
Chapter 7

“Who do you say that I am,” Jesus or Jesse?

A Reflection on Christology and Christian Identity

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The question “Who am I?” is a common question that most of us, at some point in our lives, begin to ponder and reflect upon to define our identity, the meaning of life, our purpose in society, and other relevant aspects related to our personal goals and our place in the world. Reflecting on identity elements and aspects that define it is not a recent task. For many years philosophers and theologians alike¹ have sought to provide parameters and frameworks of reference to help us understand who we are. More recently, psychologists and counselors² also have provided means and tools for us to discover our identity. In following these parameters, most authors lead us to find our identity in our history and background as reliable sources to determine who we are and how our identity is shaped. But when it comes to the identity of marginalized social groups, this search is quite elusive, because it is difficult to trace one common historical background for a social group that has been defined by others and not by the group itself.

This process is not any different for particular individuals who are members of these groups. As James A. Banks points out,

Each individual has a total picture of self that is largely a product of the individual's interactions within his or her social environment. How a person views himself or herself is cogently influenced by significant persons within his or her social world. Often individuals who exercise power over a person's life, such as parents and teachers, are important influences on the development of an individual's self-concept.³

In the case of marginalized individuals and groups, those who exercise "power over" them in many instances define them as inferior. Marginalized social groups do share a common identity and background that pattern their identity and experiences of oppression. Generally, the social location of marginality and the identity that issues forth from it is typically one that has been given and imposed; of course, it is different from one that is self-determined. Furthermore, marginalized social groups may share some common elements, but not all the members of the group will have identical experiences; thus, they may or may not fit the given and determined parameters ascribed to them. For example, in the United States, for many the category of "Hispanics" encompasses all Spanish speakers; however, within the so-called Hispanic group, there are many diverse backgrounds and historical traditions based on countries of origin and their time in the United States—that is, first-, second-, or third-generation.

Often, the identity of marginalized groups and their understanding of their history is at odds with the way groups in power conceptualize them. In other words, the way that one group constructs its identity may be completely different and in clear opposition from the way that other or dominant power groups view them, perceive them, and define them. Those in power appear to always have a favorable and self-legitimizing reading of historical events that they claim is correct, objective, and right, while the social understanding and historical interpretation of marginalized groups are too often seen as deviant, subjective, and biased. In his book *Mañana*, Justo L. González refers to this peculiarity: "Even the name 'America' raises the question: What preposterous conceit allows the inhabitants of a single country to take for themselves the name of an entire hemisphere? What does this say about the country's view of those nations who share the hemisphere with it?"⁴ According to González, members of the dominant culture in the States have appropriated for themselves the name "America," which by so doing dismisses the claim of all the other countries in the Western Hemisphere. In fact, on occasion I introduce myself to members of dominant groups in the United States saying I was born in North America, which inspires them to quickly try to correct me. Typically, they proceed to inform me that Mexico is not part of North America. In their mind, there is only one America—the United States of America. Although some of the members of the dominant U.S. society include Canada among its definition of America, in my experience Mexico is almost always excluded from that geographic definition. It seems to me that a superior or exceptional narrative is part of the interpretive frame of reference for many members of the dominant U.S. society. And, of course, some of these dynamics are not much

different from personal narratives and the way we construct our personal and social identity.

In addition to these general social categories and dynamics, we can easily observe that members of marginalized groups see themselves as members of other subgroups as well, and often they see themselves as affiliated with other identifying factors that may not be considered predominant in their own group. Yet the dominant group would insist in placing all persons under the same label. For example, the way the term "minorities" is employed to describe all persons who are nonwhite (that is, not part of the dominant group) demonstrates how the defining discourse of a powerful majority becomes a standard view in society; indeed, those outside this standard gaze are typically lumped together as "minorities." In other words, the binaries are the powerful versus the powerless, majority versus minority, white versus people of color, and so forth.

