

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**Thesis Project:**  
**Music of the Brown Church: Connecting Religion, Social Justice, Latina/o Studies and  
Worship Practices**

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M.A. Ethnomusicology

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

While the term “The Brown Church” might be new, concepts such as liminality, social justice, and faith are not new to the Latino community or the faith community. These concepts and the exploration of how they might relate to the music, which is being used in worship and praise, are the central focus of this work. Looking through the available literature, examples of secular music are utilized in social justice and equality issues outside the church in various settings. Considering the centrality of faith, worship, and God in many Latina/o/x/e households, it is likely that music will also play this role for the church and the social justice pursuits related to faith, which are experiencing a renewed interest and resurgence at present.

Several subcategories will be explored throughout this thesis project, which is important because without having quantitative material available, the research which I conducted for this project is based on the information which exists at present. The concept of the Brown church may feel like a new concept to some readers; however, what is new is the terminology, and the current momentum might feel new for those who engage in this work. The book *The Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology and Identity* by Robert Chao Romero catalyzed this thesis project. It has also served as a personal and professional awakening and understanding which was previously lacking. While this was not the first book relating to these corresponding fields to be written or published, it is the first one I encountered. The following excerpt pushed me to learn more about my own Latinidad and how that relates to my faith.

As the Brown Church, we take solace in knowing that Jesus, our Lord, was also Brown. As a working class, young adult Jewish male living in the colonized territory of Galilee, he also occupied a space of social, political, cultural, and religious liminality. Geographically, galilee was a borderlands region where Jewish, Greek, and Roman worlds collided. As a sign of their cultural mestizaje, Galileans like Jesus spoke with an accent and were bilingual. Politically they were ruled by the roman empire, subject to

oppressive tribute, and dehumanized by imperial laws that made them second class citizens in their own historic land. Even among his own people, Jesus and other Galilean Jews were looked down as jibaro, as backwards campesinos, who lived far from the center of religious and economic power in the capital of Jerusalem. When God chose to dwell among us, to take on human flesh, and to make our suffering his own, he chose to be Brown.<sup>1</sup>

To understand the purpose, premise, and hypothesis that propelled this project, it is essential to understand what The Brown Church is and what it is not, both on macro and micro levels. It is also necessary to understand the significance of the statement above for those who are Brown and those who are not. It is essential to know that the works cited and explored for this project have functioned to tear down the veil of white Jesus for this author and replace him with a more authentic understanding of the man, which leads to further understanding of the sacrifice that was made as our Savior. These facts are based on the idea of Brown, both regarding Latinos/as/xs/es and concerning Jesus and His social and ethnic status during his lifetime.

For Romero, Brown is a term that umbrellas all individuals who do not fit into mainstream Christianity, primarily divided into white or black churches. Romero explains, “Latinas/os are Brown. Not necessarily literally and phenotypically Brown, but Brown in terms of our racial and social positioning in United States history.”<sup>23</sup> This idea of social and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 16.

racial standing is the cornerstone on which the rest of this work is based. This state of liminality is something that our Lord experienced in his own time, making it valuable in understanding the place of Latinas/os in the church today.

Moving past this idea of Brown as another term for liminality or betwixtness, it is essential to understand some of the individual groups which fall under that umbrella. While the entirety of Latin America could fit into this categorization, I will focus on Mexico, including portions of the United States that historically belonged to Mexico and Central America, for the focus of this research and writing. Mexico is an in-between space geographically that is neither North American nor South America, but also is not Central America. Central America is comprised of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama. There will also be a focus on the individuals who are living in the United States but are migrant workers from Mexico and Central America, those who are DACA<sup>4</sup> recipients or Dreamers, and those who are first-generation American Citizens, as they are essential to understanding the makeup of the Latina/o/x/e or Brown Church.

By focusing on Central America, Mexico, and the United States, I aim to create a smaller demographic from the much larger group defined as Latinos/as/xs/es. In this subset, several Indigenous groups may provide additional information and context for many of the sources currently available on the topics of this research. An important concept essential to understanding this topic is the use(s) of the term Indigenous and its relation to this research. According to the United Nations, the term has not been adopted due to the vast diversity of Indigenous peoples and groups. Several criteria are described by the UN, which provides aid in a modern understanding of the term:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>

- Self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level/acceptance by the community as their member
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic, or political systems
- Distinct language, culture, and beliefs
- Forming non-dominant groups in society
- Resolving to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive people and communities<sup>5</sup>

Numerous Indigenous groups in the United States, Mexico, and Central America make up a sizable percentage of the Latina/o/x/e individuals whose experience this research aims to explore. This group could also be referred to as a mixed ethnicity group or, in Spanish, *mestizo* or *mestizaje*, which is the state of being mixed. According to the Minority Rights Group, “there were 25.7 Million Mexicans who self-identified as indigenous, equivalent to 21.5 percent of the national population at the time, with another 16 percent identifying as part-indigenous.”<sup>6</sup> With numbers that large, it is essential to understand, accept and transmit information about the detrimental impact white Europeans, specifically White Christians, have had on these various indigenous communities in the past several hundred years. Romero does an excellent job of wrapping these concepts around to explain the more profound actions,

The Spaniards invented race in the Americas by lumping these diverse Indigenous ethnic groups together and calling them “Indians.” It is significant to note that these various native communities did not possess an overarching social identity before the Spanish arrival. To the European conquerors, however, their Brown bodies made them all “Indian.” As “Indians,” they were perceived as sharing inherent cultural characteristics that made them inferior to Spaniards and that justified their conquest and exploitation. In the words of the Law of Burgos, “By nature they [Indians] are inclined to idleness and vice, and have no manner of virtue or doctrine.” To add insult to injury, these diverse

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<sup>5</sup> “Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices.” 2020. United Nations.  
[https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session\\_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices*

native groups were incorrectly labeled “Indian” because Columbus believed he had arrived in the Indies of South Asia.<sup>7</sup>

### **Availability of Research and Source Materials**

At present, there are numerous sources available relating to the history of the Latin American Church and emerging works are emerging that focus on the intersection of Social Justice, Faith, and the Brown Church. The first work encountered and explored was *The Brown Church* by Robert Chao Romero, but another excellent source that should be explored is *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*, written by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah.

This research will focus on three related topics outlined in *The Brown Church* and *Unsettling Truths*. The first of those topics focus on understanding the Latina/o/x/e church community in the United States, Mexico, and Central America. It is essential to a deeper understanding of where Latinas/os/xs/es are regarding their faith and their worship preferences, and practices are at in the present moment. The second component explores the history of the Brown or Latina/o/x/e church. Does this exploration include understanding how history shapes the Latina/o/x/e or Brown experience with the church? The answers are found in understanding several topics, including Manifest Destiny and other doctrines, policies, and laws that dehumanize Brown individuals and give preferential treatment to the White European *conquistadors*. Without a basic understanding of these racist and hate-filled principles, it would be impossible to understand the current climate in which Latinas/os/xs/es find themselves, which impacted their view on faith and worship. This research's final component or facet

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<sup>7</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 62-63.

understands the musical and ethnomusicological aspects of the church's music in the United States, Mexico, and Central America.

### **Consideration of Social Change and Political Climate**

Understanding the Latina/o/x/e church means understanding it in its entirety. It is tempting to focus on just the church or just the current climate in mainstream worship culture, but it will not provide a complete understanding of these topics and research focus areas. Without understanding the full impact of the past and understanding the current political and social climate of change, it is impossible to understand the Latina/o/x/e Church. Latin America has a long history of violence, but the more recent past has been entirely entrenched in this violent state of being. In *The Future of Christianity in Latin America*, Daniel H. Levine describes the causes of this violence, "The last 40 years have been a time of much violence in Latin America. The specific character of this violence (repressive, revolutionary, associated with civil wars, urban gangs, and domestic abuse) has shaped the pattern of religious change both for Catholics and protestants."<sup>8</sup>

Currently, in the United States and elsewhere in the world, there is a focus on issues of social justice, racial equality, and the divide caused by politics surrounding these issues. There is an argument that these issues are not political or social but are human rights issues. As an issue of human rights, it is essential to understand that link to Christianity, faith, and the church. However, the connection between social justice and religion is often overlooked or even ignored when looking at some civil rights and social justice figures. Romero describes this,

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel H. Levine. "The Future of Christianity in Latin America." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 41, no. 1 (2009): 121–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27744084>. 137-138.

Unfortunately,, the centrality of faith in the praxis of Cesar Chavez, as well as in the lives of other civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., is often overlooked in both academic and activist circles. Almost without exception, academic and popular discussions of Chavez and King claim them as role models while at the same time scrubbing them of their Christian faith. They take the “Rev.” away from King and the “Abuelita Theology” away from Chavez. They also ignore the important role played by the Christian church in the major civil rights successes of the 1960s.<sup>9</sup>

It would be impossible to discuss this current social and political climate without discussing the hateful rhetoric of some political parties and movements. The Brown church movement has done an excellent job of addressing these issues and sorting through the underlying cases, which is immigration.

The Brown Church of the United States has arisen to challenge its persecution at the hands of a twenty-first-century Pharaoh named Donald Trump. Like the Israelites three thousand years ago, the Latina/o community has been scapegoated by the majority culture and cast as a foreign military threat in a time of war. We are exploited for our cheap labor and vast economic contributions to the Gross Domestic Product of the United States (\$428 billion annually) as well as our additional billion dollar contributions to federal, state, and local taxes. In the same breath, we are blamed for the economic and national security woes of the country by wily politicians eager for the power of elected office.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the history of the United States, there have been waves of immigration marked by individuals coming to this country looking for a better life, and the “American Dream.” At the current time, Latinas/os/xs/es are becoming the most significant minority in the US, and they represent a large number of Christians in the United States; more specifically, they represent two-fifths of Catholics in this country because of the influx of immigrants to the United States from Latin America. It is also true that Latinas/os/xs/es have a higher birthrate than others.

American families and the rates of individuals immigrating continue to grow, which all leads to

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<sup>9</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 140.

<sup>10</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 209-210.

The population surge is noted in the statistical data. This also leads to the Latina/o/x/e connection impacting the political, cultural, and religious awareness in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

While many Latinas/os/xs/es participate in the Catholic church, many join in protestant denominations, with a substantial number participating in Evangelical worship practices. Within the Evangelical base, there is an effort, and often emotional one, to title the rise in numbers of immigrants in the United States. This is often filled with hateful rhetoric and behaviors, which further the confusion for members of these religious affiliations who are also Latina/o/x/e. It is important to remember that this hateful rhetoric is often spouted by individuals who consider themselves Christian. This dichotomy is just one essential yet complex consideration for the Brown Church and the work of this paper and research. When examining this change from the Biblical perspective,

Karla R. Suomala describes this in *Immigrants and Evangelicals: What does the Bible Say*,

...there are a number of different terms for “alien” or “stranger” in the Hebrew Bible and that the term *ger* in the Leviticus passage should be distinguished from *nekhar* or *zar* found in other biblical texts. A *ger*, he explains, would have legal status and was entitled to the same rights as a citizen. The other terms do not grant this kind of status, says, Hoffmeier, and therefore, it is wrong “to confuse these two sociological categories of foreigners and then use Scripture regarding the *ger* as if it applied to immigrants of today who enter the country illegally.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Personal Considerations**

There are several personal considerations regarding this research and this thesis project. I was born in Honduras when there was significant civil unrest and upheaval in

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<sup>11</sup> German Martínez, “Hispanic Worship and Culture: The Process of Inculturation” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, (1993: Vol 11)79.

