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


BROWN CHURCH



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# EL PLAN ESPIRITUAL DE GALILEE



**E**L PLAN ESPIRITUAL de Aztlán is the historic manifesto of the Chicana/o movement. First promulgated in 1969 during the height of the civil rights era, it declares:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal “gringo” invasion of our territories, *we*, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, *declare* that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny. . . .

Once we are committed to the idea and philosophy of El Plan de Aztlán, we can only conclude that social, economic, cultural, and political independence is the only road to total liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism. Our struggle then must be for the control of our barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, our economy, our culture, and our political life.<sup>1</sup>

El Plan was revolutionary because it articulated a bold, new “Chicano” social identity that recognized the flagrant history of racism against Mexicans in the United States and sounded a clarion call to social justice activism. Chicanas and Chicanos understood that the United States had seized half of Mexico’s territory in 1848 as part of what even Abraham

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<sup>1</sup>El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán was adopted by the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado, in March 1969. “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” MECha of Central Washington University, accessed September 18, 2018, [www.cwu.edu/~mecha/documents/plan\\_de\\_aztlan.pdf](http://www.cwu.edu/~mecha/documents/plan_de_aztlan.pdf).

Lincoln had called an unjust war. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the US-Mexico War, granted erstwhile Mexicans the rights of US citizens in theory, but denied these rights in practice through legislative and judicial chicanery. Chicanas/os also knew that Mexicans and other Latinas/os had been segregated in housing, education, and public spaces during the era of Jim Crow, and that the Méndez, Bernal, and López families fought these injustices in the courts and won.<sup>2</sup> Chicanas/os were also familiar with so-called Americanization programs that sought to erase Latina/o culture and force assimilation, as well as with having their mouths taped and their hands slapped with rulers for speaking Spanish in public schools. More than that, they lived the dismal reality of socioeconomic and political marginalization. The median income of a Mexican American family in the 1960s was 62 percent of the general population. One-third of all Mexican American families lived below the federal poverty line (\$3,000/year). Four-fifths were concentrated in unskilled or semiskilled jobs, and one in three of this number was employed in agriculture. The vast majority of Chicanas and Chicanos attended segregated schools. Seventy-five percent of students dropped out before high school graduation. In 1968, only one Mexican American served in the United States Senate and three in the House of Representatives. Not a single Mexican American was elected to the California state legislature.<sup>3</sup>

Armed with an understanding of this history and the consciousness of their lived realities, young Mexican Americans created a new, politicized cultural identity that they called Chicano. As reflected in *El Plan* and the famous poem “I Am Joaquin,”<sup>4</sup> Chicana/o identity comprised three main components: (1) pride in the dual indigenous and Spanish cultural heritage of Mexican Americans; (2) recognition of the historic

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<sup>2</sup>See *Mendez v. Westminster*, 161 F.2d 774 (9th Cir. 1947); *Doss v. Bernal et al.* (1943), Superior Court of the State of California, Orange County, no. 41466; *Lopez v. Seccombe*, 71 F. Supp. 769 (S.D. Cal. 1944).

<sup>3</sup>Zaragoza Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 306.

<sup>4</sup>Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, “I Am Joaquin,” 1967, [www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm).

structural and systemic racism experienced by the Mexican descent community; (3) commitment to a lifestyle of social justice aimed at remedying the socioeconomic and political inequalities experienced by the Mexican American community.<sup>5</sup> Beyond a new social identity, Chicanas and Chicanos throughout the United States developed a multifaceted movement known as “La Causa,” which fought for labor rights for farmworkers, educational reform, and women’s rights.

