

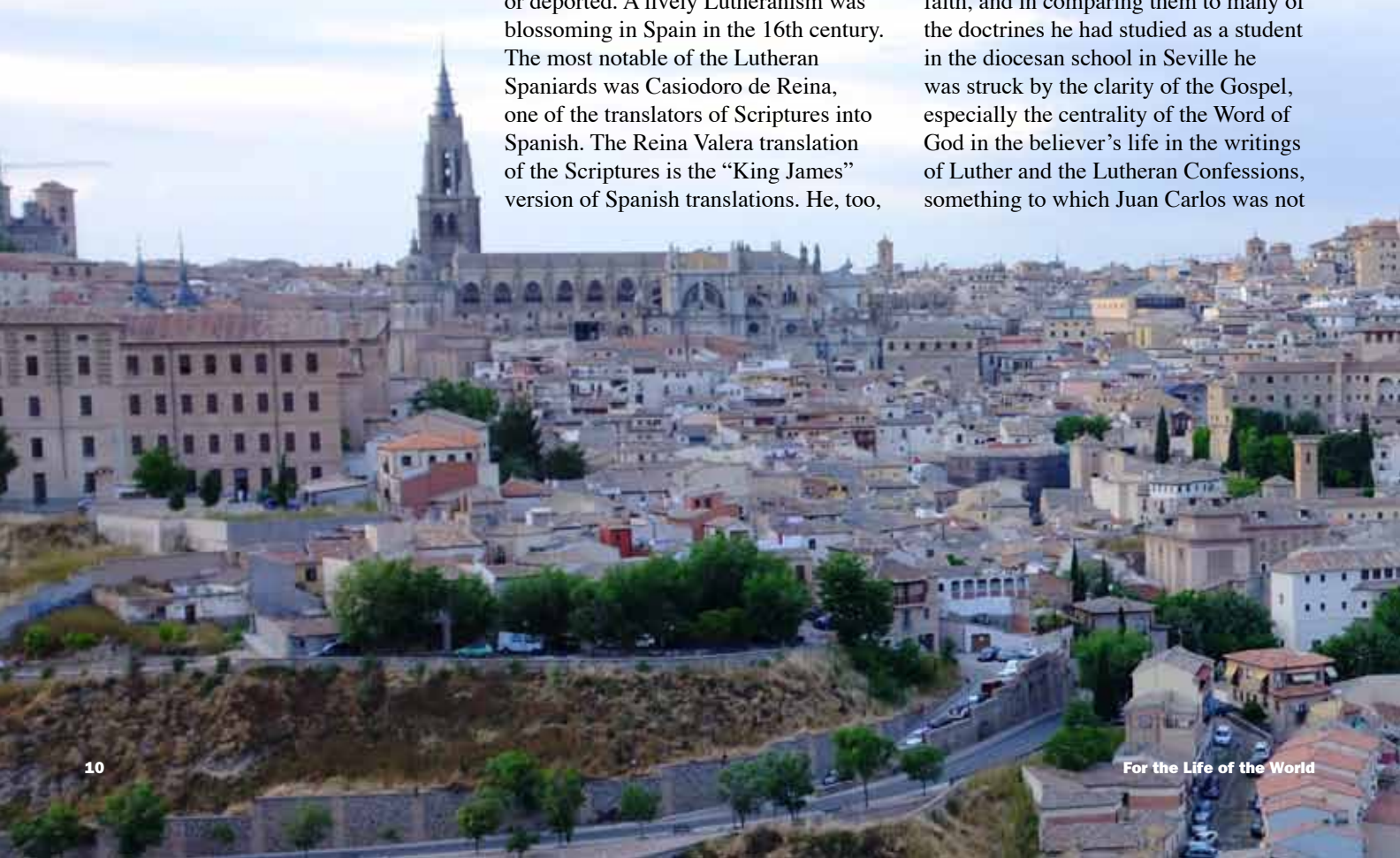
Reemergence of the Lutheran Church in

From the Giralda, the magnificent Moorish tower standing alongside the Cathedral in Seville, you can see the large open plaza that fronted Seville's town hall. In the middle of that plaza Lutherans were brought to trial before the Inquisition in September 1559 and December 1560. Many of these Lutherans were either martyred outside the city or exiled. More Lutherans were martyred in Valladolid in May and October of 1559, essentially wiping out the presence of Lutheranism in Spain.