For the above reasons, the dominant group (those in power who may or may not be the majority), intentionally and unintentionally, fails to see and understand the richness of backgrounds and important contributions that others, different from them, make to society and culture. For example, first-generation immigrants from Mexico are often viewed with a common lens by members of the dominant culture in the United States—the one-size-fits-all approach to understanding their culture and background. Although many first-generation Mexican immigrants have many identity elements in common, multiple factors also diversify them. For example, the great majority of them identify themselves as Christians, but under this category there is great diversity in their denominational affiliation, such as Catholic, Charismatic Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, pentecostal, and so forth. Because the defining discourse of dominant culture imposes labels, homogenizes strangers, and determines the standards of identity for marginalized groups, the voices, rich traditions, and valuable contributions of cultural and linguistic minority groups are overlooked.

Thus, I want to consider and explore the notion of Christian identity as defined by the dominant culture and its impact for developing an inclusive understanding of Christianity, one that invites and affirms other groups, as opposed to one that imposes and delineates. In what follows, I look at the Christian narrative and the way the dominant culture uses aspects of it to promote an agenda that favors and sanctions the ideas and practices of the dominant culture.

JESUS ACCORDING TO PETER: A CHRIST-LESS DEFINITION?

Before I explore the sociological, historical, and political practices of the dominant culture, I want to begin my analysis and exploration with Jesus' self-identity. Although I believe that the identity of Jesus presented in the Gospels is not free from the cultural and sociological interpretation of its time, the Gospel narratives give us an understanding of the identity of Jesus by discussing

the character of his ministry. I focus here on the conversation Jesus initiates by asking his followers who they think he really is. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus inquires about the nature and determining factors of his identity, simply by posing a direct question to his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?"⁵ I believe this inquiry is extremely important since Jesus himself is calling into question his identity and wants to know how he is perceived by his disciples and the community at large. We should be asking this very question, while trying to understand the meaning of Christian identity. I believe that by looking at the Markan concern to determine the identity of Jesus, a space opens up for understanding the meaning of Christian self-identity and discipleship, which may even challenge the established views of a static, exclusive, and stagnant Christ.

In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" they reply by sharing what they have heard and by telling him what people are saying about him. The collective answer was an association of Jesus with a great prophet Elijah and with John the Baptist. Although Jesus was a popular figure and people knew of him and his teachings, their perception of Jesus did not match what Jesus wanted to communicate to them in teachings and sermons. After hearing what the public said of him, the Markan Jesus turns to his closest friends, to those who have shared meals with him, those who have been with him during his teachings and preaching, those who have experienced miracles and have seen firsthand his authority and power. Certainly, the close friends of Jesus would be able to provide an accurate depiction of his identity. So, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"⁶ In the Gospel account, Peter replies, almost instantly, "You are the Christ!" For some readers, those who are quick to move to theological assumptions that favor their social location, Peter's response represents an affirmation of faith, a theological declaration, and objective claim. Readers who follow this approach can easily imagine Jesus' face with a big smile and a grin of satisfaction since one of his friends knows and has identified him as the Christ, which is a proper theological label. For them, his close friend Peter knows, understands, and firmly states the identity of Jesus.

In fact, Peter's statement seems to be a long-awaited response to Jesus; surely Jesus was pleased by the declaration. After all, this was his mission, to reveal his identity to his disciples, to his followers, and to the whole world. However, Jesus' response to Peter's declaration is puzzling to say the least. There seems to be a problem with Peter's answer, which up to this point seemed to be the correct theological statement. After Peter's reply, according to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus warned Peter and the rest of the disciples not to share this message regarding his identity with anyone.⁷ Again, this is quite a surprise, why does Jesus want to conceal his identity? Why is he trying to prevent the dissemination of his identity? Is Jesus not the Christ? Is the identity of Jesus not attached to the prophetic and royal aspects of the messianic title? Was Peter wrong in his declaration? If Jesus is not the Christ, then who and how do we define his identity?

