Hearing the Word in Spanglish: Contributions to the Church at Large

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As I come before you today, I am both honored and surprised. The reasons why I feel honored should be obvious. This is a prestigious lecture at a prestigious school, and being invited to deliver it is indeed an honor.

But allow me to say a word about being surprised. I grew up in a Protestant church in Latin America. As Protestants, we read theology in English. We read Bible commentaries in English. Tacitly and unwittingly, but still in many ways, we were told that good theology came from the North Atlantic and was written either in English or in German. What we had to do was to read that good theology and find ways to translate and transpose it into our situation. I went to a seminary where over 90% of the books in the library were in English. My textbook on Church history made it appear that the apex of that history had been reached in the North Atlantic, and all we could do now was to live up to it...

And now I find myself here before you! Me, with my foreign accent and my foreign look!

Two surprising things have happened in the way from then to now. First, the church has changed. The old margins have come to the center, and much of the old center has lost its vitality. What was once the one-way movement of ideas, resources and teachings from the

center to what was then called the mission field has now been reversed, at least in part, so that today in any good theological library here in the US you must have books translated from Spanish, from Korean, from Portuguese, and from Swahili. So, the first surprising change of the last fifty years is this cataclysmic change in the life of the church.

But then, there has also been significant change within my own being. I am no longer who I was when I studied in seminary, nor even who I was when I came to this country for my graduate education. Frankly, the time came when I was quite bored with biblical interpretation. I had read dozens and dozens of commentaries. Actually, every time I had to preach, I read all those commentaries, and I usually ended up merely repeating what they said.

Then, when I was teaching seminary in Puerto Rico, the Second Vatican Council came along. I had been formed in the ecumenical movement, first the World Methodist Student Federation and then the World Council of Churches. But now we were called to a new type of ecumenism —new, not only in the positive sense that it included Roman Catholics, but also in the more questionable sense that every church institution had to provide what was really an ecumenical show.

And so did we at the Seminary. We organized a great ecumenical service at the church across the street from the seminary. Just about anybody who was anybody in the church was there. The Roman Catholic archbishop, in full regalia. The Methodist bishop, in even fuller regalia. The

Episcopal bishop, in his purple shirt and gleaming pectoral cross, the president of the Lutheran synod with his symbols of office, a dozen Pentecostal pastors in dark suits. And I, too, was there. As dean of the Seminary, I wore my academic regalia. We processed in with a vast choir and accompanied by an organ and trumpets...

All was well, until I came to read Scripture. I began solemnly, and not expecting much of anything new:

> 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 are all baptized into one body —Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Corinthians 12: 12-14)

And so, I read on, trying to give emphasis to a passage that I had read so many times, and that all those present had also heard many times.

All went well, until I came to a verse I had never noticed before: "those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor." I hope no one noticed. But I could hardly refrain from laughing. What part of the body were we?!

I spent the rest of the service mulling on what I had just read, and the next morning I went to the library to read more about it. There was very little I could find. Apparently, none of the commentators I was reading saw the enormity of what Paul was saying. Many pointed out that what Paul says about the body having many members is relatively commonplace in Hellenistic

literature. Apparently, just about all that Paul was saying was not new. The one new thing was precisely the one I had never noticed, the one most commentaries ignored: "those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor."

Then the connection between that passage and the rest of the Epistle suddenly dawned on me. Paul is chastising the Corinthians because in their eucharistic celebrations the rich have too much and the poor do not get enough, and he is telling them that in this body, which is the Church, in this body of Christ, those whom society treats with less honor are to be treated with greater honor.

That episode —and some others at about the same time— gave me permission to read Scripture anew, to look at what was there that I had unwittingly been taught to ignore. And Scripture was no longer boring! And commentaries became exactly that: commentaries that may prove helpful to understand a text, but that may also hinder our understanding.

