

Book Review: *Taking Up the Mantle: Latin American Evangelical Theology in the 20th Century*

**By J. Daniel Salinas. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK:
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In *Taking Up the Mantle*, J. Daniel Salinas weaves together complex threads of a Latin American Evangelicalism that has roots in religious divisions in Europe in the 17th century, reached Latin America in the missionary movements of the 19th century, and remains somewhat fragmented today. Despite theological conflicts between what Salinas refers to as the three main wings of Latin American Protestantism (Pentecostalism, dispensationalism, and denominationalism), and despite the violence that has long plagued many Spanish-speaking countries, the Latin American church has still seen tremendous theological growth. There has also been significant progress toward a more ecumenical expression of Christianity in Latin America. This book uncovers relatively unexplored chapters of Latin American theological history. It should spur us to further recognize and explore the unique place of Latin American Evangelicalism in the context of global Christian theologies.

Taking Up the Mantle takes a chronological and institutional approach to the story of Latin American evangelical theology in the twentieth century. Thus Salinas begins his narrative with the Panama Congress of 1916 and ends with a slew of theological meetings and conferences in the late seventies and eighties. This provides readers with a coherent snapshot of Latin American evangelical theology in the twentieth century but by no means a complete picture. In any case,

chapter one sets the stage by introducing readers to the political and theological climate of Latin America around the turn of the century, focusing especially on what strategic meetings and their publications reveal about evangelical thought in these early years. Much of their discussion centered on how Latin American evangelicals ought to relate to Roman Catholics, Social Gospellers, and North American missionaries.

Salinas then identifies three distinct generations of Latin American evangelicals, which roughly correspond to chapters two, three, and four of his book. The first generation, according to Salinas, lasted from Panama 1916 to the Primera Conferencia Evangélica Latinoamericana (CELA I) at Buenos Aires in 1949. It included theological leaders such as Scottish Presbyterian missionary John A. Mackay, Argentinian pastor Gabino Rodríguez, and Mexican Methodist journalist Gonzalo Báez-Camargo. Báez-Camargo's magazine *Luminar* aimed to see Protestantism "Latinized" and made into a "native plant," and Mackay's 1932 book *The Other Spanish Christ* became an oft-quoted classic for future Latin American theologians (43). Then came the second generation, which lasted from CELA I to the founding of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (FTL) at Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 1970. This generation, which included ecumenical leaders such as Argentinian René Padilla and Peruvian Samuel Escobar, faced an urgent need for sound theological responses to the growing radicalism of the 1960s. According to Salinas, most "ecclesiastical leaders were not prepared to deal with the situation" (56). However, a few emerged with a contextualized theology that allowed Latin American evangelicals to mediate between the two extremes of capitalism and collectivism by casting aside what Padilla called their "Anglo-Saxon clothing" (92). But the unity and consolidation ushered in by the formation of the FTL did not endure in the third generation. Liberation theology led to fragmentation in the Latin American theological community. The late seventies and eighties were "a rocky decade" marked by rifts between *Confraternidad Evangélica Latinoamericana* (CONELA), which aligned itself with the more theologically conservative Lausanne Movement, and *Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias* (CLAI), which aligned itself with the more theologically liberal World Council of Churches (141). The fifth and final chapter ties up loose ends by outlining Latin American evangelicals' search for definition and maturity—their relationship with other Third World theologies, ongoing conversation with the rapidly growing Pentecostal movement, and the role of female theologians in Latin American thought.

Salinas's background in theology and familiarity with the culture of Latin American Evangelicalism clearly shine through in his narrative. He links Latin American political unrest with the emotive eschatological hope found in Spanish-speaking liturgy. Additionally, his emphasis on Pentecostalism is consistent with demographic trends in which, according to Salinas, one in four evangelicals

were Pentecostals by 1940. Lastly, he returns again and again to the topic of Christology, highlighting the evangelical tendency to de-emphasize Christ's humanity (Docetism), which fueled the rhetoric of liberation theology. As René Padilla observed: “[Latin American evangelical theology] affirms Christ's transforming power in relation to the individual, but is totally unable to relate the gospel to social ethics and social life” (141–42). This was clearly not the case in liberation theology, though the weight with which they embraced Christ's humanity resulted in an equally imbalanced negligence of Christ's divinity, and an occasional endorsement of violent revolution. The contemporary result of these parallel conversations, however, is a widespread evangelical misunderstanding of the Incarnation and passion of Christ, which in turn led to a poor theology of suffering, a tendency which has culminated in today's prosperity gospel. These theological deficiencies lead Salinas to his hortatory conclusion: he calls for additional theological education and theological texts written in (not just translated into) Spanish. This is fitting for a scholar who has dedicated his life to this very endeavor.

Salinas should be applauded for his hard work in the archives. This is a rich book with helpful footnotes and a thorough bibliography, and it is anchored in primary source testimony (much of which Salinas has presumably translated from Spanish to English for his readers). From the outset, Salinas makes his approach clear: “The aim here is to let the voices be heard as they were originally expressed without allowing more recent views to taint our approach to the subject matter” (1). However, this approach has drawbacks. With a block quote on nearly every other page, the narrative can be difficult to follow at times. Though there is great value in reading these long quotes, it would have been helpful for Salinas to shorten the quotes, limit the number of them, or provide more of his own commentary to help readers extract the most understanding from each primary source citation.

In any case, *Taking Up the Mantle* is an excellent launching pad for future inquiry on Latin American evangelical theology in the twentieth century. It introduces us to a choir of Latin American voices that deserve more attention. For too long have erudite theologians like Samuel Escobar and René Padilla been overshadowed by liberationists. For too long have academics assumed that Latin American theology begins with Gustavo Gutiérrez. Salinas brings to light a deeper history in *Taking Up the Mantle*—in this account Gutiérrez does not arrive until chapter four. Salinas demonstrates that Latin American theology is older and more historically varied than many might think.



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