

“(De)cyphering *Mestizaje*, Encrypting Lived Faith”
Dr. Néstor Medina

Abstract

My role is to talk about the multivalent category of *mestizaje* in Latina/o theology. For starters and for the purpose of this presentation, *mestizaje* carries simultaneously the following meanings: One, the biological intermixture that took place between indigenous communities and Spanish peoples as a result of the Spanish invasion and subsequent colonial societies that started at the end of the 15th century. Two, the historical double condition of cultural intermixture: on one hand, the realization that our cultural traditions stem from multiple cultural sources: Spanish, Indigenous, African, and Anglo, and growing. And on the other hand, the unmasking of the cultural assimilationist and colonizing social and religious structures that discriminate against Latinas/os in the US.

Mestizaje then operates as the key for unlocking the richness of the Latina/o experiences of faith in God. With all its real and perceived limitations, the condition, notion, and category of *mestizaje*, I would argue, marks the point of intersection between Latina/o theology’s dual act of deciphering and recodifying: Deciphering—in the sense of unraveling and unmasking the intersection of oppression and exclusion based on culture and racialization of peoples. Encrypting—in the sense of re-codifying the lived faith of Latina/o communities. In other words, *Mestizaje* is a cipher that encompasses the complex set of intersecting forces (positive and negative) that constitute Latina/o communities, and which serve as reservoir of theological meaning.

Bio

Néstor Medina is a Latino-Canadian theologian. He is Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture at Regent University School of Divinity. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto, Toronto School of Theology. He is a member of the Canadian Theological Society, Society of Pentecostal Studies, and the America Academy of Religion. He is a member of the AAR’s International Communications Committee. He has published articles on Liberation Theology, Latina/o Theology, pneumatology, and Pentecostalism, and he is the author of *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping "Race," Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*, which was the winner of the 2012 Hispanic Theological Initiative’s Book Award. More recently, he became the recipient of the Louisville Book Grant for Minority Scholars, to work on his upcoming book *Humanity, Culture, and the Spirit*.