating as before he arrived. This statement encourages Millian's congregants to move away from their emphasis on individual human will and to adopt God's will for Christian community that embraces human diversity in all its expressions, an expanded version of family that goes beyond genetics and bloodlines.

It must be noted that Millian has not magically become a united family just because Pastor Miguel uses these declarations and preaches through the lens of this theme of family. In fact, in 2015 the divisions between congregants of the three different services still remained. However, by consistently declaring Millian a family, Pastor Miguel understands himself to be

[291] Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases."

laying the groundwork for the possibility that one day the Millian will be united as One Millian, by giving them the opportunity to "recuperate the feeling of family" for at least one hour a week within the context of worship.

Year 3, Theme of Discipleship: "We are good people, because we have accepted Christ, now we must follow him and become his disciples."

The third-year theme of discipleship grew out of the first two themes as a continued project of dismantling the "social-club" mentality and training Millian members in the values of Beloved Community. In Pastor Miguel's belief system, if Millian is a great family, united in God's love, such a family responds to God's call to follow Jesus as disciples together in community.[292]

During this year, alongside the other two phrases he introduces: "We are all good people, because we've accepted Christ, now let's follow him." He developed this phrase specifically for Millian, beginning with only just the first part— "We are all good people, because we've accepted Christ"—and then adding in the final part about following Jesus when Pastor Miguel introduced the theme of discipleship in the third year.

When I first heard this phrase early in my fieldwork it struck me as odd, because I had never heard Pastor Miguel say anyone was "good" from the pulpit in this declarative fashion. When I inquired about the phrase, Pastor Miguel said that he developed it because he had received complaints from leaders in the congregation that he did not publicly praise the "good" work of particular leaders during worship, nor did he acknowledge in general how "good" Millian members are as people—due to all the money they tithe, all the money and charity they give to the immigrant neighbors, etc.[293]

[292] Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm; Balderas and Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm.
[293] Balderas, Informal Interview following One Worship Service; Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases."

In response to this concern, Pastor Miguel invented the phrase that acknowledged their need to be called "good," but with a theological twist: "because you've accepted Christ." This shifts the focus from their goodness being merit or status based (i.e. how much money or time has been given or how long they have been members) to their goodness being based in a decision to choose to accept Christ. Within the divisive and status-focused congregation of Millian this declarative statement is radically equalizing. The long-term member who has been tithing for years is just as "good" as a new worshipper who cannot afford to tithe and perhaps even subsists through charity from the church. Pastor Miguel added the final part of the phrase as part of his third-year theme of "discipleship" ("now let's follow him"), and it invites Millian worshippers—united in God's radical and equalizing love as family—to go beyond accepting Christ as savior, beyond attending to their own community, and beyond participating in weekly rituals in order to minister with those outside of the church.[294]

Subject Positioning and Social Categorization of the Thematic Structure of Pastor Miguel's Sermonic Curriculum

Analyzing the subject positioning and social categorization of Pastor Miguel's declarative, liturgical statements will reveal the ways in which the statements invite congregants to learn and perform new ways to relate to each other and to those who live in the community that surrounds their campus. This analysis can then be compared to the forms of subject position and social categorization that show up in structural aspects of his liturgical decisions and leadership models in Chapter 6. Again, the three statements I will be analyzing below are:

- "I love you and there is nothing you can do about it." (associated with Year 1, the theme of love)

[294] Balderas, Informal Interview following One Worship Service; Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm; Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases."

- "We are a great family, not perfect, but a great family." (associated with Year 2, the theme of family)
- "We are good people, because we have accepted Christ, now we must follow him and become his disciples." (associated with Year 3, the theme of discipleship)

Pastor Miguel speaks all of these declarations while standing in front of his audience, the Millian congregation of worship participants on a Sunday morning at the English-speaking services.[295] As he does so he occupies the full authority afforded him by his office as an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and as Millian's Lead Pastor. As I mentioned earlier, once introduced, a declaration remains a part of an expanded repertoire of multiple declarations. He does not drop them once he has moved on to a new theme as part of an expanding organic process.

Standing in Ecclesial Authority & Claiming Personal Social Categories

As mentioned above, Pastor Miguel says that he specifically makes this personal declaration of imposed love in order to model how one makes a decision to love that is not based on feeling or future reciprocity, but rather on Christian faith. Although loving is mandated by Christian faith, as with any normative ethos, believers do not always act in accordance with it, and through this

[295] Although he does occasionally use these phrases at the 2 p.m. Spanish-speaking service, he does not do so with as much frequency. While I am focusing on the training program Pastor Miguel has implemented for the English-speaking services, he is simultaneously training those members in the Spanish-speaking service with an approach that is not focused on giving up power in order to relate to others, but rather one that empowers them as full participants in Millian's church life. Eric Law describes this simultaneous approach this way: "...the church needs to encourage people of color to gather in communities of their choosing. In these communities of faith, they are encouraged to find their identity and strength just as the powerless disciples gathered together before the Pentecost event." According to Law, "It is essential that these two approaches be taken together so that those in power and the powerless can meet in the middle where they can interact on equal ground," Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 49. While this is an important aspect of Pastor Miguel's approach to ministry, I decided to focus on his approach with the English-speaking congregation, because the majority of his effort has been focused on their transformation, and not on growing the numbers of the small Spanish-speaking service, until Millian as a whole has decided to become multicultural. Although beyond the scope of this study, Pastor Miguel's ability to implement these mirrored approaches simultaneously should be taken up in further examinations of his lived theology.

declaration Pastor Miguel models the practice of deciding to love, which is a decision that each person must make of their own volition.

In the first part of the declaration, "I love you," Pastor Miguel positions himself as the only one who has agency and renders the audience passive. As the subject, "I," Pastor Miguel, loves the "you," who are the participants in Millian's worship. The second part of the declaration, "and there is nothing you can do about it," underscores the autonomy and agency that Pastor Miguel has when making this declaration. It makes explicit that the "you" in the sentence has no role to play in this declaration—it is truly a personal decision of the "I" that cannot be affected by the "you" in any way. Even if members of the speaker's audience reject the speaker's action, there is nothing they can do to stop it, but neither do they have any obligations associated with the decision that Pastor Miguel has made. While they are not obligated to love Pastor Miguel in return, they also cannot escape or negate the love he has declared for them. Pastor Miguel is asserting his own power and authority with regard to whom he decides to love.

As stated above, this statement includes two distinct sets of people. One is Pastor Miguel, the individual, and the "you" is everyone else he is addressing in MMUMC on a given Sunday morning at the English-speaking services. The "I" in this case is an individual with a very specific background who can be categorized, though not exhaustively, as a brown-skinned, Mexican, male immigrant with United States citizenship, who is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, who holds a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry, and who speaks in non-Standard English and fluent Spanish.

By making this declaration before a majority white English-speaking Protestant congregation in "broken English," Pastor Miguel is disrupting social structures that most of the members of Millian are used to. This is evidenced by members' frequent criticism that his accent

impedes their ability to understand, even though many refuse to use the hearing-aid equipment in order to hear him more clearly.[296] For Millian, this is the first time they have had to submit to a lead pastor has not spoken in standard English, and some question his ability to lead because of it. In order to solidify that this power structure is indeed different from what many in his congregation are used to, Pastor Miguel asserts his surprising (to some) authority with his declaration of love.

Even though this declaration uses social categories to invert presumed realities for certain of these social categories, it only does so for the "I." For the "you," the social categories to which this pronoun refers cannot be exactly determined, since the declaration is made in a public worship service and not to a specific demographic or social category of persons. Although the majority of attendees to the morning services are English-speaking and white, there are a few non-white members, with visitors and family members often in attendance. Moreover, at the 11 a.m. service there are some Spanish-speaking members who take advantage of simultaneous translation. It is not possible to narrow the group down to a particular category since it is possible that some visitors or family members might attend without even considering themselves Christians. Regardless of people's various categorizations, when Pastor Miguel declares "I love you and there is nothing you can do about it," he does so to whomever has made the choice to be in the room. Instead of a social category, the "you" indicates a group united by a common action—attending the worship service at Millian.

Standing with MMUMC as Disciples of Jesus Christ

Unlike the first declaration that centers on Pastor Miguel's identity and personal decisions, these next two declarations about family and discipleship include descriptions and judgments about

[296] MMUMC Member D and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 51:30-54:00.

Millian. In these declarations, he does not situate himself outside of the group, as an individual in relationship to his congregation. Instead, using the subject "we," he positions himself as part of the group that he is describing. This means that the judgments about Millian's identity that he is making and their implications apply not just to whom he is addressing, but also to himself as well. He does not stand outside of the Millian congregation but decides to be a part of it. This is important since his goal is to model a form of Christian discipleship in which members of the community decide to move forward as family, not as separate individuals, to follow Jesus as disciples.

Since both of these statements have the same subject, "we," and refer to the same grouping of people, i.e. the worshipping community at Millian, including Pastor Miguel and other worship leaders, I will analyze the social categories within them at the same time. The "we" of these declarations is equated with two groupings: "a great family" and "good people," while the third grouping of "Christ's disciples" is held out as a future possibility and goal for the "we" to become. Again, as discussed above, the "we" does not refer to a demographic social category, but rather to a group of people who have acted in unison by attending worship at Millian on a Sunday morning. The term family, in this case, does not refer to a specific humanly constructed category. Since everyone in the room is a member of the family, this is not referring to the typical understanding of family that is linked to genetic connection or relation to persons by blood or heritage. Instead the term family is structured around the idea that those who are followers of Christ become a family by the power of the Holy Spirit, despite their distinctions based on categories that are constructions of human beings, such as race, language, and status.

The second category to which the "we" is equated is to "good people." Unlike the category "family," to which, within the declaration, there is an implicit connection to Christian

theological concepts, the category of "good people" is explicitly limited to those who "have accepted Christ." This declaration redefines the category of "good people" from those who participate in a variety of actions or those who exhibit particular attributes that lead others to judge them as "good" (listening to your mother, being patient or kind, recycling, staying faithful in marriage, giving money to the church, going to service every Sunday, participating in Bible study, etc.). Instead, within this declaration the category of "good people" is narrowed down to one single action — "accepting Christ." This declaration states that anyone who accepts Christ, regardless of their virtuous behaviors, is a "good person." He is not saying that people can be good *only if* they accept Christ. Rather, he is making the point that the only thing that makes people good *within* Christian community is the fact that they've accepted Christ. Limiting "good" to those who "accept Christ" negates any other social status that may be accrued in a host of other ways. It also allows new Christians and Christians that are new participants to enter with the same status as Christians who have attended Millian for many years. All are "good," and no one, in this respect, holds a higher status than anyone else.

The final category that the "we" has the potential to be is "Christ's disciples." Although the "we" are "good people" because they have "accepted Christ," this does not mean, according to Pastor Miguel, that they are disciples. To become Christ's disciples requires yet another shared action: the "we" must follow Christ. Again, this categorization is tied to scriptural and theological themes of salvation and discipleship. "Accepting Christ" grants you a certain status in the community but becoming "Christ's disciples" requires "following Jesus." Like the other two categories just discussed, "Christ's disciples" is a category that does not indicate a social categorization based on socially constructed group features, rather, according to Pastor Miguel, it

is a category of people who choose to engage in a shared action. In other words, those who are "Christ's disciples" are those who follow Jesus.

