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Edwin Aponte and Miguel De La Torre, Introducing Latinx Theologies

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Edwin David Aponte and Miguel A. De La Torre. *Introducing Latinx Theologies*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020. 256pp. \$30.00 Paper. ISBN: 978-1-62698-372-4.

Edwin David Aponte and Miguel De La Torre offer an excellent introduction to the histories, epistemologies, methods, and core commitments of Latinx communities and theologies in the United States. Updated from their 2001 original edition, entitled *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*, the 2020 edition, *Introducing Latinx Theologies*, includes the cultural and political ramifications of the 2016 election on Latinxs across the country. In taking on an important change in title from the previous edition, the shift from Latino/a to Latinx, the book represents a trend among academics meant to include diverse gender expressions, though it should be noted that this trend has not gained popularity among non-academic Latino/a circles. The authors address this shift in their book, noting that “it dispenses with the problem of prioritizing male or female by negating that binary. The real power of the term and its true meaning, however, erupts with its final syllable. After years of Latin lovers, Latin looks, Latin music, and Latin America, the word describes something that is not as much Latin . . . as it is alternative to America, the unexpected X factor in America’s race debate” (13).

Among the goals for the book are a focus on dealing with the realities of our communities, both academic and “real-world,” in a way that offers an unromanticized, decolonial look at our identities and daily lived experiences. Additionally, Aponte and De La Torre seek to complexify Latinx identity, highlighting the biological and cultural hybridity that make up the many language, ethnic, religious, and racial communities we are a part of across the country. They note, before presenting updated statistics on the complex demographics of U.S. Latinxs, that “under the racialized, white Euroamerican gaze, all Latina/os are seen as the same, as one monolithic group, where the distinctions between the Spanish and Portuguese languages

are not even worth mentioning, and the differences existing between a Puerto Rican, a Brazilian, an Argentinean, or a Chicano are deemed irrelevant” (8).

It is the shared experiences of oppressive realities that warrant a book attempting to address theological sources, methods, and commitments from perspectives that are otherwise diverse enough to merit more particular study. At the same time, the authors highlight the reality of our hybrid expressions of identity in our daily lives, within the ways we practice multiple religions, and multiple forms of Christianity, all at once. In that sense, decentering a particular universalizing Latinx perspective in favor of a hybrid version has the positive effect of complexifying U.S. Latinx identity, as my students noted during their reading of the book for our “Introduction to Latinx Theology and Ministry” course. These twin themes of Latinx oppression and hybridity as unifying experiences within the U.S. context continue throughout the book.

The authors go on to unpack myriad cultural influences before dissecting the systematic contours of U.S. Latinx theologies. Among the cultural influences are experiences of shared marginality, seen in narratives of migration across several of our national contexts, as well as race and the *mestizaje/mulatez* cutting across many of our biological and colonial histories. Some of our shared sociocultural sins are also addressed, including the reality of *machismo* pervasive across many of our cultural backgrounds. A deeper analysis of the racial hierarchies within our own communities, and the histories of racism and colorism that accompany them, could have made an important addition to the text. It should be noted, though, that the authors include criticism as well as praise of *mestizaje/mulatez*, both as anti-racist categories and as categories that erase indigeneity. Their treatment of Latinx theologies covers our cultural influences across disciplines from scripture to doctrine to ethics, and remains introductory, as the title of the book announces. Particularly helpful to my students were the sections on methodology and

epistemology, which elucidate the roles of *teología en conjunto* and *lo cotidiano* as *locus theologicus*. These allowed my students, some of whom were Latinas and Latinos and some whom were not, to dip their toes in ways of doing theology that none of them had intentionally engaged in the past.

The final chapters of the book take historical looks at the religious and daily lives of U.S. Latinx communities. The authors made sure to include a broad swath of experiences within these histories: the book is decidedly ecumenical in its treatment of Christianity among Latinxs as well as interreligious, as it looks at the realities of indigenous and African-based religious and spiritual practices engaged in by many Latinxs, according to their particular family histories. Aponte and De La Torre trace the history of Latinx theologies and theologians, from important ecumenical predecessors to popular spiritualities that some consider syncretic in a pejorative sense, though they have emerged in the course of our histories, in our families, and as effects of colonialism. The authors' treatment of this history is helpful in the way that it centers the experiences of colonization. Decoloniality and postcolonialism, schools of thought and practice distinct from each other yet sharing a focus on these experiences, are an important facet of contemporary Latinx explorations in theology and ministry. These perspectives deal with the realities of racism, sexism, capitalism, religious education, and caste systems that are rightfully shedding a stronger light on indigenous, LGBTQ, and other border-crossing voices that have been ignored or marginalized even by Latinx theologians ourselves. A stronger treatment of decoloniality, its distinctions from postcolonialism, and an overview of the importance of these perspectives within Latinx theology could have been another welcome addition to this text.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of this book is one that is shared by many other introductory texts: In surveying the contours of a subject area, it leaves a depth of analysis absent

from the text. Yet for the purpose of educating graduate students (and perhaps undergraduates as well) it lays important demographic, epistemological, and methodological foundations for deeper engagement to take place, and it allows students to understand the Latinx experience as diverse and as generative for constructing theology and practicing ministry for the whole church. In that sense and for those purposes, I recommend the book.

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