In attempting to respond to these questions I would like to suggest taking a close look at Peter's answer and what he may have had in mind when he declared that Jesus was the Messiah. From Jesus' response in the text, one can imagine that Peter's literal answer was correct—that is, using the term "messiah" to describe Jesus—but maybe the social and political implications of the term were not the same ones that Jesus had in mind.⁸ If this was the case, perhaps Peter's own aspirations and personal agenda got in the way. Maybe Peter was defining Jesus according to his satisfaction, imposing on him a notion that, although it may have been popular and widely recognized during his time, carried a heavy dose of Peter's self-promoting purposes. If Peter, like many others during his time, thought of the Messiah as a liberating figure and as a political power broker who would bring prosperity and change to current oppressive structures, then one would easily think that those closely associated with this liberating political figure would receive special favors and would get to enjoy the benefits of a new order under a renewed leadership. Perhaps this is what Peter had in mind as he quickly responded to Jesus affirming that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Peter, a close friend who had shared many important events with Jesus, seems to miss the point by his reply to the question posed by Jesus concerning the issue of his teacher's identity. Peter projects his own set of values on Jesus in a way that could arguably be intended to seek self-promotion, power, and authority. In a way, Peter's answer is one that represents a selfish way of thinking and an egocentric worldview. Perhaps this is why Jesus demands that Peter and the rest of the disciples not share this "good" news with others. What the textual issues, interpretations, and explanations suggest is that we construct our Christian identity too often in a similar self-serving manner. We selectively construct our identity, we look for ways to affirm our history and promote our agenda, and we look for self-validating practices and for ideologies that protect our personal interests. But this self-centered approach in constructing identity is exacerbated when the person doing it claims membership in the dominant culture, which includes an interpretation that enjoys the kind of collective affirmation that promotes and insists that one's personal interpretation is valid, correct, and objective. Without a doubt, self-centeredness is a human problem, but in the conversation between Jesus and Peter, the story continues to assist us in developing our personal and Christian identity.

As the story develops, Jesus begins to disclose his future sufferings and rejection. He describes to Peter and the disciples, with strong conviction, his final destiny. And Jesus' description is distant and strikingly different from what Peter, the rest of the disciples, and the community as a whole believed the Messiah was supposed to do. Jesus discloses his self-identity as one that embraces suffering and sacrifice as essential aspects of his personhood and mission. Jesus chooses a path of self-denying and endures suffering as a way to demonstrate who he is. Harold Recinos provides a helpful insight in understanding the implications of Jesus embracing suffering:

Jesus' suffering directs us to question the meaning of the stories of women, the poor, and all people in desperate need. A Jesus who reveals God is with the lowly utters good news of change to hurting people. What is certain is that those who find solace in the image of a suffering Jesus are summoned to discover Christ's presence in the anguish of the poor and oppressed.⁹

According to Mark, the Messiah is not one seeking earthly power and popular fame, but One who gives himself for the sake of others, One who embraces a life of self-denial by placing others first, One who takes an unpopular road with all the wrong people, and One who rejects glamour, fame, and prestige. If this is Jesus, maybe this is precisely the reason that Jesus prevented Peter and the disciples from spreading Peter's definition of his identity as Messiah. In other words, Peter, the apostles, and the crowds all failed to see and understand Jesus' identity; they, like us, were looking after their own interests and self-promoting agenda.

Furthermore, after Jesus reveals his identity and shares with the disciples what it entails, Peter, with the same quickness and boldness with which he responded to Jesus' first question, immediately interjects and tries to prevent Jesus from taking the road that leads to Jerusalem—to his suffering, rejection, and death. Peter tries to persuade Jesus not to go to Jerusalem. Now, it is Jesus who quickly responds and rebukes Peter in a not-so-kind way: "Get behind me, Satan!" which seems to corroborate my interpretation of Peter's motivation. It is clear to see that Peter's agenda and the recently revealed identity of Jesus are at odds. Peter was looking for something for himself. Perhaps following Jesus was a way to receive political favors. His definition of Jesus as the Messiah had little to do with Jesus, and it was filled with egocentric and power-seeking benefits. No wonder Jesus rejects this type of thinking as one that comes from Satan, one that has human motivations as a priority rather than placing the "things of God" first.¹⁰

JESUS IS JESSE ACCORDING TO THE DOMINANT GROUP IN THE UNITED STATES: A CHRIST-LESS SOCIETY?