A Discourse of Beloved Community

This type of positioning and social categorization runs counter to the us/them, instrumental discourse found within the language of the "Radical Hospitality" goal in the 2011 H/LSMP, and more generally it stands in contrast to the "social-club" mentality at MMUMC that Pastor Miguel is working to dismantle, that includes self-segregating behavior, power struggles between competing factions, and the importance of an individual's status being based upon merit or wealth. Although all individuals in Pastor Miguel's form of discourse have the power to decide for themselves if they will love (for example), no one has the power over anyone else to force them to make the same decision. The decision to love and to be a family means that the community decides how they will walk and struggle in faith together. No one person is better than anyone else, no matter their status or good works. In this scenario, there are no homogenous self-segregating groups, but just one family, made up of a diverse set of people who are united by the power of the Holy Spirit. The values of love, family, and discipleship, as expressed in these repeated, declarative statements, have become a form of local liturgy. Their continued repetition reinforces the values that Pastor Miguel believes are needed for Millian to heal its internal divisions and transform their "social-club" mentality to a culture shaped by Beloved Community.

With this sense of the overarching structure of his sermonic curriculum, in the next chapter I will analyze the implementation of Pastor Miguel's entextualization of Beloved Community by examining a sermon and a liturgical choice he made within worship. I will conclude Chapter 6 by coming back to examining the VBS decision-making process described at

the beginning of this chapter as a lived expression of Pastor Miguel's process of entextualizing Beloved Community.

Chapter 6: "Practicar el amar en un espacio seguro como debe ser la iglesia"

"One must practice how to love in a safe space, like the church should be"

The heart of Pastor Miguel's training program for the members of Millian occurs within worship every week. Every Sunday as he implements his sermonic curriculum and tweaks "the form-centered gathering" of traditional liturgy, Pastor Miguel is crafting an experience of particular language and habits that offer his congregants the potential for Millian's transformation so that one day they may choose to become multicultural.[297] In this final chapter, I provide a close reading of this worshiping experience, looking both at an excerpt from one of his sermons and the implications of a liturgical choice he made regarding the monthly combined One Worship Service.

[297] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 88 and 99–103.

Preaching Pentecost in Broken English: The Native Language of The Kingdom of God is Love not English

"What Does This Mean?" is the title of the first Pentecost sermon of Pastor Miguel's ministry at MMUMC Memorial, given June 8, 2014 at a joint 10 a.m. worship service in which communion was served, and it serves as an instantiation of Pastor Miguel's sermonic curriculum specific to the program he implemented at MMUMC in 2013-2015. I have chosen this sermon because it also gives a glimpse into Pastor Miguel's reading of Pentecost, which is central to his own understanding of multiculturalism, and demonstrates Pentecost's influence on the values and structures of Beloved Community. The principle scripture came from Acts 2:1-21. I will focus specifically on his commentary on Acts 2:1-4, which acts as the lemma:

> 1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.[298]

In order to examine an excerpt of Pastor Miguel's commentary on this text under a rabbinic microscope, I have broken it up into three parts. Below, I have bolded the intertexts in the excerpt and added the scriptural references in brackets:

> **Part I:** What happened? You know what happened. Something . . . some wind . . . and some noise . . . and they start praising God in different languages.
>
> **Part II:** And God understood all these songs, all these words. That's why today, we are here together no matter where you are from, no matter what language you speak, but [Intertext 1: allusion to 1 Cor. 12:12-13] **we are here together united by the Holy Spirit in Christ**.
> Congregation: Amen!

[298] Miguel Angel Balderas, "What Does This Mean?" (One Worship Service, 10am, Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, June 8, 2014), https://archive.org/details/millian_20140608.

> But be careful. Is not . . . remember [Intertext 2: Genesis 11:1-9] **the tower, Babel? Remember what happened there? When they tried to be together and they tried to be God! And they tried to say, "Oh we don't need God. We speak only one language! We don't need God."** My brother and sisters, no matter our diversity, no matter we speak different languages, [Intertext 1: allusion to 1 Cor. 12:12-13] **we are one in Christ! Who empower us to that? The Holy Spirit!**
>
> **Part III:** It's no more our preferences. It's no more our personal desires. No! Now it's about God's will, now it's about love and helping others in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.[299]

Intertextual Reading of Acts 2: The Holy Spirit's Reversal of the Tower of Babel Story

In Part I, Pastor Miguel summarizes the events of verses 1-4, moving quickly past the violent wind and not even mentioning the tongues of fire in order to emphasize one aspect in particular of the miraculous events—that the apostles started "praising God in different languages."[300] In Part II, Pastor Miguel isolates the fact that the apostles begin speaking in different languages and are understood by all listeners as the important aspect of this event through an intertextual clarification that is an allusion to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. This allusion is sandwiched between two allusions to 1 Corinthians 12, a secondary lectionary scripture read during the worship service that morning. The allusion to 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 ("For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or

[299] Balderas.

[300] This exact nature of this detail is unclear to biblical scholars, with some labeling it glossolalia (speaking in ecstatic unknown languages that require interpretation) or xenoglossia. Richard I. Pervo states that based on the text itself "the situation is anomalous . . . and does not fit into the categories of religious experience," Richard I. Pervo, *ACTS: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia — a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 64. But Pastor Miguel is not concerned with categorizing the type of supernatural activity that occurred; in searching for meaning he is not trying to explain, but rather trying to unpack what such scriptural events mean for his community of faith.

free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.") brings into the discussion an aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit that is not emphasized specifically in Acts—how the Holy Spirit unifies believers into one body.

This tying of unity to the Pentecost event opens up further ambiguities—what type of unity does the Holy Spirit bring, and how does speaking in different languages tie in with being unified? These ambiguities are resolved through the juxtaposition of Pentecost with the Tower of Babel, since the tower was built to preserve a type of unity that went against the will of God, and therefore is an example of the type of unity not created by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The humans who decided to build the tower in Genesis were unified by "one language and the same words" (Genesis 11:1). Although some interpret this story as humanity's desire to be God or to conquer God, as Nahum M. Sarna points out, the sin was more about humans choosing their own will over that of God's will. "Man had fulfilled part of the [God's] divine blessing—'be fertile and increase'—but he balked, apparently, at 'filling the earth.' The building project was thus a deliberate attempt to thwart the expressed will of God."[301] This form of human unity that defied God's command for humans to be scattered all over the earth was not God's will. In other words, unity brought about by human power—for example, by all speaking the same language and in defiance of God's will in favor of human preferences—is *not* the kind of unity created by the power of Holy Spirit.

Instead, according to the events of Acts 2:1-4, read in light of 1 Corinthians 12 and in juxtaposition to Genesis 11, the kind of unity created through the power of the Holy Spirit *is* characterized by humans speaking different languages and humans doing the will of God. To make this connection explicitly clear, Pastor Miguel sums this up in his teaching in Part III: "It's

[301] Nahum M Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in Light of History*, paperback (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 67.

no more our preferences. It's no more our personal desires. No! Now it's about God's will, now it's about love and helping others in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Pastor Miguel's entire commentary on Acts 2:1-4 is about what Pentecost means for Millian's contemporary context. In the context of the Tower of Babel God's will had been to scatter, while according to Pastor Miguel's commentary, God's will for Millian is to love and help others. Pentecost means that God empowers Millian to be united in the common goal of loving and helping others, regardless of the languages they speak or the country that they originated from.

Enrolling Millian Memorial in Scripture: Transforming Babel into Post-Pentecost Beloved Community

Intertext 2 (the allusion to the Tower of Babel story) offers a means of entextualizing the current context of Millian, of interpreting Millian's current context within the logics of scripture, by drawing out this juxtaposed yet scriptural form of unity. Martin Luther King Jr. employs a similar form of entextualization in a draft of a sermon called "Knock at Midnight," in which King describes the world—specifically the evils of segregation and the church's response to it—in terms of the parable presented in Luke 11: 5-13:

> When the man in the parable knocked on his friend's door and asked for three loaves of bread, he received an impatient retort, "Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." How often have men experienced a similar disappointment when at midnight they knock on the door of the church? Millions of Africans, patiently knocking on the door of the Christian church where they seek the bread of social justice, have either been altogether ignored or told to wait until later, which almost always means never. Millions of American Negroes, starving for the want of the bread of freedom, have knocked again and again on the door of so-called white churches,

> but they have usually been greeted by a cold indifference or blatant hypocrisy.[302]

In this exposition, nothing exists outside of the biblical reality. The suffering of African Americans and the white church that turns them away are both a part of the biblical world King is preaching. The biblical narrative—what the narrative actually says and not just the themes or ideas inspired by it—is central to the entextualization happening in the sermon. In the passage from King above, the biblical narrative of the man who is being refused entry is framed in such a way that now the African American struggle is a biblical struggle. King exhorts the church to live out its biblical reality by opening the door, like the friend finally did in the parable:

> In the parable we notice that after the man's initial disappointment, he continued to knock on this friend's door. Because of his importunity—his persistence—he finally persuaded his friend to open the door. Many men continue to knock on the door of the church at midnight, even after the church has so bitterly disappointed them, because they know the bread of life is there. The church today is challenged to proclaim God's Son, Jesus Christ, to be the hope of men in all their complex personal and social problems.[303]

He then provides the story of the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama as the living conclusion of the parable:

> In anxiety and hope, I read these words "The United States Supreme Court today unanimously ruled bus segregation unconstitutional in Montgomery, Alabama." My heart throbbed with an inexpressible joy. The darkest hour of our struggle had become the first hour of victory. Someone shouted from the back of the courtroom, "God Almighty has spoken from Washington!"
>
> The dawn will come. Disappointment, sorrow, and despair are born at midnight, but morning follows. "Weeping may endure for a night," says the Psalmist, "but joy cometh in the morning." This

[302] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Knock At Midnight (Chapter 6 of The Strength to Love)," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 500.
[303] King, Jr., 502.

> faith adjourns the assemblies of the hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism.[304]

In addition to knocking on the door of the church, African Americans had kept knocking on the door of government until the door was opened and segregation was outlawed on public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama.

Through this form of entextualization Martin Luther King, Jr. includes the world before him within the scriptural world—there is no clear separation between the scriptural world and present reality. This is not a prophetic, future-fulfillment model, however, but rather a reading of the current context into the narrative content, structure, and logics offered by the scriptural passage.[305] In a similar way, Pastor Miguel is interpreting Millian's form of communal engagement and social structure (what he characterizes as a "social club") as being akin to the culture and values that are reflected in the Tower of Babel story.