It was that experience that led me several years later, when I published a book on Christian theology from a Hispanic perspective, to include a chapter on "Reading the Bible in Spanish." There were chapters on the doctrine of the Trinity, on Creation, on Christology, and so on. But the chapter that drew most attention was the one on the interpretation of Scripture, which I called “Reading the Bible in Spanish.” This did not surprise me, for Scripture is the very lifeblood of the Latino church, and therefore it is quite natural for Hispanic readers to find this

chapter particularly important. Besides, since the Spanish language is one of the strongest bonds linking Latinas and Latinos from various backgrounds, giving us a sense of identity and commonality, it made sense for my readers to be particularly interested in that chapter on reading in Spanish —or, more precisely, on reading from our own perspective and with our own issues in mind.

So, I called that "reading in Spanish." But today I need to correct that somewhat. We are proud of our language. We love its idioms and its cadences, its nuances and its ambiguities. Indeed, many of us could not even imagine ourselves without our language. But we must be careful, for language —particularly proper language— is a two-edged sword.

On language, have you ever considered why is it that in English we often have a word for a living animal, and another for the meat it provides? A steer or a cow becomes beef. A hog or pig becomes pork. A sheep becomes mutton. Have you noticed further that the words by which we call the living animals are usually of Anglo-Saxon origin, and the words by which we call its meat are of Franco-Norman origin? This did not happen by chance. It actually reflects the time when English was being formed, which was also a time when a Norman elite ruled over a Saxon population. While the Saxons raised the cows, the pigs, and the sheep, they seldom enjoyed their meat. This was consumed mostly by the Normans, who called it beef, pork, or mutton. Although the Normans ate the beef, the Saxons sure had reasons to beef over it!

There are many other such instances in which language reflects past oppressions and prejudices. When the word was first used, "hysteria" was clearly understood to refer to the "hyster," the womb, and was therefore supposed to be a condition affecting women or effeminate men. And the word "testify" originally was connected with 'testes," and therefore only men could testify—and, for the same reasons, only men could "testate."

Similar cases occur also in Spanish. From the times when Arabic was still spoken in vast regions of Spain, we have the word "algarabia," which originally referred to the Arabic sections of a town, but today means a confused and loud babble, because the dominant, Spanish-speaking culture considered Arabic a senseless and noisy babble.

All languages are so permeated by this sort of prejudice that it is practically impossible to speak without using them. At a restaurant, people would be surprised and even shocked if we ordered "a cut of roast cow" or a "leg of sheep", or a "hog loin." Spanish-speaking Arabs today refer to a noisy confusion as an "algarabia" and have no sense that they are offending their ancestors. And it would be very difficult for Christians to speak at all without referring to the New "Testament." To purify all language of every such sedimentation of injustice and prejudice would both leave us with very few words and obscure the pain of those in the past who lived under subjection and prejudice, and whose faint memory still comes to us in the language we speak.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that language can be and is offensive. It is particularly offensive when it reinforces an injustice or a prejudice currently existing in the society in which the language is being spoken. Thus, while we have no reason to beef over whether an animal is a sheep or mutton, we certainly have reason to be offended and to complain over language that demeans women, minorities, other cultures, people of a different sexual orientation, or any others. Language is offensive and destructive whenever it reinforces injustice and inequality —and therefore many who today have no beef about "beef" still have much to beef about language!

This is particularly true within the Latin community, where we often make fun of one another because our vocabulary is not exactly the same, because our sing-songs are different, or because we slur particular letters.

This is fun, but we must take care lest it become oppressive, lest we use our supposedly "better" Spanish to claim power and authority over those who do not speak as we do. After all, I tell my Spanish-speaking friends, the best Spanish is nothing but very poorly spoken Latin, that has been corrupted by Gothic, Arabic, Native American influences, and even English!