Now, if we take this interesting narrative in which Jesus discloses his identity by correcting Peter's confession and the crowd's perception; if we take this narrative and use it as the grounds to build the foundation of our Christian identity and faith, then we would be required to leave our assumptions and self-serving definitions aside to meet Jesus and to learn who he is. Obviously, this is quite an impossible task since Jesus (physically) is no longer with us; however, Jesus in the Gospel narratives provided guidelines of his self-identification. He not only revealed himself to his disciples and followers but Jesus also disclosed himself to others; perhaps those of us who never had the opportunity to meet Jesus in the flesh will someday encounter him spiritually and also know where to find him in the world. One narrative that helps us clearly identify Jesus is found in Matthew 25. In this text Jesus clearly identifies himself with those who thirst or are hungry, in prison, sick, naked, and strangers. In this crucial passage and

many others,¹¹ Jesus clearly identifies himself with marginalized groups, strangers, outsiders, those on the wrong side of social norms, those considered by the civil society as inferiors, and those who have no means to repay favors. This Jesus identifies with marginalized and oppressed persons, the least of society who are defined by dominant social groups in unfavorable ways, those persons who seldom have the chance to express themselves with their own voices.

What does it mean that Jesus identified himself with the marginalized? What does it mean that Jesus rejected Peter's answer? Why did Jesus prevent Peter's self-centered definition from spreading? What does it mean to be identified with Jesus Christ in a nation where many citizens consider themselves Christian and whose civil religious tradition images nationhood in divine election language? What is the role of Christians who are members of a society that sees itself the most powerful nation in the world? How should Christians in this nation construct their identity? Is it possible to reconcile the claim of Christian identity with a history of ethnic cleansing, slavery, segregation, wars of conquest, racism, and racist nationalism? We could frame these questions by suggesting a simple point: it would appear that the history of American exceptionalism would have one think that the country, like Peter, declares Jesus is the Messiah in a way that legitimates its power, purpose, and asymmetrical relations in the world, while ignoring the way Jesus claims an identity with marginality.

Many historical events, approved laws, and common practices seem to indicate that mainstream Christianity in the United States stands closer to Peter and far from the focus of Jesus' rebuttal of Peter's answer than to the question of Jesus' identity. For example, the near annihilation of Native Americans done with the approval (and often willing participation) of Christian Pietists, who had fled the British Empire in search of religious freedom, and the enslavement of Africans for centuries with the use of Scripture to maintain and justify the oppressive slave system bespeak a denial of Jesus' identity as the Messiah of good news. Although the U.S. Constitution sought to promote freedom and liberty at the time it was written, it first predicated citizenship on the exclusion of race, class, and gender. The very Constitution of the United States, said to reflect religious principles and promote individual freedom and liberty, assured a state of voicelessness for black slaves thought in early America to be not quite human—lacking humanity and equality by two-fifths!

Without a doubt, the ideology and practices of Manifest Destiny further reveal an egocentric, imperialistic, and power-seeking identity that favors dominant culture groups and is justified by their interpretations of the Christian narrative. The conquest of the West in the name of Christian evangelization and progress turned strangers encountered in the new lands into inhuman, inferior groups deserving all that came their way. Strangers were not complete, because they needed true religion, legitimate culture, Western education, and submission to the purposes of social progress as defined by dominant conquest. And of course, since the dominant group believed its way of cultural life and religion was superior to that of cultural others, encountered strangers were not

only forced to submit to the imposed vision of life. Defeated strangers had to relinquish their identity, and if they wanted to be counted, they were required to allow the dominant group to define them, label them, and locate them in inferior positions in the newly ordered society. Briefly stated, dominant groups have historically defined other groups according to their terms and without their participation;¹² they have created categories and labels that empower them to set social rules, while defining others as outsiders. Dominant classes have created and promoted laws, rules, and traditions designed to protect themselves, while leaving marginal and vulnerable people to survive on the goodwill and charity of that same dominant group.

I believe this tendency is the one that Jesus clearly refused to accept as part of his identity. In fact, it is this type of power-seeking attitude and trait that Jesus denounced as coming from Satan. Indeed, it is ironic that the dominant group in the United States claims a Christian narrative as an important and instrumental element in its identity, yet its practices, history, and interaction with marginalized groups show that its identity according to Jesus is more in tune with the practices of injustice, inequality, and the denial of life—all elements easily associated with the symbolism of Satan. Since power elites place and continue to make a power-seeking agenda and egocentric desires their ultimate concern, they continue to neglect and oppress strangers and marginalized people in society.

