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## Francisco Lozada, Jr. and Fernando F. Segovia, eds. Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies

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Francisco Lozada, Jr. and Fernando F. Segovia, eds. *Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies*. Semeia Studies 68. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. 386 pp. \$46.95 Paperback, ISBN: 978-1-58983-654-9. \$61.95 Hardcover, ISBN: 978-1-58983-927-4. eISBN: 978-1-58983-655-6.

What does it mean to be a Latino/a biblical critic? Editors Fernando F. Segovia (1-39, 323-363) and Francisco Lozada, Jr. (365-369) analyze Latino/a biblical criticism in light of recent works and bookend fifteen responses to this question by additional authors in this volume. As Segovia notes, this makes *Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies* an analysis of “the vision of the critical task espoused by Latino/a critics” (2). Stated another way, “the project seeks to ascertain how such critics approach their vocation as critics in the light of their identity as members of the Latino/a experience and reality” (2). Given the focus on the interpretative task, the book’s primary audience is composed of specialists in biblical criticism and hermeneutics as well as scholars and graduate students in related disciplines who are interested in how Latino/a identity affects scholarly biblical interpretation.

Ruminations on the complexity and fluidity of Latino/a identity abound. (Aware of the term’s limitations, I use “Latino/a” in this review, in keeping with the designation used in the book.) Alejandro F. Botta, for example, discusses how only in the U.S. context is the label “Latino” imposed on him as an intelligible categorization of his Italian ancestry and Argentinian upbringing (107-119). Rubén R. Dupertuis writes of how complicated it is to locate himself in the landscape of Latino/a identities, given a father born in Argentina, a mother born in Costa Rica but raised in California by parents from Spain, his own rearing in Mexico and Michigan, and his lack of the expected Latino(a)/Latin American identity-markers in his skin color, accent,

and last name (133-149). Jacqueline M. Hidalgo writes of a “‘no place’ of otherness” in which her own Costa Rican father can accuse his children of being neither Costa Rican nor “United Statesan” (165-186 [166]). Timothy J. Sandoval writes of being “hailed” as a Mexican on both individual and structural levels, despite having a mother of Norwegian ancestry and his own birth and highly assimilated North American upbringing in the San Francisco Bay Area (263-295 [271]). Even as a youth, it was clear to Sandoval that his “Mexican” identity stemming from his father was presumed to be a social disadvantage (266-267). This is just a small sampling of the rich reflections on Latino/a identity in the volume.

That Latino/a identities and experiences are complicated is nothing new. The essays reinforce this point. The diverse collection resists any delimitation of Latino/a biblical hermeneutics as a uniform enterprise by which a rigid set of parameters determines what constitutes interpreting the Bible from a Latino/a perspective. Whereas earlier generations could present readings “from Hispanic eyes” and the like, taken together the essays make the complexity and pliability of the designation “Latino/a” abundantly clear. Indeed, a number of the essays regard with critical suspicion the possibility of configuring Latino/a biblical interpretation in ways that may, even inadvertently, reinforce essentialist notions of Latino/a identity, even as those essays express well-deserved gratitude for the pioneering work of the earlier generation of Latino/a scholars and theologians (e.g. Eric D. Barreto, 73-93; Dupertuis, 133-149).

Each contributor articulates their understanding of how identity affects their particular approach to biblical criticism. Efrain Agosto foregrounds his experiences of marginalization and his desire to “disarm” the center by claiming his “Hispanic/Latino, community-oriented, liberating voice” in his work as an interpreter of biblical texts (43-58 [49]). Botta affirms that his own “Latinicity” means using the standard historical-critical methods in a holistic fashion that

attends to matters of class (107-119, esp. 114-117). Cristina García-Alfonso draws from her Cuban roots to construct a “corporal hermeneutics [that] acknowledges the human body as part of the task of biblical interpretation” and emphasizes physical survival (*resolviendo*) as her hermeneutical lens for reading biblical texts, as she illustrates in her reading of Rahab in Joshua 2 (151-164 [152]). Ahida Calderón Pilarski argues that being a Latino/a critic means “to take, through a process of conscientization, a well-informed and well-engaged stance in the inquiry process” that is informed by the intersecting perspectives of ethnicity, gender, hermeneutics, and faith (231-248 [231]). Again, this is just a sample of responses to the question posed by the editors. But it is enough to show that the volume, in addition to underscoring the multiplicity of ways to be Latino/a, also signals that there is no one way to be a “Latino/a biblical scholar.” As Lozada suggests, Latino/a biblical interpretation could be as much “about challenging the idea that there is a ‘proper’ way of doing Latino/a biblical interpretation” as it is about foregrounding Latino/a identity (368).

To be sure, this leaves the contours of Latino/a biblical hermeneutics rather open-ended, raising the question of whether any work produced by Latino/a biblical critics constitutes an exercise in Latino/a hermeneutics. Or does this label apply only to work carried out by Latino/a scholars who have undertaken the critical self-theorizing on their identity represented in this volume? Can non-Latino/as adopt hermeneutical approaches developed by Latino/a interpreters to produce Latino/a readings? The volume offers no clear answers on such matters. Indeed, definitive answers would likely be elusive and illusive. Nevertheless, continuing to reflect on questions like these is important for developing Latino/a hermeneutics. While I am not necessarily opposed to constructing parameters by which we can identify exercises in Latino/a

biblical criticism, I agree with Lozada that these should be matters “open to constant negotiation” (367).

While some essays resonated with me more than others, which in an edited collection is the norm, the volume as a whole is a rich and stimulating venture into the question of how Latino/a biblical criticism is configured by Latino/a scholars who practice it. Taken together, the essays simultaneously remind the academy that “Latino/a biblical criticism is here!” while at the same time posing the critical question, “What are Latino/a biblical scholars actually *doing* here?” This volume marks an important moment in the ongoing conversation by which Latino/a biblical scholars define and negotiate Latino/a biblical hermeneutics.

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