Because of the deep persistence of racial and structural inequality in the Latina/o community, the Chicana/o social identity continues to thrive among millennials and Generation Z today. They will not stay silent in the face of a US presidency that declares that they and their family members are rapists, drug dealers, and criminals, unjustly arrests and deports their mothers and fathers, and separates children from their parents at the border and locks them in cages. They cannot sit back as supporters of the status quo when 27 percent of all Latina/o children still live in poverty, only 8 percent will graduate from college, and less than one in one hundred go on to earn a doctorate.<sup>6</sup> Nor will they stand silent when thousands of beautiful Brown youth are treated by law enforcement as guilty until proven innocent, and dozens are gunned down as part of unjust systems of policing. Nor can they turn a blind eye to the physical suffering experienced by themselves and their family members for lack of healthcare, and an inequitable health care system in which 39 percent of Latina/o immigrants, and 25 percent of all Latinas/os, have no health insurance.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the bloody El Paso Massacre, they understand

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<sup>5</sup>Aída Hurtado and Patricia Gurin, *Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>National Center for Children in Poverty, “Poverty by the Numbers By Race, White Children Make Up the Biggest Percentage of America’s Poor,” accessed September 18, 2018, [www.nccp.org/media/releases/release\\_34.html](http://www.nccp.org/media/releases/release_34.html); Tara J. Yosso and Daniel G. Solórzano, “Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline,” *Latino Policies and Issues Brief* 13 (March 2006), [www.chicano.ucla.edu/files/LPIB\\_13March2006.pdf](http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/files/LPIB_13March2006.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>Jens Manuel Krogstad and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Hispanic Immigrants More Likely to Lack Health Insurance Than U.S.-Born,” Pew Research Center, September 26, 2014, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/26/higher-share-of-hispanic-immigrants-than-u-s-born-lack-health-insurance](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/26/higher-share-of-hispanic-immigrants-than-u-s-born-lack-health-insurance).

that we live in a turning point of United States history.<sup>8</sup> In the face of this lived reality, thousands of young Latinas/os continue to find personal and cultural validation and empowerment in the Chicana/o identity. Where they struggle, however, is in finding connection between the Christian (Protestant, Catholic, Pentecostal, Evangelical) faith of their families and these social justice concerns that weigh so heavily on their hearts.

There is good news, however, because what most young Latinas and Latinos have never heard is that Jesus had a “plan,” too, and his manifesto arose out of a shared experience of socioeconomic, political, and cultural colonization and marginalization.

Like Latinas/os in the United States, Jesus and his Jewish sisters and brothers lived as colonized peoples in what was once their own land. Roman soldiers sieged Jerusalem in 63 BC and made Judea a client state of the empire.<sup>9</sup> From then, and on to the days of Jesus, Rome ruled the ancestral Jewish homeland through puppet governments and stripped the Jews of their socioeconomic, political, and religious sovereignty. Similar to the concept of Manifest Destiny, which undergirded the unjust US-Mexico War, Rome and its various emperors believed that they possessed a divine destiny to bring peace and prosperity to the ancient world. The Caesars in fact claimed for themselves titles like “Son of God,” “Lord,” “King of kings,” and “Savior of the world,” and the poet Virgil praised Rome for birthing global renewal and “a new order of the ages.” Convinced of a similar universal calling, the authors of the United States Constitution would later borrow this phrase for the Great Seal of the United States and the dollar bill.

As a *fronterizo* from the northern borderlands of Galilee, Jesus lived a doubly marginalized life.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the general weight of oppression experienced by all Jews under Roman colonization, Galilee was relegated

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<sup>8</sup>Jenny Jarvie, David Montero, and Suhauna Hussain, “The El Paso Shooting Victims: What We Know,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 2019.

<sup>9</sup>N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 29-30, 62.