That is, until the year 2000 when the *Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina* (IELA) sent the Rev. Marcos Berndt to begin mission work in Spain that led to the founding of the *Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Española*, the first mission in Spain since the 16th century when all the Lutherans were either martyred or deported. A lively Lutheranism was blossoming in Spain in the 16th century. The most notable of the Lutheran Spaniards was Casiodoro de Reina, one of the translators of Scriptures into Spanish. The Reina Valera translation of the Scriptures is the "King James" version of Spanish translations. He, too,

was forced to leave Spain, and his image was burned in Seville in April of 1562.¹

Two of the first Spaniards Pastor Berndt reached out to were Juan Carlos, his wife Ana and their three children in Seville. In late 2000, during his theological studies, Juan Carlos discovered the doctrines of the Lutheran faith, and in comparing them to many of the doctrines he had studied as a student in the diocesan school in Seville he was struck by the clarity of the Gospel, especially the centrality of the Word of God in the believer's life in the writings of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, something to which Juan Carlos was not



Spain

By Arthur A. Just Jr.

accustomed to in his theological studies.

During all of 2001, Juan Carlos was rethinking what formed the basis for a spiritual life in Christ. He began reading, and teaching, Luther's *Small Catechism* in his local parish and was completely captivated by its teaching of the faith. In November of that year, he discovered an internet webpage of the Lutheran Spanish Mission and was again impressed by the clarity of their doctrines. As a result of this webpage, Pastor Berndt visited him and his wife Ana in Seville. Three months later, Pastor Berndt and I visited Juan Carlos and Ana in their home, and in May of 2002, I introduced the Rev. Walter Ralli

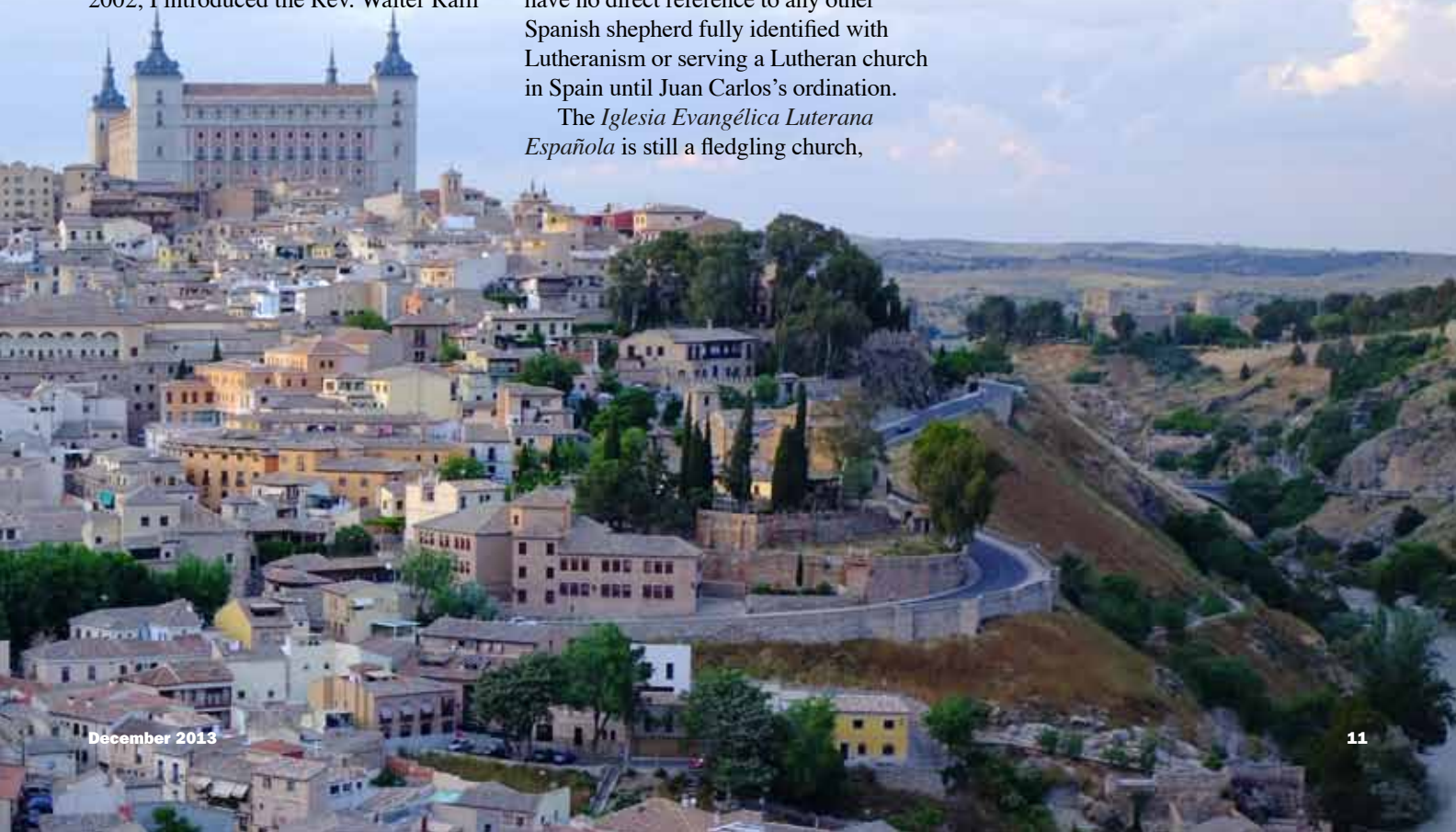
to him as he was taking over the mission in Spain as the second Argentinian missionary. A few years later the Lutheran church in Argentina would send another missionary to Spain, the Rev. Gustavo Lavia, who continues to serve in the capital city of Madrid.

