THOMAS HARWOOD:
PROPHET AND PRECURSOR OF MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY

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Thomas Harwood is a buried treasure. For centuries the American southwest has been a place of searching for material wealth and riches. This expanse of mountain, mesa, plain, and canyon abounds with tales and traditions of lost gold mines and forgotten buried treasure. But there is more than material wealth to be discovered. There is spiritual wealth to be found. To rediscover the forgotten riches of Thomas Harwood is to find a treasure that shines and shimmers with meaning for our time. Over years of ministry in the southwest, Harwood’s mind and personality were able to grow and stretch, able to transcend much of the racial prejudice, the paternalism, and the ethnocentrism that infected his time, and create a mindset and methods of multicultural ministry that are apropos to the task of Christian ministry in the coming century. A treasured future can be discovered buried in a treasured past. This forgotten but timeless man, prophet and precursor of multicultural ministry, imparts much needed purpose and pattern for the future.

Thomas Harwood fought for the future of his nation without slavery in the Civil War. After the war he was admitted on trial to the Northwest Wisconsin Conference in 1865. He was persuaded by his friend, the snowshoe priest of Colorado, Rev. John Dyer, to leave a comfortable appointment in Wisconsin and come to the New Mexico Territory in 1869 to take charge of a diverse field of ministry that included Native Americans, Hispanics, African-American Buffalo soldiers, Jews, and Anglo-Americans from both the North and the South. In this environment, he was extremely effective.

A personality characteristic that made Harwood’s ministry effective was a relentless passion to spread the gospel and further the cause of Christ among all people regardless of ethnic background. A good portion of the people of the American southwest in the last half of the 19th century and the early 20th century were migratory, relocating to areas of profitable economic activity. Consequently, Harwood was constantly on the move, ministering to people where they were. For 38 years from 1869 to 1907, he was on the road traveling by foot, horseback, buggy, stagecoach, and later train, preaching in homes, on rooftops, town plazas, military posts, Indian Reservations, in recently built adobe chapels, and establishing schools and organizing churches primarily in New Mexico, but also in the states of Texas, Arizona, California, and in Old Mexico. A typical circuit riding tour would take him 1,400 miles and last for a period of 10–12 weeks. In a single year
he would travel 15,000 miles or more. With rugged health and tenacity of purpose, Harwood maintained this rigorous pattern late into life. At age 70, as presiding Elder of the El Paso District, he made a 44 day trip around his district traveling as far as California. The trip entailed 2,100 miles by rail, 200 miles by wagon and stagecoach, 50 miles on foot, 28 sermons preached and 60 homes visits made.  

"60 homes visits made!" Even as the head of the Spanish Mission and what we call today a district superintendent, he retained a practice he started at the very beginning—persistent visitation in homes. When Harwood began his circuit riding in 1869, he often camped alone when traveling in uninhabited areas. In settled areas he could always find a home to stay because of the unwritten law of hospitality throughout the territory. By lodging in homes of Hispanics, Anglos, and the Pueblos of Native Americans he was able to learn the mores and customs of the territory. He stayed in homes of Jews and became aware of how their presence had enriched the southwest. He spent one interesting night with a group of hobos along the railroad tracks across the river from La Joya, keeping warm around a fire of burning railroad ties.

Harwood did not stay in luxury. The home frequently was a one room adobe house with a large family where he would be shown his bed in one corner of the room. It piqued Harwood that most travelers took advantage of this hospitality and gave no compensation. He paid for his lodging and meals which was always a surprise to his hosts. If the opportunity arose, he asked the family for permission to pray and preach and suggested that the family invite their neighbors for a religious service.

It took Harwood longer to feel comfortable visiting Apaches on the reservations. He came to New Mexico with fear generated from reading reports of Apache atrocities in eastern newspapers. In New Mexico he knew first hand of murders committed by roving Apaches. On the other hand, he felt sympathy because he knew that several of the Apache wars were caused by the stupidity and callousness of the federal government. Thus his feelings were ambivalent. As the years progressed, he surmounted his bias and fear and was able to do effective work at Dulce on the Jicarilla Apache reservation in northern New Mexico. Some of the people were baptized by Harwood and joined the Methodist Episcopal church. After his wife Emily’s death in 1902, Harwood traveled to Dulce to conduct the quarterly conference. In the meeting was a leader by the name of Cruz Apache who had known and appreciated Emily. In previous years, Harwood had preached in Cruz Apache’s tent on the reservation and had known his wife who had recently died. When the two grieving men met, they embraced,

shared their pain, and comforted one another with words of hope about seeing their wives again. Both had come a long way.2

