

ROBERT CHAO ROMERO

BROWN CHURCH

FIVE CENTURIES OF LATINA/O SOCIAL
JUSTICE, THEOLOGY, AND IDENTITY

STUDY GUIDE

This resource was compiled by a group of Brown Church leaders known as Young Líderes (AETH, La Asociación para La Educación Teológica Hispana), a ministry dedicated to creating young *líderes*, or leaders, to transform the church of today for the hope of *Mañana*.

Sarah Raquel Gautier
Juliany González Nieves
Guesnerth Josué Perea
Itzel Reyes Soto
Heidi Elizabeth Lepe



Introduction

1. This chapter introduces us to the concept of Brown as a way to understand Latinidad. How do the definitions of Brown, Brown Church, and Brown Theology inform a positive reframing of Christianity? Can this reframing influence Latino Christians only, or does it help with understanding Christianity overall?
2. Early in this chapter, Dr. Chao Romero introduces the concept of *spiritual borderlands*. How does this concept help us understand the tension felt by Brown Christian students? Have you ever felt like you have been in your own spiritual borderlands?
3. The Brown Church has a long history, though the term is new. Why is it important to explore the history of the Brown Church? How can discussing often-ignored histories help us understand more about ourselves? Why is it important to remember and recover our past?
4. Dr. Chao Romero writes, "When God chose to dwell among us, to take on human flesh, and to make our suffering his own, he chose to be *Brown*" (p. 16). What does it mean that when God chose to dwell among us, God did so in the form of a Brown person? How can that understanding enrich our own relationship with God?
5. What is your understanding of social justice and the mission of the church?

Chapter 1: **El Plan Espiritual de Galilee**

1. This chapter makes a contrast between the Galileans of Jesus' day and Chicana/os in the United States. How does Dr. Chao Romero compare and contrast both groups? Have you seen any of these parallels in your communities?
2. Dr. Chao Romero writes that "to change the system, Jesus had to start with those who were excluded from the system" (p. 37). How did Jesus' ministry work to change the system? How do we identify those who are excluded in our current systems in order to change those systems?
3. Using New Testament analogies, Dr. Chao Romero defines three common approaches to oppressive systems: compromise (Sadducees), assimilation (Herodians), and withdrawal (Essenes). How does he compare those postures to the ones currently assumed by the Latina/o community? What have been your personal experiences with these approaches?
4. Dr. Chao Romero states, "Although the good news of Jesus is for the whole family, it goes first to the poor and all those who are marginalized," and he affirms that God has a "preferential option" for the disenfranchised. What does it look like for us to love everyone equally, while displaying special concern for the vulnerable?
5. In this chapter, Dr. Chao Romero introduces the idea of *misión integral* as defined by Padilla and Escobar. How does *misión integral* help articulate the different needs of the body of Christ? How does *misión integral* tend to the different needs of our communities?



Chapter 2:

Las Casas, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and the Birth of the Brown Church

- 1.** Dr. Chao Romero mentions Paolo Freire's concept of *concientización*, the "experience of becoming awakened to the reality of injustice in the world." How do you think one becomes *concientizada/o*? Can you recall a specific moment in your life when you gained *concientización* about a specific issue? What were your initial feelings? Were any of your life patterns altered as a result of this *concientización*?
- 2.** How does Dr. Chao Romero complicate Bartolomé De Las Casas even though he calls him the "father of the Brown Church"? Is it possible to acknowledge the contributions of historical figures despite their flaws?
- 3.** According to Dr. Chao Romero, "The Laws of Burgos gave birth to legal racism in the Americas." What were some of the characteristics of such laws, as mentioned in this chapter? Can you think of any contemporary laws that perpetuate racism? How can grouping diverse peoples together facilitate racism?
- 4.** Dr. Chao Romero makes it a point to highlight that *El Requerimiento* legally codified imperialism in Latin America. How did *El Requerimiento* wrongly interpret Scripture? Did that make the church complicit in imperialist structures, especially in Latin America? Does that in any way inform the way the church approaches evangelistic endeavors today?
- 5.** When discussing La Virgen de Guadalupe, Dr. Chao Romero states, "La Virgen points us to Christ, and she has been a powerful symbol of the fact that God loves the indigenous people of Mexico and is their protector" (p. 70). What has been your understanding of La Virgen de Guadalupe? How might you relate to La Virgen as a manifestation of God's love for indigenous Christians?

