

The Wounded Majority: Repentance and Reform  
By José F. Morales Jr.

I often hear, within my denomination and among other church bodies, “The church is dying.” I find this quite interesting (read “racist”). For what’s behind this statement is this assumption: the “church”—the *real* church, the church that really counts—is white. My denominational and ecumenical colleagues should say, “The *white* church is dying.”

For years now, among most denominations, immigrant churches and churches of color are growing the most, while the “established”, big temple sanctuaries feel more and more like museums. The church *is* growing: the Mexican-, Brazilian-, Ghanaian-American church is growing. “The church is dying?!” Huh!

We “minorities” are apparently not part of the *real* church. According to white denominational powers, we don’t count. We are merely footnotes to their ecclesial essay. We’re not an integrative part of that essay.

But we can’t blame entirely the church for thinking in such ethnocentric, supremacist ways. The church is simply and uncritically mirroring the larger American sentiment. We people of color, we migrant peoples, we are at best footnotes to the great American essay; and at worst, we are typos that need to be deleted.

How then are we the church expected to speak out against such thinking when the church thinks the same way? How are we to denounce “white only” sentiments when whites are the only ones that count in our churches? How do we exorcise these supremacist demons when those demons are members of our Church? “If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.” (Mark 3:25 NRSV)

Before reform comes repentance: we must repent from our narrowing ethnocentric vision; repent from our painting the church with one hue; repent from our thinking that we decide who’s in and who’s out. After repentance comes reform.

The lawyer in Luke 10 is asking for the way to repentance, and Jesus gives him both repentance and reform. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” asks the lawyer. Jesus wisely takes the lawyer to the Law, “Love God... love neighbor.” Then the lawyer, like all good lawyers, looks for a loophole, “And who’s my neighbor?”

Jesus the storyteller then defines “neighbor” for the lawyer by using a Samaritan, that is, an immigrant, an “illegal”, a “footnote”. Most folks don’t realize how shockingly powerful and powerfully shocking this was back then, or how this should shock us today as Americans hopped up on hatred. Jesus used an untouchable to touch us, an unnoticeable to get us to notice. It was the untouchable Samaritan who touched the wounded, the unnoticeable who took note of suffering. Jesus concludes with a call for reform, “Go and do likewise.”

Now, with this scriptural exposition, I'm not telling my white sisters and brothers in the faith that we people of color, we migrant peoples, need them to be Good Samaritans. No! I'm telling whites that their life-denying xenophobia has made them the wounded man on the side of the road. (After all, we're not punished *for* our sins but *by* our sins.) Their ethnocentric proclivities have beat them up, and now they need a Good Samaritan—an "illegal", an immigrant—to care for them. Reform insures that the wounded majority has enough Good Samaritans around.

In this light, it can be said that advocating for immigration reform can prove to be healing for a church and nation in need of de-white supremafication. Reform and the consequent assurance of diversity within the American milieu can be liberating for a nation trapped in its own (white) skin. Fighting for reform can serve as a spiritual discipline for the white American church; as a type of prayer that rebukes the supremacist demons that possess both church and state.

Immigration Reform allows us to pray in a new way, to write a new essay. So let's get praying! Let's start writing!

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