<sup>12</sup> Karla R. Suomala, “Immigrants and Evangelicals” *CrossCurrents* Vol. 67, No. 3 (2017) 594.

that country. This led to an international adoption to the United States when I was six weeks old. I was blessed with parents who stressed the importance of maintaining a connection with Honduras and Central America, which facilitated multiple trips back to Honduras and other cultural activities. I have been impacted and intrigued by the region's art, music, and culture during each trip. I have also been deeply affected by the knowledge that my roots come directly from the Indigenous peoples of Honduras, specifically the Maya. This led to an interest in the intersection of Mayan music, Mayan culture, and the church's role in that history and culture.

I had planned to travel to Guatemala and Honduras in July of 2020, but due to the ongoing Covid outbreak, the ability to make that trip was impacted by Covid. However, I was able to make another trip to Honduras in June of 2021. It was evident on this trip that the knowledge relating to traditional and Indigenous musicians was limited to sources within the country itself. That is true of many of the other countries my research focuses on; able to note that there are many personal feelings. Honduras is a part of who I am, even though I am not here. The effort on behalf of my parents to instill a connection to the country of my birth has been valuable. That searches interest and research have also fulfilled that search for understanding and relationships said it has not to maintain a sense of distance in an anthropological mind. I have deliberately sought new connections to my Latinidad, as well as to the church. I thought that if I used those previous connections, I would have an even more personal connection to this topic, and I would not be maintaining a bit of objectivity.

One other crucial personal consideration is that musical concepts relating to Latin America Music and Central American music specifically have impacted this career choice and the choice of focus area in my future career. These musical, personal, and professional interests have influenced other ways. Due to this passion and drive to discover more about this part of my life, I have become better at Spanish and learning about different aspects of this culture. While

every individual or ethnomusicologist will not have a concrete understanding of those concepts, it would create another lengthy facet for this thesis project: the start of oversized or large more.

### **The Latin American Church and the Brown Church Institute**

In looking at the history of the Latin American church, specifically related to the Central American countries, there is little information available. This is because much of the public and published data basis ed on data from just a couple of countries, such as Mexico, Guatemala, or Latin America. Due to this, it is essential to remember that when looking into the church's history in Central America, it is also necessary to look at the church's history in Latin America. As this is a complex and multifaceted topic, the following timeline may be helpful. It is adapted from *The Histories of the Latin American Church: A Handbook* by Joel M. Cruz:

#### *A Brief Timeline of The Central American Church*<sup>13</sup>

- 12,000-30,000 First humans arrive in the Americas
- 1300-1500 Aztec and Inca empires emerge
- 1492 Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas
- 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas divided the New World between Spain and Portugal
- 1502 First enslaved Africans arrived in the New World
- 1508 Papal bull gives control of the church in the Spanish colonies to the crown
- 1511 Antonio de Montesinos protests the abuse of the Indigenous peoples  
The first diocese in the New World is established in Santo Domingo  
Bartolome de Las Casas begins his lifelong defense of the Indigenous peoples
- 1517 Luther ignites the Protestant Reformation
- 1521 The Aztecs fall to Hernan Cortez

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<sup>13</sup> Joel M. Cruz, *The History of the Latin American Church*, (2014: Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press) 3-10.

- 1524 Franciscan missionaries arrived in Mexico
- 1531 Our Lady of Guadalupe appears to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin
- 1537 Pope Paul III declares the Indigenous peoples to be fully human in *Sublimus Dei*
- 1571 Inquisition established in Mexico
- 1759-1788 Catholic Enlightenment in the Americas occurs
- 1767 The Jesuits are expelled from the Spanish Colonies
- 1820s-1900s, The Catholic Church became an instrument of the state in Latin America
- 1823 United Provinces of Central America secede from Mexico
- 1846-1848 The United States fights a war against Mexico
- 1800's (mid) Protestant Missionaries begin arriving in Latin America during the Spanish-American War
- Latin American Plenary Council meets in Rome
- 1901 Pentecostal movement begins in Topeka, Kansas
- Azusa Street Pentecostal revivals in Los Angeles include Mexican Americans
- First Pentecostal revivals in Latin America (Chile)
- 1910 Mexican Revolution begins
- 1913 Committee for Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA) formed to unify protestant mission agencies and churches
- 1929 Protestant denominations meet at the Havana Congress to be the "Latinization" of the churches
- 1944 Guatemalan revolution begins
- 1949 Latin American Evangelical Conference (CELA) forms in Buenos Aires
- 1954 CIA-engineered coup deposed President Jacobo Arbenz and installed a military dictatorship in Guatemala
- 1955 Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) founded in Rio de Janeiro; Church and Society in Latin America (SAL) founded
- Latin American Evangelical Commission for Christian Education formed (Peru)
- 1962-1965 Vatican II inspires contextualization of theology and practice
- Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta formed the United Farm Workers Association in California
- 1960's (late) Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement spreads to Latin America

- 1968 CELAM II (Medellin, Colombia) declares the “preferential option for the poor”  
Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated  
Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL), founded  
Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation
- 1973 Commission for the Study of the History of the Church in Latin America  
(CEHILA) formed
- 1979-1990 Priests take positions in the Sandinista government
- 1980-1992 Government militias target catholic leaders in El Salvador; Salvadoran Civil War
- 1980 Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated in El Salvador; three US nuns and a  
lay missionary were murdered in El Salvador
- 1982 Latin American Council of Churches (CLA), founded in Peru
- 1985 Women theologians gather to discuss liberation theology from the women’s  
perspective (Buenos Aires)  
Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter were killed by armed forces (US-  
trained) in El Salvador.  
Latin American Evangelical Pentecostal Commission (CEPLA), founded
- 2013 Jorge Mario Bergoglio elected as Pope Francis

**Precontact**

It is imperative to distinguish the various periods of development in Latin America and Central America. The first period of interest is the time referred to as precontact. During this time, the people who inhabited the continents of North and South America had entered these continents from the Bering Strait. According to some historians, they may have also come across the Pacific Ocean to these continents. This migration continued in waves from around fifteen and twenty-five thousand years ago. Cruz describes these cultural impacts further, “They developed into a myriad of people groups with diverse cultures and languages unknown in the

Old World and whose civilizations ranged from nomadic hunter-gatherers to the Maya, Aztec and Inca empire builders.”<sup>14</sup>

While the Aztecs played a significant role in understanding the music of Central America, Mexico, and the United States, the other major Indigenous group of the region would be the Maya. Less is known about the Mayan people, but some information about the Maya and the church is available. The information about the Maya and their belief systems comes from many diverse sources, including historical records, archaeological sources, ethnography, hieroglyphs, iconography, and comparisons to other cultures, primarily the Aztec culture.<sup>15</sup>

During the latter part of the pre-contact period in Spain and Portugal, this time was referred to as Iberian or Iberian History. The term Iberian can be used to describe the population of the Iberian Peninsula; however, it is a term that can also be used about a specific ethnic group from Spain and Portugal. During the time before the “Discovery of the New World,” both Spain and Portugal were coming out of centuries of struggle between Christianity and Muslims, leading them to be in a place of exploration.<sup>16</sup> As part of this expansion and exploration, the Royal patronage was established; Cruz describes this, “Known as the Patronato real in Spain and the padraodo real in neighboring Portugal, the royal patronage consisted of the right to name bishops to empty offices. Throughout the Middle Ages, it was long debated who

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<sup>14</sup> Cruz, *Histories of the Latin American Church*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Diane Z. Chase and Arlen F. Chase, “Changes in Maya Religious Worldview: Liminality and the Archaeological Record” in *Maya Worldviews at Conquest* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado), 223.

<sup>16</sup> Cruz, *Histories of the Latin American Church*, 17.

rightfully held that privilege, the pope by virtue of being the vicar of Christ of the secular ruler for his support, financial and otherwise, of the church's mission within the realm."<sup>17</sup> These actions set the stage for what comes during the time of the conquest.

As we move out of the pre-conquest times, we see that "the planting of Christianity in the Americas was an endeavor of imperialist greed and evangelical self-sacrifice. As Christian institutions and spiritualities developed in Latin America, they took on forms and emphases that continue to inform faith and practice today."<sup>18</sup> One of the essential things which are known about the cultures in the New World before the arrival of the Spanish in the 1540's to the region is that music was an important feature. Arnd Adje Both describes this in his writing,

Archaeological finds made in the historical center of Mexico City show that at least three shrines were dedicated to the Aztec gods of music, Macuilxochitl und Xochipilli... comprised of deposits with bells, fragments of ceramic drums and trumpets, a set of precious stone flutes, and groups of votive representations of musical instruments made of ceramics, volcanic stone, and greenstone...Remains of a similar shrine were discovered at the northwest corner of the Cathedral of Mexico City.<sup>19</sup>

While there are many things we do not know, the one thing that we do know is that music composition existed and was celebrated long before the arrival of the Spaniards. Linda L O'Brien describes the composition techniques in her article Music in the Mayan Cosmos, "According to the traditional mythology, the composition of music is an activity already completed by the ancestors, though occasionally, a new piece will be acquired by a musician in

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<sup>17</sup> Cruz, *Histories of the Latin American Church*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Cruz, *Histories of the Latin American Church*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Arnd Adje Both, "Aztec Music Culture," *The World of Music* 49, no. 2 (2007): 97

his dreams.”<sup>20</sup> The music part of the Mayan cultural landscape is also described, “The repertory ascribed to the ancestors consists of approximate five simple melodic formulas, skeletal melodies with semi-fixed and rather loosely interpreted harmonic implications. Each of these is known by a title which identifies its specific use.”<sup>19</sup>

After the arrival of the Spaniards, and with them the Roman Catholic belief system, there were aspects of the Mayan belief system which could be contextualized and parts that could not.

O’Brien explains,

Maya concepts of death were at odds with those stressed by the Catholic Church in the New World, and these Indigenous belief systems were affected almost immediately upon contact – so much so that standard ethnohistoric references appear to reflect changes within a generation following the conquest of the Maya by the Spanish. However, other aspects of Maya religion remained or were transformed with less modification.<sup>21</sup>

An essential concept in understanding the conquest and colonial times in Central America is that faith and belief in the Christian God played a key role; Manifest Destiny was one principle that arose from this and created that dynamic power still in existence today. Manifest Destiny was the principle that gave the Spanish power, and they used it to try to “save” the Indigenous people and convert them. This required the belief that Indigenous people were ignorant, savage, and less than human, and that by converting them to, Christ they were doing a good deed, a deed that is required as part of their faith, which gave them a means of excusing and justifying their actions. James A. Sandos describes its importance regarding music and conversion within Spanish Missions. He states, “Music was important in conversion,

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<sup>20</sup> Linda L. O’Brien, “Music in a Maya Cosmos,” *The World of Music* Vol. 18, No 3 (1976).  
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<sup>19</sup> O’Brien, “Music in a Maya Cosmos,” 40.

<sup>21</sup> Chase and Chase, *Changes in Maya Religious Worldview*, 219.

and education in general, for the Indigenous peoples. Music played an important but largely overlooked role in converting California Indians to Roman Catholicism. Music's importance lay in its centrality to the Mass, and the Mass, in turn, lay at the religious center of the Franciscan mission."<sup>22</sup>

Another principle that affects the Latina/o/x/e Church, or the Brown Church, is the idea of El Requerimiento. Robert Chao Romero describes this principle and its impact,

El requerimiento reveals the profound lengths to which European colonial nations would go to employ legalism in order to justify their naked pursuit of land, wealth, power, and privilege. A similar type of legalism occurs today in the United States when the Supreme Court strips Latinas/os, African Americans, and other people of color of longstanding civil rights protections in voting, education, and employment, based on narrow legal interpretations of the constitution.<sup>23</sup>

Another consequence of this line of thinking can be seen if we move to the continent of Africa; we can see several kingdoms on the continent which were thriving before they were forcibly and violently sold into slavery. This type of slavery is referred to as Chattel Slavery and is a brutal type of slavery marked by violence, dehumanization, rape, murder, and other atrocities. This forceful removal took place from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Cruz describes these kingdoms,

The people who were forcibly removed to the Americas from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries came from a number of politically and culturally sophisticated kingdoms of West African, among them Yoruba, Bantu, Fon-Ewe and Kongo. Their religious worldviews included belief in a supreme deity – Olodumare (Yoruba),

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<sup>22</sup> James A Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 135.