Harwood did not have to come a long way to minister to African-Americans. As a former chaplain in the Union army during the Civil War,3 he naturally took every opportunity to preach at the post chapels of the various military forts scattered throughout New Mexico. On these occasions, the congregation usually consisted of a mixed group of African-Americans, or as they were called Buffalo Soldiers,4 and White soldiers (integrated worship rarely happening elsewhere in the United States).5 During the last half of the 19th century, there were 16 military posts in; the territory of New Mexico. Some 3,300 to 3,800 Buffalo Soldiers were stationed at eleven of these posts at one time or another.6 Harwood was heartwarmed by the enthusiastic participation of the black soldiers but often disappointed by the sporadic attendance of the white officers and their families.

Harwood’s perpetual traveling allowed him to indulge another personality trait—a streak of intrepid curiosity. It was a quality he acquired as a child: “From early life I had practiced the plan of trying to find out what anything and everything might be that I couldn’t understand.”7 As previously mentioned, he learned a great deal by lodging in the homes of Hispanics, Native Americans, or mixed families (e.g., Anglo husband, Hispanic wife). At one of the pueblos along the Rio Grande (either San Domingo or San Felipe), he was curious about the age of the pueblo and had a lengthy conversation with one of the tribal elders. Later in his journal, he lamented the loss of so much Native American history. An interesting theological dialogue took place on Harwood’s first trip to the Navajo Reservation. Three Navajo medicine men expounded on Navajo theology with Harwood and his companions interrupting at intervals to ask questions. When Harwood’s curiosity was satisfied, he explained the basics of Christian theology and fielded questions from the Navajos.

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2Kellogg, 83–84.
3Harwood enlisted in the 25th Wisconsin Infantry in 1862. The men of the unit petitioned for him to be their chaplain. He served under generals Grant, Sherman, Howard and Logan. In 1864, he was wounded in the shoulder.
4Native Americans gave this respectful appellation to Black soldiers because their hair resembled the fur of the buffalo and because their fighting spirit made them a worthy opponent.
5After the Civil War the trend was for strict segregation in the Protestant churches of the South. This tendency spread to the rest of the nation. But in many forts in the American West, integration remained the norm in the post chapels. See Martin E. Marty, Protestantism in the United States: Righteous Empire (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1986), Chapter 15.
6Monroe Lee Billington, New Mexico Buffalo Soldiers, 1866–1900, (Niwot, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1991), XVI.
7Thomas Harwood, History of New Mexico Spanish and English Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church From 1850 to 1910, in Decades (Albuquerque: El Abogado Press, 1908, 1910), 2:139.
In the spring of 1872, he became curious about the *Penitentes* of New Mexico. He had heard rumors about this secret society but he wanted to see for himself. On Good Friday, he saddled his horse and rode to the *Morada* (meeting place). As he rode up, he was waved to stay away. He noticed a man in the crowd who had worked for him. He beckoned him to come over. He spoke, "José, go and tell your captain that I am a friend to your people, and I would like to see what you do." The answer came back, "*Esta Bueno,*" (It's OK). As he entered the building, he asked José to promise that he would not allow him to be harmed since he was the only Anglo and Protestant present. The door was shut and locked. Inside there was total silence, total darkness except for one dim candle. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness he began to make out shapes of nearly naked men beating themselves with whips made out of cactus. For half an hour all was silent except for the dull thud of whips striking the backs of bleeding *Penitentes*. A haunting, mournful song, sung by everyone present, finally broke the silence and shortly the service was over. Harwood was first out of the building. As he rode away he felt disdain, but the more he thought, the more the disdain turned into a begrudging appreciation for the religious earnestness he had witnessed.

At the same time a new appreciation was growing within his life—a deep appreciation for the Spanish language. Shortly after arriving in New Mexico, Harwood was told by a cynical Anglo that his entire missionary venture was a mistake, "Now the Methodist Church has sent you here as a missionary who can't speak a word of Spanish and even if you could it would do the Mexican people no good, for they are Roman Catholic and you can never make anything more of them. You might just go down and preach to those telegraph poles."

Harwood was not deterred, he would learn the language of the telegraph poles.