Languages summarize a people's history, and in them lives the entire history of a people's struggles —struggles in which oppression and resistance have long been in a dialectical relationship, and out of which both oppression and resistance have come to shape the

language. When we Spanish-speaking people speak of our language, we must not forget that when our Roman ancestors conquered our Celtiberian ancestors, they imposed their language: *amo*, *amas*, *amat*. And yet, when our ancestors were conquered by the Goths, their sense of identity was such that they continued using the same words that had earlier been imposed on them: *amo*, *amas*, *ama*. And then came the Moors, and we learned to say -*álgebra* and *naranja* —orange—, and *ojalá* —may God will it. And then they all crossed the Atlantic and taught us "proper" Spanish; but we insisted on calling our small thatched-roof houses *bohios*, and our *aguacate*, and our *chocolate*.

Likewise, when English-speaking people hear us speak, and bemoan the way we speak their language, they must not forget that we gave them their barbeques, and their sombreros, and their tomatoes, and their potatoes, and their chocolate, and their oranges, and their avocados, and their algebra, and their albatross.

This is the reason why today, rather than speaking about "Spanish," I have chosen to speak about "Spanglish." I was brought up with great love and respect for the Spanish language. My father was a novelist. My mother was a professor of Spanish literature. I remember many an after-dinner conversation about the proper way to say something, to construct a sentence, or to use a word. We often ended up debating the point on the basis of various grammars, dictionaries and the like —although the final word was always up to the Grammar and the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, both of which sat on a cabinet

behind my father's chair with the Bible between them. (Fortunately, back then we had no TV, and therefore we were able to create our own "reality shows.") So, I do love the Spanish language.

But even though I still love Spanish grammar, and still often consult the *Dictionary of the Academy*, I must constantly remind myself that languages evolve, and that there is a sense in which language is not just what the grammar and the dictionary say, but also what the people actually speak.

Furthermore, as Christians, we must remember that it is in those languages that people actually do speak, and with the accents in which people speak, that God also speaks. We may cherish the King James Version with its "thou sayeth" and "thou willeth." But we must know that today God "says" and God "wills."

This has become quite clear to me through two well-known passages, both of which together illustrate the dialectic of what I mean when I speak of "hearing the Word in Spanglish."

The first is the denial of Peter. I remember hearing a sermon on that subject when I was about seven years old. The preacher asked, "How did people know that Peter was a Christian?" "Ah," he answered, "because when you have been with Christ it shows in your face! Because when you have been with Christ your face shines with joy!" I also remember coming out of church,

sitting on the curb across the street, looking at people coming out of church, and deciding that no one had been with Jesus!

Many years later, when I was teaching in Puerto Rico, I was invited to preach during Holy Week at a very large English-speaking Methodist church in Florida. I was worried about speaking properly and about making myself understood. Then, as I was preparing my sermon for Maundy Thursday, I came across the word of the woman to Peter in the Gospel of Matthew: "You are one of them. Your accent betrays you." She did not know that Peter was a disciple of Jesus because his face shone. She knew he was a disciple of Jesus because he had an accent, because he talked funny! It was not only I, but also Peter, who had to worry about his accent!

Looking then at the entire story of the Passion, it became clear to me that what we have there is not just a religious story of how some deeply devout and observant people refused to accept the preaching of Jesus, but also an ethno-political story of how the Judeans, who considered themselves to be better Jews that the Galileans, resented the manner in which this teacher from Galilee and his band of Galileans were taking the city by storm and calling the Judeans to greater obedience to the Word of God —as if they themselves were not marginal, ignorant, not-quite-as-good-as-us Galileans.

This theme of the marginality of Galileans as a hermeneutical tool for understanding the Gospel has been put forth and developed by Fr. Virgilio Elizondo, former Rector of the Cathedral of San

Antonio, and now at Notre Dame. In his book *Galilean Journey*, Elizondo takes up the theme of *mestizaje* as a way to understand the gospel as well as his own story. *Mestizaje* may well be translated as miscegenation, or as mongrelism. In its traditional sense in colonial society, the mestizo is a person who is half Indian and half Spanish, and yet neither Indian nor Spanish. From the point of view of the Spanish, the mestizo is little better than an Indian. From the point of view of the Indian, the mestizo is almost as bad as the Spanish. Growing up in Texas, Elizondo was repeatedly told that he was a Mexican, and yet, when he was finally able to go to Mexico, he was clearly told that he was a Texan. Who was he, then? Both a Mexican and a Texan, and yet neither Mexican nor Texan. A *mestizo*.