<sup>10</sup>*Fronterizo* means “Someone who lives in the borderlands of two nations.”

to a secondary status within the larger Jewish community itself.<sup>11</sup> Because of Galilee's distinct cultural mixture and geographic distance from the capital city of Jerusalem, Jews from Galilee were looked down on by their compatriots in Judea of the south. Like many Latinas/os, Galileans were bilingual (speaking Aramaic and Greek) and also spoke with an accent. Their frequent contact with Gentiles (non-Jews) threatened standards of cultural and religious purity. Similar to many Latinas/os, Galileans were shunned as mixed race and "half breeds"—mestizos. Galilee was also far away from the center of Jewish religious and political power in Jerusalem, which was embodied by the temple there. Galilee was the borderlands, the margins, the "hood"; Jerusalem was the seat of political, religious, and economic power, the "big city." And Jesus was a Galilean. Not only that, Jesus was from Nazareth, a small town of several hundred people that was marginalized even within Galilee itself. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" one of his early disciples famously quipped (John 1:46). If Jesus lived in California today, he would come from South LA, East LA, the Inland Empire, or the Central Valley.

Most Galileans were peasant farmers. In fact, Galilee was known as the breadbasket of the plains because it supplied important agricultural products for its surrounding neighbors.<sup>12</sup> Although Galilean farmers were subsistence farmers, they were also forced to grow extra crops for Roman tribute and temple tithes and taxes. They also paid up to half their harvest in rent to elite Jewish landlords. These extra burdens were often crushing, and led to great economic insecurity for most Galileans. Many Galilean peasants lost their lands to large landholders due to increasing debt.

Just as Latinas/os have been historically pressured to assimilate through Americanization programs and English-only movements, the Jewish residents of Galilee faced strong pressure to adopt foreign cultural, economic, and political practices and identities through what

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<sup>11</sup>Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 50-53.

<sup>12</sup>Ched Myers, *Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012), 49, 51-53.

was known as Hellenization. Similar to the unrelenting economic forces of gentrification currently experienced by Latina/o communities in Los Angeles such as Boyle Heights, Highland Park, and Pico Union, Jesus and his Galilean family were encroached upon on all sides by the dual economic and cultural forces of Hellenistic urbanization. In fact, like Los Angeles, Galilee was known to be a cultural melting pot and a geographic borderlands where Jews, Greeks, and Romans all came together—sometimes in hostility.

In Jesus' day, there were three major responses to the oppression of Roman cultural, political, and economic colonialism.<sup>13</sup> The first was compromise. This approach was characterized by the Sadducees and the Herodians. These ruling religious and political elites secured for themselves a place of socioeconomic comfort and stability in imperial society by colluding with the Romans. The Sadducees were the priestly class, and the high priest was appointed by the Roman governor.<sup>14</sup> The Herodians supported the puppet political rule of Rome.<sup>15</sup> These were the “sellouts.”

The second approach of Jesus' day was that of withdrawal. The Essenes, of Dead Sea Scrolls acclaim, embodied this approach. They felt that the best response to the oppression and religious impurity of the day was to move out into the desert and live a holy life in isolation and community. In God's time, God would act as he saw fit.<sup>16</sup>

The Zealots represent the third approach common in Jesus' day. Largely overlapping with the Pharisees of the time, Zealots prayed hard and sharpened their swords.<sup>17</sup> They felt that the best way to respond to Roman oppression was to draw close to God, live highly religious lives, and prepare for war. Their approach was to counterstance, to stand on the opposite side of the river bank locked into a duel between oppressor

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<sup>13</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 37.

<sup>14</sup>E. Mary Smallwood. “High Priests and Politics in Roman Palestine,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 13, no. 1 (1962): 14.

<sup>15</sup>Myers, *Binding the Strongman*, 56; N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 37.

<sup>16</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 37.

<sup>17</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 37, 39.



and oppressed.<sup>18</sup> The Zealots believed that as long as they remained close to God, God would give them military victory over their enemies and reestablish his kingdom.

In the twenty-first century, we see these three basic approaches reflected in the Latina/o community of the United States. We have our Sadducees—religious leaders who compromise, partnering with the ruling political establishment to maintain the status quo. Think of the numerous Latina/o clergy who stood in alliance with Donald Trump for the US presidency, and who downplayed the squalid conditions of border asylum camps. We have our Herodians—Latina/o politicians who assimilate into the American mainstream and pass laws and policies with little regard for the devastating impact on the lives of most Latinas/os. Think Ted Cruz.