His first experience with Spanish occurred late one afternoon as he was trying to get back to his home base at Elizabethtown before dark. He met an Hispanic on the mountain trail and asked directions to Elizabethtown, but the man spoke no English and Harwood no Spanish. He decided to backtrack, stay with a friend, and ask him to teach him how to ask directions in Spanish. After supper, in front of a blazing fireplace, Mr. Williams taught him to say, "*Es este el camino a Elizabethtown?*" (Is this the road to Elizabeth-town?) He was so enthralled about being able to use some Spanish that he used the phrase 20 times the next day to ask directions. He commenced to learn and practice his Spanish by keeping his diary mostly in Spanish, thus combining practice both in writing and speaking. Years later

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8 A secret Roman Catholic brotherhood that observed rites related to the Passion of Christ that include fasting, flagellation, reenactment of scenes from the Passion, and the singing of religious songs.


rereading his diary, he laughed at these early efforts and how he tortured the language, but he was not afraid to make mistakes in trying to learn.\textsuperscript{11}

He sat down and wrote his first sermon in Spanish in early 1871, and later had it critiqued by a Roman Catholic politician who was a Spanish scholar. He began to preach in both English and Spanish and conduct bilingual services. Music was very important in frontier religion. Consequently, Harwood began to translate English hymns into Spanish. His increasing mastery of Spanish not only facilitated his ministry to Hispanics, but also enhanced his ministry to Native Americans who often were fluent in Spanish.

In March 1880 the annual mission conference was held at Peralta and the conference voted to try an experiment. A bilingual newspaper would be published and, in spite of all his other duties, Harwood was elected editor and publisher. The first edition of \textit{El Abogado Cristiano} (The Christian Advocate) was produced at Socorro in May 1880 and contained articles both about the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking work as well as news about things happening in the territory. The newspaper continued until 1901, with both Emily and Thomas alternating as editors, and both Hispanic and Anglo preachers contributing articles. As with all his ministry, an underlying purpose of the paper was reconciliation between Hispanics and Anglos. It is ironic that in December 1880, a murder occurred on the steps of Harwood’s church that polarized the Anglos and Hispanics of Socorro and ignited a vigilante movement,\textsuperscript{12} but Harwood defied the incipient trend of antagonism that was spreading through many parts of the territory. Harwood remained a force for tolerance and reconciliation in New Mexico to the end of his life.

During the same year he began the newspaper, he petitioned General Conference meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio to establish a Spanish Department of publications and produce Methodist literature in Spanish for New Mexico and other areas such as Puerto Rico, Cuba, and South America that held potential for Methodist work. But the words of the prophet were not heeded—he was too far ahead of his time.

Harwood’s petition was ahead of its time because his empathy was ahead of its time. Harwood developed a rare visionary empathy: the capacity to empathize with the sufferings and oppression of others and visualize possibilities that could be realized beyond the adversity. The first sermon he

\textsuperscript{11}Harwood’s method of learning Spanish was an effective and modern approach because he combined immersion in the spoken language with writing in his journal. These two elements reinforced one another because Spanish is a consistently phonetic language. Consistent with Protestant emphasis upon literacy for Bible reading, Harwood encouraged Spanish-speakers to become literate so they could read the scriptures in their own language.

wrote in Spanish was entitled, “Bearing Burdens and Finding Rest in Jesus, the World’s Great Burden Bearer.” The sermon was rooted in his sensitivity to the hardships faced by New Mexico Hispanics which kept many of them mired in poverty. For instance, he understood from his reading of New Mexico history that one reason New Mexico was behind other states and territories in literacy, education, economic development, and agricultural methods was because New Mexico was isolated for centuries from the rest of the world by Spanish colonial policy.13

He was able to transcend his antagonism toward Apaches and understand that the foolish refusal of the government to allow the Mimbres and Warm Springs Apaches to retain their reservation on their ancestral land at Ojo Caliente (southwest of Socorro, New Mexico) and force them to move to the hated San Carlos reservation in Arizona, was the underlying cause for the last Apache War began in 1877, first led by Victorio and later by Geronimo.14

In educational work Harwood worked in conjunction with the Women’s Home Missionary Society. The members of this society did not share his understanding of the people they were trying to educate. The society, in 1902, instituted a policy in the Albuquerque Girls’ School that Hispanic girls cold not attend a church that worshiped in Spanish. Harwood was outraged by this ruling because it was a slap in the face of the people of his Spanish mission. In his report, that same year, as Superintendent of the New Mexico Spanish Mission he wrote, “It makes our preachers and people feel bad because it shows a depreciation of them and their work; and it looks to them like an effort to alienate the children from their own Mexican people.”15

Harwood’s identification in this incident was with his Hispanic preachers. But how did Harwood come to develop Hispanic preachers? Very early in his ministry he realized that to bring well-educated Anglos from the East to New Mexico and ask them quickly to learn Spanish, the customs of the people, and gain enough trust to become effective in ministry, was too much to expect. But empathizing with Hispanics, he could visualize their potential to minister, with proper training, to their own people. Harwood knew that the most effective means to reach people was to travel to where the people were and visit from home to home. He concluded the local people could do this best:

I believe the natives of the country are the men for the work. They would certainly make great itinerants so far as travel is concerned. They are expert riders on

13Minutes of the New Mexico Spanish Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1892–1914, (Library Division of the General Commission on Archives and History, “Report of the Superintendent of the New Mexico Spanish Mission to the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Las Vegas, New Mexico, October 9–13, 1902”), 34.
14Harwood, History of New Mexico Spanish and English Missions, 2:119–120.
15Minutes of the New Mexico Spanish Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1892–1914, (1902), 32.
horseback and exceedingly swift on foot. They have been known frequently to travel on foot 100 miles in 24 hours... The Catholic Church so far as I can learn, has no Mexican priests. She depends wholly upon an imported ministry, mostly from France. The Mexican people don't like it. I believe that good young men of their own nationality would be far more efficient for this country... If we had the means to educate them.16

Harwood did find the means to educate and train his indigenous clergy. He first used the mission schools, then Albuquerque college, and finally the Albuquerque Boys' Industrial School—all of which he either founded or helped to establish. Over his ministry he recruited and trained 84 Hispanic preachers and their effectiveness was quite evident. In 1906 he reported the Spanish Mission with 2,063 members and 34 churches. The mission had 5 districts and 3 Hispanic presiding elders.17

He was successful in recruiting Hispanic clergy and ministering to a diversity of people because of his cutting edge sense of equality. In an environment where the norm was to see minorities as inferior, he treated every person and every group with respect and equality. He grew into an attitude of linguistic equality. As he became more proficient in Spanish, he began to hold many of his worship services in English and Spanish. The first annual meeting of the New Mexico Mission was held at Peralta in 1876 with almost an equal number of Hispanic and Anglo clergy in attendance. The meeting was conducted bilingually. In later years, when the Spanish Mission had separated from the English Mission, he realized that as long as the Spanish Mission remained a mission rather than an annual conference with equal voting rights in the denomination, his Hispanic preachers would remain second-class citizens in the church. He believed it was taxation without representation. The mission had the requisite number of members to become a conference. Harwood tried to persuade the bishop to organize them into an annual conference but the bishop refused to grant them equality giving as reason the preposterous excuse that there was not sufficient "esprit de corps" within the mission.18 For the same reasons, Harwood agitated tirelessly for statehood for New Mexico, realizing that a main reason for delayed statehood was prejudice against the predominance of Hispanics in the territory. His sense of equality was wide-ranging, progressive and visionary. In _El Abogado Cristiano_ he wrote that there were three important things that the General Conference of 1880 failed to do:

- It did not elect a colored Bishop.
- It did not provide for the ordination of Women.
- It did not provide for the publication of Methodist Literature in Spanish.19

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19 Harwood, 1:326–327.
A strength of Methodism is its emphasis upon equality. Harwood embodied this strength. He and his wife, Emily, also incarnated another strong element of Methodism in their southwest work—education. When the Harwoods, both with backgrounds in education, arrived in the territory, a public school system was nonexistent and the illiteracy rate was the highest of any state or territory in the United States. Of people over 10 years of age, 73% could not read, 78% could not write. The local people were more enthusiastic about having a school than having a church, so the Harwoods first established a day school in a donated adobe chicken coop. Out of this initial school work they later developed a Sunday school and preaching services. This was a method that they used repeatedly in the years to come. The educational work was a value in and of itself, but it also provided a doorway into the religious work.

In subsequent years, the Harwoods established mission schools throughout the New Mexico Territory.\textsuperscript{20} The Harwoods believed in high standards and this was reflected in the excellence of the education in the mission schools. They also believed in the value of the native Hispanics retaining their Spanish language and, thus, education was bilingual.\textsuperscript{21} These qualities plus the sparseness of education in the territory made their schools attractive to a variety of people as indicated by Thomas Harwood in his description of their school built at Tiptonville:

The school opened early in the fall in the new building. It was a sight worth seeing to see children, Mexican, American and mixed, from all directions, coming over the prairies, down the canyons, over the hills, some on burros, some on carts, some on Mexican ponies, some in buggies, and of course some on foot. We had about 60 school boys and girls.\textsuperscript{22}

The education of girls was generally neglected in New Mexico. The Harwoods responded to this need and, going against the grain of common opinion that women were not worth educating, made a concerted effort to fully include females in their educational work. It is in relation to the education of girls that Thomas Harwood also rejected the dominant rationale of