The same is true, Elizondo then says, of Jesus in particular, and of Galileans in general. From the point of view of the Romans, they were just as bad as any other Jew. But from the point of view of the "right" Jews of Judea, they were little better than Gentiles.

Therefore, in Elizondo's experience and in his theology, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the affirmation of the *mestizo*, of those who belong, but do not quite belong, of those who have no place where they really belong. Christianity is by nature a *mestizo* religion, in that all purity, be it ethnic, cultural, or even ceremonial, is left behind by the action of God affirming those people and those experiences that by their very nature do not belong —or, one could say, belong in more than one place, and therefore both places reject them.

It is interesting to note that I learned later that, at about the same time that, quite independently from each other, Elizondo and I were mulling over Galilean in-betweenness, Puerto Rican missiologist Orlando Costas was working on the same subject and exploring how Galilean marginality could serve as a paradigm for Christian mission.

This is one of the central tenets of most Hispanic theology in the US. Expanding on the themes of Galilee and of *mestizaje*, others have taken up the theme of Nepantla, a Náhuatl word meaning "the land in between." And many Latinos and Latinas of Caribbean extraction, where the mixture of races has been mostly between Europeans and Africans, prefer to speak of *mulatez*, the quality of being *mulato*, both black and white, and therefore neither black nor white.

This is what should have been obvious to any who read the story of Peter's denial but was not either to that preacher whom I heard when I was a child nor to me until I was placed in a situation in which it was practically unavoidable.

But then I come to the second passage that is crucial if we are to understand the dialectic of hearing the Word in Spanglish. This is the story of Pentecost in Acts 2. When we read that story, we are so overwhelmed by the noise like a wind, and by the tongues of fire, and by everyone understanding what the disciples say, that we miss the significance of people being able to hear

the preaching of the Gospel, as they say, "each in our own tongue." We also tend to overlook the significance of the words, "Are not those who speak all Galileans?"

First, on the matter of hearing "each in our own tongue": If the purpose of the Holy Spirit was to make it possible for all to understand what was being said, the Spirit had two options. One was to make all understand the language of the disciples —in other words, to make them all understand the Aramaic with a Galilean accent that the disciples spoke. The other was to make them understand each in their own tongue.

As far as objective communication is concerned, there would be no difference between these two, for in either case those who heard would learn of the wondrous acts of God of which the disciples spoke.

But there is a big difference. If the Spirit had made all to understand the language of the Galileans who spoke, this would mean that this language was normative for the preaching of the gospel; that henceforth in order really to hear the gospel, one would have to hear it in that language. And, since language is indissolubly connected with culture, it would have meant that the culture of the Galileans would be normative in the church. The Galileans, or those who best assimilated their language, culture, and traditions, would forever be in control.

If, on the other hand, the Spirit were to make all those present hear in their own language, this would mean first of all that those hearing, no matter what their language or their culture, would have equal access to the gospel and equal authority in the community of faith. It would also mean that the control of the message had now escaped from the original Galileans. From now on, things would be going on in the community of faith that they, the original proclaimers and teachers of the faith, would not be able to understand and much less to control. This is something Latinos and Latinas frequently see in the context of our own denominations. The fact that we speak a different language means that we cannot be as closely supervised as some would like and that we therefore are able to venture along innovative and even unprecedented paths. Obviously, this risks the possibility of serious errors, shortcomings, and missteps. But without such risks, mission would stagnate.

