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## Book Review

Anderson, Justice C. *An Evangelical Saga: Baptists and Their Precursors in Latin America*.  
Publisher: Xulon Press (August 10, 2005) ISBN 1597814954.

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There are three things behind a book. All of them are necessary to its production. None of them can be missed or the book will not be there. First, there is the author. There is no book without an author. Second, there is the method the author used to produce his/her book. There is no book without a method. The third thing is the actual writing itself: There is no book without a book.

Let's consider these three in the analysis of Anderson's *Evangelical Saga*.

### **Justice Anderson, the person**

A native of Texas, Justice Anderson introduces himself as a “some time Baptist pastor, a long time Baptist foreign missionary, and an even longer time professor of missiology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary” (Fort Worth, Texas).

For seventeen years Anderson served as a missionary in Argentina, especially attached to the faculty of the International Baptist Theological Seminary, where I had the privilege to study and to teach later in life for almost 25 years.

During his later tenure as professor of missiology at Southwestern, Anderson had the privilege to travel and research Baptist history in most of the regions of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Anderson belongs to that extinct breed of life long missionaries. Even when he was back in his own country, he referred to himself as a missionary in reverse, that is, comparing himself as an Argentinean with a missionary vision for North America. At 83, Anderson is still teaching in universities in Texas, and traveling to Latin America for mission purposes.

Anderson has never forgotten his missionary vein. That interest and concern determine the method of his book, the characters he decides to research and the way he deals with them. This book looks as a book of history, but it is a book of missions.

This missional character of the stories and the history that Anderson recalls gets especially revealed by the end of his book, which includes two endings. The first one is a chapter on the future of Christianity in Latin America at the light of its missionary importance for global Christianity, and the second is an *addendum* on Pentecostalism in Latin America, a chapter that those who are going to participate in this dialogue with Pentecostals that the BWA is beginning to engage in should read carefully for clues and tracks that could be followed not only in Latin America, but in the rest of the world.

### **Justice Anderson, his historical method**

The historical method followed by Anderson is quite particular. He explains it candidly at the beginning of his book.

The first leg for his historical method of tracing the history of Baptists in Latin America is expressed by Anderson with these words: “Baptist history in Latin America will be highlighted as an important, but not exclusive, part of a more significant evangelical saga.” (xxvi-xxvii). The word “saga” was selected by Anderson to convey “the story of heroic persons and events” (xxv). Anybody who knows even summarily the history of Baptists and other evangelicals in Latin America will concur with Anderson that it is a larger-than-life story.

“As I chronicled Baptist history in my Spanish volumes during a seventeen year missionary ministry in Latin America,” says Anderson (xxvi), “I became aware once again of the Baptist’s debt to a multitude of forerunners, especially in the Two-thirds World, without whose evangelical contributions our struggling Baptist forefathers would have labored in vain. Many of these had no desire to be Baptists, and certainly did not intentionally promote the growth of a Baptist denomination. But by being faithful to the propagation and defense of the evangelical principles mentioned above,” –Anderson mentions three principles: (1) the supreme authority and complete reliability of the Bible, (2) the necessity of personal faith in Christ, or the new birth, and (3) the imperative of proclamation, evangelism, and missions – “they prepared the soil for an emerging Baptist denomination. For this reason, I will treat these evangelical precursors . . . before tracing the beginnings and development of the Baptist denomination in the geopolitical areas of Latin America” (xxvi).

The second leg of his historical method is a concentration on the human characters rather than in the circumstances and events that surrounded them. Here Anderson also shows his missional interest. Rather than concentrating on circumstances and events, or in dubious periodifications of historical phenomena, Anderson concentrates on people. This is not casual.

While it is true that many times the outcome and fate of events are determined by circumstances, it is even truer that the will and stubborn determination of pioneers is many times the one that finally decides the results and consequences of these events. Anderson provides more than one example of this rugged and vigorous spirit of the forerunners in Latin America.

Anderson divides the precursors in two types: providential and intentional. I will come back to this later in this review.

A third leg that plays an important role in the historical method of Anderson is the fragmentary and hodge-podge nature of the missionary enterprise in Latin America. Painting the picture of such diverse mosaic of actors is like putting together a 10 thousand piece puzzle, when the colors of the pattern in the face of the pieces are just a spectrum of pastel colors. The stories that Anderson threads in this history of Latin American Baptists are diverse, variegated and multifaceted. Separate from each other, they become interesting pieces of a museum, a disconnect of a hodge-podge of human desires and achievements. Put together and threaded into a unit, however, they become a beautiful pattern and demonstration of the *missio Dei* which inspired them to develop their *missio humanae*. Their visions and human stories have become bites and pieces of a larger story, the story of “la obra del Señor” –the work of the Lord.

The historical method of Anderson is quite interesting and peculiar, but the most important thing –the only valuable thing, finally– is the book itself.

### **Justice Anderson, his book**

James Leo Garrett, a Southwestern professor himself, writes a generous Foreword to Anderson’s book. Garret locates this book “in the face of the convergence of three Christian phenomena. First, that the center of gravity for Christianity is shifting from Europe and North America to the Southern hemisphere. Second, there is the changing face of Christianity in Latin America, with its 480 million professed Christians. Third, the Baptists of North America and most of Europe until recently had little knowledge of the origins and growth of Baptists in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the same is possibly true of most general historians of Christianity, for the entire story until recent years have been largely confined to the Spanish and Portuguese language” (xiii).