Chapter 3:

Multicultural Voices of Colonial Resistance

- 1.** Dr. Chao Romero mentions that idolatry lies at the foundation of the caste system. How does idolatry conflate Christianity and the caste system? Have you seen Christianity conflated with other evils in the world?
- 2.** Compare and contrast Garcilaso de la Vega and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. How were their visions of indigenous autonomy similar?
- 3.** Dr. Chao Romero asserts that Sor Juana challenged Christological thoughts of leading male theologians. How did her story challenge the church to think of women as equal? Can you think of a person of faith and/or movement who defies the church today in similar ways?
- 4.** Why has the church traditionally viewed interdisciplinarity as a threat to Christianity? What do you think about studying other disciplines alongside theology?
- 5.** How do modern-day Brown Christians wrestle with detangling their faith in Jesus from colonial Christianity?



Chapter 4:

Padre Antonio José Martínez, the U.S.-Mexico War, and the Birth of “Brown”

- 1.** Dr. Chao Romero mentions that Manifest Destiny formed the backbone of US civil religion. How does Manifest Destiny distort the gospel? How do we still see this expressed in today's church?
- 2.** How did the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo create “Brown”? How did Latina/os, particularly of Mexican descent, acquire a liminal space in US society?
- 3.** How did Padre Martinez re-instill some of the practices that better connected the church with its Mexican roots?
- 4.** As you learn about the policies mentioned in this chapter, how do you see them impacting you or those around you?

Chapter 5:

The Spiritual Praxis of César Chávez

- 1.** Dr. Chao Romero affirms that in the Mexican American and greater Latino community, our *abuelitas* (grandmothers) and *madrecitas* (mothers) are often our best theologians, using the term “Abuelita Theology.” These powerful women are the key figures in our spiritual formation and hold the torch to initiate and invite us into a life of profound, living faith. How did Abuelita Theology influence the life of César Chávez from his early years to his time leading the United Farmworkers movement? How have you seen Abuelita Theology influence your own life or the lives of others?
- 2.** Dr. Chao Romero mentions the “radical uniqueness” of the United Farmworkers movement, which was a “creative fusion of popular Mexican Catholicism, traditional Catholic social teachings, and Alinsky-based community organizing methods” (pp. 129-30). What spiritual practices rooted Chávez and the United Farmworkers movement? What spiritual practices already root or can root your activism?
- 3.** Toward the end of Chávez’s journey in activism, we see a change in which his principles that were once faith-rooted became self-centered. What two central principles of biblical teaching did Chávez ignore? How is our work in justice compromised when we ignore these principles, and how can we build a foundation to sustain the work of faith and activism?
- 4.** Although Chávez came from a Catholic background, he partnered with the greater body of Christ (Pentecostal community and Protestant California Migrant Ministry) to extend the kingdom work in social justice. Is there a local organization or church you can partner with to carry out justice work in your community today? What’s one step you can take to partner with that local organization or church?
- 5.** Dr. Chao Romero presents us with Chávez’s redefinition of the Christian church and the church’s responsibility in the work of social justice. How would Chávez describe the role of activism for the church? How might your faith community respond to Chávez’s understanding? What does activism mean and look like for you?



Chapter 6:

Social Justice Theologies of Latin America

- 1.** After Catholic bishops from Latin America gathered at the conference of Medellín in 1968, the Liberation Theology movement “was launched as a pastoral response to the socioeconomic injustice and violent political repression” throughout Latin America (p. 143). Describe the three central themes of Liberation Theology. How do these themes resonate with you and your faith community’s understanding of God?
- 2.** In this chapter, the acronym BCC is presented to the reader. What does BCC stand for, and what was its mission/goal in the local church communities of Latin America? What two structural levels additionally complimented BCC? How can a ministry in your church form a similar model?
- 3.** In this chapter, Dr. Chao Romero identifies three “limited Christologies.” Name and describe them. What makes each of these a “limited” Christology? In what ways have you experienced these limited Christologies?
- 4.** During the 1960s and ‘70s, Latin American evangelical theology began to shift in response to the unrest throughout Latin America. The decolonization of faith led to the framework and theology of “misión integral.” What is misión integral? What distinguishes the Protestant evangelical practice of misión integral from the Catholic practice of Liberation Theology?
- 5.** From a biblical context, to what did liberation theologians parallel the suffering of the poor of Latin America? How does God’s liberation bring life? How can this liberation bring life to our social issues today in the United States? What does liberation mean to your community?