At this point, it may be well to remember what Yale missiologist Lamin Sanneh says in comparing Christianity and Islam, both of which he knows quite well. According to Sanneh, the core difference between the two lies in the translatability of the gospel, in contrast with the non-translatability of the Koran. A translation of the Bible is still the Bible, but a translation of the Koran is not the Koran but only a translation thereof. And then Sanneh goes on to affirm that this is the reason why in its expansion Christianity has adapted to so many different cultures and taken so many different shapes.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the gospel is translatable, which means that it can move from culture to culture, and that in so doing there are also power shifts within Christianity itself.

But back to Pentecost and the book of Acts: If the story of the Gospel, leading from Galilee to Jerusalem, is one in which the marginal Galileans are brought to the very center of God's action in Jerusalem, the story of Acts is one in which those Galileans find that they cannot retain the center and that others who would otherwise be marginal are now brought to the center.

This should be obvious even from a very cursory reading of Acts. We may call the book the *Acts of the Apostles*. But in truth it is the acts of the Spirit bringing others to take the central place of the apostles. There is no doubt that at the very beginning, for the first five chapters, the apostles are at the center of the action. But then, in chapter 6, we find that the twelve are criticized because they do not seem to attend properly to the needs of the Hellenistic widows. (One wonders: could these be widows who at Pentecost heard the message and are now claiming their place jointly with the Aramaic-speaking widows?) At any rate, as a result of criticism raised against the twelve, seven others come to the foreground. One of these seven, Stephen, occupies center-stage in chapters 6 and 7, and another, Philip, in chapter 8. But already in chapter 7 another person appears who is, in all likelihood, a member of the synagogue of Cilicia, one of the synagogues that framed Stephen: Saul of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia. Saul then appears again in chapter 9, and by chapter 13, he is rapidly becoming the main

character in the story. Meanwhile, as the church moves to ever new environments, the twelve seem to become more and more marginal, and the same is true of the church in Jerusalem, of which he hears for the last time in chapter 21, giving Paul a bad piece of advice.

Thus, the Spirit through whom the Man from Galilee was conceived, and through whom the Galileans had the power to proclaim the gospel at Pentecost, is now empowering others to take the place of the Galileans.

Needless to say, this is crucial for those of us who see in the *mestizaje* of the Galileans a paradigm to understand our own condition and role in the church. If we are given any power by the Spirit, this is not power to retain power, but power to share power, power to invite others into the center, even though it may be at the cost of our own marginalization.

This is why I have chosen to speak, not only of hearing the Word in Spanglish but also of making this a contribution to the church at large. Even though our own cultural experience and social situation may help us see in Scripture elements that may not be as clear to others, we must not claim these as our own possession. As in the case of those early Galileans at Pentecost, if our word comes from the Spirit, it is not a word to possess but a word to share. If our power comes from the Spirit, it is not power to possess but power to share.

On this basis, we are almost ready to turn to some remarks about how Latinos and Latinas read Scripture, and how such reading may be a contribution to the church at large. But before we do that, a final caveat is necessary: The perspectives and experiences of Latinas and Latinos are as varied and as complex as those of any other human group. This means that when I speak here of reading the Bible in Spanglish, I am well aware that there are other readings in the Hispanic community and that I am speaking only as a member of that community and out of my own limited experience and observations.

Having said this, I begin by asking, what is it that I most notice as a central characteristic of Latin readings of Scripture? And the answer is both quite simple and quite complex: The role assigned to the Holy Spirit —and to the present action of the Holy Spirit.