Latina/o Essenes, those who withdraw, are probably the most common within the Latina/o religious community. Modern day Latina/o Essene churches do a good job of connecting their members with personal Christian spirituality and relationship with Jesus. Their great blind spot, however, is that they tend to dismiss legitimate and pressing issues of social justice as “liberal” and “worldly.” To make matters worse, many modern day Latina/o Essenes and Sadducees have formed a partnership with Latina/o Herodians in support of the status quo and modern day empire. Chicana/o activists are the secular Zealots of our day, seeking the liberation of La Raza “by any means necessary,” but often without a spiritual foundation.

In response to these limited options, many Latina/o millennial and Gen Z Christians today feel trapped in what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “a constant state of mental nepantilism.”<sup>19</sup> *Nepantla* is an Aztec word meaning “torn between ways.” It captures the experience of the Christian-Activist Borderlands and is another word for Brown. In the twenty-first century, millions of young Latinas/os find themselves torn between the worlds of contemporary Latina/o Essene spirituality and the activism of

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<sup>18</sup>Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 100.

<sup>19</sup>Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100.

modern day secular Chicana/o Zealots. Like Carlos in chapter one, they enter the Christian faith and personal relationship with Jesus through the Latina/o Essene church. In fact, many grow deeply in their spiritual life as Latina/o Essenes. After going to college or getting involved in the world of activism, they come to understand the history of racism in the United States against Latinas/os, and they get “woke.” Most Latina/o Zealots are hostile to Christian faith, however, and condemn Christianity as the religion of the modern day Roman colonizers—i.e., white Republican males. Confused, many Latina/o millennials and Gen Zs go back to their home churches and look for answers from their pastors and parents about how to reconcile their newfound social consciousness with the Essene faith of their youth. In response, they hear one typical Latina/o Essene response: “Don’t get involved with the Zealots—that is, activist Chicanas/os. They’re liberals who don’t know God. We’re called by God to obey the government. Our president is chosen by God, and to challenge him is to challenge God. The gospel is about a personal relationship with Jesus and doesn’t concern itself with social justice.”

As social justice-minded Latina/o Christians, we can find great hope in the example of Jesus. Like Chicana/o activists of the 1960s, Jesus also had a “Plan,” and he developed a *movimiento* that has lasted more than 2,000 years.<sup>20</sup> Born into a borderlands context of imperialism and cultural nepantla, Jesus declared a fourth way: *El Plan Espiritual de Galilee*.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:14-15 NIV)

**Galilee.** Jesus began his movement in Galilee. As we’ve discussed, Galilee was a borderlands region and symbol of cultural mestizaje and multiple rejection. Jesus was a young adult, working class, mestizo from the “hood.” He was conceived to a single mom. God became flesh and launched his movimiento among those who were despised and rejected

<sup>20</sup>*Movimiento* means “movement.”

<sup>21</sup>“The Spiritual Manifesto of Galilee.”

by both their Roman colonizers and the elite of their own people. Jesus didn't go to the big city and seek recruits among the religious, political, and economic elite. He didn't go to the Beverly Hills or Harvard or the Upper East Side of Manhattan of his day. He didn't go to a modern day Latina/o Beverly Hills like South Florida or Hacienda Heights. He started in what today would be East LA, the Artesia Community Guild, or Spanish Harlem. To change the system, Jesus had to start with those who were excluded from the system. This also reveals the intentionality and inclination of God's heart toward the poor and marginalized of every society. In fact, from a biblical standpoint, although God loves all people equally, he shows unique concern for immigrants, the poor, and all who are socially marginalized. One Brown theologian calls this the Galilee principle: "What human beings reject, God chooses as his very own."<sup>22</sup>

**Kingdom of God.** In the context of deep longing for liberation by his own colonized people, and against the backdrop of centuries-old biblical expectations, Jesus proclaimed that he was king and Lord. As king, he came to establish the long-awaited rule and reign of God on the earth, which would transform every aspect of our lives and the world. The "good news" was that Jesus came to make us and the whole world new.