<sup>23</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 66.

Nazambi Kalunga (Kongo) and Onyankopon (Akan) – who rules the universe through hundreds of lesser gods, spirits, and ancestors.<sup>24</sup>

The principles of Manifest Destiny and El Requerimiento served the Spanish well, as they invented race. The Indigenous peoples were called “Indians,” which lumped the many different ethnic groups together under one name. All the Brown bodies were the same in the eye of the Spaniards, who believed them to be inferior, which helped justify their conquest, abuse, and exploitation. This was represented in other laws, “In the words of the Law of Burgos, ‘By nature they [Indians] are inclined to idleness and vice and have no manner of virtue or doctrine.’ To add insult to injury, these diverse native groups were incorrectly labeled “Indian” because Columbus believed he had arrived in the Indies of South Asia.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the vicious and cruel actions, which were the norm rather than the exception during the colonial period, small acts of resistance by the Indigenous people gave rise to what would eventually become the Brown Church. In *The Aztec Empire and Spanish Missions*, the authors, Beatriz Aguilar, Darhyl Ramsey, and Barry Lumsden from the University of North Texas describes these acts of resistance by the indigenous peoples,

During the colonial period, from 1521-to 1821, most of the population of what is now northern Mexico were peasants and Indigenous groups. Despite Spanish attempts to convert them to Catholicism the Indigenous printed their mark on the mestizo culture in the form of traces of their culture and beliefs. For example, most catholic churches were built over indigenous temples. The Indigenous inserted their idols inside the crosses so that whenever they worshipped Christ, the still worshipped their former gods (a practice that continues today.)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cruz, *Histories of the Latin American Church*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 62-63.

<sup>26</sup> Aguilar, Ramsey and Lumsden, “The Aztec Empire and the Spanish Missions,” 69.

Aguilar, Ramsey, and Lumsden also describe how the Indigenous peoples created new music while maintaining a sense of their own culture, techniques, language, and sounds. “In addition to preserving their language, Indigenous composers and musicians transferred some of their stylistic features to the new musical styles imposed by the Spanish. The Indigenous who composed music in the European style often did so using their native language.”<sup>27</sup>

One central figure in the Brown Church and social justice is Bartolome de las Casas.<sup>28</sup> Romero describes his importance,

The prophetic ministry of Bartolome de Las Casas laid the foundations of social justice in the Americas. Through his writings and social advocacy, Las Casas invented interdisciplinary social justice scholarship and theologizing, and became a central inspiration in the development of Liberation Theology in Latin America. His example of religious protest would go on to inspire many others throughout the colonial period and into the twenty-first century.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from las Casas, the Blessed Virgin plays an influential role in the Latina/o/x/e church. Our Lady of Guadeloupe is one of the most potent and most recognizable symbols for Latina/o/x/e Christians. Romero writes, “The blessed Virgin de Guadalupe symbolizes that God did not overlook the grave injustices of the conquest. Jesus understood the profound misrepresentation it represented, and he sent his mother and other prophets like Montesinos and Las Casas to make peace.”<sup>30</sup> Even in today’s struggles between the church, social justice, and other issues explored in this thesis project, it is possible to see how not understanding the

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<sup>27</sup> Beatriz Aguilar, Darhyl Ramsey, and Barry Lumsden, “The Aztec Empire and the Spanish Missions: Early Music Education in North America,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 24, no. 1 (2002): 76.

<sup>28</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 53.

<sup>29</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 74.

importance of the Blessed Virgin plays a part in modern struggles. Currently, in the ELCA a, there is a rift caused by a Latino Pastor being removed from his position in a missional church in California served the needs of the Latina/o/x/e community on the feast day of Our Lady of Guadeloupe. This dismissal was seen as unjust and an attack on the Latina/o/x/e community, but the choice of this specific day is also seen as adding insult to injury. It is important to remember these complexities when working with the Brown Church.

Another interesting concept that should be explored is described by Romero how Idolatry lays at the center of all of the laws and principles guiding the conquistadors and how that still has an impact today. He writes,

Those from Spain, or those who imagined themselves from Spain, idolized themselves and their culture as the supreme manifestation of the image of God. According to their twisted, unbiblical logic, those from Spain possessed a monopoly on Jesus and cultural civility. In order to become his follower, one had to first become a Spaniard. They condensed and conflated Spanish culture with Christianity and thereby idolized themselves. This idolization of Spanish culture and identity is blasphemy and continues to pervade Latin America and US Latina/o media, society, and even churches, to the present day.<sup>31</sup>

As we move away from the colonial times, we see that the desire to “save” the Indigenous peoples did not abate. The Jesuits continued to use the models previously utilized for evangelization into the 1830s.<sup>32</sup> This leads us to our current time in history; the US-Mexican war played a large part in the Brown Church. This land grab was shown with theological justification based on the concepts of Manifest Destiny. These individuals believed in a divine calling that

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<sup>31</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Mark G. Theil, “Catholic Ladders and Native American Evangelization” in *U.S. Catholic Historian* 51.

<sup>32</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 101.

allowed them to murder and plunder Native Americans and Mexican to claim their land for God.<sup>32</sup> Through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans, and others.

Latinas/os/xs/es, by extension, became Brown. The citizenship was promised in exchange for millions of acres of lands at me, just never came. This left Latinas/os/xs/es in a place of being liminal in every way.<sup>33</sup>

To repair the past sins, there has been a call to integrate localized expressive cultural forms most conspicuously revolved around the substitution of Latin with a local linguistic vernacular or language. Like many other theological ideas, the mandates of Vatican II flowed from the Catholic Church to radiate power outward. So, the shift to include vernacular expression took place in one form or another globally, virtually wherever the catholic church was a functioning institution.<sup>34</sup> This is also relevant in other denominational types of worship.

While so many other individuals and events play an essential part in the Latina/o/x/e church, the vital things to note are that the exchange between politics, social justice, and the church is evident in more recent times. Sometimes the faith part is silenced for leaders in this movement and others, such as the civil rights movement, as a whole. However, history, power, race, and religion are linked together in the past, present, and future.

### **An Overview of the Brown Church Institute (Formerly the Brown Church Movement)**

When they think about Latinas/os/xs/es and church, many people automatically think Catholic. Other denominations and religious alternatives are present from the very beginning in Latin America. Levine writes about these, saying that.

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<sup>33</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 118.

<sup>34</sup> T.M. Scruggs, "(Re)Indigenization? Post-Vatican II Catholic Ritual and "Folk Masses in Nicaragua," *The World of Music* 47, no. 1 (2005): 95.

“...they were often suppressed, hidden, or incorporated with syncretic Catholic practices. As pluralism and democratization have lowered the barriers to expressing religious alternatives, a number have acquired an important presence throughout the region.”<sup>35</sup> Many Latinas/os/xs/es are finding themselves in an Evangelical worship setting.

To understand this trend is essential to understand what the term Evangelical means. In the news media, specifically in the United States, evangelical has come to be linked with particular political leanings and very narrow viewpoints and faith tradition. The term is an umbrella term that could fit many denominational groups, from Protestants to Lutherans, to Southern Baptists to Pentecostals to those congregations who identify as non-denominational.<sup>36</sup> What is known and trustworthy is that Evangelicals are a large and diverse group. In her article, *Immigration Trends and Evangelical Communities*, Janelle S. Wong describes the membership of evangelical churches as becoming more diverse yet segregated. She says, “The membership of evangelical churches is becoming more racially diverse, but the overall picture is one of racial segregation. This segregation may help to explain why we see real differences in political attitudes and the sources of those attitudes across racial groups.”<sup>37</sup>

While Evangelical leanings are becoming more prevalent in Central America, it is essential to note that there are differences in evangelical leanings which can be identified along racial lines. Wong describes these differences,

White evangelicals, as a group, are more conservative politically than Black, Latinx or

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<sup>35</sup> Levine, *Future of Christianity in Latin America*, 131.

<sup>36</sup> Suomala, *Immigrants and Evangelicals*, 590.

<sup>37</sup> Janelle Wong, “Immigration Trends and Evangelical Communities” in *Immigrants, Evangelicals and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change (2018: Russell Sage Foundation)*. 71.

Asian American evangelicals This study shows that race is such a powerful part of American politics that, with the exception of attitudes toward abortion and same-sex marriage, Black, Latinx, and Asian American evangelicals are much less conservative than even whites who do not identify as evangelical.<sup>38</sup>

Another critical component to understand is that Latina/o/x/e and Asian, or Brown liminal, evangelicals are more likely to come to this faith practice through conversion, which could be accomplished through conversion by proximity or living in an evangelical household, which is a significant contributing factor of the conversion process. The Pew Research Center found that of the twenty-two percent of Latina/o/x/e respondents who identify as protestant, most were individuals who left the catholic tradition. More who left Catholicism, which was their childhood religion, than those who currently identified as Catholic. That same report describes some forty percent of all Latinos/as/xs/es who were currently identified as Protestant but considered themselves to be born-again. This practice of switching religions was only slightly more prevalent among Latinas/os/xs/es born in the US versus those who were foreign-born. This study also found the same about foreign-born who switched their faith practices before migrating than those who changed their faith practices after migration to the United States.<sup>39</sup>

While Latinas/os/xs/es may be moving away from the tradition of the Catholic church, there is a strong history of Catholicism in Central America specifically and Latin America on the whole. Pope John Paul II launched a “conservative restoration” and “New Evangelization” in the 1990s in Latin America. It officially launched in Santo Domingo at the meeting of the Latin American Bishops. *An Introduction: The Power of Religious Identities in the Americas*, Manuel A. Vasquez & Phillip J. Williams describe this push,

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<sup>38</sup> Wong, *Immigration Trends*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Wong, *Immigration Trends*, 66.

Furthermore, within the Catholic Church, the Vatican systematically weakened progressive bishops and pastoral projects. Pope John Paul II's "conservative restoration" in Latin America took the form of the "New Evangelization," officially launched at the 1992 Santo Domingo meeting of Latin American bishops. In the New Evangelization, "Charismatic and Neocatechumenal movements, alongside other international initiatives like Opus Dei, eclipsed the work of the popular church, save for instances like Chiapas, where a combination of acute social problems, a rising ethnic consciousness and a vocal 'liberal' bishop has given currency to a strong liberationist line. At the same time, cultural and economic shifts encourage people to consider other religious alternatives, including evangelical, Protestantism, African-based religions, and Spiritism."<sup>40</sup>

As discussed in the introduction, Catholicism and the Indigenous beliefs had many instances of being opposites. The most common discourse was on the distinction between Heaven and Hell and the ideas about good and evil. Since the Indigenous belief system was the nearly polar opposite of Catholicism, modifications regarding life, death, and the afterlife were made in the conversion process to make this transition smoother. Some aspects of Catholicism, which did not differ so vastly from the indigenous worldview, were readily adopted and modified by Indigenous groups, like the Maya, to fit their concepts of belief.<sup>41</sup>

In more recent times, Catholic bishops have long relied on the same models for organizational practices, models which focus on supervision and control.<sup>42</sup> Vasquez and Williams discuss this idea of control, "From our perspective, however, old questions remain. In particular, the issue of power, both in terms of domination and resistance, is just as relevant

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<sup>40</sup> Manuel A. Vasquez and Philip J. Williams, "Introduction: The Power of Religious Identities in the American" *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol 32, No 1, 2005: 8.

<sup>41</sup> Chase and Chase, *Changes in Maya Religious Worldview*, 221 & 223.

