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*The Latino Christ in Art, Literature, and Liberation Theology.*

By Michael R. Candelaria Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018, p. 272, \$65.00.

Combining his running interest in Liberation Theology (1990) and Latin American modernity (2012), Michael R. Candelaria brings Art History to bear as he seeks to address “a veritable absence of Hispanic/Latino representations of Christ” (1). Echoing Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (2002), Candelaria laments “Iberia and Latin America” remain “peripheral to the history of the West and insignificant to the self-understanding” of “Western culture,” but also that Latin American theology itself pays “scant attention to its cultural expressions of Christ” (2-3). Defining both theology and philosophy as “types of literature...forms of fiction, largely products of a fertile human imagination of the way the world could be” (4), The author sides more with Freud and Ludwig Feuerbach than Emilie Durkheim in seeing religion and art as projections of humans’ relation to their own “wishful needs or fantasies...concerns, anxieties, values, ideals...hopes, and material conditions of life” (6). This definition guides the author’s larger view of the importance of doctrines, sacraments, and even religious devotions such as Communion which, next to the crisis of grinding poverty, appears as “a wafer of bread and a swig of cheap red wine from a tiny plastic cup” (216).

The first section addresses the relationship of art and poetry to political and theological movements complimenting other new scholarship tying Liberation Theology to largest modernist trends (Barger 2018). Chapter One discusses painter Salvador Dalí’s trajectory in Republican and Francoist Spain and his embrace of “nuclear mysticism” (15), which combined materialism and Spanish Catholic spirituality in paintings such as *Crucifixion* and *Christ of St. John of the Cross*. Candelaria focuses on authorial intent and the meaning of a religious symbol outside a religious context. Chapter Two largely conducts a focused criticism of New Mexican Franciscan Angélico Chávez’s “inquisitorial process” (43), one meant to superimpose orthodox theological readings onto the woman in Dalí’s painting. Candelaria credits Chávez’s struggle to create a Hispanic Chicano theology but questions Chávez’s invocation of Church doctors such as Duns Scotus, and scripture passages on Mary and the alleged prophecies of Jesus’ coming. Through these examples, Candelaria highlights the danger of “spiritualiz[ing] a text with an undeniable materialist content” (57).

In Chapter Three, Candelario turns to José Clemente Orozco, who, when painting in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, held to a “skepticism about religion” and “cynicism about political ideals” (65). He put distance between himself and Revolutionary ideals, rejecting indigenismo and artistic revolutionary simplicity in favor of classical techniques and artistic internationalism. Through his Prometheus Christ,

Orozco extolled education's universalist potential but criticized modern knowledge's dark side through painting on the American Conquest and Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. Candelaria suggests the elite-mass motif in Orozco's paintings foreshadows liberationist critiques of "mass behavior" (93).

Candelaria explores in Chapter Four how Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno supported the mystical Spanish philosophy, prioritizing the human condition and subjective faith over abstract philosophy and the scholarly pursuit of a "historical" Jesus. This juxtaposes nicely with Chapter Five, which analyzes how Jorge Luis Borge's Fictional Christ consists of a multitude of conflicting accounts-not unlike caricatured readings of the Gospels-tied together by the thread of "the ignorant, who, in turn crucify [Christ]" for his attempts to save them (144). In Chapter Six, Argentine politician and writer Richard Rojas' "invisible Christ" fulfills universal aspirations through the absence of an authorized depiction of him. While such a vague notion of Christ historically led to denials of Jesus' human characteristics, it also leaves room for depictions of Christ that affirm radical politics.

Candelaria then transitions to Liberation Theology in Chapter Seven. In Candelaria's analysis, liberation theology's charge meant drawing on a "historical" Christ and not the Christ of faith as "the only possible basis" for a "genuine Latin American Christology" (173). It rejected popular forms of religion, centuries of layered orthodoxies, and convenient ideological manipulations. However, this theological strain proved incapable of articulating a unified vision for Christ and succumbed to circular reasoning. This manifested in the "cosmic Christology" (184) serving as "the derivation of purported universally valid norms and transcendent values" (182). In Chapter Eight, Candelaria turns to attempts by Virgilio Elizondo to solve the impasse by seeing to see Christ in dreams of racial and dualistic "Latinism" failed. Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa's Aztec goddess draws closest to US Hispanic religious sentiment by jettisoning Christ altogether.

Abstract theologies do not connect to popular classes. However, the elitist liberationist tendencies Candelaria documents dissipated with the enshrinement of "inculturation" in the early 1990s (IV CELAM 1992, Santo Domingo; Burdick 2004; French 2007) and with an increased focus on a decolonial popular Bible reading method (Mesters 1969; de Lima Silva 2001). Even the esoteric versions of eco-theology, which track most closely to those criticized here, seem to have given way to more pragmatic approaches captured in Francis' *Laudato Si* (2015). Candelaria's reminder to particularize US mestizo attempts to form a liberationist current, avoiding the mistakes of the past, remains as relevant today as ever.

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