This includes everything messed up and broken in our world—whether personal, familial, social, or global. It includes our personal emotional brokenness and dysfunctional family relationships, but also poverty, colonialism, racism, white nationalism, slavery, human trafficking, oppression of immigrants, warfare, lack of clean water, AIDS, gang violence, and lack of educational opportunity. God wants to transform all of us and all things. Jesus came to reconcile all human beings to himself and to one another. There is no room for "oppositional identities"; the goal is the Beloved Community.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 91.

<sup>23</sup>AnaLouise Keating, "I'm a Citizen of the Universe': Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change," *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1/2, The Chicana Studies Issue (2008): 53-69. Martin Luther King Jr. popularized the concept of the Beloved Community through his speeches, writings, and activism.

This holistic focus of the good news is referred to by Brown Theologians as *misión integral*.<sup>24</sup> In the words of Brown Theologian René Padilla, *misión integral* is “the mission of the whole church to the whole of humanity in all its forms, personal, communal, social, economic, ecological, and political.”<sup>25</sup> This is Brown soteriology—a Latina/o view of salvation.

The apostle Paul articulated the holistic nature of El Plan Espiritual de Galilee in his letter to the Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

The spirit of *misión integral* is likewise communicated by John in *Apocalipsis*:

El que estaba sentado en el trono dijo: «¡Yo hago nuevas todas las cosas!» (Apoc 21:5 NVI)

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5)

The multicultural vision of Christ’s beloved community is cast in Revelation 7:9-10:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,

<sup>24</sup>“Integral” or “holistic mission.” Ruth Irene Padilla DeBorst, “Integral Mission Formation in Abya Yala (Latin America): A Study of the Centro de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios (1982-2002) and Radical Evangélicos” (PhD diss., Boston University, 2016), 364.

<sup>25</sup>Tetsunao Yamamori and C. René Padilla, eds., *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires: Kairos Ediciones, 2004), 9.

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne,  
and to the Lamb!”

Although the good news of Jesus is for the whole human family, it goes first to the poor and all who are marginalized. Like a loving father, God loves all his children equally, but shows special concern for those of his children who suffer most.<sup>26</sup> Immigrants, refugees, and the poor bear the brunt of a sinful and broken world, and they feel firsthand the destructive effects of sin most directly. God’s unique concern for them is reflected in more than two thousand verses of sacred Scripture. It is clearly reflected in Jesus’ “Nazareth Manifesto,” as well as in his famous Beatitudes.<sup>27</sup>

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus launched his public career in his hometown of Nazareth by reading these words from the scroll of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
*to bring good news to the poor.*  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let *the oppressed* go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Lk 4:18-19)

From this passage, we learn that the “good news” of God’s kingdom was first proclaimed to the “poor,” the “captives,” the “blind” and the “oppressed”—the Nazarenes, Galileans, and Jewish underclass of Jesus’ day. Riling under the double burden of Roman colonialism and economic and spiritual oppression by the elites of their own people, they

<sup>26</sup>Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 176.

<sup>27</sup>Samuel Wells and others have referred to Luke 4:18-19 as Jesus’ “Nazareth Manifesto” because it lays out his ministry mission statement centered on social engagement. Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2015).

needed first to hear the announcement of God's liberation. Though they were seen as weaker in the eyes of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and ruling elite, Jesus considered them indispensable; though they were thought to be less honorable, Jesus gave them greater honor. Jesus gave greater honor to those who lacked it (1 Cor 12:22-25). He went first to those "outside the gate" of institutional power and authority.<sup>28</sup>

We find this same divine predilection towards the poor in Jesus' famous "blessings" and "woes" found in Luke chapter 6.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.  
"Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.  
"Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.  
"Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.  
"Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep." (Lk 6:20-25)

As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter seven, Brown Theologians refer to God's unique concern for the socially and economically disenfranchised as "the preferential option for the poor." In the words of Gustavo Gutiérrez,

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<sup>28</sup>Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).