In his brief retelling of the Tower of Babel story, Pastor Miguel emphasizes the sin of the builders who elevated their human will over God's will. Then, in Part III, the closing line of this commentary, he ties this elevation of human will over God's will directly to the Millian community by explicitly equating this posture towards God with their personal desires and preferences: "It's no more *our* preferences. It's no more *our* personal desires. No! Now it's about God's will, now it's about love and helping others in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit." In this line, Pastor Miguel reads Millian (including himself) into the scripture, simultaneously assessing them to be a type of Tower of Babel and offering them a way to reject this identity in favor of a form of Beloved Community that is shaped by Acts 4:2 understood in light of 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. In his use of scriptural discourse, Pastor Miguel harnesses the

[304] King, Jr., 503–4.
[305] Richard Lischer, "Martin Luther King, Jr : 'Performing' the Scriptures.," *Anglican Theological Review* 77, no. 2 (Spr 1995): 160–72.

practice of intertextuality for the process of entextualization. Through this process he scripturalizes both the congregation's present reality, which Pastor Miguel perceives as inadequate, and a vision for a more faithful social practice.

Pastor Miguel's sermonic approach is based on the assumption of only one world—God's world/God's reality—and does not acknowledge a separate reality. Everyone and everything fits into it. Pastor Miguel engages scriptural models—both desirable and undesirable ways of living—and offers a means of identifying undesirable aspects of a particular community's present as well as the desirable possibilities of its future life within scripture. As applied to Millian, scripture is what helps deconstruct Millian's social-club mentality, by understanding it in terms found in the Tower of Babel story; at the same time, scripture helps construct the reality that makes a multicultural congregation possible, by demonstrating the possibilities of diversity as a characteristic of unity that is offered in the Pentecost story.

As this reading of the sermon demonstrates, the event of Pentecost serves as a hermeneutical key for Pastor Miguel's definition of multiculturalism as a form of Beloved Community. The possibility of communities remaining diverse in language and nationality *while* understanding one another is, in Pastor Miguel's belief system, a miracle only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is God's act that made multicultural community possible, and it is only the continued presence of the Holy Spirit that makes this type of community a real possibility in the present.

Pastor Miguel's multilayered curriculum repeatedly underscored the values and characteristics of Beloved Community that Pastor Miguel believed would give Millian the spiritual tools it needed to repair its internal divisions. Moreover, its purpose was to ready the congregation for the structural transformation necessary in order to welcome new people, many

of whom would not speak English as a first language and who would come from very different cultural backgrounds, into their congregation as full participants; this means not offering a false welcome with an expectation that new members will assimilate to the dominant culture, but rather offering an invitation to help shape it.

Recently in a conversation with Pastor Miguel, I brought up the fact that in this study his words would be represented by two different forms of English. On the one hand, all of the interview data that I had gathered in Spanish would be translated into Standard English. On the other hand, anything that I would use from his sermons would be left in his nonstandard form of English. In response to this observation Pastor Miguel told me, "You know, I could take a few months of classes and I would be able to speak [standard] English perfectly. But I have decided not to do that." The first reason for his decision is to be welcoming to immigrants for whom English is not their first language. He has been approached several times by adult children who report that their parents (whose first language is not English) feel welcome and comfortable to be in an English-speaking space when he is the pastor, specifically because he does not speak perfect English. With this form of "imperfection," in other words, others who do not speak standard English perfectly feel like it is a place they could belong. His second reason is theological. He stated that the imperfection of his English is a reminder that English is not the official language of the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, all nations and all languages are of equal value; one does not dominate another.[306]

For those who might forget the linguistic egalitarianism of the Kingdom, or who have never considered it, i.e. those for whom English is their only language, Pastor Miguel keeps speaking in broken English to ease them into the reality of the Kingdom of God, where English

[306] Balderas and Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm, 18:50.

will be one language among many. "Be careful. Is not . . . remember the tower, Babel? Remember what happened there? When they tried to be together and they tried to be God! And they tried to say, 'Oh we don't need God. We speak only one language! We don't need God.' My brother and sisters, *no matter our diversity, no matter we speak different languages, we are one in Christ! Who empower us to that? The Holy Spirit!*" While this tool of disruptive discourse is definitely making many members at Millian uncomfortable, it seems few have yet to capture the lesson. In an interview, one member characterized the situation of certain members' complaints about not understanding Pastor Miguel (but also who were unwilling to take steps to remedy the situation) as a problem that Pastor Miguel had no way to solve: "He's been in the country long enough now that if he was able he would have overcome that linguistics barrier in speaking English."[307] Even this member, who had criticized the other members' unwillingness to use available technology to help them hear better, understands Pastor Miguel's broken English as a barrier, one that is due to a deficit or lack of ability on his part. This corroborates a general belief among Millian members that I encountered who doubt Pastor Miguel's experience and ability to lead as the pastoral authority of Millian. Again, Pastor Miguel is accustomed to this type of dismissal from members of the dominant culture, and he does not take it personally. Rather he continues preaching Pentecost in broken English on purpose, he says, to welcome those often excluded in English-only spaces, and to perform a lived expression of the post-Pentecost Christian community that he preaches about. For those familiar only with English-only spaces, he warns them through this act not to expect their own language to be privileged in God's Kingdom.

[307] MMUMC Member D and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 53:44.

"One Bread, One Body" Singing Beloved Community into Reality Once a Month (for a few minutes)

While Pastor Miguel's preaching enrolls Millian into the scriptural world through narrative so they can aspire to one day live as a post-Pentecost Christian community, his choice of "One Bread, One Body" as the Closing Hymn for the monthly, combined One Worship Service allows them to live it (once a month, for a few minutes while they are singing the song).

A Close Reading of "One Bread, One Body"

"One Bread, One Body" is a well-known song, beloved by most United Methodist congregations.[308] As #620 in the *United Methodist Hymnal* (*UMH*), it is placed among the hymns, #612-641, that are designated as hymns for "the sacraments and rites of the church/Eucharist (Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper)." It is a common hymn to sing during

[308] "One Bread, One Body" was written in 1978 by the Jesuit priest Father John Foley. He was a member of the St. Louis Jesuits, a group of five men whose contribution to contemporary American Catholic liturgical music made them key figures in the post-Vatican II reforms that radically altered liturgical practice in the Catholic Church, which had been in place for centuries. For the first time, liturgies that had until this point been read in Latin were performed in the vernacular of the worshippers; the priest faced the congregation to celebrate the Mass; and worshippers were encouraged to actively participate in worship. In "All at Once the Music Changed," Foley writes: "One interpretation underlay most 'new liturgy': the entire assembly is the worshiping body. Though the priest of course exercised an irreplaceable role, Mass 'belongs' to all members, each according to his or her role. People in the pews were to participate fully, consciously and actively. All are genuinely part of the assembly," John B. Foley, S.J., "All At Once The Music Changed: Reflections on Liturgical Music in the United States Since Vatican II," in *Toward Ritual Transformation: Remembering Robert W. Hovda*, ed. Robert W. Hovda and Gabe Huck (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 110; The same year that John Foley composed "One Bread, One Body," a new organization called the National Association of Pastoral Musicians had their first conference in Scranton, Pennsylvania, entitled: "Musical Liturgy is Normative." See: The National Association of Pastoral Musicians, "'Musical Liturgy Is Normative': A Report on the First Annual National Convention," *Pastoral Music*, July 1978; Foley and the other members of the "famed group," the St. Louis Jesuits, gave a keynote presentation entitled "Relating Music to the Liturgy." In a 2005 National Catholic Review article Jim McDermott stated that with their focus on scripture, attentiveness to traditional forms of Catholic music, and innovative use of musical structure the St. Louis Jesuits "revolutionized not only music but liturgy itself," in Jim McDermott, "Sing a New Song: Part 2, The St. Louis Jesuits: Earthen Vessels," *America Magazine | The National Catholic Review*, May 30, 2005, http://americamagazine.org/issue/533/article/sing-new-song. Foley marks the rise in influence of Jesuit music from 1975-1990. In addition to internal liturgical forms of worship, another focus was on the expansion of ecumenical relationships with other Christian denominations. With its ecumenical focus, the hymn "One Bread, One Body" contributed to that transformational shift. Indeed, it continues to be one of the most popular hymns from this period, and it succeeded in transcending denominational boundaries, as demonstrated by UMBoW, which deems the hymn appropriate for the liturgy of Holy Communion, see: Robert W. Hovda and Gabe Huck, *Toward Ritual Transformation: Remembering Robert W. Hovda* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 30.

the taking of communion. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (*UMBoW*) instructs that any hymn that effectively expresses "the people's loving communion with God and one another" can be sung at this point in the service, and that #612-41 are good hymn choices.[309] The hymn "One Bread, One Body" is mentioned specifically as a hymn with a refrain that worshippers can commit to memory and therefore sing without the need of holding a hymnal when in line to receive the elements.[310] As a hymn that emphasizes Christian unity through the use of Pauline scriptural quotations and allusions, it reminds parishioners of their connection with all Christians who partake of the same sacrament around the globe. As Laurence Hill Stookey states, "The whole church . . . participates in and yet awaits the perfect reign of God."[311]

There are two aspects of Pastor Miguel's choice that stand out. The first is that he made "One Bread, One Body" the Closing Hymn, which is sung at the end of the worship service during the "Sending Forth" moment of the liturgy, rather than using it during Holy Communion. The second is that he chose to have this hymn remain as the Closing Hymn for every monthly One Worship Service. If, for example, Pastor Miguel had chosen to repeatedly sing "One Bread, One Body" during the Holy Communion moment of the liturgy, this choice would have had less significance—this is when the hymn is usually sung. The choice would also not have stood out as such a unique liturgical practice if he had only decided to sing it as the Closing Hymn for one of the One Worship Services. Regarding the "Sending Forth" moment of the liturgy, *UMBoW*

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[309] United Methodist Church (U.S.), "An Order of Sunday Worship Using the Basic Pattern," in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 30.
[310] "It is particularly effective if the people can sing from memory. Sometimes it is effective to sing and repeat a chorus such as Jesus, Remember Me (UMH 488), Remember Me (UMH 491), the refrain of One Bread, One Body (UMH 620), or the alternate refrain from Beauty of the Earth (UMH 92)," United Methodist Church (U.S.), 30.
[311] Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 26; The UMC practice is that all who desire to take communion and who "intend to live a Christian life" be allowed to do so. The UMC Book of Worship states, "All who intend to lead a Christian life, together with their children, are invited to receive the bread and cup. We have no tradition of refusing any who present themselves desiring to receive," United Methodist Publication House, *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 92.

instructs as follows: "The final hymn or song of sending forth may be an entire hymn or simply one or more stanzas. It may be: 1) A hymn of thanksgiving and praise or a doxology; 2) Consecration to service in the world; 3) A recessional; 4) A hymn of thanksgiving following Holy Communion; 5) A favorite hymn or theme song, sung every week."[312] "One Bread, One Body" is not recommended for any one of these categories by the *UMBoW*, and at first it seems not to fit any of the five categories listed. As McCall argues, changes to the liturgy, even subtle ones, reflect theological motivations that have in mind particular ends.[313] As we shall see, this hymn, normally sung during the rite of Holy Communion itself, in the context of Millian, becomes an appropriate hymn of "Sending Forth" for "Consecration to service in the world."

