

2014

## Book Review: Jesus for Revolutionaries (Robert Chao Romero)

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### Recommended Citation

Anna, Natalie M. (2014) "Book Review: Jesus for Revolutionaries (Robert Chao Romero)," *Justice, Spirituality & Education Journal*: Vol. 2014 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jsej/vol2014/iss2014/8>

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**BOOK REVIEW:**  
**JESUS FOR REVOLUTIONARIES (ROBERT CHAO ROMERO)**  
**BY NATALIE M. ANNA**

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Jesus is for revolutionaries because Jesus was, and is, revolutionary. As Romero mentions in *Jesus for Revolutionaries*, “Jesus, the Savior of the world and God in the flesh, was raised in the hood and chose inner city drop-outs to lead the most powerful and transformative social movement which the world has ever seen” (p. 78). *Jesus for Revolutionaries* merges hard-hitting, biblical truths with a conversational tone that gives new life to ideas of justice that have been around for 2,000 years. Romero uses historical, personal, and otherwise relevant true stories to give flesh and bones to proven facts about the social justice issues of affirmative action; poverty, classism; and racial, cultural, and gender diversity.

From the very beginning, the main idea is revealed: the intersection of being a follower of Jesus and pursuing social justice. *Jesus for Revolutionaries* is an unflinching look at how being a follower of Jesus requires Christians’ attention and efforts in helping the “least of these” in a variety of ways. Sadly, many have become discouraged or even walked away from Christianity because of how it has been horribly misrepresented. On the other hand, many Christians have denied the biblical mandate of pursuing justice. Romero shows us a better way: love through justice.

*Jesus for Revolutionaries* is broken down into 17 small chapters, which provides an easy way to track from topic to topic. The readers always know what the author is addressing next. Because the cause of justice is shown to be close to God’s heart, there are overarching truths that bind seemingly different issues together. God cares for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, in whatever situation they may be. Through Christ, all of these oppressed are redeemed and given new purpose.

Romero effectively begins with “student stories from the revolution.” The readers learn of students who were intrigued by the idea of Jesus, but were repulsed by Christianity because they saw it as a tool of oppressors. They walked away because Christians had forgotten John 13:25, “They will know that you are my [Jesus’] disciples, if you love one another” (NIV). As an alternative to the sinful way of treating others, Romero then moves to “God’s Equal Protection Clause.” Romero’s explanation of God’s Equal Protection Clause serves as the biblical basis for social justice. All humans are made in God’s image, and as such, it is offensive to God when anyone, especially those who call themselves Christians, oppress or marginalize others.

After establishing a solid biblical basis for social justice, the book moves into discussing the issues. Chapters 2-5 deal with immigration, particularly from Latin American countries. It is here that Romero argues that it is wholly un-Christ-like to accept their labor and yet despise their presence. These chapters identify the immense contributions made by immigrants. Most people do not realize that Latinos contribute 33 times more to the economy than they drain through social services. From immigration reform, Romero addresses affirmative action, which is covered in chapters 6-7. It is here that the author suggests a novel idea: Jesus invented affirmative action. By choosing students (the disciples) from some of the least prestigious backgrounds and utilizing them in revolutionizing the world, Jesus demonstrated the principle of the upside-down Kingdom. By breaking the norms, Jesus showed that all have equal access to a relationship with God.

Unfortunately, throughout history, many Christians have twisted Christianity in order to accommodate their political beliefs. Romero explains how this has caused great damage to countless people. Instead of listening to the God of justice, mercy, and love, Christians have warped their interpretations of the Bible to justify wars, slavery, and epidemic prejudice.

Romero is firm in asserting that Christianity is not identified with *any* political party, conservative or liberal. This assertion will make some uncomfortable, no doubt. However, readers are reminded that their allegiance lies with a risen Savior who gave up His own life in order to identify with *them*.

Romero contends that colorblindness is not the solution; only Christ’s solution of understanding and redemption is adequate. Less talked about in Christian social justice books is gender, but Romero does not shy away from the controversial topic. It is quickly shown through the story of Deborah and Jael that women can be fierce leaders and mightily used for God.

Romero continues to maintain good critical thinking skills throughout the final chapters of *Jesus for Revolutionaries*. All along, there is no question where Romero stands on an issue, but he never expresses himself in such a way that unfairly alienates anyone. He also delineates the consequences of this country's past mistakes and considers the implications of his own viewpoint; that is, God's view of diversity is that each person glorifies God in a unique way. Romero reminds his readers of historical issues that prove Christians have not always embraced this concept. He then examines modern day classism and the historical notion of Manifest Destiny. Romero utilizes known facts to illustrate that these stances have caused blemishes on people's view of God. Despite the fact that Christianity has often been misrepresented, Romero asserts that God always raises up a remnant that more accurately carries His name. Romero offers this list of names: Bartolomé de las Casas, Roger Williams, Bishop Oscar Romero, William Wilberforce, Lucretia Mott, César E. Chávez, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, and Jesus. He next asks, "What do they all have in common?" They were revolutionaries who understood their roles as ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Something unique about this book is that it does not leave the reader thinking, "Okay, what do I do now?" The last two chapters conclude the book with a thorough, though not exhaustive, list of resources and practical ways to get involved in almost all aspects of social justice, from urban poverty to gender to human trafficking to microfinance to immigration.