The entire Bible, beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God's predilection for the weak and abused of human history. This preference brings out the gratuitous or unmerited character of God's love. The same revelation is given in the evangelical Beatitudes, for they tell us with the utmost simplicity that God's predilection for the poor, the hungry, and the suffering is based on God's unmerited goodness to us.<sup>29</sup>

God's preferential option for the poor, the weak, the least members of society runs throughout the Bible and cannot be understood apart from the absolute freedom and gratuitousness of God's love. . . . For God, therefore, "the last will be first, and the first will be last." . . . God's love, and therefore what God demands of us, leaps over these boundaries and goes out in a free and generous search of those whom society marginalizes and oppresses. . . . Universality and preference mark the proclamation of the kingdom. God addresses a message of life to every human being without exception, while at the same time God shows preference for the poor and the oppressed.<sup>30</sup>

It is also of paramount importance to note that the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus also includes a "preferential option for mujeres."<sup>31</sup> Men and women are both deeply loved by God, but, in a fallen world characterized by sexism, misogyny, and machismo, women often bear the brunt of sinful gendered relationships. And when God sees one of his daughters abused or exploited by one of his sons, God does not stand idly back. Jesus desires his sisters to thrive in the full image of God in which they have been created, and for them to take their rightful place as spiritual leaders, *mujeristas*, within the church.<sup>32</sup> In the words of path-breaking *mujerista* theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz:

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<sup>29</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxvii, in Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús*, 175.

<sup>30</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 116.

<sup>31</sup>Roman Catholic theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz was the first to extend the biblical principle of God's preferential option for the marginalized to women.

<sup>32</sup>*Mujeristas* are "womanists" or "feminists."

In the *mujerista* God revindicates the divine image and likeness of women. The *mujerista* is called to gestate new women and men: a strong people. *Mujeristas* are anointed by God as servants, prophets and witnesses of redemption. *Mujeristas* will echo God's reconciling love; their song will be a two-edged sword, and they will proclaim the gospel of liberation.<sup>33</sup>

### REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS

“Repent.” Greek: *metanoieite*. Have a new mind. Think differently. Concienciación. Get “woke.” Change the way you are thinking about how you are living your life and how you can change the world. El Plan Espiritual de Galilee calls us to follow Jesus and learn from him how to bring about liberation for ourselves and this broken world. We must stop thinking like an Essene. We are not going to change the world by withdrawing into the desert. Nor will we change the world through political compromise like the Herodians and Sadducees. Though it might seem romantic to some, we are also not going to find liberation from empire by mixing religiosity with violence as the Pharisees and Zealots attempted—that did not, and does not, end well.

No, if we want to change the world, we must do an about face, a change of direction, and believe the good news that Jesus is Lord and King, As Jewish messiah, and therefore Savior of the world, Jesus came to make us and the whole world new. Nothing and no one is left out!

When Jesus gives us eyes to see, and allows us to understand El Plan Espiritual de Galilee, it is *La Buena Nueva!*<sup>34</sup> When we finally get it, it is “like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field,” or “like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Mt 13:44-46). The scales fall from our eyes. We are made new. Nothing can contain our joy. We are ready to change the world!

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<sup>33</sup>Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “*Mujeristas: A Name of Our Own!!*” Religion Online, accessed September 18, 2018, [www.religion-online.org/article/mujeristas-a-name-of-our-own](http://www.religion-online.org/article/mujeristas-a-name-of-our-own).