Leveling the Playing Field with Song

The very act of participating in a joint worship service brings people from congregations that identify as separate entities together as "one body." The act of singing together is more than mere passive presence in the service, it is an active performance of the unified body. Moreover, participants *en masse* proclaim and affirm the messages found within the lyrics presented to them as they sing. Drawing from Tia DeNora's work on the "aesthetic agency" of music, Gerardo Marti argues that "[m]usic is an ordering device as it structures behavior in the here-and-now in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. As a means of structuring social action, music allows opportunity for coordinated activity with other people. Indeed, music is a form of social control."[314] In the act of singing of "One Bread, One Body" at Millian, each participant (1) embodies an authoritative speaking role that makes declarative statements such as "we are one

[312] United Methodist Church (U.S.), "An Order of Sunday Worship Using the Basic Pattern," 31.
[313] Richard D. McCall, *Do This: Liturgy as Performance* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 72.
[314] Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide*, 20–21.

body in this one Lord" and (2) becomes a part of the "we" of the local and global community through the statement "and we, though many throughout the earth." Regardless of each person's background or status, the subject position of each singer is as an authority figure who ultimately declares that everyone present in the sanctuary participates in the shared membership within in the body of Christ, as a globally connected community.

These shifts in power dynamics, for the duration of the song, offer a space during which Beloved Community is experienced and its values embodied. Those who come from positions of power may be accustomed to making declarative and authoritative statements. However, their subject positioning shifts as they become one voice among the many of their fellow singers. For those who come from positions of vulnerability, and who lack power in this context, a different shift occurs. While they sing this song they are empowered to make declarative statements as if they were authoritative, even while still remaining only one member among many. Through the duration of the song, everyone participating is united within the same subject position, one that is determined by their shared declarations and not by human constructs of race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or political ideology. As they sing, they declare and perform their unity as one body in the One Lord.

Becoming One Body

For the duration of the hymn, participants in the worship are compelled to prioritize their shared action in community with other Christians over human constructions such as race, status, or language. A new social category of "we" is declared and embodied. According to the chorus, the "we" is equated with: (1) "those who bless"; (2) "many throughout the earth"; (3) "one body in this one Lord." The "we" carry out shared actions of blessing as one global community. Who the "we" is, is based on shared action and relationship to Christ, not on other social categories. This

is supported by verse 1 that declares irrelevant categories that may be important outside the world of the hymn: "Gentile or Jew, servant or free / Woman or man no more."

What makes both these dynamic shifts in subject positioning and social categorization significant at Millian is the contrast between white and Brown bodies, which underscores the radical declaration of unity in the hymn. Singing "One Bread, One Body" at Millian shifts the emphasis of the hymn from focusing on a conceptual, idyllic, and global unity to the local context where unity seems improbable at best. Pastor Miguel is a constant visual reminder to those in Millian's congregation of the people who live right outside their church doors, a majority of whom are non-white and Spanish-speaking. I argue that the presence of Pastor Miguel standing before his majority-white congregation turns the practice of singing "One Bread, One Body" in unison into one that speaks to local concerns of unity over and above the global and ecumenical concerns that generated the hymn in the first place. The hymn continues to declare unity between different church denominations, but within the context of Millian, the internal and local divisions are crystalized by the way the words belie Millian's reality outside the One Worship service.

In other words, Pastor Miguel disrupts the *cultural* unity of Millian. The differences between him and most of his parishioners are clear, even as all sing in unison about being one body. Reflecting on this liturgical choice, Pastor Miguel states:

> La letra del canto habla mucho de la unidad que tenemos en Cristo, lo cual no elimina la diversidad pero si la afirma. Y esa posibilidad de ser uno, es en Cristo. El primer domingo de mes, porque es cuando estamos todos juntos, los tres cultos, para adorar a Dios, y es afirmar que es posible ser uno en Cristo a través de lo que simboliza…el cuerpo de Jesús dado por todo el mundo, incluyéndonos a nosotros. Uso solo este canto porque es un proceso; es decir no puedo darles toda la medicina en una sola toma, los mato. Así poco a poco, ni lo sienten y el cambio se da. La Intención es que

> conscientemente tomen su decisión, así que solamente les doy elementos para que reflexionen. El canto básicamente es para ser usado en la comunión, porque así dice el himnario, pero mi racional es que al momento de regresar de nuevo a la vida diaria, al mundo, es necesario recordar que en Jesús además de salvación tenemos la posibilidad de igualdad. Y entonces actuemos en consistencia.
>
> The lyrics of the song speak about the unity we have in Christ, the kind of unity that does not eliminate diversity but affirms it. And this possibility of being one, is in Christ. I picked it for the first Sunday of the month, because it is when we are all together, the three worship services, to worship God, and to affirm that it is possible to be one in Christ through what symbolizes . . . the body of Jesus given for the whole world, including us. I use only one song because this [i.e. the entextualization of Beloved Community—Kelly Figueroa-Ray's addition] is a process; this means I cannot give them all the medicine at once, it would kill them. So, little by little, so they don't realize the change it is making. The intention is for them to consciously make a decision, so I just give them the elements so they can reflect upon this decision. I picked this song because it is for communion, and because that is what the hymnal says it is for, but my rationale for putting it at the end of the service is that at the movement of going back into everyday life, to the world, it is necessary to remember that in Jesus, in addition to salvation, we have the possibility of equality, and therefore we act consistently with what we believe.[315]

Having "One Bread, One Body" as the closing hymn after celebrating communion together every month is a repeated, performative affirmation of local unity sung right before leaving the service. This hymn, when recontextualized at Millian, offers an opportunity for the congregation to embody and perform a new set of values through shifting subject positions and the adoption of social categories that cause them to live out Beloved Community values, for a few minutes, at least. In a nonconfrontational manner, Millian worshippers are compelled by Pastor Miguel's liturgical choice to practice a localized internal unity that may increase the

[315] Miguel Balderas to Kelly Figueroa-Ray, "Facebook Message - ONE WORSHIP SERVICE," October 15, 2007.

possibility of their forming relationships with people of different cultures. Even though not on the list of recommended hymns for sending forth by the *United Methodist Hymnal*, "One Bread, One Body" certainly functions as a "Consecration to service in the world" for those worshiping in the context of Millian.

As demonstrated through the analysis of an excerpt from his sermon above, one function of Pastor Miguel's preaching is the entextualization of Millian into the scriptural world, first by identifying Millian with the human community in the Tower of Babel story, and then by offering a post-Pentecost scriptural identity where a multilingual community is miraculously united through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Miguel's liturgical structuring of the One Worship Service encourages yet another form of entextualizing Beloved Community—the actual performance and embodiment of this new identity by Millian within the context of worship. Pastor Miguel sees the liturgical structure of the monthly One Worship Service as a means of training and preparation for the possibility that the members of Millian could one day choose to become multicultural. When the congregation sings "One Bread, One Body," Pastor Miguel understands this as one step towards welcoming those of different cultural and national backgrounds into Millian as full participants.

Morning or Evening? The 2015 Vacation Bible School Timing Decision as a Lived Expression of Pastor Miguel's process of Entextualizing Beloved Community

Lucy Torres became the director of Vacation Bible School (VBS) in 2014. She ran the program in coordination with the previous director and therefore did not recommend any changes for that first year. In my interview with Lucy, she expressed frustration at the fact that there was no adult participation from community members—parents dropping off and picking up their kids waited outside. Lucy had to specifically ask parents to come to the children's classroom to pick them up.

This was partly due to security issues, but her main frustration was that the other organizers and parents were treating VBS like any other entertainment event or camp. Children would tell their parents about what would happen during camp, but Torres reported, there was no dialogue about what the children had learned.[316]

Vacation Bible School as Free Summertime Babysitting

This characteristic of VBS is not unique to Millian but is one that is widespread in the Protestant Christian community. In *Stuff Christians Like,* Jonathan Acuff titles a section "Using Vacation Bible School as Free Babysitting." Acuff writes: "Denomination, schomenation, when our kids are out of school for the summer and we've suddenly got to fill eight weeks of time with activities, we Christians like to put aside our denominational differences and bounce our kids like Ping-Pong balls around the country to different Vacation Bible School programs."[317] In a post entitled "The summer that Cayden got saved twice," blogger Jamie Ivy recounts how she had signed her kids up for every VBS within a twenty-mile radius of her home to fill up the summer months.

> That summer we went to every single VBS in town and I started to feel quite icky by the end of the summer. I didn't feel icky for the reason that you think I did. You would think that I would feel icky for taking advantage of the VBS system and abusing each sweet church's open arms to my kids. Little did they know that when we showed up for the first day of the week and my kids whispered that they knew all the songs it was because they sang them last week at the *other* church across the street. I am fully aware that I took advantage of free childcare and snacks for my kids that summer. But listen, a mom has to do what she has to do to survive four children when their dads [sic] on the road. It's a matter of survival y'all.[318]

[316] Torres and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 01:31:00-01:53:00.
[317] Jonathan Acuff, *Stuff Christians Like* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 116.
[318] "The Summer That Cayden Got Saved Twice," *Jamie Ivey* (blog), June 11, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20171221231759/http://jamieivey.com/my-struggle-with-vbs.

Ivy shows no qualms with VBS "hopping" or taking "advantage of free childcare and snacks" for her kids. What finally causes her to end the VBS-hopping practice was that her son had "accepted Jesus into his heart" at two different VBS programs. When she asked her son about his "conversions" he knew nothing about them. Ivy reflects: "At this point I was getting a little frustrated at the whole system I felt that I was a part of. This is where the icky feeling came into play. I began to feel as though my child was a number on some churches stats page that they were broadcasting and proud of, and yet he had no clue what they were talking about."[319]

The "icky feeling" Ivy is referring is in reaction to the instrumentality of the VBS system she had experienced and willingly (and unabashedly) participated in. One the one hand, she admits to having taken advantage of free child care (and snacks), regardless of the VBS program and its theological values. On the other hand, certain programs were using her son to bolster their "conversion" stats. Although such instrumental tendencies may be less explicit in non-conversion-oriented programs, there is still the same logic if these programs are organized around attracting children, often with entertainment, for the sake of eventually bringing the parents along as well. Using children to increase conversion numbers or to attempt to increase church attendance is an instrumental approach to evangelism.