Any good teacher will tell you that an effective lesson draws the learner in, engages them, and leaves with a desire to learn more. *Jesus for Revolutionaries* does just that. At the end of each chapter, there are PraXis questions, which guide the reader into a deeper, more personal understanding of the ideas presented. At the end of the book, there are also appendices: a practical manifesto for the Christian revolutionary, a list of further multimedia resources, and a study guide.

Is Romero demanding? Yes. Is he unapologetic? Yes. Does it work? Yes. Jesus was a revolutionary that radically loved and cared for the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised. His followers are called to do the same.

Romero's arguments are well supported. Although they are not all listed, there are 2,000 verses on God's heart for the poor and the marginalized. Scripture is consistently and effectively used, and in addition to biblical support, Romero uses both fact and story to make convincing arguments. The author's intentions were accomplished, because even though he is an admittedly impassioned writer, he manages to maintain a balanced view. As a scholar with an undergraduate degree in history, a J.D. from Berkeley, and a Ph. D. in Latin American history, in addition to his own personal experiences as Chinese-Mexican-American, his arguments effectively stand.

A balanced, objective view is maintained throughout the book. Where others may have resorted to anger or hostility towards the perceived oppressor, Romero refrains from such behavior and instead operates in grace and Christian love. As a reader of European descent, the text never once felt alienating or personally accusatory. Rather, Romero called out sins inherent in all cultures, providing a 360-degree perspective on social justice.

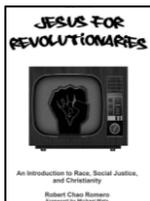
*Jesus for Revolutionaries'* main limitation is that it focuses primarily on Latinos and African Americans, with very little statistical or historical information on Asian Americans or Native Americans. However, Romero's intention was never to cover an exhaustive array of issues. In addition, the reader is more than equipped to take the lessons learned from *Jesus for Revolutionaries* and apply them to all people groups.

The book title is accurate. Not that Jesus fits comfortably in the views of the revolutionary-minded, but that Jesus himself was a staunch advocate for justice, both directly through His words and indirectly through His actions. When looking to be engaged in social justice, there is no better example than Christ.

*Jesus for Revolutionaries* attracts a unique market. Written for those who "care passionately about issues of race and justice, but do not know how to reconcile faith with an abiding concern for social change" (p. 26), it is an appropriate book for both those who have not been shown an accurate portrayal of Jesus and for those who follow Christ and are looking for a manifesto explaining obedience to biblical commands to fight for justice.

This book echoes sentiments written by other Christians coming from a multicultural perspective, such as Richard Twiss and Kevin Blue. They are all zealous for the cause, but they all hold their views and actions under the light of God’s word and let His heart influence their actions. They are similar in balanced views and in rejecting partisan politics.

*Jesus for Revolutionaries* is like having a conversation with a well-versed, passionate friend. This book is greatly needed because there are Christians who need to hear that social justice is not a calling for *some*, it is a mandate for *all*. Christians might not all be on the front lines, but there are myriad ways that they can live their lives in ways that challenge systemic injustice and be the hands and feet of Jesus. *Jesus for Revolutionaries* explains just that.



### **JESUS FOR REVOLUTIONARIES**

Robert Chao Romero, PhD

FREE eBook ([lulu.com](http://lulu.com)) \$13.50 ([amazon.com](http://amazon.com))

ISBN #: 9781304531063 (eBook) and 978-1304513984 (paperback)

Binding: eBook or paperback



### **ROBERT CHAO ROMERO**

Professor Robert Chao Romero considers himself fortunate to be able to study himself for a living. With a Mexican father from Chihuahua and a Chinese immigrant mother from Hubei in central China, Romero’s dual cultural heritage serves as the basis for his academic studies. His research examines Asian immigration to Latin America, as well as the large population of “Asian-Latinos” in the United States. His first book, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* (2010), tells the forgotten history of the Chinese community in Mexico. For his next project, Romero has begun research on the history of Mexican segregation in the United States and the important, but much overlooked Mexican desegregation cases of *Doss v. Bernal* (1943), *Lopez v. Seccombe* (1944), and *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946). Before he joined the UCLA César E. Chávez Department Chicana/o Studies in 2005, Romero was a UC President’s Postdoctoral Fellow in the UCLA Department of History and School of Law. He is also a former Ford Foundation Predoctoral and Postdoctoral Fellow. Romero received his J. D. from UC Berkeley and his Ph.D. in Latin American history from UCLA.



### **NATALIE M. ANNA**

Natalie M. Anna (BA Biola University) is a current Biola University student, working on her MAEd with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction. Her research interests lie in elementary education, intercultural studies, social justice, parent engagement, and bridging the gap for underprivileged students. She is passionate about being a Christ-following teacher in the public school setting. A southern California native, she has travelled in India and is currently studying in Vienna, Austria.