

Reviews

Guerra Martínez, Juan Francisco and Luis Scott, eds.
**Iglesias peregrinas en busca de identidad:
cuadros del protestantismo latino en los Estados
Unidos.** Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2004, 274 pp. ISBN
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Juan Martínez, director of Hispanic Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Luis (Lindy) Scott, professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Wheaton College, have collaborated as editors of this fascinating volume on the history of the Protestant church among Hispanics in the United States. The twelve chapters, written entirely in Spanish (with an English translation in progress), were contributed by scholars representing a variety of Protestant denominations. A possible translation of the book's title is *Wayfar-ing Churches in Search of Identity: Snapshots of Latino Protestantism in the United States*. The prologue points out that this volume is similar to a "family photo album," with numerous snapshots of events and persons, but with many more still missing. However, church history does not consist of a series of abstract doctrines, but rather a series of historical events in which we see and receive the presence of God.

In the introduction, Juan Martínez discusses the difficulties of writing such a history. First of all he mentions the problem of discontinuity. Not only must one research the history of the Protestant church among Hispanics of Mexican origin in the U.S. Southwest, but one must also consider the history of the Puerto Ricans, the Cubans, and others on the East Coast. Additionally, the many separate waves of immigration make it difficult to find consistent patterns. The large number of Protestant denominations further complicates the picture, as well as the fluidity of cultural identity, adaptation, and assimila-

tion. Should Hispanic congregations that use English be included? What about multicultural churches with a majority of Latinos and Latino leadership? In spite of the complexity inherent in such research, we must make the effort to preserve the stories.

The first section of the book consists of six chapters dealing with the history of specific denominations, representing a variety of experiences. The first chapter, by Juan Martínez, deals with the first contacts between Anglos and Latinos in the U.S. Southwest and the establishment of the first Latino Protestant churches in that region during the 19th century by mainline denominations such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. The second chapter, written by Eduardo Font, focuses further on the Hispanic churches of the American Baptist Convention, recounting their stories in Puerto Rico, New York, the Southwest, and the Midwest. In the third chapter, Sergio Navarrete gives the history of the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination that was born in the early 20th century and that swelled enormously with successive waves of immigration caused by the Mexican Revolution that began in 1910. Today this is the Protestant denomination with the greatest number of Latino members in the U.S. The fourth chapter, written by Ismael Martín del Campo, gives the history of the Apostolic Assembly of Faith in Christ Jesus (*Asamblea Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús*), an indigenous Latino Pentecostal denomination originating in California with no direct ties to an Anglo church. In the fifth chapter, Luis (Lindy) Scott recounts the more recent work of the Evangelical Free Church of America among Hispanics in the Chicago area, comparing types of leadership and concluding that the Hispanic churches that thrive the most are often led by Hispanic pastors who have the same type of life experiences as the members. The sixth and final chapter in this section, written by Tony Solórzano, describes the ministry “Final Call” (*Iglesia de Cristo Ministerios Llamada Final*), founded by a Guatemalan immigrant and representative of the recent Neopentecostal movements that have increased dramatically in both Latin America and the U.S.

The second large section of the book deals with important themes in the life of the Latino Protestant churches in the U.S. The seventh chapter, written by Juan Martínez, discusses the processes of acculturation and assimilation among distinct Latino subcultures. In the eighth chapter, Nora Lozano gives an overview of the role of women in the Hispanic churches (who are often doubly “invisible”) and their struggles to follow Christ in spite of sexism, classism, and racism. The ninth chapter, by Luis (Lindy) Scott recounts the fascinating story of Reies López Tijerina, who is often grouped with César

Chávez and Rodolfo “Corky” González in the fight for Chicano rights during the 1960s. López Tijerina was an evangelical pastor who believed that the Bible justified his actions to recuperate land rights. In the tenth chapter, Daniel Ramírez discusses the history of Latino Protestant hymnology. Although at first most songs in the Latino churches were translations from the English hymnals, the number of indigenous songwriters grew, and Pentecostal favorites (such as “Alabaré”) have migrated to mainline denominations and even to the Catholic church. The tenth chapter, written by Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, deals with missiology and the concept of borders as a space of new creation and prophetic character. In the final chapter of the book, Janet Treviño de Elizarraraz recounts the history of the mass media in evangelization, particularly of radio during the 20th century.

For those who can read Spanish, this volume contains a wealth of information. As can be expected, the chapters vary in quality—from those containing a detailed analysis and critique of historical happenings and future challenges to those which more simply describe a series of events. This is not a book that is meant to be read from cover to cover in one sitting. Instead, it is a rich source of information on various facets of the growth of the Hispanic Protestant churches in the United States. Although readers will likely focus on chapters closest to their specific interests, a thorough reading of all the chapters will provide a perspective on the complexity and richness of this area of church history.

There are many gaps in the history, acknowledged freely by the editors. The volume begins and ends with a call to compile many more “snapshots” of the history of Protestantism among Hispanics in the United States, to organize and study these snapshots in their historical context, and to challenge the traditional way in which church history is recounted. No longer can the history of the Latino Protestant Church in the United States be relegated to a footnote.