Los Papas tienen que estar envueltos, the parents need to be involved: Lucy's new vision for VBS at Millian

In Lucy's estimation, this type of organization, which lacks adult participation, did not produce a program that was focused on nurturing the children's relationship with God. In order for the children's relationship with God to become the focus of VBS, according to Lucy, "los papas tienen que estar envueltos," (the parents have to be involved) in the program itself. It was for this

[319] "The Summer That Cayden Got Saved Twice."

reason that she thought it was important to offer a class for adults alongside the children's VBS program and to switch the hours it was held from the morning to the evening.[320]

In 2013, right before Pastor Miguel began as their lead pastor, Millian began to target members of the community for attendance at VBS with flyers and personal outreach.[321] Registration numbers continued to hover around sixty children, but another concern began to surface—volunteers who had served for years were beginning to retire. In 2012, the annual Charge Conference report stated that there had been "approximately 60 youth, 30 adults and 12 teen volunteers."[322] However, the numbers of volunteers began to drop significantly, and in 2014 the number of adult volunteers dropped to twenty adults and nine youth helpers.[323] While the morning hours suited their schedules, it did not work for younger, working adults. In her report for the 2014 Charge Conference, Lucy stated: "Since we did not have a Kindergarten teacher, classes were rearranged and combined. We will consider evening VBS next year to encourage adult participation."[324]

In order to encourage adult participation (from both Millian and the surrounding community), Lucy recommended offering VBS during evening hours instead of in the morning. She wanted to open up the possibility of volunteering to a new set of younger adults from both MMUMC and from the surrounding community. She also wanted to uncouple VBS from the Montgomery County Lunch Program, so that volunteers and families of the children could eat

[320] Torres and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 01:48:00.
[321] See: MMUMC Staff, "No Church Affiliation from VBS 2013" (Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2013), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD.
[322] MMUMC Staff, "Charge Conference Report 2012."
[323] "Teachers & Volunteers VBS 2014" (Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2014), Millian Memorial United Methodist Church archive, Rockville, MD.
[324] "Faith Development Report" in: MMUMC Staff, "Charge Conference Report 2014."

together.[325] Third, she wanted to offer adult classes in English and Spanish so that the parents would have a way to get directly involved with the program.[326]

But will there be enough children? Will there be enough volunteers?

Although Lucy had been named the director in 2014 and then again in 2015, the long-term members of the Faith Development Committee initially did not embrace her recommendation. Lucy's reasoning, experience, and the authority of her position were not enough to convince the other Faith Development Committee members to trust her judgment or accept her recommendation. Not only did they not listen to her motivations for the change, but frankly, they did not trust that she would be able to run a successful program in the evening, mainly because they had never done so themselves.[327]

In light of certain committee members' resistance to her recommendation, Lucy approached Pastor Miguel for advice about how to proceed. He reminded Lucy that the decision was ultimately up to the committee as a whole and suggested three steps to directly address the concerns of the committee members who questioned Lucy's recommendation: (1) conduct a survey of the families who had attended in 2014 to see if they could come in the morning and/or in the evening, and if they would be interested in participating in a class for adults; (2) come up with two lists of teachers, one willing to teach in the morning and one group willing to teach in the evening; (3) present all this information to the committee and let the whole committee make a final decision regarding what time VBS would be held. In this way, the decision was left

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[325] In previous years, the VBS program was held during the day because it was also linked to a free lunch program offered by the Montgomery County Lunch Program. Lucy's main problem with this program (besides her distaste for the cold lunch that many kids did not eat anyway) was that it could only be served to the children. Parents, volunteers, and staff of VBS could not eat lunch together. Lucy thought it was important for everyone to eat together as a practice of relationship-building and for offering a way for the parents to be directly involved with the program. Torres and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview.

[326] Torres and Figueroa-Ray, 1:31:00-1:53:00.

[327] Figueroa-Ray, "Faith Development Meeting Notes."

entirely up to the committee, and Lucy would be prepared to begin planning for VBS whatever the group decided, since she would have volunteers in place for either timeframe.[328]

Although Lucy agreed to conduct the survey that was tailored to the concerns of the long-term Faith Development Committee members, it is important to remember that Lucy's main motivation for introducing the recommendation was above all to increase the number of adult volunteers that had dropped by a third since 2012, and more specifically she wanted to increase the participation of adults (parents and Millian members). In truth, she envisioned an entirely different model for the program. Lucy wanted VBS to be an experience for the entire family, and therefore she wanted shift the structure of VBS so as to encourage families and volunteers to participate together as one whole group. Even if most parents only stayed for the meal, it would be a chance for them to meet their children's teachers and to participate along with their children for part of the event.

In the end, Pastor Miguel's strategy for Lucy gave her the leverage necessary to persuade the other members to go along with her recommendation. As a nonvoting voyeur, I could feel the tension in the room. The four white members voted to go along with her recommendation, but they really did not want to. They stalled as long as they could and even tried to put off the vote for another week. Both Pastor Braulio and Ruth broke in to remind them that Lucy deserved a decision, one way or another, because she only had a few months to prepare. There were four white people, who were all uncomfortable with holding VBS in the evening, and three Latinos, so the white people could have ignored the recommendation, but they did not. Why? I believe that the fact that I was sitting there typing away on my computer was one factor in their decision. They knew I was recording everything for my study. If they were going to reject Lucy's

[328] Torres and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview.

recommendation, in front of my white "scholarly" gaze they may have felt compelled to have a good reason to do so. Yet Lucy had covered all of their concerns. She had called families who had attended previously and could guarantee students in either the morning or the evening. She had also created two lists of volunteers, one for the morning and one for the evening. Either way she was ready to move forward. With none of their own research to present—except recalling that once, a VBS that none of them had personally been involved in had been tried in the evening and failed—they had no good reason to reject her recommendation. This alone may have been enough to for them to accept her recommendation, however, my presence also may have caused them to consider how their actions might be perceived by outsiders in a way that would not have been the case had I not been there.

A Faith Development meeting as the training ground for Beloved Community through the imposition of collaborative decision-making process

Before 2015, the organizational structure of the VBS program was very similar to that of the Egg roll diagrammed in Chapter 3. The organizer of the event recruited volunteers who carried out the tasks of planning and implementation of the event. Children from the community participated in the event, but their parents were passive actors who had no input in how the event was organized or carried out. As with the Egg Hunt, the flow of services, including low-cost child care and food (snacks and lunch), went from Millian to the community members. The community members provide nothing (except a small fee when they can afford it) except their children, whom they had dropped off without entering the church. Although the teachers interacted closely with the children, there was almost no interaction with the parents. Although this is a variation, the pre-2015 VBS model enacted the us/them instrumental model of community outreach explicated and analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4.

One of Pastor Miguel's priorities for his first three years at Millian was to reform Christian education at Millian. Due in part to elderly volunteers retiring and in part to what Pastor Miguel interpreted to be a boycott on the part of other members who were unwilling to fill the positions while he was pastor, two positions in Christian education were left vacant: the director of VBS and the superintendent of Sunday School in 2015. Since no one else volunteered and since both have extensive experience in Christian education, Lucy continued as director in of VBS in 2015 and Ruth, Pastor Miguel's wife, became the superintendent of Sunday School. With these positions, both Lucy and Ruth automatically became members of the Faith Development Committee. Since both Ruth and Lucy have worked in multicultural settings for many years, they are able to deflect others who are used to dominating the group. In the meeting discussed above this was demonstrated by Ruth breaking into the conversation to say that Lucy deserved a decision that day in order to prepare for the VBS event. Their presence as leaders on this committee gave them, in coordination with Pastor Miguel, the opportunity to begin to transform what had been a structure of autocratic leadership and top-down organization into a collaborative decision-making environment more suitable for multicultural community.

In *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results*, Morten T. Hansen opens the book by stating, "Bad collaboration is worse than no collaboration."[329] When forcing people to work together leads to infighting or distracted inefficiency, collaboration is a waste of resources for a business. However, when done right, Hansen argues it can lead to (1) better innovation; (2) better sales; and (3) better operations.[330] In Millian's context one barrier to collaboration that the church is up against is what Hansen calls

[329] Morten Hansen, *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results*, unknown edition (Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 1.
[330] Hansen, 26–31.

"The Not-Invented-Here Barrier."[331] There are two characteristics of this barrier that were displayed in the Faith Development meeting. The first is the presence of an "insular culture" that occurs "as [people who work together] spend time with each other to the exclusion of outsiders, they restrict the influx of new viewpoints and reinforce their own beliefs."[332] This is illustrated by the members of the group that continually repeated the same concerns for which Lucy had presented solutions at the very beginning of the meeting. Moreover, as evidence from the rest of my fieldwork corroborates, there was what Hansen calls a "status gap" between the white and Latino members of the group. Hansen says of a status gap, "If individuals think that they have higher status than others, they will not reach out to collaborate with those 'less worthy' human beings."[333] The white members in the room trusted their own casual experience with VBS (not one of them had ever directed the program) over Lucy's extensive experience (both as the director the previous year and her previous leadership roles in the United Methodist Church more generally) and the preparation and research she had conducted regarding their concerns.

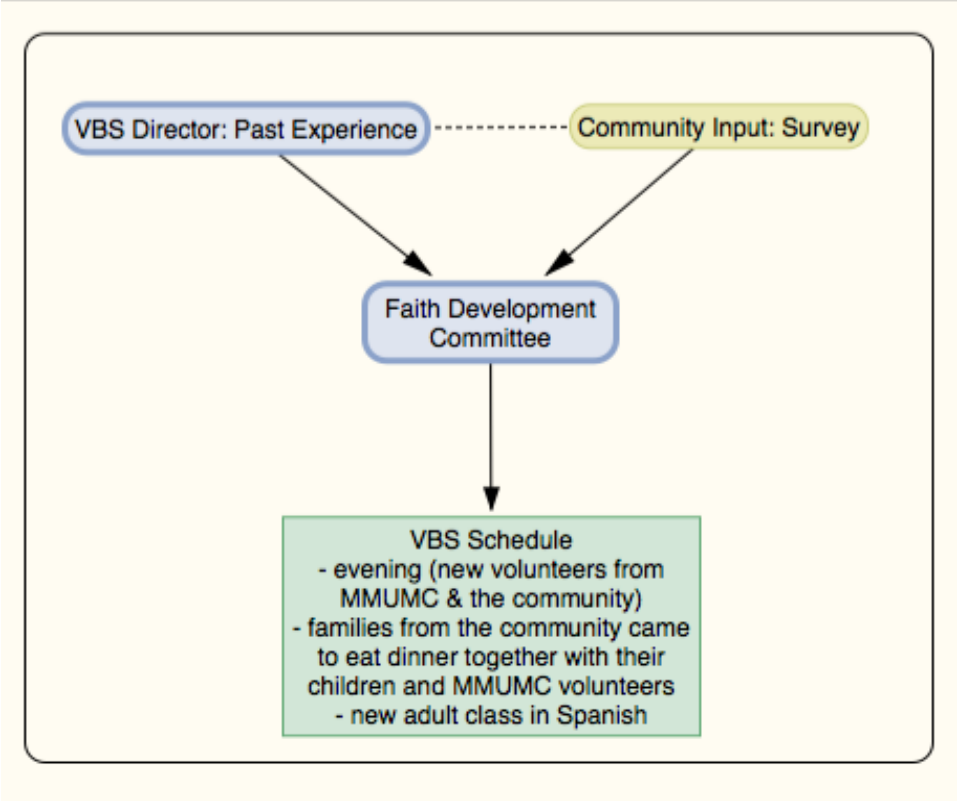
In order to overcome this barrier, Pastor Miguel's approach, which in this case was adopted by Lucy, was not to try and change their minds about which timeframe was better, but rather to have Lucy address all their concerns in a professional manner, offer her recommendation, and then leave the final decision up to them. While in a business it is often just easier to hire or fire personnel in order to build a collaborative team, sometimes it is necessary to work with people in order to change their attitudes and behaviors.[334] Hansen points out that in these situations it is important to focus on changing particular behaviors rather than attempting

[331] Hansen, 50.
[332] Hansen, 51.
[333] Hansen, 52.
[334] Hansen, 113–14.

