

As a weary and inflammatory national election season in the United States approaches its peak, I can imagine the various pressures you are under as a Latina pastor. You're trying to formulate your own voice while paying attention to the voices of influencers and the endless news cycle. As I pray for you and your leadership role, I hold in mind the many dynamics you are facing and the weight of pastoring amongst and alongside el pueblo¹ latino. You want to be faithful to the Word and Work of God, and a multitude of voices inside and outside la iglesia² threatened to drown out the fire of your truth-telling voice.

On the one hand, our Latina community continues to be dehumanized as criminals, illegals, and "garbage" and as a threat to white supremacist ideologies and white suburban security; on the other hand, our Latina voting members continue to be used as a political pawn that promises immigration reform and "total" participation in a diverse United States. Since our Latina community is una comunidad de comunidades³, you have family and church members who spread across the political and theological spectrum. Some are energized to vote for their first time and others want to sit this one out. Still some are coming to you for discernment and clarity on how they should vote. There are others who are bombarded with misinformation and fear, and they have decided to put more hope upon Trump's return to the White House than Jesús' Return for the restoration of all things.

Latinx activists in your church have also expressed their indignation over Biden's violent and hypocritical stance on Palestine; this has made them cut ties with the Democratic party and they want to write "Free Palestine" in their ballots. A group of politically engaged members clearly will vote for Vice President Kamala Harris since it's "el tiempo para que las mujeres lideren."⁴ Those Latinos who migrated decades ago have unwavering allegiances to the Republican party (even when the candidate is questionable) because they received Reagan's amnesty in 1986.⁵ Some within this cohort (with a very limited memory), accuse other Latinx immigrants of taking up funds and services from U.S. citizens and those currently living on Social Security. Yet people who are still in an irregular or undocumented status are praying that voters will not choose anti-immigrant terror and policies again. Not to mention single issue voters who are anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage, who are also pro-immigration reform, universal health care, and higher taxes on the rich. While younger voters do not see gay marriage and abortion as a faith or religious issue, they are puzzled as to how Harris is not a clear option.

¹ The people as both a political entity and a relational force. Throughout this epistle, I chose to use words in Spanish for they connote familiarity as well a broader and deeper taxonomy otherwise diluted with its English counterpart. Italicizing such words would present them as foreign, and they are certainly not in our lived latinx conversions, realities, and relationships. For those who do not speak Spanish, as a way of solidarity with those who do not speak English, we invite you to sit with the experience of reading terms you need a translation for as well as slowing down in your reading.

² The church.

³ A community of communities.

⁴ It's time for this country to have a woman's leadership

⁵ Officially known as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.

Nevertheless, these visions for the United States across generations, migration stories, ethnicities, and theologies converge in la iglesia Latina⁶ that you are pastoring. They all sit next to each other every week. They love each other deeply as a subversive, reconstituted familia “called to imitate the life and work of our Triune God.”⁷ And so you are afraid that if you say the “wrong thing” you will alienate people. After all, this “subversive familia” in the power of the Spirit has shaped your call “to love, to serve, and to advocate for those in need of advocacy.”⁸ At this time, as a Latinx, bivocational, bilingual, pastora, Paul’s exhortation sounds utopic and unrealistic: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,”⁹ seriously? You can hear all these voices that place expectations on your pastoral leadership, your prophetic voice, and your entire body. Your vocation as a disciple of Jesús- that brown skin Palestinian Jew who in the power of the Spirit changed your life- continues to be alive. Therefore, you are wondering “what does faithful witness to this Jesús look like in this historic moment for Latinx pastoral leadership?” In the power and ongoing legacy of our ancestros, abuelas, padres y madres en la fe¹⁰, I remind you of Jesús’ voice with clear political commitments to el pueblo¹¹ as a compass for these turbulent and uncertain times. My prayer is that Jesús’s words will lower the noise of others’ voices and that the Spirit of Life will breath new energies into your truth-telling voice.

