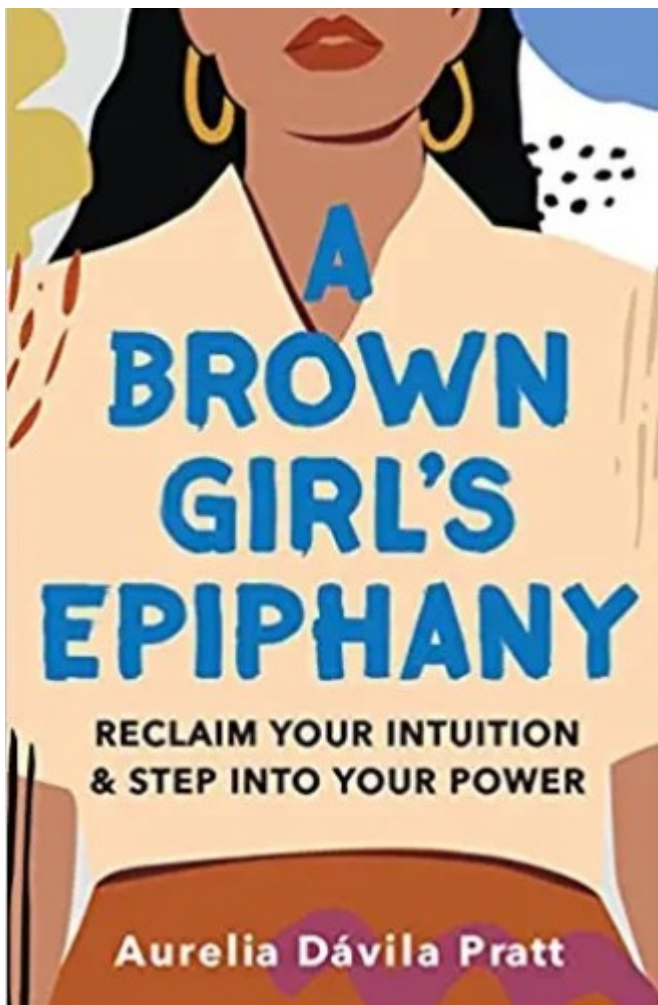


Aurelia Dávila Pratt's paths to healing

Her powerful debut resonates deeply with my lifelong labor to honor my name and my voice.

by [Carmen Acevedo Butcher](#) in the [November 2022](#) issue

In Review



A Brown Girl's Epiphany

Reclaim Your Intuition and Step into Your Power

By Aurelia Dávila Pratt

Broadleaf Books

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“Ah-suh-VAY-duh Hot-puh-TAY-duh” at roll call drew guffaws, a reminder that we were the only Acevedos in our rural northwest Georgia phone book. My teacher’s rhyme made my insides flinch while I sat very still at my wooden desk, the lone sixth grader with café con leche skin.

This memory resurfaced when I was just a few pages into Aurelia Dávila Pratt’s new book. At five, living in rural north Louisiana, she began going by her family nickname Rae-Rae at T-ball practice because her coaches had trouble with her first name. In high school, a cheerleader on her squad truncated *Aurelia* to *Uh-ray*, saying, “I’m just gonna call you ‘Uh-ray’ because your name is too long.”

Pratt’s powerful debut resonates deeply with my lifelong labor to honor my name and my voice. Christian notions of sin traditionally identify with the male experience of “pride, will-to-power, exploitation, self-assertiveness, and the treatment of others as objects,” notes theologian Valerie Saiving Goldstein in “The Human Situation,” and pride’s historically preached antidote is selflessness. Hence, women are harmed in a system where, as Jungian psychoanalyst Ann Ulanov suggests in *Receiving Woman*, *pride* has one meaning for those at the top of society and another for those on the bottom of patriarchal systems: “For a woman sin is not pride, an exaltation of self, but a refusal to claim the self God has given.”

Pratt’s courageous book demonstrates how one woman of color claims her sacred selfhood: “We don’t need permission or any outside authority to access every Divine resource. We already have all we need. Fullness, peace, beauty, liberation: all ours! Unlimited and without condition: ours.”