"to convince people that that they need to change."[335] Instead of attempting to persuade them of her vision of a VBS that was more family focused and involved more adults from both Millian and the community, Lucy modeled collaborative leadership by engaging in a process that Hansen terms "Involving others: From Autocratic to Inclusive Decision Making."[336] She demonstrated an "openness to people" by listening to their concerns and doing extra work to address them.[337] She demonstrated an "openness to alternatives and debate" by opening up the floor to questions, by emphasizing that the decision was up to the whole committee, and by preparing ahead of time to move forward with whichever schedule the committee decided upon.[338] By focusing on the behavior of collaborative leadership rather than attempting to change the other members' minds, Lucy facilitated a true moment of collaboration between Latino and white members of Faith Development.

The figure below illustrates the decision-making structure enacted by Lucy during the Faith Development Committee.

[335] Hansen, 110.
[336] Hansen, 151.
[337] Hansen, 154.
[338] Hansen, 154–56.



This was the first time that Latino community members had been incorporated into the organizational structure and had direct input on how VBS would be carried out. This is illustrated in the diagram with the yellow bubble. The arrows from the director's previous experience and the survey point to the Faith Development Committee, because both were brought to bear on the special meeting that was called in March to make the final decision about the schedule of the 2015 VBS.

Even if the four white members had decided differently, they would have done so as part of a collaborative effort. It is this type of collaboration that is Pastor Miguel's longer-term goal with the white members of Millian. If a person has never had the experience of collaborating with persons normally less powerful then himself, then how can one expect him to know how to do it? In order to learn how to collaborate, he must be trained, and for people who do not even realize that they lack this skill, it can take an imposition of collaboration from a leader like Lucy

in order to give them their first experience of it. Lucy had provided the Faith Development Committee with their first official training in multicultural decision-making.

Collaborative Decision-Making as form of Entextualizing Beloved Community

> *Cuando dijeren gente de diferentes grupos étnicos, ustedes están en "training."*
> *Cuando VBS, la directora es Latina, ustedes están en "training,"*
> *Cuando ahora la directora de Escuela Dominical es Latina y es mi esposa, ustedes están en "training."*
> *Cuando ahora que los ayudantes de los profesores en la Escuela Dominical no tan solo son blancos sino son Latinos y Africanos, ustedes están en "training."*
>
> When persons from different ethnic groups are leading, you all are in "training."
> When in VBS the director is Latina, you all are in "training."
> When the director of Sunday School is now Latina and my wife, you all are in "training."
> When now that the teachers' assistants in Sunday School are not only white but also Latinos and Africans, you all are in "training."
> -Pastor Miguel, in an interview on 3/30/2015

The 2015 VBS decision-making process has characteristics that mimic the discourse found in Pastor Miguel's process of entextualizing Beloved Community. Unlike the logic found in Chapters 3 and 4, Pastor Miguel does not engage the Narrative of Decline. Rather, in the sermon that was examined above he harnesses scripture to identify, challenge, and encourage his congregation towards what I term Beloved Community values and communal structures.

This process is also found through the analysis of his liturgical decisions. Within the liturgy he made choices with the goal of helping MMUMC see itself as "One Millian" instead of three separate congregations. This included the decision to fix the Closing Hymn to "One Bread, One Body" that offered MMUMC congregants the opportunity to bodily inhabit the type of community they are aspiring to be for a few minutes every month. In both the sermonic curriculum and this liturgical song, Millian members inhabit a subject position that equalizes them with the persons in the surrounding community. Millian members are also exposed to and

utter social categories that break down us/them and instrumental postures in favor of images of the body made up of many diverse parts that must work together unified in faith.

Based on this analysis, Pastor Miguel's process of entextualizing Beloved Community includes enrolling Christians in the following scripturally-shaped communal structures: (1) The central precept is a form of love that involves choosing to be a family made up of diverse people. This family is considered to be part of one body united by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a family that is made up of disciples of Jesus, who not only believe in his salvific power, but also enact this belief by following him and manifesting God's Kingdom in this world. (2) In this form of familial community, it is God's communal structure, not any one human communal structure, that governs it. Therefore, there is no "us" or "them," only a "we" that comes from an understanding that everyone is equal before God. This, however, does not take away from any individual's personhood. Rather, it is recognized that each individual has their own background and different gifts. Disciples walk together and make decisions as a team; no one is treated instrumentally, and everyone works together, albeit in different ways, to make the body work. (3) There is a doctrine of distinction within this familial community that affirms the richness of diversity that is harnessed by the Holy Spirit for the work of God in the world. No human culture dominates another, rather each culture should be celebrated, enjoyed, and provide an opportunity for exchange, fellowship, and a deepening of relationship.

Lucy's imposition of a collaborative decision-making process during the Faith Development meeting is a lived expression of Pastor Miguel's process of entextualizing Beloved Community. Regardless of the outcome of the decision, just the fact that all members, Latino and white, were engaged in a collaborative effort is evidence of Beloved Community values and communal structures. Lucy's explicit inclusion of the community in the decision-making

process, by means of their input through the survey, gave the other members in the room an example of how to treat the community as part of the "we" of Millian. In the end, with Lucy's recommendation approved, she was able to implement her new family-focused VBS model. Through her process of leadership and organization, she had modeled a practical way of approaching community members in a relationship-forming way. It allowed for community members to not only shape ministry structures but also invited them to become involved as full participants without having to assimilate to white culture.

Conclusion: "No saben quien está parado enfrente de ellos"

"They don't know who is standing before them"

"Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." Luke 9:5

Hermeneutical Ethnography: Closely Reading Our Traditions to See If We Still Recognize Them

Scripture is powerful. It has been wielded as a weapon that justifies the subjugation of entire populations through slavery. It has offered resources for movements that have overcome that very subjugation. However, there are very few disciplines in the academy that consider it a worthy subject matter for inquiry. The academic study of scripture is left to historical-critical and literary study in religious studies departments. Very rarely is scripture itself the subject of social or anthropological studies, and when it is, scripture tends to be analyzed as humans' thoughts about scripture, without any consideration for the text's role in meaning making and world shaping. When I looked around for a way to study how scripture and theology shape (and are shaped) by contemporary Christian communities, I looked to current methods in Christian

Ethnography and in the anthropology of Western Christianity.[339] I found that both lacked any rigorous examination of scripture-reading practices. While some studies focus on Bible-study practices or people's thoughts about scripture, scripture is assumed to be a passive entity, lacking any agency in how Christians make meaning and how they act in light of it.[340]

I began with post-liberal theologians like Hans Frei to try to understand the types of reading practices I was encountering among historically marginalized groups within the African-American biblical tradition and Latin-American liberation forms of reading.[341] Although tendencies in African-American scriptural reading practices seemed similar to how the Church Fathers engaged the scriptures, Valerie Cooper's work with scripture in African-American hermeneutics opened me up to a completely different understanding of contemporary interpretation. For the first time I conceived of scripture as a world to be entered into, to be enrolled in—not in a fanciful exercise, but rather because scripture's world, i.e. God's world, *is* the real world.

James Kugel writes, "In midrash the Bible becomes, as state, the world unto itself. Midrashic exegesis is the way into that world; it does not seek to view the present-day reality through biblical spectacles, neither to find referents of biblical prophecy in present-day happenings, nor referents to the daily life of the soul in biblical allegory; the Bible's time is

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[339] For examples of Christian Ethnography see: Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*; for examples of Anthropology of Western Christianity see: Bielo, *The Social Life of Scriptures*.

[340] When I speak of the agency of scripture, I do not mean that scripture has a will of its own and that it acts upon human beings, rather that certain reading strategies allow for scripture to be generative of meaning on its own, for instance see the genre of midrash as presented Daniel Boyarin in: *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.

[341] Hans Frei details and laments the shift in traditional hermeneutic practice that occurred with the turn to modernity. He states: "The realistic or history-like quality of biblical narratives . . . instead of being examined for the bearing it had in its own right on meaning and interpretation was immediately transposed into the quite different issue of whether or not the realistic narrative was historical," Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. I qualify Frei's thesis to apply only to traditional white Western hermeneutic practices. I explored the possibility that that a distinct, yet comparable form of his concept of "precritical interpretation," while limited to a particular historical phenomenon found in the ancient literature of Jewish and Christian interpreters of scripture, had developed in some contemporary scripture-reading communities, for example in African American hermeneutics, but found that this was not a sufficient explanation for these reading practices.

important, while the present is not; and so it invites the reader to cross over into the enterable world of Scripture."[342] What I encountered in rabbinics was a way to enter that world and examine what it looks like to its readers through the close reading of scriptural commentary. Kugel's method of reverse engineering offers a way to examine expositions on scripture that on their surface seem simple to understand, but in fact depend on a matrix of sources connected through a web of hermeneutical reading strategies that shape and determine the meanings of the exposition and its impact on those who believe its specific interpretation. When we slow down to examine our own traditions in this way, the risk is that we may not recognize them. As with the text written by Bishop Schnase, whose definition of hospitality is not scripture-shaped but rather shaped by the need to attract visitors and retain them as members. I am not making a judgment about his definition of hospitality except for the fact that it is characterized as scriptural. Since this mischaracterization was made by a bishop in the United Methodist Church, it carries extra weight and sanction from the UMC tradition. Therefore, United Methodists are less likely to question or examine his characterization of hospitality. Indeed, United Methodists are urged to adopt it and its logics as part of their ministries, as Millian did in the 2011 H/LSMP. Learning how to read our own interpretations of scripture more carefully can help all members of the Christian tradition to avoid such pitfalls or at least be able to evaluate such interpretations for themselves before just accepting what a bishop, or anyone for that matter, *says* that scripture says.

When analyzing Pastor Miguel's approach, this method afforded a flexibility to explore patterns of scriptural engagement across different genres and instantiations of his lived theological expression. In this case such analysis was carried out on his sermonic curriculum and

[342] Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," 143.

on a liturgical choice he made for a joint worship service. This analysis demonstrated how the intertextuality within his sermons enrolled Millian into the biblical stories of the Tower of Babel and the day of Pentecost. This form of entextualizing Beloved Community was not meant to condemn the Millian congregation but rather to offer congregants a way to move from one culture, where the power resides in homogeneity, to another, where power resides in the Holy Spirit who unites Christians as one in Christ without effacing their diversity.