Chapter 7:

Liberation Theology in Practice

- 1.** Dr. Chao Romero opens the chapter by saying, “No testimonio better captures the spirit of Liberation Theology than that of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador” (p. 163). In your own words, describe the testimonio of Oscar Romero. What caused his *conscientización*? What was Archbishop Romero’s first act of prophetic witness after this moment, and how did it challenge the socioeconomic divide of El Salvador?
- 2.** Archbishop Romero believed that the poor should guide the church in justice and should be the leaders of their own spiritual and social liberation. What roles do the poor play in current movements for justice in our contexts? How can we reimagine our spaces and communities in a way that will have the poor lead?
- 3.** Archbishop Romero uses the language of “force of love” and “violence of love” to describe the work of Christ and the church. How do you understand these concepts within Archbishop Romero’s message? How do we apply these concepts to the work of the church today? What does the “force of love” and the “violence of love” look like in your context?
- 4.** How did Archbishop Romero use the biblical truth of the image of Christ and Christ as Liberator to preach a God of justice and salvation to the rural poor of El Salvador? In what ways was his preaching distinguished from a narrow and hyperindividualistic gospel that falls short of being good news to the poor?



- 5.** What was so symbolic about Archbishop Romero's biblical reading of John 12:23-26 on March 24, 1980? In what way did this reading encourage us to follow the model of Christ, his body and blood?
- 6.** For Archbishop Romero, who is the source of liberation? How did Archbishop Romero understand human agency in the process of liberation? How does his perspective challenge current dialogues about social justice? How does Archbishop Romero inspire you to the work of justice today?

Chapter 8: **Recent Social Justice Theologies of U.S. Latinas/os**

- 1.** How would you describe the concept of *teología en conjunto* or collaborative communal theology? How have you seen this theological approach in your own life and your local church context?
- 2.** This chapter introduces how to read the Bible from a Latina/o perspective.
 - a.** Latino theologian Justo González introduced the concept of reading the Bible with "Hispanic eyes." What does this mean, and why is it important to recognize the role of our ethnic culture and experience in biblical interpretation?
 - b.** Dr. Chao Romero also introduces the term "militant reading," coined by Gustavo Gutiérrez. How does "a militant reading" of Scripture view and approach the Bible? How would your reading of the Bible change if you embraced a militant reading?
- 3.** Dr. Chao Romero speaks about how "Latina theologians have extended the principle of God's preferential option for the marginalized to women" (p. 186).
 - a.** What does "mujerista theology" mean? What is the role of "lo cotidiano" within this theological framework?
 - b.** What triple emphasis is characteristic of Latina evangélica theology? What is the relationship between Latina evangélica theology and mujerista theology?
 - c.** What contributions have women theologians made to the understanding of the Holy Spirit?
- 4.** Pentecostal Latina/o theology is also introduced in this chapter.
 - a.** How does speaking in tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit lead individuals to multicultural communities, proclamation of good news to the poor, and the enactment of justice for all who are oppressed? What Pentecostal theological imaginations can we use in our communities to further faith-rooted justice work?
 - b.** It comes as no surprise that pneumatology and eschatology play a central role in US Latina/o Pentecostal social ethics. How do these two doctrines shape the ethics of the believer? How does your understanding of the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of God influence your ethics?
 - c.** Dr. Chao Romero writes about "the colonial wound" in Latin America that is perpetuated by three main misconceptions. Name and briefly describe each of them. Have you seen these misconceptions at work in your faith community? How does the Holy Spirit play an active role in healing our faith community from these misconceptions?



Conclusion

- 1.** What is Dr. Chao Romero's call to action for the Brown Church? How can we affirm and celebrate the Brown Church in our local church?

- 2.** How does Dr. Chao Romero correlate the Latina/o community to the Israelites in the Exodus narrative? Do you agree or disagree with this comparison, and why? In what ways have you seen current faith leaders rise up to challenge the oppression of the empire today in the same spirit of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron two thousand years ago?

- 3.** What does Dr. Chao Romero mean when he says, "*Está subiendo La Raza*"? What steps can we take to become a beloved community and no longer remain divided as the Brown Church?

- 4.** How can we find healing in Jesus in the midst of our spiritual borderlands as we face colonial wounds? What is the Spirit-led process that prevents us from engaging in a "cheap grace" reconciliation in the presence of these wounds?

- 5.** Dr. Chao Romero states that "as Brown Christians, we claim a social identity" that encompasses multiple essential aspects of who we are (p. 214). What are the nine tenets of a "Brown Christian" identity? Which of these nine tenets have you neglected in your life?