<sup>42</sup> Levine, *Future of Christianity in Latin America*, 126

today as it was during the heyday of the Catholic Church's preferential option for the poor, liberation theology, and Christian base communities."<sup>43</sup>

From these ideas about preferential treatment of the poor, Liberation and other theologies emerged in Latin America. Liberation theology, which has been highly controversial, is one of a few theologies native to Latin America. It is criticized but also applauded from within the catholic church and from outside of it as well.<sup>44</sup> However, some of the most potent attacks against Liberation Theology do indeed come from within the Catholic tradition, such as those launched by Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, "The most influential religious-based attacks on liberation theology are those of Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, who insists that the liberationists are not being faithful to the mandate of the Medellin conference."<sup>45</sup>

Despite negative concepts being associated with the Catholic Church, there have been positive strides that the Church has facilitated. A notable example of this is his Vatican II opened the doors of possibility to pluralism in the liturgical setting and encouraged dialogue with other cultures and religious worldviews. This concept of inculturation is based on Biblical theology, specifically "in the goodness of creation and humanity and to a concrete, actualized, and historical vision of the Church. Most importantly, it reasserts the centrality of the principle of the incarnation of the Logos of God as a concrete historical event."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Vasquez and Williams, *Power of Religious Identities*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Edward T. Brett "The Impact of Religion in Central America: A Bibliographical Essay in *The Americans*, Vol. 49, no. 3, 1993: 301.

<sup>45</sup> Brett *Impact of Religion*, 302.

<sup>46</sup> Martínez, *Hispanic Worship and Culture*, 82.

An examination of some of the faiths and worldviews of Central America would be incomplete without looking at the Afro-Latino traditions. One crucial group to explore is the Garifuna or Garinagu. This group of mixed ethnicities, also known as Black Caribs, is prevalent along the coastline of Central America. These Indigenous peoples were descended from African's destined for slavery but who were marooned off the island of St. Thomas. This group is unique because Christianity is a large part of their faith practices and identity. According to Francisca Norales in *Communicating the Garifuna Culture in Contemporary Church Music*,

According to Taylor, most Garinagu are profession Christians and most are members of the Roman Catholic denomination. Kerns noted that from historical perspective, "Christian" and "Indigenous" (Arawak, Carib, African) elements are nearly inseparable. Garinagu have been directly acquainted with Roman Catholicism for over 250 years, since their emergence as a distinct cultural group. On that basis alone. Christian elements are nearly as "traditional" to Garifuna ritual as those derived from Amerindian and African sources.<sup>47</sup>

Despite this connection to Christianity, singing was not a large part of worship for the Garifuna. The first Garifuna Mass Booklet, or *Lemesi Lidan Garifuna*, was published by the Garifuna Settlement Day Committee in Belize City in 1983. This increased singing and church attendance and preserved the Garifuna language and culture.<sup>48</sup>

While it is true that Catholicism began the twentieth century with a monopoly on the religious field in Latin America, it was lazy in its power which led to the emergence, publicly, of more protestant religious beliefs.<sup>49</sup> Because of this, Protestant churches and missionary

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<sup>47</sup> Francisca Norales, "Communicating Garifuna Culture in Contemporary Church Music" *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2011: 80.

<sup>48</sup> Norales, *Communicating Garifuna Culture*, 82.

<sup>49</sup> Levine, *Future of Christianity in Latin America*, 123.

groups began to redirect their attention to the people living in urban areas. This is an intelligent strategy as these urban areas contain the most significant amounts of people.<sup>50</sup>

## **The Brown Church and Civil Rights**

Several vital components surround the Latina/o/x/e church and the Brown Church Movement/Institute. Most of those issues are surrounding issues of civil rights and human rights. Romero is not the first to make these connections. Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah question and ponder these issues in their work *Unsettling Truths*,

How did the church move from the ministry of compassion and care as commanded by Jesus and advocated by Paul to a Doctrine of Discovery that affirms violence and injustice in extreme forms? How did it get from following a savior who was persecuted and executed for his faith to a church that enacted persecution and executed its enemies in the name of Christ? How did we get from the Holy Spirit enabling the followers of Jesus to speak the languages of the nations in Acts 2 to Christian missionaries washing out native children's mouths with soap for having the gall to speak their own language?<sup>51</sup>

Charles and Rah continue to describe this further, stating that the Doctrine of Discovery was a sin and catalyst for racism in the United States. They described this theological distortion as one "that elevates white bodies and minds to a privileged position over others. This sinful expression racializes the image of God and links God's image to whiteness. Whiteness becomes the embodiment of all that is good, true, and honorable, including the positive godly attribute of self-governance and the desire to spread this form of godliness to savages."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Levine, *Future of Christianity in Latin America*, 132.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*. (2019: Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press) 66. <sup>52</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 85.

Since Robert Chao Romero has made the Brown Church a more mainstream idea, it is fitting that we look to his definition of the Brown Church, and Brown Christians who find themselves trapped in a liminal space. And, more importantly, how that relates to our faith and our savior.

Brown Christians reject the racist legacy of Latin America in all its manifestations. As followers of Jesus, we condemn all racist attitudes and all forms of racial inequality that are found in the Latina/o community. One can be a faithful follower of Jesus, or a racist, but not both. As a fundamental aspect of El Plan Espiritual de Galilee, we seek the promotion of racial justice and the reconciliation of all peoples, of all cultural backgrounds, within the one Beloved Community of God. As Latinas/os, we take pride in our history of mestizaje (mixture between Indigenous and Spanish), mulatez (mixture between African and Spanish), and various other forms of cultural blending, which include Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Taiwanese, Filipino, Lebanese, Arab, Syrian, Italian, German, Russian, Jewish, Armenian, and other cultural communities of the world. We honor our distinct multicultural mixture as a treasure from God (Rev 21.26) and a proud source of our identity as children of God. WE celebrate the different shades of our skin, our diverse body types, the curls and kinks and highlights of our hair, and the round, brown, green, and almond eye that are all found in our tribe. Estamos muy orgullosos de ser hijas e hijos de Dios. Somos Latinas/os.<sup>52</sup>

### **Ethnomusicology, Ethnodoxology, Evangelization, and Proselytizing**

An essential concept for this research and understanding the multifaceted nature of this work is understanding the negative and positive aspects of conversion. All Christian perspectives in the Latina/o/x/e church are based on some type of conversion. We can see the damage that forced conversion has had throughout history, but it cannot be understated, especially if there is a real effort to be better than in the past.

The first thing to consider is what is meant by the idea of religious conversion. Simply, it is the process of changing religious beliefs. In *Ethical and Psychological Implications of*

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<sup>52</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 49-50.

*Religious Conversion* by Ernest Harms, religious conversion is explained and defined,

Religious conversion is the change from one religious belief to another. As it is generally understood, it means simply that a man or woman has accepted a new set of religious convictions and that, usually, he or she now goes on Sunday to another church. This may be true for some people for whom religion is only a matter of rationalization, or a convention, or a social affair. For those, however, for whom religion has been a matter of conviction and faith, conversion can cause considerable ethical and emotional concern which affects the entire personality. Inevitably it means a deep change in the entire intellectual, emotional, and social life. It may even mean breaking with one's professional or business life and being forced to start anew, socially or economically, and make completely new adjustments, in other words, a real conversion may mean a time of severe inner turmoil, distress, and even emotional disturbance.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout his work, Harms explains many conversions situations and the physiological impacts. For example, he describes "come-in conversion," when a particular religion has surrounded someone for so long that they decide to convert to maintain relationships.<sup>54</sup> Another type described is the "turning conversion" conducted under another individual's influence. This influence could be done forcefully; both could account for current trends about the Latina/o/x/e or Brown Church. Harms explains what the impact of conversion might be and what factors might have an effect on that psychological impact,

When conversion occurs in the life of an individual, he stands between two religious worlds, the old one that he is leaving and the new one he is about to enter. The main problem will revolve around how deeply he was attached to his old faith. The struggle will be especially hard if he was "raised in the faith." There will be numerous attachments either to the old cult or to the habitual forms of general

## **Personal Observations on Issues of the Brown Church**

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<sup>53</sup> Ernest Harms, "Ethical and Psychological Implications of Religious Conversion" in *Review of Religious Research*, 1962: Vol 3, No. 3: 122.

<sup>54</sup> Harms, *Ethical and Psychological Implications*, 123.

I was recently blessed to travel to my birth country with a group of missionaries. I was conflicted before this trip,, during this, and even now while writing these words. I have always had an incredibly unique perspective on Honduras. Despite my non-Hispanic name, I look very *Morena*, very *Indio*. I have dark hair, dark skin, and hazel eyes. I look like so many of the people in Honduras and so have been able to observe missionaries from both etic and emic perspectives. However, this was the first time I was with them, that I was one of them, that *Yo era misionera*.

Our typical day involved driving into the mountains to bring food and scripture to the people in that region. What was so challenging about this is that it felt a lot like bribery in some ways. These people were desperate; they knew there was a chance that we would be bringing food and provisions, though the Honduran church leaders admitted that the people knew it was not a guarantee that food would be given. They would be asked to sit through a worship service, and at the very end, there would be the distribution of supplies. While looking at the faces of those people, mothers with young children, elderly with no way to work, I could not help but wonder about how many wanted to be there for faith and how many had nothing better to do, especially if an hour of their time got them a week of supplies.

I want to go back, I enjoyed preparing and delivering supplies, but I could not stomach the idea of holding people hostage in a hot church for God when it was not what they wanted. I could not and cannot get past the idea of people being so desperate for the food and services that missionaries represent that they would go through the motions for God. I cannot get passed the idea that being a radical Jesus follower means helping without a caveat. I could not help but wonder if this was really what we are called to do as Christians? I refused to give testimony because I could see, though the pastor could not, that I was blessed to be rescued from that type of poverty in the eyes of these people. My hardships would seem like entitled complaining to

people who did not have the means to survive. My etic/emic confusion also allowed me to view that this misunderstanding of culture is a critical problem with mission work and evangelization.

In *The Bible in Mission: Evangelical/Pentecostal View in Latin America*, Antonia Leonora van der Meer describes this problem,

So, it is possible to be faithful and committed to the biblical truth and at the same time open to listen to people from different cultures and ways of understanding. We need to learn to adapt, to incarnate ourselves and our message as followers of Jesus Christ. Missionaries have created barriers to the gospel by their lack of understanding and adaptability. But as evangelicals, we do not want to fall into the trap of creating a different gospel which is more easily acceptable.<sup>55</sup>

While it does not appear to be as expected, these missteps remind me of an instance when I lived in Honduras when I was nineteen. I stayed with a family in a modest part of Tegucigalpa's capital city. One afternoon we went to the *Pulperia*, and while there, we encountered missionaries. They were handing out pocket bibles. While observing them, there were several obvious missteps and misunderstandings at play. First, this was an upper-middle-class *Colonia*, not the impoverished *barrios* that needed assistance. Second, they did not have tangible help to offer, such as food, water, clothing, or medication, but bibles which many residents already had if they were lucky enough even to be able to read them. I did not speak, just observed. As we left, the family I was staying with explained that these missionaries believed they were doing God's work by converting non-believers. Still, the fact was that the *Catrachos* knew that God had always resided in Honduras.

Van der Meer explains another example of missionaries missing the mark, which is a trap that many Christians fall into, both at home and abroad.

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<sup>55</sup> Antonia Leonora Van der Meer, *The Bible in Mission* 2013: 77.