*“Creator’s blessing rests on the poor, the ones who walk a trail of tears, the ones who make peace...”*¹² The beatitudes on the Sermon on the Mount are Jesús’ public commitments to the multitudes of subjects that were often forgotten, invisible, and disposable in his time- the sick, demon-possessed, and disabled (Matt.5:23-25). These people were listening in to Jesús teaching to his disciples; and his disciples were learning to be shaped by Jesús (Matt 5:1-2). The First Nations Version of the New Testament translates the beginning clause and refrain of each beatitude as “Creator’s blessing rests on...” The gospel of Matthew points to Creator’s initiative to bless, include, prioritize and relate with communities that were disinherited, displaced, and diasporic. Thus, “the poor, the ones who walk softly and humble, the ones who hunger and thirst for wrongs to be made right again...” are centered as the faces of Creator’s initiatives. The well-being and participation of these subjects is Creator’s priority and basis of any eschatological hope that expects God’s invasive actions in the now.¹³ So Jesús’ public and political commitments remind his audience (living in Palestine under Roman occupation), Matthew’s audience (living in Antioch after the desolation of the Temple), and our current Latinx evangélico context (living in Tongva and Kizh lands under *Pax Americana*) that as disciples we are learning communities who must “unlearn [the ways of empire] in order to learn” to trust the ways of Creator’s power, agency, and liberation.

⁶ Latina church

⁷ Zaida Maldonado Perez. *Latina Evangelicas: A theological Survey from the Margins*. 71.

⁸ Ibid. 70.

⁹ Ephesians 4:3

¹⁰ Ancestors, grandparents, and parents in the faith

¹¹ The people

¹² Matthew 5:1:11. *First Nations Version: Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*.

¹³ Branson & Roxburgh. *Leadership, God’s Agency, and Disruptions: Confronting Modernity’s Wager*. 19

So when accompanying people in the discernment of their vote, remind them that we vote in solidarity with the faces of “the poor, the ones walking the trail of tears” whom Creator has already declared blessed. Creator’s initiatives towards and with the diasporic, disheartened, displaced and disinherited influences our political commitments. Political parties are mobilized by their greed for power and privilege, domination and death. Therefore, no political party can claim exclusive rights to “Christian values” or influence our decisions on single voter issues. Jesús denounces self-preserving models of leadership that grasp power in his critique of tyrant rulers and clearly warns us: “This will not be the way of the ones who walk with me.”¹⁴ Jesús reminds us that service for one another and a complete identification with the oppressed¹⁵ is the way of Jesús’ learning community and her leadership. One of our ancestors in the faith, Gustavo Guitierrez explained it this way: “...in order to fulfill its mission, the Church relies more on the strength of the Lord than on the strength of Power. And the Church will be able to establish...the only earthly ties which it should have: communion with the disinherited of our country, with their concerns and struggles.”¹⁶

Therefore, consider what ties will mobilize your pastoral leadership? What earthly ties beckon your congregation to follow Jesús in his Reino de Vida¹⁷? Who are the faces of the disinherited in your neighborhood and community that lead to communion with Creator? What if your longing for your church to be passionate for Jesús is actually found in a communion with the poor, marginalized, and the immigrant amongst you? How do these faces, bodies, and stories inform your vote and your iglesia’s political commitments? Which vision of the United States as proposed by the candidates allows for collaboration with the Reino de Vida¹⁸ politics of service and solidarity? Which earthly ties have actually turned our allegiance towards the strength of Power- militaristic, economic, and/or racial hierarchies- versus the strength of the Lord? How has current pastoral leadership fallen prey to a “diseased social imagination”¹⁹ in which control, management, and proximity to power are our metrics for self-worth, success, and survival? Is announcing a wounded and risen Christ hypocritical when we can’t denounce misogyny and homophobia in the church?

Jesús is asking his church to be “an alternative to tyranny”²⁰ by drinking the cup of suffering and being immersed into Jesús’ *downward* greatness through service, solidarity, and advocacy. Many of those whom you lead feel an internalized racism and a colorism that tempts them to move away from this alternative towards the cup of American exceptionalism, or white evangelicalism. In fact, many of your colleagues have already drunk this cup for notoriety,

¹⁴ Matt 20:25-26. First Nations Version: Indigenous Translation of the New Testament.