<sup>34</sup>“The Good News.”



## DISCIPLESHIP

After we hear and believe the good news of Jesus' kingdom announcement, the next step is to follow Jesus in discipleship. As Jesus called the Twelve, so he beckons us: "Come, follow me." To be a disciple of Jesus is to be his student or mentee.<sup>35</sup> And the goal of being Jesus' disciple is to become like him in both character and action. As we walk with him each day in the big and *lo cotidiano*, he teaches us, heals us, and transforms us from the inside out to make us more like him.<sup>36</sup> As we walk with Jesus, he sends us to where he has already been at work—among the poor, the suffering, the immigrant, and all who are cast aside. He even calls some of us to the "Joseph of Arimatheas" and religious and political elites of our day. Jesus acts through us to bring his kingdom to bear in every space of hurt so that God's kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven. He sends us out in mision integral to serve as agents of God's reconciliation, redemption, and justice.

Jesus' offer of discipleship is extended to all. The revolutionary nature of discipleship is easy to miss without knowing the history of this word and practice. In the days of Jesus, the privilege of being the disciple of a rabbi was limited by ethnicity, gender, and formal academic achievement. Only Jewish boys were allowed to become disciples after successfully navigating a rigorous, three-tiered religious educational system.<sup>37</sup> The three levels of Jewish education were called Bet Sefer (House of the Book), Bet Talmud (House of Learning), and Bet Midrash (House of Study). Notwithstanding its exclusivity, it was an extraordinary educational system for its day. Bet Sefer lasted four years, and as part of its curriculum, students memorized the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Only those considered gifted were allowed to move on to the next level, Bet Talmud.

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<sup>35</sup>See Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (New York: Harper, 1998).

<sup>36</sup>"Lo cotidiano" refers to our daily lived experiences. Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

<sup>37</sup>Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 124-134.

Bet Talmud consisted of the memorization of the remaining thirty-four books of the Jewish Old Testament. Bet Midrash, or House of Study, was the third and final level of study. Bet Midrash was restricted to the most elite students, for it involved becoming a “disciple” of a well-known rabbi, and eventually, becoming a rabbi oneself. Being a rabbi, in turn, was one of the most revered and well-respected positions one could hold. Those who did not make it up the educational ranks returned home to apprenticeships as farmers, fishermen, carpenters, shepherds, etc.

As part of the ritual of becoming a disciple, a successful student of Bet Talmud would approach a well-known rabbi and declare: “Rabbi, I want to be your disciple.” A period of theological questioning would then ensue, and, if the test was passed, the rabbi would invite the student into the sacred bond of discipleship. The rabbi would say, “Come, follow me.” At that point, the disciple would leave his father, mother, family, friends, and community to follow the rabbi. From that point on, the disciple’s main task was to learn from the rabbi and become like him. The main way this was accomplished was by spending every waking moment with the rabbi. In fact, we are told that disciples would follow their rabbis so closely that at the end of the day they would literally be covered in dust from their teacher’s feet. A saying was even circulated among disciples that admonished them to “cover yourself with the dust of your rabbi’s feet.”<sup>38</sup> Following sixteen years of apprenticeship with a rabbi, Bet Midrash was completed and, at the age of thirty, one could begin their own career as a rabbi.

It is within this highly exclusive educational and religious context that Jesus called Andrew, James, and John to be his first disciples. He broke all the rules when he told these fishermen, these rabbinic school flunk-outs to “Come, follow me.” You could even say that Jesus invented affirmative action. But the revolutionary nature of El Plan Espiritual de Galilee did not stop with an expansion of discipleship among a broader category of Jewish men. Following his resurrection, Jesus commanded the remaining eleven disciples:

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<sup>38</sup>Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 130.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt 28:18-20)

