

Mañana from a New Today

Response to Robert Chao Romero

Antonio Eduardo Alonso

Thursday, February 5, 2026

I want to take my brief time to think with you about two *mañanas*: the future of Latine theology in the wake of Justo's book, and that eternal *mañana* to which all of our work points.

As all of the panelists articulated so poignantly last evening, your *Mañana*, Justo, gave us a voice—creating a vocabulary and developing a discourse that centered the lives of Latines in the U.S. in all their complexity and distinctiveness: an approach born of the embodied knowledge of a pastor and a scholar grounded in living, breathing communities; an insistence that *all* theologians broaden their often limited vision of *whose practices* and *whose lives* matter for theological reflection; and all of this while also making *so many of us* Latine theologians cry tears of recognition at what has *always* been most true for us, even if that truth has rarely made it onto the pages of a book of academic theology. And for that, I am grateful in more ways I can express.

But Justo has insisted that this event not only be about *ayer*, but truly *mañana*.

As I cast my own gaze toward the *mañana* of Latine theology, I have found myself dwelling in a tension—a tension that has increasingly intensified for me in recent years—in my teaching, in my scholarship, and in my own ministry. I worry that the assertion of *too strong* a homogenous Latine cultural identity that has marked much of Latine theological reflection in the last few decades can sometimes obscure even in its attempts to reveal. While identifying a *shared* Latine identity *has been* and *remains* vital in light of its theological, political, social, and economic implications—*especially in these times*—sometimes I worry that *too solid* a construction of that identity can have consequences that outrun even our best intentions and most faithful quests for justice. In our affirmation of the importance of *one* kind of difference we can risk unwittingly neglecting many others, even within the Latine community.

Let me name just one, *a hard one*. I confess I read *Fuenteovejuna* and Justo's reading of it through a different lens today than when Ceclia González-Andrieu handed me my first copy of the book at Loyola Marymount in 2010. Indeed, I can't help but read that beautiful and hopeful image of collective solidarity expressed in the community's unified answer to the question *¿Quién mató el Comendador*" with a tinge of melancholy today. Because anything resembling a unison "*Fuenteovejuna, Señor*" from US Latines seems *so distant* to me in our present milieu. Not only would I expect a greater multiplicity of answers, if I'm honest, I would need to brace myself for the fact that some...*many*...Latines would want to keep the *comendador* in place at the expense even of one another.

And if we are truthful, *familia*, it is not *only* the response of the "*fresas*" in their many renditions that might give us pause. We must contend—empirically, pastorally, theologically—with the fact that the head of the Proud Boys during the January 6 insurrection was an Afro Cuban Catholic from Little Havana; that the pastor of Kilmar Abrego Garcia's immigrant church was until very recently an enthusiastic supporter of the president and his policies; that the two Border Patrol agents who shot and killed Alex Pretti as he put *his own life* on the line in solidarity *with Latines* in Minneapolis are themselves Latine. And not only did the Latine vote increase substantially in support of the present administration in the last presidential election, it was in no small part due to the "*pelados*" who contributed to that success. Indeed, as with white voters, *noncollege* Hispanic voters were *more likely* to back Trump than Hispanic voters with college degrees. To oversimplify, more "*fresas*" voted for Harris and more "*pelados*" voted for Trump. And many more stayed home.

And so I find myself asking: How do *we* as theologians and pastors who so often pour out our lives and our scholarship striving to center precisely the lives of the least among us respond to the fact that many of those we want to center are presently answering the question *¿Quién mató el Comendador*" by pointing at their own *vecinos*, by pointing at many of us. And how do *we* in the face of such a reality resist the temptation to merely point the finger back at them?

All of this and more pushes us into the complexity, ambiguity, and nuance of the fact that not only are millions of Latines fleeing the church, but that many more who stay remain unchanged...or worse, remain with hearts hardened even to those most proximate to them, even somehow alienated from their own reality.

But this truth also confronts those of us who have at times been too enthusiastic to confidently identify the reign of God with the often anemic alternatives that have been served up in their many forms to instead *look* and *look again*, *listen* and *listen again* to those who have been rendered invisible by the entire system in which we now find ourselves—whatever our politics. It invites us to bind the wounds of those who are so often victims of systems designed not only to oppress, but even worse, designed to algorithmically convince people to *campaign for their own oppression*. Here, I can't help but repeat one of the most direct and powerful annunciations in *Mañana*: “the death of many gods has meant *life* for countless human beings.”¹ Indeed, there are many gods that still need to die, even in us.

So, what, then is the shape of hope in these impossible times? In the final chapter of the book, Justo gives us a glimpse of an eschatological vision of a *mañana* that is a *word of judgment* on today. He foregrounds the eschatological expectation *so real* in many Latine churches yet *so often* suspected by sophisticated white liberal theologians. Perhaps ruffling even the theological feathers of some of us here, perhaps even implicitly challenging some of the hymns I myself have written, he denounces a phrase that too easily rolls off the tongues of preachers and musicians and well-meaning folk today: “God has no hands but our hands.” This is not only a *misinterpretation*, he argues, but also a blasphemy. “The Lord may wish to use us as hands,” he writes, “but were we to fail, there is no doubt that the Lord would find other hands to carry forth the divine purposes.”² Put differently, Justo is decidedly *not* merely proclaiming the Gospel of Rachel Maddow of which Sandra grew so weary. Instead, he exhorts:

¹ Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Abingdon Press, 1990), 89.

² González, *Mañana*, 166.

“To have the Spirit is to have a *foot up* on the stirrup of the eschatological future and to *live now* as those who expect a new reality, the coming Reign of God.”³

This vision, *of course*, does not absolve us of the work yet to be done under claims of human finitude in the light of a distant reign. It is instead a hope that discloses broken fragments of the new heaven and the new earth breaking in, even as it insists that our practices, our beliefs, and our lives can neither bring about the end of the present order, nor can they usher in the one yet to come. It reminds us that *yes*, God works through our hands and feet in the world—including through our acts of daily resistance large and small to the present terror that is closing in on all sides—but confesses a deeper hope still that God’s activity is never *confined by or identical to* that work. It imbues all of our acts of solidarity and protest with an eschatological humility that sees that even our most careful resistances are incomplete and that hope does not finally depend on them. And precisely because—*gracias a Dios—it does not all depend on us*—it is a hope that frees us to resist more deeply and with a clearer vision of the coming reign—“one that seeks not merely the evolution of today into tomorrow but rather the breach that *mañana* announces.”⁴ And as one in frequent despair these days at the fragility of my own feeble responses in the face of the enormity of it all, I can only say: Thanks be to God for *Mañana*.

Dr. Antonio Alonso holds a Bachelor of Music in choral conducting from Northwestern University, a Master of Arts in theology from Loyola Marymount University, and a PhD in religion from Emory University. He is currently Aquinas Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Candler School of Theology at Emory University where he also serves as the inaugural Director of Catholic Studies.

³ González, *Mañana*, 163.

⁴ González, *Mañana*, 166.