The book is divided in two sections. The first, dedicated to the precursors, is divided in two sub-sections, one on the providential precursors, and one on the intentional precursors. “The distinction is subtle, but nevertheless real,” explains Anderson in page 1 of his book. “The *providentials* were evangelical persons and movements with had no intention of preparing the ground for Baptist beginnings. They came to Latin America either as part of a military expedition, or for economic reasons, or for social work, or as part of an ethnic immigration, or for a legion of other reasons. Their influence on Baptist beginnings was casual, or more correctly stated, coincidental” (1). The *intentional*, on their part, “came originally with a

definitely evangelical purpose, some independently, earning their keep by the labor of their hands; others, as refugees from religious intolerance or economic depression; some as chaplains for colonists or pastors of emigrant churches; a few were supported by fledgling benevolent entities; others were bivocational –businessmen, educators, engineers, or colporteurs representing non-denominational societies” (1).

Among the providential, Anderson includes the German Lutherans in Venezuela (1526), the French Huguenots in Brazil (1555-1560), the Dutch Colony in Brazil (1624-1645), the English in the Caribbean (1625-1655), the Waldensians in Uruguay (1865), the Welsh in the Argentine Patagonia (1865), and the Confederates in Southern Brazil (1866). Among the providential individuals he studies Luther Rice in Brazil (1813), Frederick Crowe in Central America (1836), and James Hickey in Mexico (1858).

Among the individual intentional pioneers, Anderson includes Huguenot Pastors in Brazil (1557), Justinian von Welz in Suriname (1621), Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Latin America (1732), Afro-American Freedmen in the Caribbean (1750), David Creighton in the River Plate (1806), James Thomson in Latin America (1818-1854). Among the societal intentional pioneers he mentions Parvin, Pitts, and Torrey in River Plate (1823), Pioneers in Patagonia as Fitzroy and Darwin (1832), Titus Coan and William Arms in Chiloe (1833), Allen Gardiner in the South Cone (1822), and Thomas Bridges on the Beagle Canal (1856). Other intentional pioneers include David Trumbull in Chile (1845), Colporteurs Matthews, Milne and Penzotti (1828), Robert Reid Kalley in Brazil (1855), T. J. Bowen in Brazil (1859), English Baptists in the Malvinas-Falkland Islands (1872), Chinese Baptists in Guyana (1861), William Taylor in Chile (1878), W. E. Reed in Ecuador (1896) and Henry Weiss, a Mennonite in Chile (1896).

The second section of the book is devoted to the beginnings and history of Baptists in Latin America. Anderson divides this second section in six chapters. There is one chapter for Baptist beginnings in Mexico, another for Baptist beginnings in Brazil, a third chapter for Baptist beginnings in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay), a fourth chapter for Baptist beginnings in the Andean Republics (Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru), a fifth chapter for Baptist beginnings in Central America (Panama, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras), and a sixth chapter for Baptist beginnings in the Caribbean (Bahamas, Belize, Bermuda, the Caymans, the Dominican Republic, French Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, Haiti, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts-Nevis, Tortola and Montserrat, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Netherlands Antilles, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, Jamaica, and the Lesser Antilles: Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). This second section, as obvious, makes the bulk of the historical research of Anderson.

As it was said earlier, the book has two endings. The first one is on the future of Latin American Christianity, a very proper and appropriate way of ending a history. Indeed, what is worth researching and learning our history for, if not for this very purpose of allowing us dwarfs, the ability to stand on “giant’s shoulders,” as Isaac Newton famously said. Quoting Rubem

Alves, the Brazilian theologian, Anderson says: “The historian is not an archaeologist of memories; he is a sower of visions and hope” (577).

The second ending is perhaps the most interesting one, and certainly one that should conceal the attention of those Baptists who are to deal with the Baptist-Pentecostal dialogue that BWA is about to begin. The chapter, called by Anderson an “Addendum,” is entitled “Pentecostalism in Latin America: An Overview,” and with or without the author’s intention, it functions as a second ending, perhaps one that reveal once more these visions of hope and Christian unity that Anderson has preached throughout the whole book.

At the beginning of this second conclusion, Anderson confesses having a change of heart about his views on Pentecostalism. He writes: “Like many mainline Latin American Evangelicals, I considered Pentecostalism a disparate, and somewhat distorted, exaggeration of evangelical principles and practice. Therefore, I did not seek its roots and development in my research. Subsequent study and observation of the phenomenon over the past quarter of a century has caused me to change my mind. There was, and still is, an intimate relationship, stranded at times, between Evangelicals and Pentecostals, especially in Latin America. They are definitely not two separate movements but, over time, have produced separate denominations” (595).

“Without doubt,” finishes Anderson his last chapter and the book, “the influence of the Pentecostal movement on the non-Pentecostals churches, Evangelical and Catholic, will continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This behooves Pentecostals to remain true to their biblical, evangelical roots. It constrains non-Pentecostals to be open to what God may communicate to them through Pentecostalism. The two movements need each other, especially in Latin America” (624). Anderson, then, ends his book by quoting José Míguez Bonino, the recently deceased Argentine Methodist theologian, who said: “Because Pentecostalism quantitatively is the most significant manifestation, and qualitatively the most vigorous expression, of Latin American Protestantism, its future is decisive not only for Protestantism as a whole, but for the entire religious field and its social projection” (625).

So, for all who participated in it, and for all who really want to get to know it, Anderson has written a piece of Baptist history worth recalling and worth reading.

Here there is a history well researched and investigated by someone who has been a participant in its development for many years as a missionary in the Latin American region, and as a respected historian of the missionary movement in his own country. As we have said, this history is –in the words of the author– a *saga*, a modern heroic narrative of historic figures and events that have become legendary.

If this book tells stories of legends, in this case, the legend includes the author, a legendary missionary to Latin America and a legendary professor of missions at a once legendary seminary in the United States of America. Muchas gracias, Justo!