Through the ages, Christians have generally agreed that Scripture is the Word of God due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Significantly, however, in times when an emphasis on strict orthodoxy has prevailed, most discussions on this subject have had to do with the inspiration of the Spirit at the time and in the process of writing Holy Writ. This was true even of Hellenistic Jews before the advent of Christ, and this is the reason why the translation known as the Septuagint had to be clothed with the legend that the translators, working quite independently, came out with exactly the same translation. This proved that they were inspired by the Spirit and that therefore the Septuagint is truly the Word of God. Similarly, during the period of Protestant orthodoxy, there was much discussion as to the inspiration of Scripture. Did the

Spirit dictate the words directly to the writers? In so doing, did the Spirit take into account the various styles and interests of different writers? What about the Masoretic vocalization of the Hebrew text? Was that, too, dictated by the Spirit, as David Hollaz claimed? If every word was dictated by the Spirit, how dare one claim, as did George Calixtus, that some are more important than others? "No! " Abraham Calov would respond, the inspiration of Scripture means that every word was dictated by the Spirit.

What is missing in this entire debate is the role of the Spirit in inspiring not only the writers but also the readers of Scripture. Is the work of the Spirit only a matter of the past, or does it take place also today, in the church, when we read the words of Scripture? Luther and Calvin would have said the latter, and so would John Wesley. But Lutheran and Calvinist orthodoxies, as well as Wesleyan fundamentalism, have been more inclined toward the former.

It is at this point that the Hispanic emphasis on the present work of the Spirit becomes crucial. Most of the Latins I meet in church would find the assertion of the Nicene Creed, that the Spirit "spoke through the prophets," quite unsatisfying. The Spirit who spoke through the prophets is the same Spirit who still speaks today. Scripture is the inspired Word of God, not only because the Spirit was active in its writing, but also because the same Spirit is active in its reading.

One consequence of this is that people looking at the Hispanic church from outside try to apply to its reading of Scripture categories that do not quite fit. Are they fundamentalist? Are they

liberal? If the measure of a fundamentalist is in taking Scripture as quite literal and authoritative, there is no doubt that most Latin believers are fundamentalist. But if the measure of a liberal is in allowing Scripture to speak to our age, even while leaving aside some traditional interpretations, then Latinos and Latinas are quite liberal.

The truth of the matter is that most Hispanics are neither. The debate between fundamentalism and liberalism stems from a historical background that is alien to us. It stems from modernity, with its emphasis on objectivity and universality. Modernity, with its mechanistic view of the world as a closed reality in which all things stem from what was before in an unavoidable sequence, lead to theological modernism and its counterpart, liberalism.

Fundamentalism is a reaction to this, claiming not only that Scripture is inerrant, but also that there is an objective, universal, and true reading of Scripture. The Bible is inerrant because every word was inspired by the Holy Spirit. But for the majority of the Latin population, both in the United States and in Latin America, modernity was always an alien reality. Yes, we were swept into modernity, but too often this resulted in much greater benefit for the modernizers than for us as modernized. As a result, many of us were never really modern, for modernity remained an alien influence. And therefore, in our better times we refuse to be drawn into a decision between modernism and fundamentalism, both products of modernity. Indeed, what I find in most Latin churches I visit is neither fundamentalism nor liberalism, but a precritical reading of Scripture that, while showing great respect for the letter of Scripture, will not allow

itself to be tied down by that letter —and much less by what we have been told that Scripture says.

This became obvious to me many years ago when visiting a Hispanic Pentecostal church in an impoverished area of New York City. When the pastor announced that he had been preaching a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments and that he would now preach on the Sabbath, I was quite ready to let my mind wander along more interesting paths. After all, I already knew what he was going to say: The Sabbath is a day holy unto the Lord. Therefore, there are certain things you must not do on the Sabbath, and certain others that you must do.

But then he surprised me. He asked: "How many of you were able to work last week?" A few hands went up. Then he asked, "How many of you were looking for work last week?" Most of the adults in the congregation raised their hands. Finally, he asked: "How is it that we live in a society where we are not able to obey the commandment of work?"

