

Mañana from a New Today

Panel Presentation

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I did not grow up in the church. By that, I mean, I didn't really go to church on Sundays, but my Mexican family and I would always go to Mass on Christmas and Easter. When it came to get Confirmed in the Catholic Church, I did it willingly, since it was important to my mother that she felt like her child belonged to—and could stay safe with—God. She never said that to me aloud, but I knew that was why.

When I started going back to church on my own, I ended up at a Pentecostal megachurch in the Chicago suburbs. I went because of the music...I had never seen music performed in that way, and especially not at church or Mass. I certainly got goosebumps, but they felt different. I now know that those goosebumps were the Holy Spirit speaking to me.

Except one thing. This megachurch was a diverse congregation, but not necessarily a diverse leadership. The White, male pastors far outnumbered the men of color and White women. When I started going to that Church, not one woman of color was on pastoral leadership.

I was new to the whole evangelical, megachurch, Protestant thing, but something felt off. I loved the music, but the sermons didn't resonate the same way. I couldn't pinpoint why.

As I learned more about the Bible and the history of evangelicalism, it was nearing the time of my exit. A few months before I left, I was talking to one of my White friends named Jack who loved to learn just like I did. He had spent many, many years in that church, but he had mentors who passed down great book recommendations to him.

He said to me, "Let's do a book swap. You give me something you want me to read, and I'll do the same for you."

Now, as a brand-new, bushy-tailed, bright-eyed young woman to the world of the theological academy, I remember I had googled what books I needed to read in order to get caught up to some of my peers who spent their whole lives reading and studying theology. Of course, Google recommended a fabulous list of White men, but I didn't know where else to look, so I decided this list was it. These were the classics. I had just finished reading Kirkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and I decided that *that* was the book I was going to gift my friend Jack. And that's the book I gave him.

I did end up leaving that Pentecostal church. On my way out, Jack and I met up to exchange books. And you'll never believe what little book he gave me back.

He handed me Justo González's book titled *Mañana*. He said to me, "My mentor gave this for me to read, and I just feel like you'll resonate with it."

Did I ever.

I started attending another church, now working as their receptionist, as well as being a barista on the side and trying to finish my seminary degree—all while earning a very small amount of money and living with roommates to save some. There were days when I wasn't sure I was going to eat dinner and had to ration how I ate my meals so I could feel full for most of the day.

The receptionist job was great, because I could actually sit and read and work on homework while I was sitting there. I brought Justo's book with me one day to work.

You know that famous saying, "Slowly, and then all at once"? That's how I read Justo's book. I remember sitting at that receptionist's desk and feeling the tears stream down my face as I read his words. I remember getting goosebumps from reading my experience of the world

into theology. And I knew better now that those goosebumps were not goosebumps, but the Holy Spirit.

The book begins with a claim: “What follows is not an unbiased theological treatise” (21). In fact, González argues, no matter how convinced one is of their seemingly objective perspective, it “betrays a bias of which the theologian is not usually aware” (21). I finally had language to articulate what was happening in the Pentecostal mega church I just left of predominantly White leadership. They had no idea that their perspective was biased.

The entire argument of the book draws upon the conviction that theology from the Hispanic perspective has something meaningful to contribute. It pushes against gnostic, Western conceptions of God, especially since “the Bible always speaks of God in relation to a creation and a people” (92). The “scandal of particularity” as stated by, funnily enough, Kirkegaard (53) means that Jesus himself was a human being born in a particular time and place (142), and his life embodies the suffering that many people, including Hispanics, have experienced (143). Overall, González calls all to be “bridge people” in their theological and Christological understandings (115).

And the book spoke to my unique experience of Mexican Catholicism into Protestantism. Because Hispanics come from diverse backgrounds, Dr. González claims we as a community must acknowledge the ecumenical nature from which they belong: some with Catholic roots and beliefs, some who converted to Protestantism, and others who began as Protestant believers. This new ecumenism comes with a practical and political side that imitates the civil rights movements that occurred in the Hispanic community: Protestant and Catholic Hispanics marching arm in arm and “learning to undo many of the prejudices that have divided them” (74).

Simply put, this book is prophetic. Its words feel eerily resonant to what the Latina/o/e community and the Christian community broadly is experiencing today in 2026. As our world

continues to face darker and darker times, the Latine community should—they must—march arm in arm and learn to undo many of the prejudices that have divided us. These are prejudices that often stem first from within church and faith communities, and they seep into our everyday lives and relationships. It should be no surprise, then, that many Latinos themselves voted for Trump, a man who promised that he would be after the very community who voted for him.

What does it look like to read our experience into theology instead of trying to cram our experience into the White one? Because what González identifies throughout *Mañana* still resonates with what is currently happening within the U.S., especially when acknowledging political and social divides within the Hispanic and Latina/o/e community, González ends the book by invoking the significance of the Holy Spirit's role within a Hispanic eschatology. For Hispanics, "*Mañana* is much more than 'tomorrow.' It is the radical questioning of today" (164). For Christians, the world will not always be as it is, but it means first confronting the injustices of today through the power of the Holy Spirit (164-7). In sum, González's work seems pertinent now more than ever, and it impacts me now just as much as it impacted 22-year-old Michelle sitting at the reception desk, unaware that one day she would be speaking at a place honoring a historian, theologian, but more importantly a person, who she still considers to be one of her heroes.

Michelle Elizabeth Navarrete is the daughter of Mexican immigrants, born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago. She is a current doctoral student at Emory University studying the Book of Psalms, decolonial/postcolonial translation studies, and U.S. Latine theologies. Part of her convictions as a scholar and musician is to bridge the church and the academy more fully.