

Miguel A. De La Torre. *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2021. 224 pages. \$24.99.

Beginning with a reference to critiques of his previous conversation-generating book, *Burying White Privilege*, Miguel A. De La Torre opens *Decolonizing Christianity* with equally potent conversation-generating content. The response to questions such as “What is the solution?” or “Tell us what to do!” is, as De La Torre observes soberly, “not complicated.” De La Torre uses the parable found in Matthew 25:31-46 as a framework for this response. Building on the insight from critical race theory that “racism is not a belief but complicity with an ideology,” the author argues that decolonizing solutions are clear as daylight and points to the need to focus on unmasking complicities of ordinary people such as “clergy, Boy Scouts, nursing mothers, and cookie-baking grandmas” (84). Identifying and redressing the evil of such “banal people” is a central part of the De La Torre’s proposed solution. As De La Torre puts it in his characteristic manner, “While people of color can better plan to protect themselves from those who blatantly express race-based stereotypes, they find it more difficult and dangerous to safeguard against courteous allies” (98). Giving flesh to this insight through various examples and arguments is a significant contribution of the book.

Employing a framework rooted in realities of racialized socio-economic systems is another strength of the book. For instance, De La Torre argues rightly that “there is money to be made in destroying the lives of Brown children” (79). In other words, while detaining children in camps and separating them from their parents is certainly a matter of the heart, the author roots such moral concerns in the brutal yet real matrix of racialized socio-economic systems that are built to profit from the destruction of lives and communities. Readers’ attention is drawn to both these pressing concerns.

A theologically creative and ethically potent portion of the book is the analyses and description of the figure of the “antichrist” as one that arises in each generation. By circumventing the periodization of the antichrist as just this one malevolent figure in a particular time, De La Torre argues that “every generation has its Nero, its antichrist” (117). It is this cyclic understanding of the antichrist that allows De La Torre to make the observation that “Trump, at the end of the day, is irrelevant” (217). The author thus calls readers’ attention to the logics of destruction, hatred, and domination that permeate every generation. Those readers looking for examples will appreciate De La Torre’s description of other “mass-murdering presidents” of the United States. The brief but specific descriptions of those figures are enough to disabuse any naiveté about what exactly each of those figures said and did. For instance, De La Torre details the horrific death of about 75,000 Mayan people as a result of the Reagan presidency. Genocidal impulses and actions, however, as the author argues, continue to play out against Indigenous people in our own time. Periodization of history—that is, among other things, relegating particular evils to particular time periods in way that allows one to mistakenly claim progress or regress, therefore, is to be eschewed. This is a significant reminder to theologians and ethicists of all stripes.

De La Torre makes several astute observations that allow readers to ask corresponding timely questions. For instance, he notes how “mass killing for the purpose of detonating a race war” have increased so much that national security agencies have described such instances of violence as a “national threat with a priority greater than foreign terrorism” (171). And yet, readers only need to ask how much the defense and military budget is and to what ends the funds are allocated in order to get a sense of where the perceived priority lies. A strength of the book,

therefore, is not only in raising pertinent questions but also creating the conditions for readers to ask similar ones. This reviewer, for example, gasped while reading about how “even today, one of the top terms used to search the internet for supremacist material is ‘RaHoWa’—Racial Holy War” (175) because of the identifiable connection between racism and religion.

For those wondering how he describes “badass believers,” De La Torre has provocative proposals. In an age characterized by strategic postures, he calls for “spiritual correctness” rather than “political correctness.” In other places, the author calls for “withhold[ing] forgiveness” and “acts of jodiendo—acts that f*ck with the social structures responsible for oppression” (187). Curious readers will find plenty of material that unpacks these provocative proposals in accessible language that does not compromise rigorous analysis.

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