

Prophets in the King's Sanctuary

Dr. Justo L. González



Apuntes
Vol. 1 Issue 1
January 1, 1981

Prophets in the King's Sanctuary

Justo L. González

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophecy there; but never again prophesy at Behtel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Amos 7:13

A *apuntes*, small though it may be, intends to be a serious journal of theology. But not any theology. **Our** theology. A theology which is **nuestra**, not simply because we have developed it, but because it has been born out of the painful encounter between the Word of God and our experiences and those of our people.

The very word, "apuntes," is ambiguous, and has been purposely chosen because of that ambiguity. On the one hand, it means jottings, notes, or marginal glosses. That is partly how we see ourselves. We do not deceive ourselves into believing that we are at the very heart of the theological enterprise. That enterprise reflects the structures of the society around it, and Hispanics are not by and large in the decision-making centers of that society. Hence the subtitle of our journal, "Reflections from the Hispanic Margin." We intend for the theology aired in this journal to be a marginal gloss to the dominant forms of Christian theology. And by this we mean both that it will be **on** the margin and that it will be **from** the margin.

But the word "apuntes" also means aimings. And that indicates that we do not intend simply to doodle at the margins of the theological enterprise. We are taking a bead on the very heart of theology, hoping –even against hope– that our comments on and from the margin will help the Church at large to rediscover some forgotten dimensions of the biblical message. While still at the margin, and from the perspective of our Hispanic experience, we shall take a new look at Scripture,

and at the entire theological enterprise. And we are convinced that this new look will be valuable, not only to us, but also to the Church as a whole.

Such presumptuousness has ample biblical foundation, for as we read Scripture we repeatedly see that God uses the margin to speak to the center. God did speak to Pharaoh; but God spoke to him through the exiled Moses. God spoke to the mighty Roman Empire; but that Word came out of a despised corner of a distant province.

Such was the case with Amos, the lowly shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees from barren Tekoa in the underdeveloped kingdom of Judah who crossed the border to prophesy in the richer land of Israel. (Did that make him an illegal alien?) Out of the backwoods, where sycamores were considered fruit fit for human consumption, came the shepherd. And he did not speak the words of the learned, for he knew and spoke only of locusts, and summer fruit, and plumb lines. But that was not what disturbed Amaziah. In the rich kingdom of Israel, where some slept in ivory beds and anointed themselves with the finest oils, there were many who were as poor as Amos. There were many who performed the hard and lowly tasks connected with the upkeep of life, so that the few could live in comfort. What disturbed Amaziah was that this immigrant, whose accent still rang of the southern wilderness, dared criticize what was going on in Israel. And that, not only in the small villages or quietly by the fires of the shepherds, but in Bethel, which was no less than the king's sanctuary. And so Amaziah followed a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, he sent word to King Jeroboam, accusing Amos of conspiring against him. On the other, he invited Amos to leave the country; to return to his homeland and prophesy there, where his words would spell trouble for neither Amos nor Amaziah.

Amaziah's words have a familiar ring to Hispanics. Repeatedly, when we have spoken of the social evils of this country, we have been told—sometimes openly, and sometimes subtly—to go prophesy in our own land. That is particularly puzzling for those of us whose ancestors were in this land generations before they were occupied by the United States. But in any case most of us are aware that there is a connection between such invitations to return to our poorer countries in the South and the threat which we pose to the Amaziahs and the Jeroboams of the Northern Kingdom. Things would be safer and quieter were we to go and speak our radical word down south.

For some odd reason, God has told us to speak here. And speak we must. And speak we shall.

However, that "we" does not refer primarily to those of us who write in **Apuntes**. Most of us cannot say, like Amos, that we are not professional prophets. On the contrary, we have been trained in the official "schools of prophecy," and many of us "eat our bread" as prophets. The **we** that stands in the place of Amos today is that larger community of migrant laborers, vinedressers, garment workers and janitors whose truly prophetic word those of us who write in **Apuntes** simply try to articulate. Our word may be silenced. But theirs cannot be, for their very existence is in itself a prophetic word. In the harsh deeds that one sees and the harsh words that one hears in East Harlem, God speaks an even harsher word of judgment to this Northern Kingdom. As God lives –and because God lives– a nation whose social and economic structures produce such evil cannot long remain unpunished. That is the word that we have heard. Most of us do not like it any more than Amos liked the news of the chastising of Israel by the hand of Assyria. But we have heard this word, and we must raise the cry.

This word is more radical than most of us would like. It speaks of evil and the need for reformation, not only in society at large, but also in the Church. Amaziah and Jeroboam are closely allied. That alliance has taught us to read Scripture in such a way that it does not threaten the privileges of the powerful. Quite unconsciously on the part of both teachers and students, that is what many of us learned in our "schools of prophets." At best, we learned to challenge social evil. But we did not see to what an extent that evil was reflected in our own theological formulations and ecclesiastical structures. What we have now learned, from the Word of God crying out to us out of Harlem, Chicago, Miami, Crystal City and San Joaquin, is that we must look anew at the entire fabric of Christian theology and ecclesiastical organization. We must look at it from the margin, and from that margin we must both make comments and take aim at the core of the life of the Church.

That is what "apuntes" means. And that is what **Apuntes** means to do. We realize that this is not an easy task, nor one to be undertaken lightly. What is at stake is no less than a total rethinking of the entire corpus of Christian theology. This cannot be done by any single individual, for the task is too vast. Nor can it be done within the confines of denominational

lines, for those lines often reflect concerns and experiences which are not those of the Hispanic community. For that reason we invite all who see the need for the development of a Hispanic perspective in Christian theology to join us in this undertaking, and to use **Apuntes** as their means of reflection and expression.

Resumen

Desde una perspectiva hispana, nuestra revista se propone ofrecer "apuntes" o notas marginales acerca de la vida y el pensamiento de la Iglesia. Pero esperamos que esos "apuntes" desde la periferia "apunten" al centro de esa vida y ese pensamiento. El profeta oriundo del Reino del Sur que profetiza en el santuario mismo del Rey del Norte puede servirnos de pauta en esa tarea.

APUNTES BIBLIOGRAFICOS

450 años del pueblo chicano (Albuquerque: Chicano Communications Center, 1976)

This book was prepared for the Bicentennial in 1976. But it has become an invaluable work for the study of the Chicano people. Its main impact is to impress upon us all that our life in the U.S.A. has been, is, and will continue to be a life of struggle for cultural recognition and human liberation.

In order to reflect theologically as Hispanics, we must begin with such a visual and written history of the Hispanic group of longest presence in U.S. territory (or in Occupied Mexico). The information conveyed in this book is the kind of knowledge which must inform our present and our plans for the future.

Roberto Navarro

Pastoral Care with the Poor, por Charles Kemp (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972)

La pobreza, además de ser una condición económica, es toda una situación humana que ha de entenderse en su totalidad. Viene acompañada de problemas adicionales en cuanto al trabajo, la educación, la vivienda, la salud, etc. En los EE.UU., tiene un marcado impacto en las minorías étnicas.

Este libro muestra cómo es visto el pastor en los focos de pobreza —que no es el modo en que se le ve en el resto de la sociedad. Entonces, a base de eso, muestra cuál puede ser la función pastoral en el contexto de la pobreza, y qué características y actitudes se requieren.

La cultura de la pobreza y la realidad de los pobres en nuestro mundo demandan una respuesta de la iglesia, y en particular del ministro. Puesto que muchos hispanos en los EE.UU. viven en condiciones de pobreza, este libro puede ser muy útil para los pastores hispanos.

Alejandro Lafontaine



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.