In the previous pages, I have attempted to provide an alternative understanding of Christian identity by connecting the history and practices of the dominant group with issues of marginality in the United States. Now I want to mention an interesting fact. Many boys from Mexico and other Latin American countries are often named "Jesús." When these men and boys find themselves in the United States, their name becomes the center of an interesting controversy. Their name, "Jesús," just like the main character of the Gospel narrative, is considered irreverent by the dominant group. The collision of these two cultural and religious naming practices results in the name "Jesús" being replaced by "Jesse"! The dominant group once again finds a way to impose the objectivity of its interpretation and erases the cultural and religious value of the name "Jesús" to maintain its sacredness. At schools and at work, many young boys and men are asked to change their identity to fit in and to adjust to their new reality, which is defined by dominant cultural values that disregard Latino/a cultural, religious, and family values. Although more deserves to be said about the social and psychological implications of changing one's name to fit in and about the conflict that the name-changing practice creates among the extended family, instead I focus on what it says about the Christian identity of the dominant group in the United States and its Christology.

When "Jesús" becomes "Jesse," it is not simply a matter of pronunciation, but is a sign of theological domination. The ideology of the dominant group behind this name-changing practice is rather easy to see: How could a Hispanic be Jesus to us, the "official" members of the one and only Christian nation? In short, it is impossible for a Hispanic to know who Jesus is; in fact, Hispanics

need to be educated in the way of the proper Christology and the orthodoxy that is only produced by the dominant group in the United States. I suspect that for many, this chapter, and perhaps this whole book, would be considered not as a Christology but rather as an exploration of sociological and cultural practices among Hispanics. But why is this work not considered as integral in the development of Christology? Because "Jesús" has been forced to become Jesse! Because for many in the dominant group there is only one definition of Jesus, one Christology, and one Christian identity, and all others are considered deviant. Precisely for this reason, it is extremely important to consider the way that Jesus identifies himself and the way Jesus reacts to Peter when his definition of Jesus carried Peter's own interest and agenda.

Has the dominant group, by claiming to have an exclusive right to define "Jesús," missed Christ altogether? Can a nation that prints "in God we trust" on its currency claim to know Jesus, while building a wall to keep so-called illegal aliens out? If the dominant group trusts in God, why doesn't it ask God how to treat strangers? If its trust is in God and its Christian identity defined by Jesus, why does the dominant group trust its own agenda of political advancement and imposition of identity? I believe self-centered Christians and the many members of the dominant group have for years produced a theology that affirms the norm, the standard of power, and for this reason the group's positions neglect and deny other voices. The interpretations of the dominant group did not (and do not today) allow other interpretive perspectives, due to their imposing ways of promoting their cultural/theological interpretations on all communities as right teaching or orthodox understanding. Those who claim to have the right theology and the proper interpretation of Christology, like Peter, may have arrived at the proper terms and nomenclature, but according to Jesus they have missed his true identity. Their words may be right, but their practices are Christ-less.

A CALL TO CONVERSION (CHRISTIAN IDENTITY): FROM A STATIC TO A DYNAMIC/FLUID CHRISTOLOGY

I began describing aspects that form and shape identity. Now I pause to reflect on my personal cultural identity and experiences. I grew up in a town bordering Mexico and the United States; hence, my formative years were shaped by the clash of cultures occurring on a daily basis along the border. Once on vacation with my parents visiting southern states in Mexico, I realized that many of the things I considered part of my Mexican cultural heritage were not considered Mexican for persons who lived in the southern regions of Mexico. Similarly, when I traveled north into the territory of the United States, what I believed were American identity traits were not viewed as truly American. I gradually realized that my identity was a product of two cultures; moreover, I became aware that both in Mexico and the United States a dominant discourse defined authentic cultural identity, while any deviation from this pure identity was

rejected. Later, thinking about these experiences and reflecting on them theologically, I realized that social groups develop cultural rules for conserving their history and traditions, even at the expense of others. The need for security and stability leads groups to define themselves, and often the process of developing this definition comes by the *via negativa*—by asserting that the group is not like others. In other words, groups create an us-versus-them dichotomy. And of course, when two or more groups collide (cultural wars), the definition of the group in power, the dominant group, always prevails. This dynamic is described by Zygmunt Bauman as follows:

With the *pluralism* of rules (and our times are the times of pluralism) the moral choices (and the moral conscience left in their wake) appear to us intrinsically and irreparably *ambivalent*. Ours are the times of *strongly felt ambiguity*. These times offer us freedom of choice never before enjoyed, but also cast us into the state of uncertainty never before so agonizing. We yearn for guidance we can trust and rely upon, so that some of the haunting responsibility for our choices could be lifted from our shoulders. But the authorities we may entrust are all contested, and none seems to be powerful enough to give us the degree of reassurance we seek. In the end we trust no authority, at least, we trust none fully, and none for long; we cannot help being suspicious about the claim to infallibility. This is the most acute and prominent practical aspect of what is justly described as the “postmodern moral crisis.”¹³

Bauman acknowledges the ambivalence between groups, in our case cultural, that claim that their reality and expressions are objective. He also notes that by such acknowledgment, groups in power create the conditions of suspicion the moment they impose their definition of a legitimate structured reality. Bauman offers a tentative solution to this social dynamic, which requires a new moral understanding for social relationship. He argues,

Reciprocity is the vital attribute morality does not possess—but should possess if one wished it to be universalizable. The duty of one partner is not the other partner's right; neither does the duty of one partner demand an equivalent duty on the side of the other. A stance does not wait to become moral until it has been reciprocated and thus turned into an ingredient of dual or multiple *relationship*. Nor is it the expectation, however vague, of being reciprocated that makes it moral. The contrary, rather, is the case: it is equanimity with which the subject views the question of repayment, reward, or equal standard that renders him or her, for as long as such equanimity lasts, a moral subject.¹⁴

What Bauman is describing is an equal relationship between groups and individuals who embrace conflicting claims. Bauman is calling for a reciprocal relationship among equals in which the exchange of ideas and cultural assumptions are dealt with within a framework of “equanimity.” In light of Bauman's discussion and the concern to understand Christian identity and Christology, let us examine the idea of conversion, which assumes a shift in religious identity.

The word “conversion” comes from the Latin word *conversio*, which employs the same Latin root for the Spanish word *conversión* (and the English word “conversation”). These two words—“conversion” and “conversation”—seem to be at odds; the first one denotes a change in one's identity, a change in one's worldview, while the second one denotes an exchange of ideas and words in a social interaction setting. Rather than focusing on semantic differences, I want to suggest that the word “conversion” be understood by the idea of conversation. In other words, conversion can be understood as a social interaction, an exchange of ideas, but in an environment of “reciprocity” and “equanimity” that insists that the interlocutors are dialogue partners capable of changing each other.

Conversion as dialogue assumes that a conversation is under way among equals; hence a dominant group is required to admit and recognize its history, social location, and privileged position, while the nondominant groups engage in dialogue predicated on their equality of status with the dominant group. In conversation of this kind, all voices have value and are heard, and all persons' view of social reality is acknowledged for its validity and contribution to social understanding. Ada María Isasi-Díaz describes this dynamic in reference to theological work:

A multiplicity of theologies calls for true dialogue, what I call engagement. Engagement requires a relationship of empathy as well as commitment to a joint search. Of course this means that there can be no real dialogue, no real engagement between Latino/Hispanic Theologians and others, unless they take time to know us and the struggle of Latinas and Latinos and we take time to know them and the struggles of their people. In a way this kind of engagement would change radically the face of theology and theological studies since the point of reference and what everyone is expected to know and to espouse would no longer be “mainline” theology or official theology. Real engagement among theologians and theologians would mean that a multiplicity of methods would be examined, and that theological praxis of different communities of struggle would become intrinsic to theological education. Engagement among different theologies would prevent us from falling into total relativity and individualism since all engagement is, in a sense, a calling to accountability.¹⁵