Named by *Sojourners* magazine as one of “10 Christian Women Shaping the Church in 2022,” Pratt is lead pastor of Peace of Christ Church near Austin, Texas, a church that displays the greeting “LOVE THY NEIGHBOR (no exceptions).” Inclusivity also pulses through *A Brown Girl’s Epiphany*. In our greed-driven world, as buzzword battles, toxic sound bites, and vicious viral likes fragment our hopes for a humane narrative, Pratt centers stories to open us for better listening and understanding, radical empathy, and compassionate action.

With a warmhearted prose style, she welcomes us to walk with her through relatable personal narratives that provide profound paths for healing ourselves and society. Her book dares to envision how a healthy collective conversation can move us out of harmful hierarchies and into collaboration, inclusive community, and equity. Part memoir, part theology, and part self-help, its premise is that naming our stories is an act of loving resistance.

Pratt's spiritual work, or "sacred sifting," includes asking herself, "*Who are you?*" Her response sings with authenticity:

I am Chicana. I am Filipina. I am the color of earth. But I'm also more than this. I am a child of God. The stuff of Spirit swirls around within me. I am a culmination of my ancestors' stories. I am a story bearer. My existence is holy, and my healing is their healing too.

Her story complexifies through vulnerability. We learn that she was born and raised in hardship in the Deep South: "We didn't have much, but we never went without food." We meet her much-loved first-generation Filipina and Czech Jewish mother, and we feel Pratt's profound trauma at ten when her parents divorced and her mother moved 900 miles north, giving custody to her ex-husband before leaving the family permanently.

Pratt faces the realities of trauma by opening up to both human and divine help. She models tending to the wounds of the child within us as we reimagine our shared world. One of her resources is therapy, which she presents as part of a healthy lifestyle, stigma-free. Her stories of visiting a therapist for help with the wound her mother left behind remind us how America desperately needs more therapists and accessible therapeutic programs.

This book also vibrates with the bravery of Pratt's Mexican American grandmother, who in the late 1940s worked as a Tejana migrant fruit picker as a way to travel north. Her culture, Pratt says, was "marked by in-betweenness—no longer fully Mexican but unwanted and unvalued by American society and government." From this stark liminal space, her grandmother often commanded her: "Remember where you came from."

Pratt's wise telling of her ancestor's story echoes and deepens the timeless reminder in *On the Consolation of Philosophy* when Lady Philosophy directs Roman

patrician Boethius—falsely imprisoned, awaiting execution—to remember his divine intuitive sagacity: “You have forgotten your true nature.” Our true nature, Pratt reassures us, is our birthright of *imago Dei*.

She is in good company dethroning the narcissistic psychology of original sin, sweeping it out by bold definition: With “every bit of ‘authority’ I can muster, I’m telling you right now: original sin is actual utter bullshit.” Julian of Norwich didn’t see sin in her visions, nor an angry God; Brother Lawrence’s God never chided him; Howard Thurman recommends listening for “the sound of the genuine in yourself”; and Matthew Fox finds “original blessing” in Genesis 1.

A Brown Girl’s Epiphany invites us to imagine our world if we embodied this knowledge: “God dwells within us. We are made up of the stuff of love. We are good. We are good. We are good!” The first part of the book devotes a chapter to each of six paradigms we’d be happier leaving behind: autopilot, shame, hierarchy, politeness, productivity culture, and scarcity. The second part describes how we can step into abundance, permission, our child self, goodness, the divine feminine, mystery, embodiment, and our power.

Stepping into our power is “messy work,” Pratt admits, “not for the faint of heart.” It requires “untangling ourselves from all sorts of harmful messages,” “a hell of a lot of unlearning,” and “our willingness to step into endless new paradigms.” Pratt covers a lot of ground as she sketches out some of these paradigms—from the tiring falseness of chasing perfectionism to the liberation of the divine feminine in us all, from Richard Rohr on nurturing a nondualistic mindset to Gloria Anzaldúa on overcoming “the tradition of silence.” I’m grateful for the contribution that *A Brown Girl’s Epiphany* makes to healthy theology by helping us all honor the sacred gift of our unique voices, together.