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\item \textsuperscript{20}It is the contention of the Harwoods and other protestants that the mission schools helped prepare the way for a public school system in New Mexico. One specific way the Harwoods' mission schools set a precedent for public schools was their inclusiveness. Girls and boys, catholics and protestants, Hispanic, Anglo, and mixed race children were all in attendance at the mission schools. This precedent countered the bias against educating girls and boys together (even the early public schools established in the 1870s did not admit females), and the attempt in later years to establish segregated schools in New Mexico.
\item \textsuperscript{21}In 1891, the New Mexico legislature passed a bill mandating that all public schools be non-sectarian and be taught only in English. This action was part of a larger trend to de-emphasize the use and teaching of Spanish in the territory. The Harwoods, tenacious in their belief in the advantage of knowing both English and Spanish, swam against the current and continued to teach bilingually in their schools. See Porter A. Stratton, \textit{The Territorial Press of New Mexico 1834–1912} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), Chapter V.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Harwood, \textit{History of Spanish and English Missions}, 1:127.
\end{itemize}
Thomas Harwood
demeaning and culture destroying assimilation as the purpose of education among minority groups:

The policy of the school should not be as some Americans seem to think, to educate these young (Hispanic) girls simply to make good servants in American families; neither to educate them out of their own nationality as some others seem to think; neither to deprecate their own Mexican people; but to educate them for usefulness among their own people.²³

In its historical context, this is an amazing statement. In his philosophy of educating minority students, in some respects, Harwood is ahead of our time! Hispanics are not to be stripped of their language and culture, but are to be respected, affirmed and built upon, so they can be trained to be leaders to elevate their own people and consequently the entire territory of New Mexico. He affirmed the potential of Hispanic girls to be much more than maids in Anglo homes. They can be equal leaders with boys in improving the community. In essence, what occurred in these Harwood schools, and in all of Harwood’s work, was a creative and dynamic interaction of Hispanic and Anglo cultures. The best elements of each were shared in a way that enriched and enhanced both cultures.²⁴

One can only imagine how history might have been different if Harwood’s philosophy of education would have been applied in schools of the period among Native Americans where the goal was total assimilation and destruction of cultural identity. Unfortunately, Thomas Harwood’s involvement with Native American education was less than with Hispanic education. In 1890, he and two other Methodist ministers made a missionary reconnaissance of the Navajo reservation to select sites for schools and missions. In subsequent years The Missionary Society and The Woman’s Home Missionary Society established schools on the Navajo reservation and the Jicarilla Apache Reservation. Busy as superintendent of the Spanish Mission, Harwood gave support and encouragement as time and energy allowed.

Addressing educational needs also served as a unifying principle among the people of his diverse ministry. Harwood focused his ministry upon those needs and elements that were integrating forces in his work, elements such as education, preaching, visitation, and pastoral care. Early in his ministry he encountered families from the South ranching in northern New Mexico. As a veteran of the Union Army, he quickly learned to avoid

²³Minutes of the New Mexico Spanish Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1892–1914, (1902), 32.
²⁴An example of this was the adoption of the Hispanic “Abrazo” (embrace) by Harwood. Raised in a culture that did (and still does) discourage expression of emotion by males, he was befuddled when Hispanic women greeted him with an embrace. He learned to accept this as an expression, of honest affection and began using the “abrazo” with other preachers including Anglo clergy. See Harwood, History of New Mexico Spanish and English Missions, 2:9 & 34.
divisive conversations about the war and politics and to concentrate on meeting the religious needs of the people through preaching and pastoral care.25

After his death in 1916, Harwood’s vision grew cold, dim, and dead. However, Thomas Harwood comes to us out of the pages of a buried legacy and a forgotten history as a precursor of multicultural ministry, utilizing personality traits and methods that were far ahead of their time. The words describing his life and work are not part of sentences lying dead in obscure books, but live, glitter, and glow with wisdom and inspiration.

The treasure awaits full uncovering.26

25In this strategy of maintaining unity amidst diversity, Harwood was in essence following the political precedent of his former commander in chief in the Union Army, Abraham Lincoln. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Lincoln faced the challenge of holding together the discordant elements of the new Republican Party. Lincoln latched onto an issue of general agreement, the danger of the spread of slavery, and used it as an integrating force to hold his coalition together and deflected attention away from the disintegrating forces. This masterful strategy enabled Lincoln to keep his party unified, win an election with it, and with it produce victory in war. See Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition (New York: Random House, 1948), 150.

26The intent of this article is not to idealize Thomas Harwood beyond the facts. No individual is totally able to surmount the limitations of a particular period of history. Residues of prejudice, paternalism, and ethnocentrism remained with Harwood to the end. But his rare quality was the “extent” to which he was able to transcend the attitudinal narrowness of his time.