Many understand that we are called to follow Jesus' model in humble and loving service. Some serve in arts, others in sports, many offer training courses to the young, as well as to women, others serve in literacy and in community development. Sadly a growing number of churches are influenced by the self-seeking theology of prosperity and have lost compassion for the needy. And many still follow the traditional view that our real task is to present the gospel and seek to convert people to Christ. But there is hope, even though the dimension of social needs and suffering continues to be much greater than our possibility to respond adequately and seek the empowerment and restoration of the dignity of people living at the margin of society.<sup>56</sup>

In *Ethical Evangelism and Proselytizing* by Elmer J. Thiessen, he writes about troubling practices in terms of faith and ethics. He writes,

Let me just make a brief mention of one other practice that concerns me. I know of churches in my own denomination that have sent small groups of Christians to the Ukraine or Russian for two or three weeks, to engage in evangelism. These groups travel around to villages with a translator and share their personal testimony. But I think this approach raises some ethical questions. What we have here are foreigners trying to evangelize, via a translator, often with little or no understanding of the culture into which they are speaking, and with no long-term commitment to the personal they are speaking to. Does this not violate the dignity criterion of ethical evangelism? And what about criterion 12 of ethical evangelism? Ethical evangelism is sensitive to the culture of the recipients. I am not sure that the approach above satisfies this criterion either.<sup>57</sup>

While it is true that missionaries and their work have an impact, there are no simple answers regarding these types of activities; there is no clear right and wrong where this work is concerned. It is essential to understand, accept and acknowledge this and other missteps. Van der Meer writes about this in describing the observations of Rene Padilla,

[Rene] Padilla is critical of the way the gospel has been brought to Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Western missionaries were convinced that they had the right vision of translating and preaching the Bible, often with little understanding on contextualization, a message which offered eternal salvation, but many had no concern for people's human struggles. So the gospel came as an alien religion and did not present answers to their

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<sup>56</sup> van der Meer, *The Bible in Mission*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> Elmer J. Thiessen, "Ethical Evangelism and Proselytizing" in *The Mission of God*. 2015: 128-129.

<sup>60</sup> van der Meer, *The Bible in Mission*, 71.

needs and questions. Mission should be done following the model of Jesus Christ, who lived as a normal human being in his own context and brought the good news in a way that made sense to the people and answered their needs.<sup>60</sup>

## **Research Questions**

While this subject matter is broad and has many different components that could be explored, the main focus of this research is to analyze worship trends in the Latina/o/x/e church in my geographical region. While I would hope to do larger-scale research in this area eventually, the focus on my immediate area serves two purposes. First, this Latina/o/x/e community in my immediate vicinity is primarily of families from Central America and Mexico, which is the region I am most interested in studying. The second purpose of this focus is to begin to create a larger pool of information on music related to the Brown church. A critical consideration for this research is identifying if and how the intersection of social justice and religion is exhibited in the music utilized in worship services. Some manifestations of this might be discovering a preference for music composed for this specific population, finding trends of using specific languages versus others, or an effort to use more traditional instrumentation or musical components. This is a vital aspect to consider since decolonization is an entire process taking place, not just in the Latina/o/x/e community but elsewhere in terms of other Indigenous populations. It would also be essential to consider how decolonization could occur about the church (universally) and music used in worship, as the history and basis of this worship practice affect colonial practices. How do we decolonize something so ingrained in these people's culture and faith practices?

Another component to consider is if there is no significant effort to create new and authentic works for worship, and churches and individuals are choosing to use translated music, what

might that say about the ownership of these worship practices. For example, if church leaders decide to use translated music, whether contemporary Christian music or traditional hymns, how do these choices affect issues surrounding being Brown. A fitting example of this complexity would be exploring songs that describe being “washed white” as part of the Christian belief process. While it is understood that this terminology is related directly to the idea of white being a euphemism for clean, it is a euphemism based on implicit bias and the idea that white is right. If Brown leaders use these songs, is there an approach to addressing these issues, and if not, is there a whitewashing within our own communities?

There is a wealth of information available regarding the history of the Latin American Church and the history of conversion and evangelization. There is also a lot of literature on the intersection of social justice and the church. Liberation Theology was founded on those principles and is still a guiding force in the Brown Church, despite its controversies. Looking at the church’s history in Latin America, it is essential to note that past atrocities cannot be forgotten or overlooked. They must be acknowledged and accepted to move forward. In addition to doing that, there is still a gap in the research and literature available. That gap deals with the music component. While there is ample information about Latina/o/x/e music, there is not as much information about music related to the church. Part of that is because much of the music related to faith is found within the countries themselves. Time, humidity, and lack of interest have led to those musical compositions and information being trapped in some countries in Central America.

I hope to add to this growing knowledge base through a broad range of research on church and worship music in Central America and Mexico, and the United States. I am blessed to live in an area with a large migrant community. While this type of research will not provide

information about the United States, it will give some insight into worship practices that can be further explored in future research.

### Glossary

Ally/Allyship – individuals who use their privilege to assist those without or with limited fight oppression and empower those voices and groups.

Assimilation – changing culture or behavior to fit the patterns of the majority group.

Bias – preference, often unconscious, affects and limits the ability to impartiality.

Bicultural – an individual who functions and/or identifies in two cultures.

Borderlands – used in terms of physical space (i.e., the region along the United States/Mexico Border) and social space (see liminality)

Brown – metaphor that refers both to the skin color of liminal groups and to the space between black and white that these individuals occupy.

Classism – subordinating individuals due to income, occupation, education, or socioeconomic status

Code-switching – switching between languages, dialects, intonation, or delivers, either consciously or unconsciously.

Colonialism – the historical system of forcible taking over a colonized territory or group; can be political, social, economic, or religious; creates an unequal relationship between the oppressor (colonizer) and the oppressed.

Colorism - the belief that lighter skin, or skin that more closely resembles white skin, is preferential to darker or Black skin.

Conscientization – becoming aware of political and social conditions of inequality in terms of treatment, conditions, or opportunities.

Critical Race Theory – an academic movement that studies the law as it intersects with antiracism efforts.

Cultural Appropriation – individuals of the dominant or privileged group taking ownership of oppressed or less influential groups' culture, religious or spiritual components, dress, or ceremonies.

Cultural Competence – the ability to work with and engage with people of diverse cultural identities and backgrounds, relevant to all work, education, religious, and social settings.

Diaspora – scattered population or a particular common origin

Discrimination – thoughts and actions based on a bias favor one group of individuals over another.

Disenfranchised – being deprived of power, rights, opportunity, or services.

Diversity – a sharing of a similar and different individual or group values, beliefs, or characteristics

Emigration – leaving one’s home country to live permanently in another.

Equality – an individual or group is given access to the same resources or opportunities.

Equity – understanding that individuals have diverse backgrounds and circumstances and access to resources or opportunities are adjusted to achieve an equal outcome.

Ethnicity – the belonging to a group with common origin or cultural traditions.

Ethnocentrism places one’s ethnic group over others, judging or assuming about another group based on one’s group norms.

Immigration – the act of coming to a foreign country to live permanently.

Indian – a derogatory term used to describe the Indigenous peoples of the Americas; there is a current trend of some indigenous individuals and groups trying to take back their power through positive usage.

Intersectionality – the complex issues of race, gender, class, and ability coming together for some individuals or groups.

Liberation Theology – developed by the Latin American Catholic church to address God’s preference for those suffering from poverty and social and political oppression.

Manifest Destiny – the use of God and Christianity to justify the brutal methods and practices present during the expansion of the continent; the idea that one was preordained to take domination over people and lands.

Marginalize – systemic disempowerment of an individual or group through denial of resources and prejudicial treatment.

Microaggression – actions or remarks that convey bias (i.e., “Where are you from?” being used to ask a question about a person’s ancestral roots)

Multi-Ethnic – an individual who identifies with two or more ethnic groups; an individual whose parents come from different ethnic groups.

Multi-Racial – an individual who identifies with two or more racial groups; an individual whose parents come from different racial groups.

People of Color – a term used to describe individuals who are non-white either through physical attributes or through the community and culture they are part of

Prejudice – preconceived opinion about a person or group; usually negative

Privilege – an advantage or benefit to individuals in the majority group who create unequal circumstances.

Race – identification of individuals based on physical characteristics, cultural and historical commonalities, a social construct.

Racial Profiling – using race or ethnicity as grounds to suspect an individual of committing a crime or offense.

Racism - is an ideology that divides individuals and groups into racial groups with a hierarchy where some races are superior to others; historically, shown through the dominion over people of color by white or European individuals.

Reaspora – individuals of the diaspora moving back to their countries of origins.

Social Justice – the work and practice of allyship and coalition to promote equality, equity, respect, and assurance of rights for marginalized groups or individuals.

Stereotype – a belief, feeling, or assumption about an individual or group that is widespread and socially sanctioned; may be positive but negative because they support oppression.

## Spanish Terms

Barrio- a neighborhood, usually lower in socioeconomic status; English equivalent of “the hood.”

Bracera/o – a Mexican worker admitted for a limited time into the United States.

Campeño – a term sometimes derogatory for farmworkers

Catracho/a – slang or nickname for individuals from Honduras

Colonia – a neighborhood or community, usually middle class to upper-middle-class

Corrido – a song or commentary of life along the border between the United States and Mexico

El Plan Espiritual de Galilee – a document that describes and asserts freedom of religious expression for Latinas/os who are Christian.

Guerros – light-skinned

India/o – dark skin; Indigenous descent

Jibaro – term akin to “country bumpkin.”

Latinidad – the Latina/o/x/e experience; understanding the diversity of issues and topics which cause both pain and pride in the Latina/o/x/e community

La Causa – movement in the United States included labor rights for farmworkers, women’s rights, and educational reform.

La Raza/La Raza Cosmica – the idea that Latinx is the only true race as it is made up of all of the world’s races; in the past was divisive, while in its current use, it is a term of pride in being a mixture.

Mestizaje – mixture

Mestizo/a – a person who is mixed race or mixed ethnicity

Mija/mijo – daughter/son

Mision integral – a theological concept that describes the Church’s obligation to work for all people but specifically those in the most need.

Morena/o – dark skin, hair, and eyes

Pulperia – a neighborhood store; similar to a bodega or corner store

Posadas – the liturgical reenactment of the Holy family while they were looking for a place for the Virgin Mary to birth Jesus, a metaphor for the search for safe refuge for immigrants.

Rubia/o – blonde

Sistema de Castas – caste system

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Indigenous Peoples of Central America and Mexico**

When referring to the area of Central America, confusion exists over the ways it is defined geographically, culturally, racially, and ethnically. For this work, the countries that make up Central America are Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, although some might consider Panama and Costa Rica included. These five countries consider themselves to constitute Central America. For example, the Honduran Flag represents this through symbolism, the two blue stripes represent the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and a white stripe represents the land between. Amid the white land portion of the flag, five blue stars represent the five countries of Central America and their hope for unity and peace in the future. Several other flags for these countries share some of the same symbolism for the same reasons.

While Mexico is not part of the five countries of Central America, it is still closely related culturally and geographically. Despite being connected, Mexico is traditionally described as its landmass, not considered a part of North America (the United States and Canada), Central or South America, or the Caribbean. In the United States, many of the Southern and Western States are part of what were historically Mexican lands; so, for this study, those areas will be included as part of Mexico and the Aztec Empire. The area that comprises the Aztec Empire is often referred to as Aztlan.

Mexico (including portions of the United States) and Central America are historically and currently home to several indigenous groups. The principal groups of this area which will be studied for this research are the Aztecs, the Maya, and the Garifuna. The remnants of the Aztec and Maya are found in villages located outside of major cities. Many maintain residence surrounding religious centers of pre-colonial times, such as the indigenous communities outside

Antigua, Guatemala, or Copan, Honduras. The Garifuna inhabit settlements located along the Caribbean coastline regions and in communities found in New York City and New Orleans.