This form of analysis also showed how his approach to liturgical decision-making was another instantiation of his approach of entextualizing Beloved Community. Singing "One Bread, One Body" as the Closing Hymn at the monthly One Worship Service gave congregants the chance to perform Beloved Community as a bodily practice. As congregants sing, the power and status that determines day-to-day interactions are liturgically effaced, as those who are many declare in unison that they are one in Christ. Again, this does not erase difference, but it also does not allow differences to determine the structures and exchanges of Christian community. For one hour a month and most especially when this hymn is sung, everyone has the opportunity to experience being on the same level—male, female, African-American, African, Hispanic, white, 9:30 service attendees and 11 a.m. service attendees, etc.

This approach also enabled me to examine how scriptural logics were echoed (or not) in the leadership and organizational structures of specific ministry events. With the 2015 Easter Egg Roll, I demonstrated how the autocratic leadership and top-down organizational structures worked to deepen divisions between Millian and the community participants through an us/them instrumental approach to multicultural ministry. These structures did not echo the social discourse in Rev. González's excerpt in the "Theological Framework," but rather seemed to be modeled off of logics uncovered in Bishop Schnase's definition of Christian hospitality. As my

analysis demonstrated, his definition of Christian hospitality was grounded in extra-textual examples and was not shaped by the scriptural passages that were cited in his work.

In terms of the planning and carrying out of the 2015 VBS event, I demonstrated how the new leadership and organizational structures implemented by Lucy Torres, director of VBS, echoed the logics found in the social discourse of Pastor Miguel's repeated declarations and liturgical decisions. Pastor Miguel's repeated declarations emphasize social groupings not based on social constructs. Rather, groupings are determined by actions and decisions that individuals or groups make together. Lucy Torres sought input from the neighborhood community, and a decision was made that included backing from both Hispanic and white members of the committee. In the end, people from different ethnic backgrounds decided as individuals to be in community together as part of the committee and how a ministry would be implemented, as a team.

Hermeneutical Ethnography has allowed me to articulate a form of multicultural training that to this point has only been experienced, practiced, lived. This study has also shown that the fruit of applying this method to the workings of a local church congregation yields a more complex and nuanced understanding of how scripture works within the discourse, structures, and activities of a local church. For scholars interested in the way scripture and tradition function within the Christian church, I hope this study demonstrates that this method offers supplemental modes of inquiry, mines new types of data, and offers new insights to scholars in Religious Studies, Theology, Sociology, and Anthropology.

And the Narrative Goes On…Twitter

"Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace."
– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*

In the latest iteration of "narrative of decline" initiatives, the General Board of Discipleship, a national institution of the United Methodist Church in the United States, has launched a new movement named #SeeAllThePeople. The name of the movement comes from the children's nursery rhyme: "Here's the church / here's the steeple / open the doors / and see all the people." While in the original song, the idea was to open the door and see all the people inside the church, the movement offers an alternative interpretation—that "all the people" to be seen are actually outside church doors, not inside. This program perceives the nonsuccess of previous responses to decline to be the result of the responses' failure to address Christian discipleship and their attempts instead to attract new members through "quick fixes":

> Over the years, with the best of intentions, we have tried to make disciples by tinkering—tinkering with our worship services, collecting great amounts of data, tracking demographics, scrutinizing particular metrics, creating hospitality plans, and tinkering with other aspects of congregational life. While these are important and necessary elements to a vital congregation, they can also distract us and lead us to believe that we can tinker or program our way back to vitality.[343]

Unlike the "narrative of decline" examples given in this study, the #SeeAllThePeople movement is not rehearsing the narrative in the same way. The information on the website does not use fear as motivation to join in the movement. There are no numeral statistics of church decline cited or declarations of a church crisis. Instead all the videos are upbeat and portray a post-racial multicultural reality where people inside churches (surprisingly diverse, yet all English-speaking) have cut themselves off from those who live outside of the church (also surprisingly

[343] Junis B. Dotson, "#SeeAllThePeople | Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations" (Discipleship Ministries, 2017), 4.

diverse, yet all English-speaking), and need to go outside the church doors and "talk the language of the community."[344]

However, "the narrative of decline" continues to provide a primary source of logic for this initiative. Although the packaging of this method is more nuanced than Bishop Schnase's and has been updated for a more contemporary, digital-age audience (hence the hashtag title—the long reach of social media among millennials is not entirely lost on church leadership), much like Schnase's approach, the program's main focus is on changing church culture in order to build relationships with people who are currently not attending church: "Culture is the strategy."[345] In an explanatory video, Rev. Junis Dotson says that church culture change will only work if people remember "the Why" of Christian discipleship.[346] Just like Schnase, who depends on business experts in his work to provide both a reason for and way out of church decline, this concept comes from Simon Sinek's work, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*.[347] The literature on the website grounds "the Why" of "intentional discipleship" in Methodist theological traditions and claims that the priority of this program is that Christians grow in their faith and that they do so by building relationships to the community. However, there is also a promised byproduct that comes straight out of "the narrative of decline" tradition: "The result, the byproduct, the fruit are vital, vibrant, healthy

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[344] In one "conversation-starter video," available on the website, an older white pastor confronts a diverse group of teenagers who are playing basketball in the street. The pastor says he will be back out after the meeting, "Is that a promise?" say one of the youth. During a small group meeting, also made up of a diverse group of people, the pastor coaches the members about how to relate to youth culture including advising them to "talk the language of the community." After a prayer, the group heads outside to play basketball with the teenagers. Then the video pans out to a view of the entire city. Watch the short video in full here: Discipleship Ministries, *The Shift | #SeeAllThePeople*, accessed December 23, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=54&v=0B6K-TIoYqk.
[345] "#SEEALLTHEPEOPLE," December 23, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20171223014803/http://www.seeallthepeople.org/.
[346] Discipleship Ministries, *Junius B. Dotson | "Culture Is the Strategy,"* accessed March 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=171&v=BtJPN4oHruI.
[347] Dotson, "#SeeAllThePeople | Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations," 15; See: Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Portfolio, 2011).

congregations."[348] It is no coincidence that referring to congregational growth as a "byproduct" quickly gives way to another term, "fruit." Fruit is not the byproduct of tending an orange grove; it is the *telos* of tending that grove. The national United Methodist Church is still trying to come up with new ways to avoid the "death Tsunami" that Lovett Weems predicted would begin this year and last through 2050.

"Shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

After four years of ministry, Millian still does not meet Pastor Miguel's litmus test for a multicultural congregation: (1) the leadership in most committees continues to be overwhelmingly white, elderly, and only English-speaking and (2) congregants from different backgrounds do not eat each other's food. Nor does Millian meet the technical definition used by sociologists of a multicultural church, since the population of the congregation continues to remain over 80% white. Moreover, the membership and attendance numbers have continued to fall. In 2016 there were 382 members on the rolls and 108 in average attendance—Millian's lowest numbers to date.[349] From the point of view of those who employ multiculturalism as a strategy to avoid decline, it is clear that the experiment of multiculturalism is failing at Millian.

In 2016 Pastor Miguel made a request that the Baltimore-Washington Conference conduct the 360 Readiness Survey in 2016. As mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 1, this survey revealed wide-spread ambivalence about the mission and vision of Millian. It revealed that the congregation as a whole had not embraced the multicultural strategy imposed upon it by

[348] Discipleship Ministries, *Junius B. Dotson | "Culture Is the Strategy"*, 02:44-02:51.
[349] GREATER WASHINGTON DISTRICT BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE, "MEMBERSHIP/ATTENDANCE," Statistical Bar Graph (Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2016 2004), http://www.umdata.org/ChartViewer.aspx?Width=500px&height=500px&Data=MembAtt&SeriesName=MembershipAndAttendance&Title=%20&Level=Church&pastorno=0&Confno=381&distNo=26&churchNo=170487&GBNO=170487&StartYear=2004&EndYear=2016.

previous church and conference leadership. In response, an advisory committee was appointed to reevaluate the mission, vision, and future focus of Millian. The advisory committee was made up of leaders from all three worship services. There were two Latino members (one of whom was Pastor Miguel), one African member, three African-American members, and six white members. Four of the members were male and eight were female. They worked together for nine months on the new strategic plan, which they finalized in February of 2017 and presented to the congregation in March. It is telling that the word "multicultural" has been removed from the vision statement as well as the Lovett Weems-inspired language from the mission. Again, the mission and vision statements in place from Pastor Miguel's arrival through February of 2016 were:

> **Our Mission:** Reaching new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Christ.
>
> **Our Vision:** To be a dynamic, spirit-filled, multicultural, multigenerational, church numbering in the thousands, impacting our neighborhood, nation and world through radically inclusive community building.

The new plan states: "This 2017 Strategic Plan is organized around revised Mission & Vision statements that the advisory committee believe more accurately reflect the Millian congregation, our neighboring community and the world today." The new mission and vision statements are:

> **Mission Statement:** Reaching and building up **ALL** people for Christ.
>
> **Vision Statement:** To be a Christ-centered church, positively impacting our neighborhood and world by helping our community replace intolerance with love and justice for all.[350]

[350] Advisory Committee, "Millian Memorial United Methodist Church Strategic Plan for 2017" (Millian Memorial UMC, March 10, 2017), 2, https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3k7XmdSYgwFM3lfaDB6eFdGdmFJQWtOV2cxRkFyeUE1OFd3, emphasis is part of the original source.

Multiculturalism continues to be represented in the plan in the following Strategic Imperative: "Establishing Community Connections, the Multi-Ethnic & Multi-Cultural Church (Intentional Listening Externally)." The group who authored this section of the plan included two African Americans, one African, and one white member. It is interesting to note that Goal 2 is to reevaluate events that involve the community through community comment and participation:

> Goal 2: To determine if the involvement of the community in planning for community/church events make a difference in participation, ownership, values, attitudes and opinions of the group.
>
> Objective:
> To identify common projects & actions, i.e. food pantry, fall festival, Advent event that will enable Millian/community to develop more positive opinions of each other.
>
> Actions to Achieve Objectives:
> Create a diverse church/community group to plan, execute and evaluate a new/old community project i.e. food pantry, fall festival, Advent activities.
> Specific actions include:
> 1. Pre/Post survey of attitudes and opinions.
> 2. Determine the project and resources needed.
> 3. Select a coach not a member of the group.
> 4. Develop a detail plan to include budget, publicity, volunteers, etc.
> 5. Evaluation[351]

Unlike the language found in the 2011 H/LSMP, this goal lacks "us/them" language and contains concrete ideas about how to solicit input and participation from community members, including community surveys and evaluations of the events. I hypothesize that if practices such as these are carried out, the autocratic, top-down organizational structure of events such as the 2015 Easter Egg Roll will not remain intact. With more community and congregational input, most likely such leadership and organizational structures will be transformed into more collaborative, team-

[351] Advisory Committee, 3.

based models that encourage relationship building instead of transactional exchanges between Millian and the surrounding community.

As far as Pastor Miguel is concerned, the actual text of the strategic plan was secondary to the fact that it was the result of a collaborative effort from people of different backgrounds who represented attendees from all three worship services. This has been his goal from the very beginning—to have representatives from all the different backgrounds and worship services make decisions together about how to respond to God's call. Pastor Miguel believes that it is through his organic approach to ministry (and the power of the Holy Spirit) that a cross-section of Millian members worked as a team to develop the strategic plan together. Pastor Miguel is less concerned about the plan's success; he counts it a success that such a process was carried out at Millian, that people worked together as a team, as "One Millian."

