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Being known for good fruit

You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit...., Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:16-17, 20)

Growing up in Argentina within a pastoral home, sermons and Bible verses were part of my every-day life. I was always particularly struck by the simplicity and beauty of Jesus's words, which my adolescent mind saw as having a certain clarity. Paul's teachings and other New Testament writers were more complex, so they were a bit more distant.

This particular Matthew passage was clear and has almost become a framework for understanding others. This section of the Sermon on the Mount provides a framework for how to judge false prophets; Jesus's words apply broadly, the "proof is in the pudding," or as we say in Argentina, "la verdad de la milanesa."

In December of last year, I received an unexpected message from a friend, Dr. Edwin Hernandez. He told me that Dr. Justo Gonzalez had contacted him for help in finding someone who could do some work with archives in Princeton. And since I am a student in Princeton Theological Seminary, Dr. Hernandez felt I was a good match. I was eager to undertake the task, and now I am working under the auspices of the Justo and Catherine Gonzalez Resource Center.

For many years, I have respected the work of Dr. Gonzalez but never had the chance to meet him. As a new professor of church history at Instituto Biblico Rio De la Plata in Buenos Aires, I was surprised at the lack of quality works in Spanish until I discovered *Historia del Pensamiento Cristiano* and *Introducción a la Historia de la Iglesia*. These books served as phenomenal materials for students unfamiliar with the story of Christianity. And now I had a chance to work with the author!

While in Atlanta for training, I stayed at the Gonzalezes' home. I was shown overwhelming hospitality, and over the next few days, I spent hours talking with them about everything from patristic theology to baseball! At their dinner table, we laughed together as we shared stories from all aspects of our lives. I listened attentively to Justo and Catherine as not only experts in church history but also as those who had served their communities with care. Clearly, they exemplified this passage from Matthew.

Since that trip to Atlanta, whenever I mention the names "Justo and Catherine" and tell people that I am working with some of their papers, people's faces light up, and they exclaim what wonderful people the Gonzalezes are



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and how much they respect them. Within academia, like all other social or professional spaces, one's reputation and character precede one. Jesus put it simply, "A good tree bears good fruit." Justo and Catherine have indeed borne "good fruit."

One of the things that I took away with me from my time with them was that, above and beyond their wonderful works that are housed at the Gonzalez Center, they have been activists and faithful to living a gospel-centered life. As someone who is early in my academic career, I am personally challenged not only to develop a reputation that my peers respect from my academic work, but more importantly, that who I am and how I treat others "bear good fruits."

– Stephen Di Trolio

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