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INTRODUCCIÓN A LA TEOLOGÍA MESTIZA DE SAN AGUSTÍN. By Justo L. González

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**INTRODUCCIÓN A LA TEOLOGÍA
MESTIZA DE SAN AGUSTÍN.** By
Justo L. González. Abingdon Press, 2013.
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[http://earlyafricanchristianity.com/blog/
post.php?s=2014-06-25-latin-
american-view-of-augustine-a-review.](http://earlyafricanchristianity.com/blog/post.php?s=2014-06-25-latin-american-view-of-augustine-a-review)

We are already accustomed to scholarly and ground-breaking contributions in the areas of church history and US

Latino/Hispanic theology from Justo González. This volume will not disappoint. It offers a new way to approach our Western theological tradition for our edification and pastoral work. González accomplishes this by interpreting Augustine through the hermeneutical lens of *mestizaje* (cultural blending). González describes his task: “In more recent times in dialog with friends and colleagues, such as Orlando Costas, Virgilio Elizondo, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and others, I began to suspect that Augustine’s restlessness was not only due to his distancing from God, as he explains in his Confessions, but that it was also due to the internal struggle of a person who lived within the tension of two heritages, two cultures, two worldviews—plainly stated, ‘de un mestizo’” (7, reviewer’s translation). This volume engages the reader in re-reading Augustine from the perspective of *mestizaje*, an essential hermeneutical key in re-reading our entire church history (13). Second, this interpretative tool allows González to analyze and understand Augustine as “*un pueblo hispanounidense*,” a people who also live in the struggle of *mestizaje*.

The introduction provides the historical, cultural, and theological reasons to re-read Augustine in light of his *mestizaje*. Chapters 1 through 3 provide Augustine’s personal, intellectual, and theological formations in his quest to understand and serve God. Chapters 4 through 7 show how Augustine, as pastor and bishop, engaged Manichaeism, Donatism, Pelagianism, and the religious paganism in his world. Chapter 8 highlights the importance of Augustine’s theological work for our understanding and re-reading of Western theology.

In the introduction González defines and explains the hermeneutical key of “*mestizaje*” and situates Augustine within his own “*mestizaje*.” When the Germanic people invaded and destroyed the Roman Empire, Augustine’s writings became a bridge between the former Christian tradition and the new historical and cultural conditions. Both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Church claimed his authority. The majority of Christians reading Paul today do so through the eyes of Augustine. It is important to distinguish this in order to rediscover and correct some of his influences (9–10). González then explains the reading of texts in light of our *mestizaje*. Our reading of the text needs to take into account that we “belong to two realities and at the same time do not belong to either reality” (11). González adds, “It is a rarity that *mestizaje* is simply bipolar, for usually the two poles of this *mestizaje* possess elements of their own *mestizajes*” (13).

Chapter 1 defines important elements of Augustine’s *mestizaje*. González points out the works of the first bishop of Rome and the foundational works for Western theology by Tertullian and Cyprian proceeded from North Africa, not from Rome (17). González describes Thagaste, a small free city of proconsular Numidia, now Souk-Ahras, where Augustine was born. González describes the cultural strata present in this region where Augustine grew, developed, and carried out his pastoral and theological work. These strata may be attributed to a *mestizaje* that occurred in the interaction of Punic and Berber cultures with Roman culture.

Augustine’s *mestizaje* is also a product of his heritage. His father Patrick, a tax collector, was of Roman ancestry

and a pagan most of his life. His mother Monica, more than likely a Berber, was a devout Christian. Augustine learned her Christian faith—a faith that in many ways was opposed to the dominant Roman values and culture. Augustine lived within a Greco-Roman culture within North African cultures. We need to understand this in order to appreciate Augustine’s writings.

In chapter 2 Augustine immigrates to Italy (AD 383). He is still in spiritual turmoil, searching for the truth, not truly satisfied with Manichaeism. In Milan he comes under the influence of Bishop Ambrose. González points out several texts in Augustine’s *Confessions* where it is evident that Ambrose helped Augustine bridge the mestizaje of his father’s Roman culture with the homegrown Christian faith of his mother (38–39). During this period he was greatly influenced by the Neoplatonism of Plotinus. Plotinus allowed him to affirm the reality of the one divinity from which everything flows, and to affirm the spiritual world to counter the Stoics, who affirmed only a corporeal worldly reality (36–37). González shows how Augustine’s appropriation of Platonism was influential in his pursuit of the knowledge of God and the soul, a theme and methodology that influenced Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (46–47).