Exploration into this subject matter reveals the importance of determining the use(s) of the word indigenous and how it relates to this research. According to the United Nations, this term has not been adopted into their system because of the diversity among indigenous peoples and groups. Several different criteria are described by the United Nations, which provide help in a modern understanding of the label indigenous:

- Self-Identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic, or political systems
- Distinct language, culture, and beliefs
- Forming non-dominant groups in society
- Resolving to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities<sup>58</sup>

The Aztec indigenous groups were traditionally located in the geographical area of Aztlan, which is comprised of most of Mexico and sizable portions of the United States. The religious and spiritual practices of the Aztecs seem to have been syncretistic, taking pieces and parts from other cultural practices they were exposed to.<sup>59</sup> Currently, Mexico is home to a large and diverse indigenous population, with many individuals falling under the heading of Mestizaje, which is a continual process of cultural and ethnic mixing and blending, something that began during colonialization. According to Mexico's National Commission for the

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<sup>58</sup> "Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices," United Nations, 2020, accessed December 1, 2020, [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session\\_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Aztec," accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Aztec>.

Development of Indigenous Peoples (CONADI – Comision Nacional para el Desarrollo de Los Pueblos

Indigenas) in 2017, “there were 25.7 million Mexicans who self-identified as indigenous, equivalent to 21.5 percent of the national population, with another 1.6 percent identifying as part-indigenous.”<sup>60</sup>

The second indigenous group explored is the Maya found throughout Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula. According to Minority Rights Group International, several smaller ethnic groups exist today and are associated with the indigenous group known as the Maya during pre-colonial times. These groups still speak languages derived from the traditional Mayan languages of their ancestral areas throughout Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras. An estimated eight million Maya lived throughout Mesoamerica.<sup>61</sup>

The last indigenous group explored for this research endeavor is the Garifuna or the Garinagu. This group is sometimes overlooked in their indigenous identification because they are Black and have roots in the African Diaspora. This unique group is descended from Africans brought to the Americas during the slave trade and either escaped or were marooned. This group found refuge with the Carib/Kalinago population of the Caribbean islands. It became the Afro-Indigenous group known as the Garifuna or Garinagu, who have settlements primarily in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Belize, and the United States.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “Indigenous Peoples.” Minority Rights Group, May 13, 2020, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/indigenous-peoples-4/>.

<sup>61</sup> “Maya Today,” MesoAmerican Research Center. The Regents of the University of California. 2020, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.marc.ucsb.edu/research/maya/maya-today>.

<sup>62</sup> “Garifuna (Garinagu),” Minority Rights Group. December 6. 2017, accessed December 3, 2020, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/garifuna-garinagu/>.

The Garifuna, Aztec, and Mayan descendants all face several similar obstacles in their lives. Many of these communities are ostracized, stereotyped, and lack basic healthcare and educational opportunities, which only puts them in a marginalization place. These groups have all been impacted by the church's work (as a universal entity) regarding conversion techniques and continued mission work, and missionary presence. Though there are also humanitarian groups and efforts for these indigenous peoples, many of the main goals of mission work are conversion and "saving."

The constant contact with mission groups and workers has also impacted these indigenous groups' cultural existence. Indigenous music has served and continues to serve as a religious/spiritual component for these groups and a part of significant life cycles such as births and deaths. Western church music also has a place in the overall musical landscape for these indigenous groups and music in Central America and Latin America. Both Indigenous and Western church music are present in the musical practices of those groups and those regions.

### **Importance of Music in Precolonial Indigenous Life**

For this research, it is essential to determine the depth and breadth of the musical traditions of the indigenous peoples in Mexico and Central America. This research will include information on the history of the music produced by these indigenous groups before, during, and after colonization. The musical components of Indigenous peoples' spiritual and religious life will be the focus of determining the historical and current spiritual and religious musical practices.

Music played a vital role in the lives of the Indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America. Through excavation and other archeological endeavors, the importance of music in the society of the Aztecs is described by Arnd Anje Both:

Archaeological finds made in the historical center of Mexico City show that at least three shrines were dedicated to the Aztec gods of music, Macuilxochitl und Xochipilli... comprised deposits with bells, fragments of ceramic drums and trumpets, a set of precious stone flutes, and groups of votive representations of musical instruments made of ceramics, volcanic stone, and greenstone...Remains of a similar shrine were discovered at the northwest corner of the Cathedral of Mexico City.<sup>63</sup>

The existence and study of these shrines assist in demonstrating the critical musical practices played in the daily and spiritual lives of these indigenous peoples.

For the Maya, music was believed to be something that was created by and for the Nawals, or gods of their belief system. In pre-Columbian Mayan culture, the composition of music was viewed as a preordained activity by the Nawals. Linda L. O'Brien describes the composition techniques in her article "Music in the Mayan Cosmos." "According to the traditional mythology, the composition of music is an activity already completed by the ancestors, though occasionally a new piece will be acquired by a musician in his dreams."<sup>64</sup> In this same article, O'Brien explains the typical repertoire of the Mayan people. "The repertoire ascribed to the ancestors consists of approximately twenty-five simple melodic formulas and skeletal melodies with semi-fixed and loosely interpreted harmonic implications. Each of these is known by a title which identifies its specific use."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Both, *Aztec Music Culture*, 97.

<sup>64</sup> O'Brien, *Music in a Maya Cosmos*, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

The music of the Garifuna/Garinagu people can be traced through their history. The general belief is that the Garifuna originated from the slave trade when a slave ship was shipwrecked, and they were marooned during the sixteenth century. The integration of the Africans among the Carib/Arawak peoples took place throughout the seventeenth century. This assimilation took place in the form of marriages and the blending of cultural components, including music and the rituals associated with life events.<sup>66</sup> Through this blending of elements of the African Diaspora and the Indigenous peoples, new spiritual and religious practices were developed, including music. The most documented information for these religious endeavors refers to the Dugu ritual, where spiritual possessions occur to heal an afflicted or sick individual. These rituals are also used as a thanksgiving type ritual.

Music had a prominent place in society and culture for the indigenous peoples before the arrival of the Spanish in the 1540s. During colonial times, the Indigenous peoples quietly fought to keep their customs and traditions, despite the intense and often violent attempts of the Spanish to hold dominion over them. Both writers, “In the temple precinct of Tenochtitlan, music had multiple functions and played in integral role in many rituals. As many practices were concealed from the Spaniards and did not survive the conquest, important information is fragmented or lost.”<sup>67</sup> This explains why there are differing amounts of information known regarding pre-colonial musical traditions and practices.

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<sup>66</sup> Byron Foster, “Celebrating Autonomy: The Development of Garifuna Ritual on St. Vincent,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 33, no. 3/4 (September and December 1976): 75-76.

<sup>67</sup> Both, “Aztec Music Culture,” 96.

<sup>71</sup> Romero, *The Brown Church*, 65.

## Music as a Means of Conversion and Evangelization

For this research, determination of the importance of music in colonization, conversion, and evangelization practices both past and present is a principal component. To explore this topic, considerations regarding the motives of the Conquistadors, which can be described in the concept of Manifest Destiny, must be explored. The idea of Manifest Destiny, which was written as a legal process in El Requerimiento in 1513, is the belief that God ordained the Spanish to convert the indigenous peoples of the Americas and claim control of the land. This was the basis for the cruelty, brutality, and inhumane treatment of the indigenous peoples, all committed in the name of God. The ideology was that they had the right to conquer and control these people to convert them.<sup>71</sup> This ideological stance was also described by Raimundo C Barreto, in his book *World Christianity as Public Religion*: “In other words, European evangelization in Latin America demanded a break with one’s indigenous past and the adoption of the superior way of life exemplified by the missionaries.”<sup>68</sup>

Manifest Destiny, as previously detailed, was the principle that gave the Spanish power, and they used it to try to “save” the indigenous people and convert them. Manifest Destiny required the belief that indigenous people were ignorant, savage, and less than human and that by converting them to Christ, they were doing a good deed. This deed is required as part of their faith, which gave them a means of excusing and justifying their actions. James A. Sandos describes its importance regarding music and conversion within Spanish Missions. He states, “Music was important in conversion, and education in general, for the Indigenous peoples. Music played an important but heretofore largely overlooked role in converting.

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<sup>68</sup> Raimundo C. Barreto, *World Christianity as Public Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 105.

California Indians to Roman Catholicism. Music's importance lay in its centrality to the Mass, and the Mass, in turn, lay at the religious center of the Franciscan mission."<sup>69</sup>

Music was a principal means of converting and evangelizing many missionaries and colonizers. Many indigenous people were trained in European/Western musical performance and composition techniques and practices. Music and its importance in Indigenous Culture aided in these conversion practices, as exemplified by the training and performances related to the Catholic Mass. Through the training and music educational practices present in the missions, indigenous musicians began composing and creating music for European religious purposes. They used this to preserve their language and culture while still conforming to the new religious regulations of their oppressors.

In the article "The Aztec Empire and the Spanish Missions: Early Music Education in North America" the authors, Beatriz Aguilar, Darhyl Ramsey, and Barry Lumsden from the The University of North Texas describes the pedagogy and purpose of music education in the missions. They also explain how the indigenous peoples created new music while adding their own culture, techniques, language, and sounds to the music being composed. "In addition to preserving their language, indigenous composers and musicians transferred some of their stylistic features to the new musical styles imposed by the Spanish. The indigenous who composed music in the European style often did so using their native language."<sup>70</sup>

Even after what would be considered the end of colonial times, the lasting impact of these practices is still being experienced. Looking into the musical traditions of the last fifty or

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<sup>69</sup> Sandos, *Converting California*, 135.

<sup>70</sup> Aguilar, et. all, *The Aztec Empire, and the Spanish Missions*, 76.

sixty years, how music is still being used as a conversion, evangelization, and “saving” tool is easy to see. Vatican II created an effort to allow and mandate the use of local vernacular to increase the Catholic church’s power. T.M. Scruggs describes this:

The call for the integration of localized expressive cultural forms most conspicuously revolved around the substitution of Latin with a linguistic vernacular, i.e., the local language. The mandates of Vatican II flowed from the nerve center of a major world religion structured to radiate power outward from a single hub. Accordingly, the shift to include vernacular expression took place in one form or another on a global basis, virtually wherever the catholic church was a functioning institution.<sup>71</sup>

As previously stated, the music created by indigenous composers for the use in Christian worship is a vital component of this research and understanding of the current implications in the present worship culture in Mexico and Central America. Examples of this musical mestizaje (mixing or blending) can be seen in twentieth-century musical compositions such as the 1968 Misa popular Nicaraguense by Carlos Mejia Godoy. Though this is not the only musical composition that uses indigenous vernacular for Christian worship purposes, it was one of the first. It played an essential part in Liberation Theology, which holds significance in the current Latino/a/x worship trends.

Nicaragua is an especially appropriate context to examine the ramifications of the politically progressive current within Catholicism. The founding of the first Liberation Theology Christian Base Communities in Nicaragua led directly to the creation of new masses in the linguistic and musical vernacular. The Misa popular Nicaraguense (Nicaraguan Popular, or Peoples’ Mass), composed in 1968, is one of the earliest masses composed in Latin America that reflects post-Vatican II directions and begins to reflect some influence on Liberation Theology.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Scruggs, *(Re)Indigenization? Post-Vatican II Catholic Ritual*, 95.

<sup>72</sup> Scruggs, “(Re)Indigenization? Post-Vatican II Catholic Ritual and “Folk Masses in Nicaragua,” 96.

## **The Brown Church, Current Latino/a/x Theology and Worship Practices**

Many Latinos/as/xs today have a complicated relationship with the Church (as a universal entity and on a local level) and how that relates to Latina/o or Chicana/o studies. These subject areas are essential to many Latinx individuals as they provide the basis for social justice and change efforts. Though not all Latinas/os/xs identify as indigenous, our cultural mestizaje requires that we have a connection with that indigenous history regardless of our level of Brownness.

The importance of the growing ideology surrounding the Brown Church, the movement behind it, and what it is to be Brown is significantly important and complex. This movement revolves around ideas and concepts of theology, social justice, colorism, racism, and faith. Brown is used concerning skin color, but Latinos come in every shade from snow white to deep ebony. So, while Brown indicates skin color, it is not a truly accurate description of that, so it also serves to describe the place between white and black. This in-between place could also be described with the term liminality. So, while Brown refers primarily to Latinos/as/xs, it also represents those who are not Latino but are not white or black but are “others” and are marginalized.

