

Seminary 2050: Global pressures, Latino realities

by [Nancy Bedford](#) in the [February 21, 2006](#) issue

By 2050 Latinos and Latinas will constitute at least one fourth of the U.S. population. They are increasingly part of Protestant as well as Roman Catholic churches, though they often live in this country without legal status. Protestant Latino/Latina churches (*iglesias evangélicas*) all over this country are discovering that their need to provide graduate-level theological education to their pastorally gifted leaders is blocked by rules that exclude “illegal aliens” from higher education.

How might a woman who has made her way across the border in response to the needs of the “care economy” (jobs in child care, etc.) answer God’s call to pastoral ministry? How might theological education in the future make space for the great crowd of witnesses in similar situations? Given globalization and its discontents—asymmetries of power, climate change, armed conflicts and patterns of migration—in what *spaces* are we to envision theological education in the future? The Syro-Phoenician woman was gifted enough to convince Jesus of a theological point so crucial that it was recorded in scripture, even if her name was not; if she lived among us today, would she have space in which to pursue higher theological education?

In order to respond faithfully to such questions, we need to imagine theological education in discontinuity with current models. But some continuity with present-day theological education at its best is also required if the present-day daughters and sons of the Syro-Phoenician woman are to have the benefit of the kind of theological education that can offer learned engagement with a variety of texts, and critical conversation on the practices of faith. Such engagement is needed in order to form and inform the healthy, nimble theologies faithful to the Spirit of Jesus that our churches so sorely need.

In the face of shifts and displacements, of market pressures and global grabs for power, theological education will require the creation of a kind of space that is likely

neither justifiable nor tenable according to the naked logic of economic rationality. The dynamics of capitalist globalization and the politics of neocolonialism are likely to continue to shape the global landscape in ways that will affect theological education deeply. What does it mean to confess Jesus as the “bread of life” in a world racked by hunger and an unjust distribution of resources? In the face of a global water shortage that is already beginning to loom, what might it mean to say, with the Gospel of John, that those who believe in Jesus “will never be thirsty”?

The imaginative ability to put at the center of the theological task the questions emerging from the “interstices” and the “margins”—and the persons whose very lives pose those questions, migrants not least—will be crucial for making spaces for lively, transformative theological education in the future.