He took me aback. Among fundamentalists, I had often heard that on the Sabbath you should not work, you should not conduct business, you should devote all your time to church, and so on. I had heard others discuss whether the Sabbath should be observed on the first or the seventh day of the week. Among liberals, I had often heard this passage used to defend the right to rest, to make certain that laborers are not exploited, and so on. I had grown up in an environment where such rights were staunchly defended. But this man was speaking, not of the

right to rest, but of the right to work. His preaching immediately reminded me that there are large numbers of people whose problem is not working too much, but not being able to work enough.

He then continued: "God made us after the divine image. God created, and God rested. God wants us to work, and God wants us to rest. Both are part of the commandment of God."

As he continued, and I reflected on what he was saying, it was clear to me that his use of Scripture took into account the connection between this commandment and other elements in the text that we often do not connect with it. God placed the human creature on the earth to till it, to work on it, to bring it to what God willed it to be. And yet, through sin we have so corrupted things that people created after the image of God cannot be imitators of the God who worked for six days and rested on the seventh.

He then said, "But even if society does not want our work, we must still work, because we are servants of the God who so commands. How are we to do this? We can do it, as creatures placed here to till the garden, by working for a society in which all can work." He then went on to speak of a cooperative that the church was organizing in order to develop economic activity in the community and inviting his listeners to work on that project. In that invitation, he spoke not only of the need to organize —a typically modern notion— but also of the fundamental Christian hope that God would intervene. God was calling them to use the tools at their

disposal, yes; but this was an invitation to join God in the work of breaking away from the cycle of unemployment and poverty and a promise that as they joined God, God would join them.

As I continued reflecting on all this, it seemed clear that this pastor was taking the commandment quite literally. In fact, he was taking it more literally than either the fundamentalists or the liberals. He was taking it literally, but not limiting his reading of it to whatever may have been the context back when the commandment was given, nor even to what he had been told the passage said. He was taking it literally, because he was convinced that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. But he was also taking it in new directions, because he was equally convinced that the same Spirit was still leading him and his congregation. It was the Spirit who inspired both the writing and the reading, and therefore, the commandment, rather than a dead letter, was an invitation to new forms of obedience. And it was the Spirit that turned the commandment into a promise: "Six days of the week you will have labor, and on the seventh you will rest."

This way of turning the commandment into a promise is closely linked to our condition as aliens and exiles. Many of us were not born on this land and are constantly reminded of it. Others born here, and even those whose ancestors have lived here for generations, have been told repeatedly that they do not belong. For this reason, we find particular meaning in the notion of the people of God as pilgrims and exiles as it appears in Scripture —in the Hebrew Scriptures, as pilgrims from Ur, as exiles in Egypt and in Babylon, and even sometimes as aliens in their own

land; and in the New Testament, in the promise of a better city and a new citizenship, of a Reign of God even beyond the reign of Cesar.

Life in exile is often pain and despair. But among the people of God living in exile, hope overcomes pain and despair. "Six days you shall labor" is an imperative that reminds us that we are not free to do as we should, even when we wish to do so, that work is a privilege that many among us lack. And at the same time, "Six days you shall labor" is a future indicative that promises us that the day will come when, by the intervention of the Spirit of God, the commandment will become a reality.

This is the great contribution of the Latin church, and of its hearing of the Word in Spanglish, to the church at large: to remind us all that the people of God are always in-between, always in Nepantla, always a pilgrim people living in the now with an eye on the not yet, always sharing in the pain of humanity, and yet always hoping for the day when God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; working and even exploited in alien vineyards, and yet knowing that they will sit each under their own vine; living in the violence of urban ghettos, and yet always remembering that they shall turn their swords into plowshares; hiding from those who would deport them, and yet looking for the day when borders will disappear, and no one shall make them afraid.

Until that day, those who live in homeless pilgrimage remind the rest of us that the people of God is always a pilgrim people. Those who live in exile remind all of us that the people of God is always a nation in exile, always longing for a better homeland. They may speak in broken English. They may speak Spanglish, but through them, the Word of God comes to us so that, as in that story of old, we might hear, "each in our own tongue."