Chapter 3 narrates Augustine’s life from his baptism to his work as a presbyter, co-bishop, and bishop in Hippo. He understands that as a baptized Christian his calling is to confess and bring forth this faith of the gospel to the world. During this period he has an urgent desire to live within a Christian community dedicated to meditation

and devotion. This chapter explains the unique vision of Augustine concerning the monastic life and how he practiced it. This type of Christian monasticism, as González points out, is the one that influenced Martin Luther and his community of Augustinian friars.

Chapter 3 explains also Augustine’s development concerning true Christian knowledge in light of his theory of “Illumination.” This is an important development in the area of epistemology, as González observes, for Christian theology and for Western thought until the thirteenth century.

Chapters 4 through 7 engage the reader in Augustine’s pastoral work in view of his cultural and theological contexts. Chapter 4 reflects on Augustine’s pastoral work influenced by the Manicheans before his baptism in Milan. González sheds light on how Manes’s syncretistic rendering of Manichaeism impacted Alexandria and the Roman colonies in North Africa. González summarizes how Augustine developed a Christian answer to Manichaeism concerning evil in the world. Augustine refuted the gnostic tendency of Manichaeism to reject the body and God’s earthly creation. It is during this period that Augustine affirms the unity of God as creator of the world, the unity of a person, and the unity between the Old and New Testaments. He becomes critical of the Neoplatonic outlook on nature. Above all, he develops a theological framework that rejects the threatening demands of Manes’ dualism.

Chapter 5, the most useful chapter in my opinion, shows how Augustine engages his cultural context and how his theology blooms and becomes influential

in the West. This chapter unfolds the mediating position followed by Augustine between Donatism and the orthodox catholic faith in light of his *mestizaje*. Still, González observes that Augustine never captures very clearly or completely the suffering and social injustice experienced by his people. In fact, Augustine contributed to the confusion between catholicity and uniformity that dominated the medieval church. This is also a point that, in my opinion, has limited the affirmation of a true catholicity, where the faith of the people is affirmed and understood. González has always been a champion in correcting this limited type of ecumenism where the specific communities of faith are neglected within the catholic expression of the church.

In chapters 6 and 7, González navigates through several of Augustine's works through the lenses of *mestizaje*. This exercise pinpoints the pastoral and theological acumen of the bishop from Hippo in confronting Pelagius and in developing a theology of history in light of the Roman Empire's debacle. We can appreciate here why he is considered the "doctor of grace" by Catholics and Protestants alike and how they differ in their appropriation of Augustine. Also we can discern how Augustine's theology of history influenced and limited the political outlook of the Western world and the church.

In his concluding chapter González explores how Augustine's vision enhanced and limited the theological perspective of Western Christianity. First, he kept alive for the church its intellectual heritage. Second, he provided pastors and church leaders at the beginning of the Middle Ages with intellectual and theological tools to direct the life of the church dur-

ing those uncertain times. He uplifted grace as an essential principle and foundation for a church that was becoming very legalistic. He provided a necessary hermeneutical principle to interpret the sacred texts, in particular St. Paul's epistles. He also explained why there should not be a contradiction between the languages of reason and grace.

Because Augustine was the predominant lens of his time, the church began to understand and construct her theology limited by his vision. This left out some important interpreters such as Basil, Irenaeus, and Athanasius. González pinpoints some of the limits of Augustine's theology of history. While Augustine gave people hope in difficult times, his division of secular and sacred history gave an upper hand to a somewhat Platonic churchly kingdom. This bifurcation, as González is keenly aware, has driven away or stifled the eagerness of Christians to act in light of God's justice and love in the present world.

This book may not deepen our understanding of how to appropriate Augustine in light of our twenty-first *mestizaje*; however, I believe that González's purpose is to show how Augustine lived and worked and theologized in light of his *mestizaje*. If we understand this point of departure, we will not only understand Augustine better but we will become more adept in interpreting other theologians in light of their cultural crossroads. We will also be able to be more reflective of our theological crossroads and the various cultures that intersect our *mestizaje*.

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