

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



# Voices of Hispanic and Latin American Faith Freedom

In September and October 2021, BJC hosted Voices of Hispanic and Latin American Faith Freedom – a series of live conversations broadcast on Facebook. Each discussion sought to share a unique perspective, exploring the thinking of people who identify as Hispanic, Latinx, and/or Latin American. They shared about culture, ethnicity, religion, race and freedoms. All of the conversations with BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. are available at [Facebook.com/ReligiousLiberty](https://www.facebook.com/ReligiousLiberty) and on [BJC's YouTube Channel](#).

This series coincided with National Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from September 15 through October 15. It sets aside time to recognize and celebrate the histories, cultures, and contributions of people whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Find out more about National Hispanic Heritage Month [here](#).

Please note that the first conversation, featuring a discussion between Jesse Rincones and Anyra Cano, is in Spanish, as are the corresponding study guide questions. The other two conversations are in English, as are the study guide questions.

The following questions are to guide further personal reflection or small group discussions after watching each conversation.

## CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS



**Rev. Alyssa Aldape**



**Anyra Cano**



**Rev. Aurelia Dávila Pratt**



**Erika Perez, M.Ed.**



**Jesse Rincones, J.D.**



**Juhem Navarro-Rivera, Ph.D.**

## ¿Que significa la libertad religiosa a los hispanoamericanos?

Guests: Jesse Rincones, J.D., and Anyra Cano

Original airdate: Sept. 23, 2021

Watch the video [here](#).

1. La “libertad religiosa” es la libertad de creer y ejercer o actuar sobre la conciencia religiosa sin interferencia innecesaria por parte del gobierno. En su cultura hispana, ¿que ha sido su experiencia con el tema de la libertad religiosa?
2. Anyra Cano menciona que en la historia mexicana se edificaron edificios sobre algunos templos indígenas y compartió sobre el peligro de imponer una religión sobre la otra. ¿Como ha visto usted que el gobierno impone o da preferencias a alguna religión?
3. Jesse Rincones menciona esta cita del Dr. Pablo Deiros, Pastor de Central Baptist Church, en Buenos Aires, Argentina: “Dios no le ha dado a ningún Estado el poder de obligar a los seres humanos a la observancia religiosa. Igualdad de derechos para todos y privilegios especiales para nadie es el ideal que, en América Latina, no parece ser ni explícita ni implícitamente evidente.” ¿Como podemos asegurar que nuestro pueblo y nuestro gobierno se mueva así la ideal de “Igualdad de derechos para todos y privilegios especiales para nadie”?
4. Jorge Lee Galindo, Presidente de la Comisión de Libertad e Igualdad Religiosa, dice que nos de los problemas de la libertad religiosa en México incluyen “Delincuencia organizada que a través del narcotráfico, está violando la libertad religiosa de los ministros de religión que son extorsionados, secuestrados y, en el peor de los casos, asesinados.” ¿Aparte del gobierno, conoce otras organizaciones o entidades que amenazan la libertad religiosa?
5. Se menciona la importancia de enfrentar los mitos que frecuentemente algunas personas relacionan con la libertad religiosa. Por ejemplo, contrariamente a la opinión popular (incluso en nuestras iglesias), los Estados Unidos no fue fundada como una nación cristiana. El Artículo VI de la constitución estadounidense declara: “Nunca se requerirá ninguna prueba religiosa como Calificación para cualquier Oficina o Fideicomiso público de los Estados Unidos”. ¿Cuál es otro de los mitos que la comunidad religiosa hispana y latinoamericana tiene sobre la libertad religiosa?
6. En su libro “La Identidad Bautista: Cuatro Libertades Frágiles”, Walter Shurden dice “La libertad religiosa y la tolerancia religiosa no son la misma cosa. La tolerancia religiosa es una aprobación; mientras que la libertad religiosa es un derecho. La tolerancia religiosa es una medida de conveniencia; la libertad religiosa es una cuestión de principios.” ¿Que es un ejemplo de como toleramos a otras religiones? ¿Porque debemos abogar por la libertad religiosa en ves de la tolerancia?
7. ¿Cuál es un punto importante que está sacando de esta conversación y cuál es un paso de acción que puede tomar? ¿Qué aprendió específicamente sobre la defensa de la justicia y libertad de fe para todos?

## What is our identity in the community?

Guests: Rev. Alyssa Aldape; Erika Perez, M.Ed., LPC; and Rev. Aurelia Dávila Pratt

Original airdate: Sept. 30, 2021

All three participants are BJC Fellows. Learn more about the program [here](#).

Watch the video [here](#).

