

EXCERPT

IVP Academic

Spirit Outside the Gate
Decolonial Pneumatologies of the American Global South

July 23, 2019 | \$32, 328 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5240-6

Using the Perennial Question of Christianity to Answer the Questions of Latinx Christianity

An impostor syndrome is as natural as any system of ideas that makes us experts on God. When we realize that, it puts our training in question and makes the inadequacy of our practice evident. When that form of ethno-racial tokenism is no longer tolerable, it requires immediate resolution and authentication.

My epistemic exodus within exile seeking for another way forward erupted as a nostalgic episode making me look south of the US border to the Global South. Ideas circling around the vortex of “Third World” countries and interstitial spaces, awkwardly, did not let me leave home, my diasporan location in the States. Exodus within exile, I call it. Dizzy, unsteady, and unready, I arrived at a new intellectual horizon for my practice and theological imagination: transoccidentality, if you will.

Let me begin by appropriating the biographical words of Olaf Stapledon, the British philosopher and science-fiction novelist, author of *The Star Maker*. In Jorge Luis Borges’s review of Stapledon’s contribution, he writes, “The review of his style, which advises an excess on abstract words, suggests that before writing literature he had read much philosophy and few novels or poems. In reference to his character and destiny, it is best to transcribe his own words.” Here blatantly I begin to usurp Stapledon’s biography: I am congenitally rough, protected (or spoiled) by capitalism. Only now I have begun to learn to self-develop, after half a century of work. My childhood lasted twenty-five years; it was shaped by the Chiquita Banana, the unknown town of San Pedro Sula (Honduras), an immigrant church in the San Fernando Valley, and an evangelical seminary in Pasadena, California. I planted churches, visited missions on three different continents, and for a decade led a denominational office comprising many congregations, just in time to flee from an imminent disaster.

As a professor of systematic theology, I learned the canonical texts, memorized the names of the classical heroes of the Western religion and the sacred history of a triumphant civilizing education disseminated by scholastic, mystical, and practical theologies. I taught passionately out of the fountain of my Western knowledge and my unrealized Latinx ministry experience for over a decade. An elite, middle-class-illustrated Latino, I purposed to educate immigrant pastors, second-generation Hispanic leaders, and the English-speaking community desiring like me to educate the disfranchised agrarian and urban Latinx population in America (the United States included). I taught in seminary, in the university, in my mission trips, in Bible institutes. But at the end I learned very little from my teaching.

My students, who were pastors and missionaries doing ministry mostly in the back alleys of urban America, taught me better. Their practical questions about ministry, global missions, culture, politics, society, family, lament and trauma, poverty and affluence, holy doctrines and holy heresies, were all questions of a context once mine and somehow lost in the process of education. Their questions were also once my own questions, the very reason for which I came to school to attain several degrees. And yet there I was, with four new church plants under my belt; a regional ministry giving

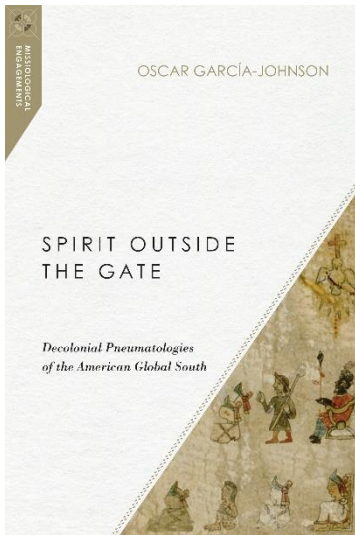


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leadership to over more than two hundred American Baptist churches (sixty Latinxs); an adjunct teaching post in one of the largest evangelical seminaries of the world; and teaching the laity on Bible, spirituality, and doctrine in a thriving Bible institute in Santa Ana. The realization of my intellectual condition of alienation came slowly after I had acquired my doctoral degree and began to fully engage with theological leadership.

Memories, after all, are sources of knowledge. Originally, I came to seminary because of a Latinx and ministry question. But this question gradually morphed into a different set of questions subsumed under a more universal, significant, and overarching body of knowledge, which arguably is to give an account of the classical questions of Christianity, the church, and the Christian witness. That is to say, the premise for this epistemic transformation (from the “particular” to the “universal”) is that by addressing the perennial questions of Western Christianity I could give answers to the temporary questions of Latinx Christianity.

—Taken from the Preface

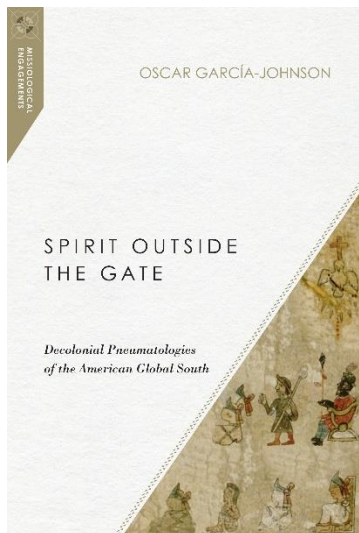


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DETAILS

IVP Academic

Spirit Outside the Gate *Decolonial Pneumatologies of the American Global South*

July 23, 2019 | \$32, 328 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5240-6

Oscar García-Johnson is associate professor of theology and Latino/Latina studies and assistant provost for the Center for the Study of Hispanic Church and Community at Fuller Theological Seminary. An ordained Baptist minister, he has also served as a regional minister with the American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles. His books include *Conversaciones Teológicas del Sur Global Americano*, coedited; *Theology Without Borders*, coauthored with William Dyrness; and *The Mestizo/a Community of the Spirit*.

Are Westernized Christians Equipped to Do Ministry in Different Cultural Modes?

Throughout the history of the Christian church, two narratives have consistently clashed: the imperial logic of Babel that builds towers and borders to seize control versus the logic of Pentecost that empowers “glocal” missionaries of the kingdom life. To what extent are Westernized Christians today ready for the church of the Pentecost narrative? Are they equipped to do ministry in different cultural modes and handle disruption and perplexity? What are Christians to make of the Holy Spirit’s occasional encounters with cultures and religions of the Americas before the European conquest?

These are the questions that Oscar García-Johnson explores in his book *Spirit Outside the Gate*. García-Johnson offers a new grammar for the study of theology and mission in global Christianity, especially in Latin America and the Latinx “third spaces” in North America. With an interdisciplinary, narrative approach, this work offers a constructive theology of mission for the church in global contexts.

Building on the familiar missiological metaphor of “outside the gate” established by Orlando Costas, García-Johnson moves to recover important elements in ancestral traditions of the Americas, with an eye to discern pneumatological continuity between the pre-Columbian and post-Columbian communities. He calls for a rerouting of theology—a realization that theology cannot make its home in Christendom but is a global creation that must come home to a church without borders.

In this volume García-Johnson

- considers pneumatological insights into de/postcolonial studies;
- traces independent epistemic contributions of the American Global South;
- shows how American indigenous, Afro-Latinx, and immigrant communities provide resources for a decolonial pneumatology; and
- describes four transformations the American church must undergo to break free from colonial, modernist, and monocultural structures.

Spirit Outside the Gate opens a path for a pneumatological missiology that can help the church act as a witness to the gospel message in a postmodern, postcolonial, and post-Christendom world.



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