



Memory and Remembrance by: Jeffrey Bamaca

It is now more important than ever to intentionally remember and celebrate the voices and legacies of our Hispanic and Latino cultures, especially in contexts in which our histories are being suppressed and erased. As a scholar of the ancient world, as I reflect on the significance of memory and remembrance, a letter from the Roman senator, Pliny the Younger, comes to mind.

In the early second century, Pliny the Younger was traveling to Tibur. Along the Via Tiburtina, half a mile east of Rome, he spotted a monument dedicated to Marcus Antonius Pallas, a freedman and former slave of emperors Claudius and Nero. Pliny was astounded and offended, perceiving the honors as a mockery. Troubled by the rise to power of a formerly enslaved person, Pliny expressed his disbelief at the recognition of someone he considered “dirt.” Pliny’s issue was that imperial freedmen and enslaved people were viewed as obstacles to a functioning government, and their access to power, even if they were Christian freedmen, was considered grotesque. Pliny’s letter illuminates the intricate dynamics of navigating our past—histories that at times evoke repulsion but also hope.

In thinking about memory and remembrance, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul sends greetings to Christians in Caesar’s household who some scholars believe might have been enslaved Christians (4:22). Regardless, the idea of Christians in the emperor’s household (and eventually the emperor himself) would become a formational mark of power in Christian cultural history.

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A mark whose reverberations we are still feeling today. It offered a powerful cultural discourse through which Christians could construct meaning and, ultimately, project themselves imperially (Christians in Caesar's Household, 22).

For better or worse, therein lies the power of memory – it is more than a mere recording of the past but a process through which identity is formed. Hispanic Heritage Month then is an opportunity to participate in a formational process – to remember where we have come from, recognize where we find ourselves, and dream about where we can go.

In his book, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, Justo Gonzalez poignantly identifies the cultural amnesia that was present and is still prevalent today (4). This amnesia is characterized by the “forgetting” of our origins, specifically the denial of our violent histories and the suppressing of our stories of migration. Remembering then is vital because it can serve as an antidote to this amnesia. This Hispanic Heritage Month then, let us reflect honestly about our histories and think about what it means to be the Latino church today.

May this serve as an invitation to remember that we cannot engage in the task(s) of theology alone – apart from our histories or communities. In John's prologue, we read that the word became flesh and in doing so entered history, making our stories his own (1:14). Let us then courageously engage our histories and celebrate the beauty of our heritage.

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LA HISPANIDAD!**
HAPPY HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH!