¹⁵ For Brunner the use of διάκονος means “table waiter,” and δοῦλος “slave” and they serve as a reversal of downward discipleship. In regards to δοῦλος, he points to the fact that there were “slaves everywhere in ancient society” and during Jesús time a slave was “the non-person who has no rights or existence of his own, who exists solely for others.” Therefore, the “shock value” of identifying with the non-persons of our time should be a starting point for our political commitments and allegiance. Frederick Emil Brunner, *Matthew A Commentary, Vol 2., 333-334*

¹⁶ Guitierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 69

¹⁷ Kingdom of Life

¹⁸ Kingdom of Life

¹⁹ Jennings, *Christian Imagination*. 9-11

²⁰ Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 178.

influence, privilege, and success under the “white gaze” of denominational politics and celebrity culture. As theo-poet Alma Lizzette Cárdenas-Rodríguez has so succinctly pointed out “¿Qué se le llama al orden que más bien trae desorden? Mentira...”²¹ And this lie is the insidious and infectious colonial wound that torments us with “we are not enough;” “we are perpetual foreigners;” “our brownness is not pretty enough;” “our language is inferior;” “our mestizaje is a limitation.” And yet Jesús is precisely rejecting these lies by saying don’t opt for this “venom wrapped in honey”²² which violates the image of God in you and your people.

So as you discern and formulate your voice this politicking season, draw upon the wisdom and strength of our abuelas.²³ I know of your Abuela Esther who always reminded me: “¡la verdad trae justicia!”²⁴ How can we forget tia Eugenia’s perseverance in prayer with her saying “¡Dilo que el Señor te escucha; si quieres sanar sácalo todo, di la verdad!”²⁵ So denounce the lies of injustice of the past and present, and announce the truth of Jesús’ liberating power and his commitments in el Reino de Vida! “Denouncing and announcing has a cost!” Pastora Gloria used to say. However, do not let that cost be your physical, mental, and emotional health, your well-being. Do not interpret Jesús call to service, solidarity and advocacy for the disinherited as self-forgetfulness; it can be as harmful as self-aggrandizement. Cultural and gender expectations are disproportionately placed upon you to care for others. In your pursuit of shalom for others be careful that you do not dismiss the truth that Creator’s blessedness may also rest upon your life. In fact, the Creator’s delight over you, your dreams, and your passions are also a matter of justice. So the Creator wants to speak the truth about you and announce God’s commitments for your own liberation!

May the Spirit of Jesús, who having all the power decided not to cling to power, give you the power of words to denounce injustice and announce God’s justice. May the Spirit of Jesús’ give la iglesia Latina in the United States re-imagined political commitments. And may the Spirit of Jesús dust off the lies that have distorted the image of God in our pueblo latino and in your life. Al que está sentado en el trono²⁶, the Lamb that was slain, be all glory, thanksgiving, and worship. Amén.

²¹ What do you call an order that rather brings forth disorder? A Lie... Cárdenas-Rodríguez. *Groanings in the Desert*. Mentira.66

²² A phrase used by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566), a Dominican priest, who denounced the genocide and enslavement of indigenous peoples in the Americas during Spanish colonial rule in the 1500s “Las Casas denounced Sepulveda’s treatise [in favor of these crimes] as “venom wrapped in honey,” for it threatened to infect so many readers and empower so many evil opportunists that would cause the damnation of many souls.” in Romero and Canales, *Las Casas on Faithful Witness*, 5.

²³ Grandmothers

²⁴ The truth brings justice. Armas. *Abuelita Fe: Lo que las mujeres marginadas nos enseñan acerca de la sabiduría, la perseverancia y la fortaleza*, 80.

²⁵ Say it for the Lord is listening; if you want healing you must spit out, tell God the truth!”

²⁶ To the One seated on the throne