

Robert Chao Romero. *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity*. IVP Academic, 2020. 248 pages. \$20.99

In *Brown Church*, Robert Chao Romero, a Chinese-Latino American historian and immigration lawyer, explores the history and theology of the Brown Church. The Brown Church is identified as a “prophetic ecclesial community of Latinos/as” which has resisted the religious, socio-economic, and political injustice in Latin America and the United States over the centuries (11). He discovers influential Christian leaders who have represented the Brown Church for the past five hundred years in his effort to present the interdependent relationship between the spiritual formation and societal transformation in pursuit of a holistic gospel and the “beloved community.”

The book starts with the author’s advocacy of a new cultural identity of young Mexican Americans, so-called, Chicana/o identity. For him, Chicana/o identity comprises three components: “(a) pride in the dual indigenous and Spanish cultural heritage of Mexican Americans; (b) recognition of the historical structural and systematic racism; (c) commitment to a lifestyle of social justice” (30-31). That said, Chicana/o Christians are called to serve as agents who pursue both spiritual growth and socio-political liberation.

In Chapters 2 and 3, the author depicts the historical figures of the Brown Church who carried out prophetic resistance against Spanish colonial theologies of conquest and dehumanization. For instance, he showcases, Bartolomé de las Casas’ prophetic writings—a central inspiration in the development of Liberation Theology in Latin America later—intentionally disputed the Spanish Colonists’ racist legacy and their cultural deficit approach toward Latin Americans. Juana Inés de la Cruz’s prophetic writings challenged patriarchy and machismo in colonial new Spain. She was the first *mujerista* (feminist) theologian of the Brown Church. The author also introduces *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as the Brown Church’s symbol of faith, identity, female empowerment, and cultural liberation (70).

In Chapter 4, he unmasks the western Christian theology of Manifest Destiny, which used to vindicate the unjust US-Mexico war as well as cultural genocide and spiritual violence toward the Brown Church. In the next two chapters, he recounts how Cesar Chavez, the Latino/a civil rights icon of the 1960s practiced faith-rooted activism and how Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador’s pastoral life and sacrifice revitalized Latin American liberation theology in the 1960s through 1980s. In the last two chapters, he explains the hallmarks of recent social justice theologies of US Latinas/os, such as the preferential option for the poor, *mujerista* (woman) theology, Latino/a decolonial biblical interpretation, and Latino/a Pentecostal and evangelical theology. In general, Latino/a theology that emerged in dialogue with their cultures, histories, and people’s experience, Romero avers, has been a critical source of Brown people’s liberation from coloniality of the Western Christian belief system and related spiritual-psychological wounds imprinted on the psyche of Latin America (48).

Noticeable benefits of this publication include, first, the known and unknown historical facts recounted that lead to uncovering misconceptions and prejudices about Latinos/as prevalent in North American social context and media. Next, the Brown Church’s constructive response to the suffering Latinos/as clearly warns against any biblical and theological attempts to validate oppression and dehumanization of the Brown people and all other marginalized racial groups. This book once again reminds us of the calling of all churches to stand on the side of the truth and to speak up against the dominant colonial powers, including their theological prejudices and distortions. Accordingly, the author wisely promotes one of the key postcolonial theological

values; namely, the truth, care, love and justice of God found and encountered in many diverse cultures and their colorful witnesses with equal weight, far beyond the dominant culture's monopolized views on them. This is the biblical, historical, and multi-cultured God in their most genuine sense, Romero passionately propagates, which our world urgently needs to discover today.

As an additional strength of this book, the author explores historical facts of the Brown Church and Latinos/as' historical suffering not only from his Latino theological point of view but also by good use of his expert legal knowledge. Yet, as a minor weakness of the book, some Asian American readers might expect to see more creative Brown (Latino/a) theology that may incorporate Asian cultural heritages into it as the author identifies himself as a Chinese-Latino American theologian.

Although this book is written in an easy-to-understand manner that anyone can read, the weight of its contents is by no means light. This volume may become a must-read soon for scholars, regardless of their disciplines, who want to exchange deep theological thoughts with Latinos/as theology and their practice of faith. In particular, since the author invites all people—whites and all colored people—to commit to a lifestyle of social justice for racial reconciliation, this book seems to be set to become another invaluable companion to Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy and vision—"The Beloved Community."

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