Francisco Lozada Jr. and Fernando F. Segovia (eds.)

This collection of essays explores different issues and questions pertaining to Latino/a identities and the possible influence of those particular identities on biblical scholarship.

In the initial essay, which follows the very helpful introduction of Fernando F. Segovia on the aims and orientations of the volume, Efrain Agosto reflects on how, at quite a young age, he got involved with teaching the Bible in a Pentecostal Hispanic church in New York City and how that experience has influenced him as a biblical scholar. The aim of his article is twofold: (1) to show how religious experience is important in the formation of the earliest Christ communities; and (2) to show how one’s experience as a modern reader may inform one’s reading and interpretation of the biblical text. Agosto wants to relate the realities of the Latinos/as today to the realities of the social actors of the biblical text, specifically those communities associated with Paul. He does this by placing them in conversation with one another. For him, these conversations are important in order to question some positions taken by the authors of the biblical text and help us to seek justice and human dignity for all.

Hector Avalos’ piece is very clear and very direct. His aim is to deconstruct “the religionist and imperialist biblio-latry that lies at the core of his profession” (p. 70). This is how he starts: “I am not a Latino biblical scholar. I am a biblical scholar who happens to be Latino” (p. 59). Avalos’ aim is to rethink Latino hermeneutics from an atheist perspective. His contribution is different from all the other essays in the sense that he is the only one who self-identifies as an atheist. Avalos criticizes Latino/a biblical scholars who use certain liberationist perspectives to advance their theological agendas. For him, the many versions of liberation theological interpretations of the biblical records present very serious ethical problems. Avalos seeks a liberation that goes beyond the assumption that any ancient text should be an authority on how we should live and negotiate our lives in the modern world.

Eric Barreto’s theoretically sophisticated article is an overview of the nature of race and ethnicity and how those concepts are related to the Bible. Ethnicity, for Barreto, “is an act of cultural fiction” (p. 76); both “race” and “ethnicity,” according to Barreto, “ultimately point to the same underlying phenomena of drawing upon myths of origins, homelands, physical difference, and, more comprehensively, notions of ‘fictive kinship’ to group people and organize difference” (p. 76). Barreto locates the experience of racial and cultural identities among Latinas/os in the USA within flexible realities. For Barreto, “Latina/o
biblical scholarship ought to reassess the complexities and pitfalls of the application of such ethnic discourse to the Bible” (p. 84), and he argues that the variegated experiences of Latinas/os should be situated in conversation with the “in-betweenness” experienced by the earliest Christ-followers.

The next paper by Aída Besaño Spencer is less successful in comparison to the previous essays. Her “Position Reversal and Hope for the Oppressed” lacks a clear thesis, and we are left to guess that her purpose might be to draw attention to “the importance of a biblical hermeneutic that is fleshed out in life” (p. 105).

Alejandro F. Botta’s brief essay, titled “What Does It Mean to Be a Latino Biblical Critic?” is a delight: It is beautifully written and it is theoretically well articulated. His autobiographical reflection is quite gripping. Notice, for example, this line: “I felt like just another human being while living in Argentina, Israel, and Germany; however, not long after my arrival in Chicago in 1997, I realized that I had become someone different for the society with which I was interacting – a Latino/Hispanic” (p. 111). Botta concludes his essay thus: “My identification is with the oppressed, no matter what race they may be. To use a religious metaphor, the metaphorical goddess of this Latino critic is not white, black, or Hispanic – she is just poor” (p. 117).

Gregory Cuellar’s essay, “Forgotten Forebears in the History of North American Biblical Scholarship,” has a clear thesis: “To reread the context of Bible reading in sixteenth century colonial Mexico in an effort to reclaim such reading as an antecedent to Latina/o biblical interpretation in North America” (p. 122). This well-written essay gives the reader insight and important information related to the early Mexican history and culture.

In “The Challenges of Latino/a Biblical Criticism,” Rubén R. Dupertuis reflects on how his experience and social location have oriented his readings and interpretations of the texts of the early Christ-followers. (I prefer to use the term “texts of the early Christ-followers” rather than the author’s “the early Christian texts” [p. 134]). Dupertuis clarifies that “while Acts notes when and where the term Christian comes into use (Acts 11:26), it is not clear that this is a term Acts claims for the followers of Jesus in the narrative” (p. 140). So what does it mean to be a Latino/a biblical critic? The author leaves the question open “so as to not limit how we name our Latino/a experiences and allowing for some messiness in how we do so” (p. 146).

Cristina García-Alfonso, from Cuba, answers that same question about being a Latino/a biblical critic with a visceral statement: “Being a biblical critic means to engage in a hermeneutic that is corporal, feminist, and attentive to issues of survival” (p. 152). Her essay, “Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematic, Objectives, Strategies,” is rooted in her experience of growing up in