According to Isasi-Díaz, engagement or conversion as a conversation among equals requires the kind of empathetic intentionality that is conducive to mutual understanding. In terms of Christian identity and Christology, the dominant group has a tendency to define Jesus and develop a Christology that reflects an ethnocentric and self-centered perspective, which seems to be contrary to Jesus' self-identification with the poor, the least of these, the marginalized, and the stranger. Thus, based on my biblical interpretation, in the United States, the dominant group (primarily among mainline denominations) looks at Hispanics from their self-centered perspective, preventing Latinas/as from expressing themselves and imposing on them their values as part of the “true” Christian faith. By doing so, like Peter, the dominant group misses completely the identity of Jesus and rejects the essence of who Christ is.

Latino/a interpretations of Jesus promise to transform members of the dominant society by way of conversation on the meaning of Christian identity. Indeed, the dialogue that may develop between the Latino/a margins and members of the dominant society can be transformative. Those who control power in church and society may find themselves more inclined to rethink Christology from the perspective of the margins, rather than self-centeredness. In other words, the ongoing conversion of Christian identity I would argue is found in reciprocal and equal relationships with the stranger, the alien, and the poor (many of whom are Hispanics in the United States) and by entering in a personal and social engagement with them. Conversion as conversation leads us away from the static Christology established by the powerful. By engaging in conversation with those at the margins, dominant culture groups may discover that Christ is already present in strangers, aliens, and foreigners, inviting all to create a new condition for living.

NOTES

1. See Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
2. See Rupert Brown and Dora Capozza, eds., *Social Identity Processes: Trends in Theory and Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).
3. James A. Banks, *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 78.
4. Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 37.
5. Mark 8:27.
6. Mark 8:29.
7. Several New Testament scholars and Markan scholars in particular have provided different interpretations of Jesus' demand for silence after Peter's declaration of Jesus as Messiah. "Peter called Jesus the Christ, and Mark introduces Jesus in the same terms but the word never appears on Jesus' lips. In fact, he responded to Peter's confession by telling his followers not to tell anyone about this conversation. It is a surprising command that has been explained in various ways. For Wrede it was the church's rather clumsy apology for its proclamation of a messiah who never claimed to be the Messiah (1971: 218–21). The Jesus Seminar, which casts Jesus as a wandering Jewish cynic, finds corroboration in the word Messiah not appearing on Jesus' lips (Funk et al. 1993: 75). Aune, on the other hand, identifies a sound reason for Jesus' silence on the subject. In the first century eschatological movements it was considered God's right to designate who the Messiah would be, rather than a title that someone might claim (1969: 31). . . . The language of Mark 8:30 places Jesus' messianic identity among the various secrecy motives in the Gospel" (Ronald J. Kernaghan, *Mark* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007], 158).
8. Marie Noonan Sabin explains that the term "messiah" had many variant meanings, but "[t]he one constant in all these variations was that a 'messiah,' as God's agent, was always imagined as victorious in his work. When Mark shows Peter rebuking Jesus for telling them he would die, he is showing Peter reacting on the basis of this assumption of victory and triumph. By the same

taken, when Mark shows Jesus rebuking Peter, he is indicating that Jesus was rebuking him for this assumption" (Marie Noonan Sabin, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005], 75).

9. Harold J. Recinos, *Who Comes in the Name of the Lord: Jesus at the Margins* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 49.
10. Mark 8:33.
11. See, for example, Mark 9:30–35; 10:32–37; and 10:42–45.
12. James A. Banks, addressing these concerns, writes, "The social, cultural, and ethnic variables that influence how historians perceive their data result in historical bias. A historian's view of the past is influenced by his or her culture, personal biases, purposes for writing, availability of data, and the times in which he or she lives and writes. Because the historian can never totally reconstruct past events and is unable to report all the data he or she uncovers about particular events, he or she must use some criteria to determine what aspects of an event to report. The historian must also interpret historical events. History cannot be written without presenting interpretations and points of view" (*Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*, 80–81).
13. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 4–5.
14. *Ibid.*, 56.
15. Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, "Strangers No Longer," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 373.