In this passage, Jesus makes a dramatic and earth-shattering announcement to his earliest students: he tells them that the call to spiritual discipleship should no longer be limited to males, and that it was no longer the sole privilege of any particular ethnic or cultural group. Jesus, rabbi and Messiah, invites all people—male and female, from every nation of the world, and every socioeconomic background—to be his disciples. No one is left out. This is where El Plan Espiritual de Galilee becomes personal. Jesus is not only the King and Lord who came to make the whole world new, he is the Teacher and Mentor who calls us to walk so intimately with him that we are covered in the dust of his feet. As he teaches us, heals us, and transforms us, he sends us out among the Galilees—and Jerusalems—of the world to pronounce the good news of El Plan Espiritual de Galilee and to be agents of his redemption, justice and reconciliation. This is the message that Brown Christians have celebrated and lived out for the past five hundred years. This is the good news upon which the Brown Church stands and is called to embody. This is La Buena Nueva.

### THE CROSS: A REBEL'S DEATH

The Brown Church also looks to the cross, for without the cross, the good news would not be possible. The cross was a symbol of multiple rejection. It was a rebel's death. Crucifixion was what Rome did to those who dared question the authority of Caesar and his ruthless Empire:

It said, loud and clear: we are in charge here; you are our property; we can do what we like with you. It insisted, coldly and brutally, on the absolute sovereignty of Rome, and of Caesar. . . . It said, in particular: this is what happens to rebel leaders.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 543.

Caesar was the false king who claimed to be Lord, Son of God, Prince of Peace, and the embodiment of “good news” to the world. It was a revolutionary political statement to say that Jesus was Lord, and Caesar was not; that Jesus was the King of the Jews and long-awaited Son of God, the Anointed One who would bring peace and transformation to the world. Jesus rightfully claimed for himself the titles of Caesar, and this led to his death on the cross. This is also what spurred persecution of the early church and the martyrdom of nearly all the apostles. And now, as then, Jesus tell us: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).

The cross was also a symbol of rejection by the religious and political elite of his own people, of his own day. Those who seek to follow Jesus today should expect the same. In the words of the Master, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also” (Jn 15:20).

On the cross, Jesus opened up the way for the kingdom of God to burst forth through all of humanity, and paid the price for our redemption and participation in El Plan Espiritual de Galilee. On the cross, Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, paid the price for your sins and mine, and for the sins of the world. This includes our personal sin, as well as the grievous social sins of racism and empire, which the Brown Church has struggled against for more than five centuries. On the cross, Jesus took it all on himself so that God’s renewal might be opened up for the whole world. In the familiar words of the Gospel of John, which, in light of El Plan Espiritual de Galilee, hopefully take on new light to those who have only before heard the gospel of empire—

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (Jn 3:16-17)

When Jesus rose on the third day, new creation sprung. The rebirth of the world, and the rebirth of all who would trust in him, follow from the lynchpin of the resurrection. When we place our faith in Christ and follow him in discipleship, we pass from spiritual death to life, and we experience the new creation of God (Jn 5:24; 2 Cor 5:17). We also become members of his body and the local and global church (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:27). As we continue to follow him in discipleship, he makes us more and more like him, and he sends us out as agents of his new creation, agents of *misión integral* and *El Plan Espiritual de Galilee*. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Pet 1:3-4). *Así es. Él nos llama. Él nos invita. Ven.*<sup>40</sup>



If Jesus launched an empire-challenging, global transformative movement beginning with the poor and marginalized of Galilee, why does Christianity in the twenty-first century share such close association with five hundred years of European colonization, genocide, and white nationalism in the Americas? What happened between the time of Jesus and the present moment, such that the radical message of *El Plan Espiritual de Galilee* became co-opted by colonialism and half a millennium of white supremacy cloaked in the raiment of Christianity? The next two chapters explore the history of the hijacking of Christianity by Spanish colonists and the multicultural, multigendered resistance that gave birth to the Brown Church.

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<sup>40</sup>“That’s the way it is. He calls us. He invites us. Come.”

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