In the current Latino spirituality and religious beliefs landscape, a strong tie exists to the native indigenous peoples of our lands. Due to overt and covert resistance, the customs and cultural elements that survived colonization and persist today are present in most facets of life, specifically in religious/spiritual beliefs. This is described in Beatriz Aguilar et al.’s work surrounding music education in the Spanish Missions.

During the colonial period, from 1521-1821, the majority of the population of what is now northern Mexico were peasants and indigenous groups. Despite Spanish attempts to

convert them to Catholicism the indigenous printed their mark on the mestizo culture in the form of traces of their culture and beliefs. For examples, most catholic churches were built over indigenous temples. The indigenous inserted their idols inside the crosses so that whenever they worshipped Christ, the still worshipped their former gods (a practice that continues today.)<sup>73</sup>

Glen Arvel Horspool's writings about the Quiche Mayan community describe this balancing act between indigenous religious beliefs and Christianity. This description also serves to illustrate the deep connection and blending (mestizaje) that occurs in indigenous communities in Central America and in the more prominent Brown Church Movement, which seeks to validate and name this history:

One of the most interesting features of the indigenous religions is the way it has managed to persist within the framework of an imposed Roman Catholicism. The burning of candles, sometimes of copal incense, and the offering of money and prayers to the images and priests in the cathedrals and calvarios are duplicated at the burning places. Set Spanish prayers and hymns are intoned at the burning places, intermixed with improvised "presentations" recited in Quiche', and addressed to both Spanish and Maya gods and saints.<sup>74</sup>

## **Search Terms**

Several search terms became prominent in the literature collected while conducting the literature review process, specifically the search for literature. Approximately one hundred different search tags were initially used to organize the material. The leading search terms related to this research are Art Song, Assimilation, Aztec, Aztec Culture and History, Aztec Music, Belize, Brown Church, Catholicism, Christianity, Colonization/Colonial Music,

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<sup>73</sup> Aguilar, Ramsey and Lumsden, "The Aztec Empire and the Spanish Missions," 69.

<sup>74</sup> Glen Arvel Horspool, "The Music of the Quiche Maya of Momostenango in its Cultural Setting" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1982), 104, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Conversion, El Salvador, Garifuna, Guatemala, Honduras, Indigenous, Latina/o Studies, Maya, Nicaragua, Mexico, Missions, Missionaries, Religion, and Worship. The use of these search terms assisted in determining the scope and direction of existing and new research.

## **Results**

While this literature review has provided considerable information and direction regarding where the existing data and research leads, it also provides some options for further investigation. The literature review shows ample information exists in Music History, Ethnomusicology, Latina/o Studies, and religious studies about the processes that aided in the music education, performance, and composition of Western music by indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America. The Indigenous musical endeavors serve as evidence of music being used as a means of conversion within the missions during the colonial period and beyond. Today as missionaries continue to have contact with these indigenous groups, music is still used as a means of conversion.

Conducting some additional and new research within the constructs of the Brown Church Movement would undoubtedly be beneficial. In the future, surveying individuals of this mestizaje to determine how music has played a role in their worship and in which categories music might fall would be essential. Continuing to explore worship music composed beginning in colonial times would also be beneficial. This research will hopefully aid in more fully understanding the complexities of Latin American Music and how the mix of influences can be traced in sacred music. One of the central tenants of the Brown Church Movement is that Latino/a/x theology is built upon the teachings of Jesus while not invalidating the experiences of the indigenous peoples, and this research would serve to understand that premise further.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Research for this project is centered around identifying some local trends within the Latina/o/x/e church in my immediate geographical area. Some of the information which was sought through the research process is related to the primary goals of Ethnomusicology and Ethnodoxology was described in Brian Schrag's writing in, *Creating Local Arts Together*. Considering the focus is on both the religious/spiritual aspects of the Brown church, the research will be aided by many of the objectives described by Schrag. Although his work focuses on creating opportunities to create new art for worship, there could be an overlap between these guidelines and this thesis project.

The first step laid out by Schrag is to meet the community and its art. The purpose of this research is done through interviews and observations of the Latina/o/x/e church in my area. This church is also part of the more extensive research and learning in the Brown Church Institute. The Brown church is primarily made up of individuals who identify as Latina/o/x. In Spanish, "Latina" is feminine, "Latino" is masculine and the newer terms "Latinx" and "Latine" are non-binary. To promote inclusion in this writing and research-based on trends in this specific community, I have chosen to use appropriate terms, the feminine, the masculine, and the non-binary terms.

I aimed to meet the community in my immediate area, within a four-county radius in Northeast Ohio. This community comprises individuals from several ancestral backgrounds; however, the primary backgrounds are individuals from Mexico and Central America in our area. Central America is defined as Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. However, many individuals are from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador in my immediate area. This information about the demographics is partially based on

the work I have done in these communities and the information collected from the churches and worship leaders in the area. Given the high number of individuals in a vulnerable immigration situation, it is impossible to quantify this data without exposing these communities to further risks. The information I am interested in is not a currently explored niche; it feels like relying on qualitative data more than quantitative.

I focused on four counties in my immediate area to focus this research better. I live in Canton, Ohio, which is located in Stark County. I also concentrate on Summit County (Akron, Ohio) and Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) in the North and Wayne County (Wooster) to the south. Focusing on these counties specifically, even though there was information available on the entirety of the state of Ohio and that there are areas that are more well known for having large Latina/o/x/e communities, was just the ability to drive to those locations and observe worship services. It was hard to limit to these four counties, mainly because I eliminated Columbus (3 hours away) and Lorain (1.5 hours away), which are known for having large communities and resources available.

Once I determined the geographical area for this research, I located churches with a wealth of online information. This helped me focus on finding a diverse subset of Latina/o/x/e churches to represent better the music being used both in a more traditional setting and in contemporary settings. Using this process of elimination, I ended up with seven congregations in Cuyahoga County, six in Stark country, and two in Summit.

County and one in Wayne County. These churches included the following denominations: Baptist, Catholic, Church of Christ, Evangelical, Lutheran, Non-Denominational, and Mennonite. Catholic and Non-Denomination churches made up the most significant number of churches, with six non-denominational churches and four catholic churches. There were two

Lutheran (ELCA) congregations, though the same pastor leads them. There was also one of Baptist, Evangelical, Church of Christ, and Mennonite.

One important consideration related to the research for this thesis project was protecting the congregations. Although the information was readily available in several internet searches, it was also conducted through personal connections. Many of the congregants in these congregations are immigrants to the United States who are not here on permanent or legal status. Due to this, it was essential to keep the identifying information about these individuals to myself and my advisors. Because of this, each church congregation was given a code that identified their county and denomination. There have been several large raids on the immigrant communities in our area, and these individuals need to be protected in their places of worship.

While learning about these congregations and communities, one of the exciting aspects of the Latina/o/x/e community in this geographic area and in general is that they tend to use church and worship not just for its religious purposes but as a physical location for fellowship and community building. Many of the families live in multi-generational households or with extended families. It is common to have adult siblings living together or in neighboring homes, with their parents being part of the household. This leads to children growing up close to cousins, which is more typically seen amongst siblings in non-Latino/a/x families. This emphasis on family was further explored by observing worship services for the general church and Christmas.

The main goal of this thesis project is to determine the direction for further work in the Brown Church Institute and my Ethnomusicological career. This limited research sought to identify information regarding the music being used in worship within the Brown or Latina/o/x church. This was accomplished in two ways: identifying and reaching out to faith leaders in Cuyahoga, Stark, Summit, and Wayne Counties. This was achieved through the utilization of the

Ohio Hispanic Coalition list of churches serving the Latina/o/x community and connections within the Living Water Association (UCC) and the Northeastern Ohio Synod (ELCA). After the churches serving Latina/o/x/e communities, primarily through outreach and Spanish language services, were identified, the worship services for those churches were observed via Facebook and YouTube. In addition to observing worship services, worship leaders and pastors from those churches also answered several questions regarding the liturgical materials and music used in worship.

The survey is made up of the following questions and answers choices:

1. Do you identify as a member of the Latino/Latina/Latinx community in the United States?
  - Yes
  - No
2. If you identify as part of the Latino(a/x) community, how would you describe your ancestry?
  - Short Answer
3. In what state is your primary place of residence?
  - Short Answer
4. Do you identify with a specific denomination of Christianity?
  - Catholic
  - Evangelical
  - Protestant
  - Non-Denominational
  - Other Denomination: Short Answer
5. Are any of the following artists used in worship services at your church?
  - Tercer Cielo
  - Alex Campos
  - Christine D'Clario
  - Edward Rivera
  - Jaci Velásquez
  - Miel San Marcos
  - Other: Short Answer
6. Are any of the following artists used in worship services at your church with Spanish translations?
  - Phil Wickham
  - Bethel
  - Hillsong en Espanol
  - Elevation Worship

- Gateway Worship
  - Other: Short Answer
7. What is your language preference for worship services and music?
    - English Only
    - Spanish Only
    - Bilingual (English/Spanish)
    - Other: Short Answer
  8. Does your worship service incorporate traditional hymns?
    - Yes, in Spanish
    - Yes, in English
    - Yes, in both English and Spanish
    - No, we do not use traditional hymns
  9. Are there any other significant musical aspects to your worship services?
    - Long Answer
  10. Are there any other significant musical aspects in your faith journey that you would like to share?
    - Long Answer

The second portion involved observing worship. One of the best things to rise out of the covid pandemic is that most churches stream, record, and distribute their worship services through platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. By utilizing these resources, I observed worship services from several different churches. From these observations, I have made some generalizations and observations about the nature of worship in this area. More information will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The primary goal of this project's research portion was to determine the trends surrounding worship in Northeast Ohio to prepare for future research. By determining these worship trends, more information regarding these specific Latina/o/x/e communities and congregations might glean the resources and preferences for worship music in this area. The first aspect essential to this determination was worship services in congregations that have worship or mass geared at the Latina/o/x/e community or Spanish language service listed as part of their work. No liturgical or denominational preference was given while determining the churches and congregations for this. To determine a complete picture of how music and worship paint a vision for the Brown church in my immediate geographical area, observations were focused on the time between Advent and Lent. In more liturgically based denominations, this is considered part of Ordinary Time. Although this was the primary focus of observations, there was also an observation of special services for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The hope of including some observations from these special services was to determine if the holiday impacted the use of music.

One of the most important things to understand is that Covid has changed the way many individuals attend church, and it has also changed the decisions made by Pastors, Musicians, and Worship Leaders as there is an effort to include individuals who are at home as well as those individuals who are attending in person. This has created new ways to experience art and music, and most importantly, for this research, the Church can be seen as a blessing and a curse, though for this thesis project, this is a positive. Due to the various covid restrictions, many churches in my immediate geographical area utilize digital church services, either pre-recorded church or live streaming their in-person services, as their primary means of worship. The congregations

and churches who are having in-person churches are still transmitting through digital means, and it was through these digital archives that observations were conducted.

In preparation for these observations, sixteen churches were selected because they focus their worship on the Latina/o/x/e community and are listed with the Ohio Hispanic Coalition. In addition to utilizing this resource, contacts within the ELCA Northeast Ohio Synod and the Heartland Conference/Living Water Association of the UCC were also used. These sixteen churches were narrowed down from the original list based on their online footprint and the information they make available through their website and social media. I observed ten complete worship services from these sixteen congregations in the geographical area previously described. These worship services ranged from just over fifty-three minutes to under two hours. From these observations, I have identified five areas of interest regarding the music and worship practices in this area specifically relevant to the Brown Church, including denomination, style or format, language, instrumentation/organology, and song selection and usage. Once these elements were identified, more information was gathered through interviews with Pastors, Musicians, and Worship Leaders who serve these congregations.

