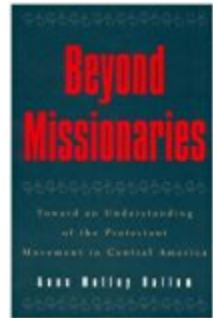


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anne Motley Hallum. *Beyond Missionaries: Toward an Understanding of the Protestant Movement in Central America*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996. xiii + 150 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8298-0; \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8297-3.

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## Latin American Protestantism

This brief book is constituted by six chapters. Chapter One reviews Protestantism in historical and social context as a movement with political and economic, as well as religious implications. Two looks at the history of Protestantism in Latin America and its achievement of a growth rate which results in a doubling each decade. Three looks at the different forms of Protestantism, both in organizational and theological terms. Four looks at Catholic/Protestant relations: some cool cooperation and some hot competition. Five assesses the political impact of Central American Protestantism. Six is a brief summary and gives some speculations about future trends.

The singular strength of this book is its author. She is associate professor of political science at Florida's Stetson University. However, her writing style and level of approach are such that this book can be easily digested by a historian, sociologist, theologian, or missionary. What is most refreshing is that she is extremely even-handed in her presentation of the material: she is not pushing a pro-left agenda, a pro-Catholic agenda, or a pro-Protestant agenda.

The great weakness of this book is that it seems it was prematurely formulated, and perhaps an unworthy indication of the author's knowledge in this area and of her scholarly abilities. The first four chapters are essentially a review of articles and books (scholarly and popular) which have already been published by other authors. The review is accurate, thorough, and balanced, but there is too little in those chapters which is truly original. The

greatest originality in this book occurs in Chapter Five, which would be publishable on its own as a twenty-eight page journal article, but even here, much of the material is a review of what has already been written.

A related weakness is an inconsistent application of the canons of social science methodology. For example, several tables quoted from other sources did not adequately explain how the data were gathered (e.g., p. 37 on estimated growth rate; p. 103 on the developmental indicators; p. 116 on communal participation in church attendance). Some tables raise statistical questions. Sometimes it is not clear if a table is presenting a correlation coefficient or a percentage (e.g., p. 109 on the percent of those voting for Serrano). Some comparative tables do not indicate their statistical significance (e.g., p. 123 has a cross tabulation of denomination and party voted for). One table which does give significance nevertheless fails to identify the statistical test used, and claims significance at the .05 level for a correlation of .16 and a sample size of twenty-two (p. 107).

Given this reviewer's fascination with qualitative methods, it was most disappointing that there was no methodological discussion of ethnographic techniques applied to this topic, or analysis of interview data. (The author does mention in a footnote that she conducted a personal interview with Guatemalan General Efraim Rios Montt, but there is no description of the context of the interview or how it was analyzed.)

While historians and political scientists will find

some interesting content, sociologists and scholars of comparative religion will be disappointed by issues which are only mentioned in passing: the motives of converts to (and apostates from) Central American Protestant denominations, and competition between more mainline Protestant denominations (including the Pentecostal) and those which may have more distinctive practices or doctrine (e.g., the Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses). In my own experience, there are local areas where missionaries from these latter groups outnumber all mainline Protestant denominations combined. Another issue which someone must address in future scholarship in this area is the internal leadership dynamic of local Protestant churches: how does the influence of the North American missionary phase out, and the indigenous leadership evolve?

One recent work in this field, too new to be cited by Hallum, would be *Evangelism and Apostasy: the Evolution and Impact of Evangelicals in Modern Mexico* by Canadian scholar Kurt Bowen (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) and ably reviewed by Carlos Garma Navarro in *Review of Religious Research* (June, 1997) vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 364-365.

I hope that Hallum will stick with this important topic and expand many of the insights introduced in this slender volume, giving more attention to methodological and sociological issues.

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