In the wake of the Facebook incident, Pastor Miguel entered into a congregation that was divided against itself, except in their doubts about his character and leadership ability, and their dismay at his lack of Standard English. The strategy of multiculturalism as a last-ditch effort to avoid closing the church had been foisted upon the community by past church leaders and the church hierarchy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Although many in the congregation went along with this strategy, it was not fully embraced. There was a begrudging acceptance that in order to keep Millian's doors open, the congregation would need an influx of members from the surrounding community. Outreach to the community increased substantially. However, the form of outreach promoted continued division between Millian and the surrounding community. Millian was the provider of services and material goods, while community members became passive (and in the eyes of some Millian members, seemingly ungrateful) recipients of their generosity.

Pastor Miguel's approach did not leverage multiculturalism as a strategy; he understood it as one possible outcome of living out God's Beloved Community in the multicultural context of the neighborhood where Millian is located. He implemented an organic multicultural training model that differs so radically from what is normally considered "multicultural training" that it is often not identifiable by the persons who are going through it. As I mentioned in the Introduction, many of the long-term Millian members pointed out to me that Pastor Miguel had not held formal training sessions on how to become a multicultural church. In fact he agrees with this, stating:

> *Cuando dijeren gente de diferentes grupos étnicos, ustedes están en "training."*
> *Cuando VBS, la directora es Latina, ustedes están en "training,"*
> *Cuando ahora la directora de Escuela Dominical es Latina y es mi esposa, ustedes están en "training."*
> *Cuando ahora que los ayudantes de los profesores en la Escuela Dominical no tan solo son blancos sino son Latinos y Africanos, ustedes están en "training."*
>
> When persons from different ethnic groups are leading, you all are in "training."
> When in VBS the director is Latina, you all are in "training."
> When the director of Sunday School is now Latina and my wife, you all are in "training."
> When now that the teachers' assistants in Sunday School are not only white but also Latinos and Africans, you all are in "training."[352]

As with Lucy's imposition of a collaborative, multicultural decision-making process on the Faith Development Committee, Pastor Miguel's form of training was bodily and experiential. The only way to be multicultural is to do multicultural. New behaviors must be practiced in order to learn them; sitting in a room with a flip chart will just not do the trick for this kind of training. As

[352] Balderas, Informal Interview - SPRC packet.

Pastor Miguel entextualized Beloved Community at Millian, his goal was to equip Millian with the tools necessary so that they could move forward together as one, united congregation in ministry. He worked from a number of angles—enrolling Millian in a scriptural world, shaping the liturgy, and providing experiences of collaborative, multicultural decision-making—in order to help Millian evolve to a point where they can make decisions together as a team. Ultimately, whether or not Millian will choose to embrace multiculturalism will be up to them.

One night after a long day of interviews, when I was particularly frustrated by the thinly veiled, although sometimes blatant, racism that continually turned up during my fieldwork, I asked him: "Do you think this process is working? Are the people changing? Do you really think Millian can become a multicultural congregation?" For Pastor Miguel, publically accusing members of his congregation of racism and white supremacy—even if he were right—would shut down any possibility of transformation. Instead, as their pastor, he chooses to love them. He visits them when they are sick, sometimes showing up at four in the morning before surgeries. He listens to their concerns, complaints, and anxieties. He walks with them as they approach death and comforts their families when they die. He loves them. This decision he understands to be a mandate of Christian discipleship. While they continue to dismiss his leadership ability, continue to complain about his broken English, and wish for the time when there were thousands of white families in attendance, he just continues loving and training them so that if one day their racism and white supremacy become too hard for even them ignore, they will have the tools they need to repent and become transformed. His goal is not to judge them, but rather walk with them on their journey as they become disciples of Jesus Christ.

Examining Pastor Miguel's process with Millian up close was very difficult for me. I had gone through a version of it myself. Therefore, it was very hard for me to watch as members of

his congregation do not grasp at the opportunity for transformation. How could they not recognize who stands in front of them? How could they continually reject the opportunity to join in a Beloved Community's welcome table? But it was hard for me on a personal level as well. Pastor Miguel, Ruth, Ismael, Magdalena, Diana, Pastor Braulio, Lucy, Isaac, and Tabita are members of my family. It is painful for me to see my family struggle within a congregation of members who do not appreciate them. I know Pastor Miguel is tired, I know his family is worn out from the constant resistance they encounter when trying to build collaborative relationships, and the constant attempts from other members to assert control over their lives. When I ask Pastor Miguel if he is angry at the way he is treated or if he is disappointed in Millian's progress, he says no. Pastor Miguel does not believe it is his job to transform Millian, just to give them the opportunity for it. He has done that. What they do with that opportunity is completely up to them, it is between Millian and God. His relationship with God, his family (especially his granddaughter), and the music and food of Mexico offer sanctuary and profound joy. He says that he takes none of what Millian's members throw at him personally, and more importantly, he does not ask permission to enjoy life and live it to the fullest. Whether they listen to the Gospel or not is not his problem. He is only tasked with living and proclaiming it.

When I ask Pastor Miguel Balderas what I think is a straightforward question, I rarely get a straightforward answer. When I asked him if Millian was changing, I was looking for a yes or no answer, but instead he told me a story.[353] His father, Don Santos, was considered a wise leader in their town of San Agustín Zapotlán in the State of Hidalgo, a small town about fifty miles northeast of Mexico City, Mexico. Family and community members would often bring him problems to solve. One night, many years ago, the problem was a drunken uncle—the man had

[353] Figueroa-Ray, "2015 Summer Fieldnotes", July 29 entry.

had far too much. Don Santos asked for two bottles of hard liquor and set them in front of his uncle who then continued drinking until he passed out. The lesson? It is easier to deal with a sleeping drunk than one who denies he is drunk in the first place. Pastor Miguel believes that if a person is in denial about a problem, you cannot fix it through a reasoned argument, you have to help the person get to the point where the problem is so obvious that it cannot be ignored—only then is there potential for transformation.

Toward the insurgent multiculturalism of Beloved Community

"Realmente es amar a la gente y cuando amas a la gente no le das caridad, le das todo porque tu la amas."
(Really, it's about loving the people and when you love the people you don't give them charity, you give them everything, because you love them.) – Pastor Miguel, Interview #7

Five lay preachers who would soon be giving sermons on Jesus's seven last words, Pastor Miguel and Pastor Braulio Torres and their families, and I were crammed into his office before the Good Friday service. Pastor Miguel had a round table set up as an altar. It was covered in a tablecloth made of lavender-colored paper and a twelve-inch wooden cross was placed in the middle. The golden, round loaf of bread was placed on top of a small clay bowl and next to a matching chalice that sat full of grape juice. A small clear plate was placed on the chalice and both the bread and cup were draped in white cloth and placed in front of the cross. He began in Spanish:

> En esta celebración queremos alabar al Señor y pedirle su bendición para que por medio de estas acciones de encuentro con nuestros hermanos más necesitados y suficientes, podamos ser signos del reino de dios en medio nuestro. (In this celebration we want to praise the Lord and ask for his blessing that by encountering our brothers and sisters who are the most in need and suffering, we can be signs of the reign of God.)
>
> Y por medio de las acciones solidarias ir anunciando el Amor de Dios. (And through actions of solidarity, we go on announcing the Love of God.)

After each leader read their part in the liturgy, Pastor Miguel signaled to his 2-year-old granddaughter and Pastor Braulio's two children, aged six and three, who eagerly yet quietly jumped to attention before him. The younger children took chunks of bread, while the older one took the cup. They carried the elements with the seriousness and dignity that they had witnessed in adults so many times before. The broken body of Jesus and his blood passed from their small hands into the mouths of the adults tasked with preaching the Gospel later that evening at the Good Friday service.

In this brief, small service no "liturgical rules" were broken; however, there were elements that stood out in contrast to a typical communion service celebrated at Millian: speaking elements of it in Spanish, having all seven worship leaders participate, and having Latino children (two of whom were toddlers at the time) serve communion to the adults. When a little Latino girl offers bread to a white, elderly male, the categories of leadership, service, power, and vulnerability are blurred. The child in a position of offering the material form of God's grace occupies a position of power and service. She is participating in the life of worship

as the adult accepts the bread from her small, brown hand. Pastor Miguel is training his leaders in a form of multicultural and multigenerational worship—through the experience of it.

John Wesley's conception of salvation was not that of a simple gift that is received upon acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Rather, the founder of Methodism believed salvation "happens over time. It begins before we even realize it and continues until we are perfected in love. It is something we live into and work out here and now."[354] Moreover, Wesley understood the entire process in terms of grace. Grace pulls people into relationship with God. Grace convicts people of their sin. Grace justifies and forgives. Grace sanctifies and grace perfects them into "'developed' Christians."[355] As with all things Methodist, sanctification is a process. It is a process of becoming more Christ-like. Christian theologian Kendall Soulen would say that sanctification is a process of developing a whole new set of reflexes. In the life of Christian community with its new language habits, one's old reflexes (e.g. love of money and status) fade, and new ones (e.g. love of God and neighbor) take their place. Slowly over time one takes on more and more characteristics of someone who would be recognized as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The training ground for continued sanctification as part of the process of salvation is the church community—it is where new habits for Christian life are taught, practiced, developed, and perfected. Pastor Miguel's process of entextualizing Beloved Community is of a piece Wesley's Way of salvation, it is a training program for the possibility of living out the Kingdom of God on earth within the joys and struggles of Beloved Community.

The question remains: can the majority-white United Methodist Church learn how to engage in nonassimilationist multicultural community? Pastor Miguel would say, "Yes! By the

[354] Scott Kisker, *Mainline or Methodist?: Rediscovering Our Evangelistic Mission* (Nashville, Tenn: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 70.
[355] Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James*, 69.

power of the Holy Spirit, anything is possible!" However, the question that remains unanswered after this study is whether or not United Methodists actually want to do so. Henry Giroux, student of Pablo Freire, writes of multiculturalism within the context of public education. He states:

> Multiculturalism is about making whiteness visible as a racial category; that is it points to the necessity of providing white students with the cultural memories that enable them to recognize the historically- and socially-constructed nature of their own identities. Multiculturalism as a radical, cultural politics should attempt to provide white students (and others) with the self-definitions upon which they can recognize their own complicity with or resistance to how power works within and across differences to legitimate some voices and dismantle others…Equality as important is the issue of making all students responsible for their practices, particularly as these serve either to undermine or expand the possibility for democratic life.[356]

Pastor Miguel is practicing a form of insurgent multiculturalism. Through each act of proclamation, liturgy, and modeling of leadership, he is training white people how to give up their power by making them do it, in very small doses, with the hope that little by little the process will become not only less painful and less scary, but actually bring them into the fold of Beloved Community. As Bonhoeffer's warning rises up from bowels of Nazi Germany, "Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace," the question is for which grace will United Methodists opt?

[356] Giroux, "Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy," 250.

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