For this thesis project, six denominations were observed, although initially, seven were identified as serving Latina/o/x/e communities in my area. These denominations include Baptist, Catholic, Church of Christ (COC), Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), Evangelical, Non-Denominational, and Mennonite. The Catholic and ELCA congregations were the most liturgical based on these denominations, utilizing a service format incorporating customary prayers and liturgical songs. The Baptist, COC, Evangelical, Non-denominational, and Mennonite all followed a contemporary format of songs being used to open worship and praise, followed by prayers, bible readings, and a message from the Pastor.

A traditional format for these worship services is based on liturgical concepts of the catholic mass. This involves a clear directive of prayers, hymns, and service orders based on the liturgy for that specific day. This is based on the Liturgical season (Ordinary Time, Advent, Lent, or other particular observations.) There are elements essential to these worship services regardless of year, including the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed, The Lord's Prayer, and Communion. There are typically three to four hymns or songs in this format and a musical Psalm and Gospel Acclamation that occur as part of the service. There are usually preludes and postludes which bookmark the service. An example of this structure would be as follows:

*General Elements of Traditional Service*

- ✠ Introductory Rites (Prelude, Processional, Welcome, Announcements, Prayer)
- ✠ Liturgy of the Word (Scripture Reading [one or two], Psalm, Gospel Acclamation, Gospel, Homily/Message, Confession of Faith)
- ✠ Liturgy of the Eucharist/The Meal (Presentation of the Gifts, Offertory, Responsorial Prayers, The Lord's Prayer, Sign of Peace, Prayers, Communion Music Selections) ✠ Closing (Announcements, Prayer, Dismissal, Postlude)

A contemporary format for worship is one in which there are typically three to five songs that start the service, followed by the Pastors message, which may or may not include scripture readings. The songs and the news are sometimes connected but do not necessarily follow a specific liturgical calendar. The congregation's needs often drive these services based on the Senior Pastor, the counsel, or factors. Musically this type of service features various songs separated by spontaneous worship and prayer, which the music underscores. While there are not the same formal elements as described for Traditional worship, incorporation of scripture is sometimes seen. The common factor is that these services begin with worship and praise, followed by a message. There are times in which a shorter musical segment may follow the message, but often the service simply concludes after the message.

The first two elements of observations and interviews were not defining factors between the Brown Church and other churches, which in this area are predominantly white. The element or factor that most distinguishes Latina/o/x/e worship services from the majority of the other services in this area is language. There were three specific ways in which language played a role in the service, which proved to be a crucial factor in the last two elements of this research, instrumentation/organology, and the songs composed or utilized for worship. The three ways in which language was used were that languages were conducted in English, with subtitles; in Spanish only; or in a bilingual fashion, where different elements were done in English and Spanish, including songs, prayers, and the message.

The services, conducted in English with Spanish subtitles, tended to look the most like most churches in this area. These types of services were all contemporary in their format. Most of these services gave the impression that they would be the same service, regardless of the racial/ethnic demographic present. Since there was interest from the Latina/o/x/e community, they simply added translations for these services. It is possible that some churches were eliminated from observations and interviews because they conducted church in this format, and it was not clear that they targeted the Brown church population.

The services which utilized Spanish as the only language were the most interesting. These services were in both the traditional and the contemporary format. These services also varied in length based on the format being used. It is evident in these services that there was a concerted effort to use music composed for Spanish worship. In a traditional setting, the book *Flor y Canto* appears to be the most popular choice. It features music directly from Latin America and musical selections explicitly written for Spanish speakers in the United States. This resource features songs created for Spanish worship instead of simply translating things that are popular in primarily white or English-speaking congregations.

Of the observations, two congregations utilized a truly bilingual model for worship. In both cases, the visual elements of the service were done with a split-screen in English and Spanish. One of the truly bilingual congregations decided to switch between English and Spanish songs, including alternating the song choices. Both congregations utilized a contemporary format and began with a song selection in Spanish, followed by one in English, and continued to rotate for the entirety of their music portion. The other congregation, which utilized bilingual worship, alternated songs but would also alternate languages within the songs.

Both congregations that utilized a bilingual language format also used contemporary selection by major U.S. artists and artists who are part of the Latina/o/x/e community. There was an effort to incorporate and merge the elements of the predominant churches in the area and maintain elements common within worship in Mexico and Central America. In addition to these musical choices, these bilingual services also featured translations of the message. This was accomplished through two pastors, one in English and one in Spanish. This format has definite advantages: it includes individuals who may not be as vital in both languages, opening the doors for a more significant number of attendees and participants.

While the most significant discrepancy was in the language usage, the one element of worship which remained the same for all of these observations, regardless of the format of the service, was the organology or instrumentation for these services was the choice in instruments or organology. The primary instrument for all of these services was the acoustic guitar. While the Acoustic Guitar, which is typical to various music styles in the United States, was used in many settings of these settings, there were at least two congregations that utilized the *Vihuela* [or *Viguelita*] (rhythmic guitar with a higher pitch and rounded back) and the *Guitarron* (larger rhythmic guitar which plays Bass). In most observations, multiple Acoustic guitars filled the role of the Guitarron and Vihuela in a musical setting. This type of instrumentation created a

sound similar to Mariachi, *Norteño*, or *Conjunto*, which is often thought of as “Latin Music.”

This is different from mainstream worship which utilizes a combination of electric, acoustic, and bass guitars.

The effort to create the illusion of Mariachi and *Norteño* styles is understandable as both types are essential to the culture of Immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

Clifford R. Murphy describes these two styles of music,

Mariachi and norteño styles have proved a powerful influence in Mexico's folk and popular music and culture, the Mexican American border region, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and other parts of Central America and the Caribbean. Mariachi incorporates folk songs and dances from the Mexican state of Jalisco (where mariachi music is believed to have originated), waltzes, polkas, Canciones rancheras, candombridos rancheros, boleros, blues, and other styles existing along a Latino-European-American folk-popular continuum. Standard mariachi ensembles include multiple violins and horns and guitar, guitarrón, and vihuela. Norteño music is a twentieth-century hybrid of mariachi music, polka, blues, and country and western. The signature instrumental features of norteño music (and its Texas variation, conjunto, which uses accordion and bajo sexto, a twelve-string baritone guitar that originated in northern Mexico near the Texas border) make it easy to differentiate from mariachi music despite the reliance of each style (mariachi, norteño, and conjunto) on rancheras and polkas.<sup>75</sup>

While the instrumentation is a vital component of this music, it is clear that the selected music has a correlation to the decision to create music that sounds distinctly “Latin.” While the observations and interviews for this thesis project surrounded a small number of congregations, some trends began to stand out regarding song choice. The first of these is that communities that utilize English during their worship service are much more likely to be using popular Christian songs, or even traditional hymns, which are popular with the majority of white congregations but in a translated manner. Congregations that held their services entirely in Spanish were much

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<sup>75</sup> Clifford R. Murphy, “Common Ground in Mariachi and Norteño Music” in *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States*, (2010: Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ) 116.

more likely to use Hymns and songs written in Spanish and much more unknown to most white congregations.

Through the observation process, I observed sixty-three musical selections. Only six were either entirely English or sung in English and Spanish out of these selections. Of the sixty-three musical examples, thirteen selections were translations of popular hymns or contemporary worship songs in the United States. The rest of the selections were chosen from resources that provide Spanish Language Hymns or Contemporary Christian Spanish Language selections. Considering that a vast majority of the selections were explicitly created for Latina/o/x/e congregations, it is clear that there is an effort to hold on to the Latin identity, specifically in worship.

While there are so many nuances that could be and should be further explored, this research provides information essential to understanding the complex fabric of the Latina/o/x/e community in this area. Conclusion: there is an effort to assimilate and maintain their cultural identity. This is no different in areas such as Boston, which has a large Irish American community holding on to those traditions and relating them to their worship experience.

While this research did not yield any additional information about the if there is a thought process going on about social change which can be related to song selection and performance practices, like can be seen in other areas of worship and worship studies, looking at the big picture provides some insight into this facet of this thesis project. First, looking at the activities of these congregations, it is clear that there is an effort to both assimilate and hold on to their cultural identity. This can be seen in various events that highlight the congregations' orgulloso. It is also clear from looking at other events in these church communities that activities fall into social justice and social change categories. When looking at the messages or

Homilies, some moments pointed toward the Biblical roots of these types of activities as well, but the music selection did not show this. There was an effort to incorporate music from various sources, including mainstream Evangelical resources. This leads to a belief that the worship leaders are more concerned with the song's content than they are with the social or political implications of Hillsong versus originally composed music.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

While many topics deserve further future exploration, there is still a lot to be learned about these interrelated topics. One of the primary findings from this project and the observations and interviews portions specifically is that there have always been social justice pursuits within the Latina/o/x/e church. The Brown church is not a new concept, though its emergence and momentum in the United States might be considered further. There has always been an effort to strive for equality and equity in Central America and Mexico specifically, but overall, Latin America. The universal church has been a leader. There have been examples of leaders in faith being at the forefront of this social justice component of religion since colonization, figures such as Bartolome de las Casas, and some would even argue the Blessed Virgin. In modern times, these leaders can be seen in men like the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero or the work of Cesar Chavez.

While there are specific examples of this convergence of faith and social justice, it appears to be something that is ingrained as a part of faith. While Latinos/as/xs/es seem to be intimately aware of this convergence due to the unique hardships experienced in their homelands, it should be argued that all faith has this component. Jesus Christ was what might be called a social justice warrior, from the sermon on the mount to his ultimate crucifixion. The actions that are the foundation of the Christian faith were rooted in justice, equality, and equity concepts. This extension is seen in some denominations but is evident in the Brown church due to this community's continuing hardships.

While the music related to the Brown Church Movement/Institute has not been fully explored, it is clear that music is essential to the congregations observed for this thesis project. The type of service, contemporary or traditional, had an insignificant impact on the utilized

musical components. The acoustic guitar was always at the forefront of these services, and the music was adapted to create a Latina/o/x/e flavor to it regardless of where it was sourced. The use of multiple guitars, either acoustic or a variety of traditional central American instruments, drums, and singing techniques, led to the worship music connecting to the cultural components of the congregation.

Even in instances where the music was adapted from traditional hymns or popular contemporary Christian music, this effort at adapting the music to the musical genres of the Latina/o/e/x congregations was apparent. They performed a Hillsong selection in one assembly, which felt unfamiliar to me as a worship leader in a predominantly white community until I listened closely to the vocal melody. The instrumentation, tempo, and rhythmic components of the accompanying instrumental music were altered to allow the song to fit into the style of central American music while keeping the melody line. While there is no evidence that using music in this way is an effort and assimilation, it does bridge a gap between the music being played on popular Christian stations and the music which would be comforting to immigrant communities.

While there is a complexity in understanding the history of the Latin American church, it is also clear that there is an effort to honor the traditions of that church. When observing special worship services for Christmas Eve or Christmas day, there was an effort to utilize traditional clothing garments and songs. Many of these congregations all celebrated a meal together advertised as conventional. This effort to keep things of cultural importance to them is essential and relevant to the future of Latinos/as/xs/es in the church. The attempt to keep this cultural component in their faith lives and home shows pride in their history and culture, despite living in an area and political/social climate where there is a lot of hate toward this community.

While this thesis project provided an opportunity to explore faith practices in my immediate area, there is still a lot of work that could be done on this topic. There are many components that are both conscious and unconscious to this community. There is still a lot of work being done on the theological elements of the Brown Church, not just from Robert Chao Romero and his team but also at institutions such as Fuller Seminary. As this work continues to evolve, I hope there is more than can be learned about how music and the arts play a vital role in faith, social justice, and the Latina/o/x/e experience.

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