1. Moderator Charles Watson Jr. admits that he struggled with how to name this particular Voices of Freedom series. Each panelist addressed their feelings towards the label of Hispanic and/or Latin American. What stood out to you about this conversation on identity and the labeling of identity? How have you, if at all, personally experienced this struggle with identity and labeling?
2. Aurelia Dávila Pratt recalls growing up in an area where she was disconnected from people who looked like her. This caused discomfort and a sense of alienation from her own community. How do languages and accents play a formative role in identity within communities? How do languages and accents influence perceptions or create bias outside of one's ethnic community?
3. Erika Perez and Alyssa Aldape mention that seeing religious faith on display in their families and communities was central to their spiritual formation. That faith also carried with it certain assumptions and expectations from others. Name and discuss other examples of biases arising from religious affiliations. What role does religious liberty play in the intersection of faith and identity? How does religious liberty help develop a more robust understanding of one's faith?
4. Alyssa Aldape mentions how "proximity to whiteness" created a perceived value in the faith spaces she served because of the relationship that American Christianity has with whiteness. What does the phrase "proximity to whiteness" mean? What damage or injury can be caused by a religious framework that centers whiteness and white experiences?
5. Each panelist has a unique response to how gender plays a role in their work as religious leaders. How did hearing their experiences affect you? What do these diverse narratives reveal about women's experiences in religious spaces?
6. Aurelia Dávila Pratt notes that using masculine pronouns week after week to describe God affects how people see women, men, and everyone in between and beyond. Do you agree? Why or why not? What else might influence the way society views gender inside and outside a religious context?
7. Erika Perez suggests the lack of flexibility and failure to accept differences are great threats to her faith community. Why is it important to dialogue and learn with others from different faith perspectives? Why is it important to advocate faith freedom for all, including for those who hold different theological positions?

## What is our identity in the community? continued

8. Throughout the conversation, the panelists recognize the “colonization” of the Christian faith in America and its effects on their community. What does “colonization” mean in a religious context? How does a colonized faith strip someone of their identity? How does a colonized ideology perpetuate Christian nationalism?
9. What is the connection between spirituality and the immigrant experience? How does assimilation into a dominant white American culture transform, alter, or distort an immigrant’s identity and heritage?
10. Alyssa Aldape talks about La Virgen de Guadalupe. Have you heard this phrase used before? Look up La Virgen de Guadalupe to learn more about the significance of this title for the Virgin Mary and what it means. What is it like to see a religious figure – especially one you already know well – through the eyes of a culture different from your own?
11. What was your most important takeaway from this conversation? What specific action or series of steps can you take to confront white Christian nationalism in your local community or in our national conversations?

## What can the religious community learn from a Latinx Humanist?

Guest: Juhem Navarro-Rivera, Ph.D

Original airdate: Oct. 7, 2021

Watch the video [here](#).

1. This conversation reflects on the difference between race, nationality, and ethnicity. Juhem Navarro-Rivera views his Latinx Humanist identity through the lens of geography rather than “blood.” Did this approach to ethnicity surprise you? Is this similar or different to how you approach your own ethnic background or identity?
2. Others create preconceived notions and assumptions about Juhem Navarro-Rivera’s Latinx identity, including his cultural and religious background. Who is likely to make these types of assumptions? When do preconceived notions become dangerous? What is the connection between stereotyping and violence?
3. Juhem Navarro-Rivera mentions that when he came into his Humanist identity, he thought he was alone, assuming those who shared his Latinx and humanist identities were few and far between. His research proved otherwise, noting that the number of people who identify as atheist or agnostic is statistically greater than every other non-Christian religion combined. Is this statistic surprising to you? Why or why not? Take a moment to reflect on the importance of community and its role in identity formation.
4. During the conversation, Charles Watson Jr. observes that in almost every religious community, there is an increasing number of people willing to leave their houses of worship and drop their religious label. Why do individuals choose to make the oftentimes very difficult decision to leave their particular religious systems? What might they gain and what might they lose in making this decision?
5. In his research, Juhem Navarro-Rivera highlights two social facts: (1) America is becoming increasingly Black and brown; and (2) America is increasingly becoming more secular. He says that for some, these facts are dangerous. Why is that? How have you seen this anxiety around the changing religious demographics in America expressed?
6. Juhem Navarro-Rivera notices a disturbing trend of individuals seeking to impose their Christian beliefs through political and government action. The trend he describes is called “Christian nationalism,” and Juhem Navarro-Rivera sees this as a threat to his religious liberty as a humanist. Have you heard the term “Christian nationalism” before? What does it mean to you? How is it a threat to both the Christian faith as well as American democracy? Visit [ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org](https://ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org) for additional definitions and resources on the dangerous ideology of Christian nationalism.
7. Juhem Navarro-Rivera asserts that many secular people view Christian nationalism as a significant threat. He believes this ideology has negative implications for race and gender. What are those implications? How does Christian nationalism stand in stark contrast to a multi-racial, pluralistic democracy?

8. Charles Watson Jr. argues that if your idea of religious liberty is narrow and exclusive, then it is not religious liberty. True religious liberty involves advocating for the rights of others, including those who do not believe or worship like you. Why should Christians, who hold a statistically dominant position in America, stand with their neighbors from different faith traditions or no faith tradition at all? Are there opportunities in your community to do this?
9. Juhem Navarro-Rivera makes a distinction between the negative feelings some in the secular community hold against institutional religion and the people who adhere to those religious systems. Many secularists, particularly those coming from religious backgrounds, associate institutional religion with trauma. Does hearing this perspective cause you to think differently about humanists or religious institutions? How can religious people be more sensitive to the impact religious institutions have on those who do not adhere to a religion?
10. Juhem Navarro-Rivera says, "Our similarities as Americans and lovers of freedom go beyond whether we worship or not." What is your initial reaction to this statement? Do you agree or disagree? How can an idea like this help a polarized American population?
11. What was your most important takeaway from this conversation? What specific action or series of steps can you take to confront Christian nationalism in your local community or in our national conversations?