Little did Juan Carlos realize back in 2002, when Pastor Berndt and I were speaking to him and his family about Lutheranism, that on October 10, 2010, at the tenth anniversary celebration of the *Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Española* (IELE), Juan Carlos would become the first Lutheran pastor in Spain since Casiodoro de Reina. To date we have no direct reference to any other Spanish shepherd fully identified with Lutheranism or serving a Lutheran church in Spain until Juan Carlos's ordination.

The *Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Española* is still a fledgling church,



Dr. Just with Rev. Juan Carlos, his wife Ana and their children





Dr. Just, Rev. Gustavo Lavia and Rev. Scott Bruzek with the Lutheran saints in Cartagena, Spain



Santiago Keinbaum, M.Div. student at CTS, with his wife Alejandra, and children Maria, Santi and Salva

servicing in a country that is as diverse as it is united. Its first congregation in the northern province of Asturias was founded on the confession of faith of two faithful Lutheran Spaniards, Javier Sanchez and Virginia, and their children. Their faithful witness was the foundation for the church in Spain, and they continue to confess the Lutheran faith today.

Spain is a country of many different “autonomous communities,” all with a unique character, communities like Madrid, Asturias, Andalusia, Catalonia, Valencia and Murcia. In each of these communities there is a Lutheran presence, with the liveliest congregation in Seville where Juan Carlos serves as pastor. He also works full time as an Aeronautical technician for Airbus in Seville, where he has served on a team that builds Airbus planes since the 1980s. He receives no financial compensation for the work he does as an ordained Lutheran pastor. He is a worker-priest and will continue to be so until his retirement from Airbus. This is the same for all the Spaniards who will serve as pastors in the Lutheran church in Spain such as José Luis in Valencia, Antonio in Cartagena and Santiago Keinbaum in Barcelona, who is currently studying at our seminary to become a Lutheran pastor.

Even though the vast majority of Spaniards identify themselves as Roman Catholic, Spain has become secularized

like the rest of Europe. Spaniards may participate in the liturgical rites during the feasts and festivals of the church, but during the week they are not outwardly religious. Like many in our country, they don’t live out their faith and embody Christ in their day-to-day life. Spaniards are family oriented, living very social lives with friends and family. Every evening in every town and city in Spain the streets are filled with families who socialize in the bars, enjoying good food and good wine. Juan Carlos told me that missionaries to Spain from Argentina and the United States should have big families and be willing to meet people, not in their homes but in the bars, where animated conversations take place over politics and religion and every manner of topic.

Since the economic downturn, Spain has been hit hard by unemployment, especially among the youth. Right now is a perfect time for the people of Spain to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and to receive mercy from a Lutheran mission that is able to speak with clarity about Gospel to Spaniards broken by the vagaries of life.

The challenge of the Lutheran mission in Spain is to enter this Roman Catholic, secularized world, a world now challenged by a loss of economic health. Spaniards are sophisticated, educated people who respond well to Lutheran theology, especially the clarity of the

Lutheran Confessions in proclaiming the Gospel through a systematic theology that is biblical and catholic. As Roman Catholics with a rich liturgical tradition, they are also attracted to the rich liturgical heritage of the Lutheran church. Many of them are searching for what Lutheranism has to offer—a liturgical church that is “Christ-centered and biblically-based, confessionally Lutheran and evangelically active.”

Pray for Juan Carlos and Gustavo, the two Lutheran pastors in Spain, for José Luis, Antonio and Santiago who are studying to be pastors, and for laypeople like Javier Sanchez and Virginia, who confess the Lutheran faith in a country where Lutheranism has finally returned after a 450 year absence. Pray for the Lutheran church in Argentina that provides leadership for the Lutheran church in Spain, and for our own Synod that makes the mission possible through the generosity of her members. 📖

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1. See Raymond Rosales, *Casiodoro de Reina, Patriarca del Protestantismo Hispano* by CPH for a full history.