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The Creation and Demise of the Academia Para la Historia de la Iglesia Latinx (APHILA), 1990–1993

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Abstract

This article reconstructs the brief history of the Academia para la Historia de la Iglesia Latina (APHILA), a short-lived but revealing experiment in Latinx Protestant historiography in the early 1990s. Drawing on archival sources from the Justo L. González papers, it contextualizes APHILA within the boom of Latinx theological education that followed González's booklet The Theological Education of Hispanics, as foundations invested heavily in new Latinx initiatives. The essay first narrates the network-building and grant-writing processes that led to APHILA'S creation and its only major conference at McCormick Theological Seminary in 1993. It then analyzes the organization's internal tensions over methodology, language policy, institutional location, and lay versus professional participation, together with the external pressures of donor expectations. Finally, it argues that APHILA'S collapse exposes both the possibilities and the structural fragilities of Latinx Protestant projects seeking to craft an autochthonous historiography in the United States.

Keywords: Latinx historiography; contextualization; church history; theological education

1. Introduction

This is the story of the creation and demise of the Academy for the History of the Latinx Church in the early 1990s. The main characters in this story were riding a giant wave of Latinx Christianity during the time. It was a time in which historian Justo L. González and other actors were constantly writing and receiving millions of dollars for their projects on Latinx theological education. González's groundbreaking 1988 study, *The Theological Education of Hispanics*, marked a new consciousness in the development of Latinx Christianity in the United States. New programs emerged from that study, such as the Association of Hispanic Theological Education, the Hispanic Summer Program, and the Hispanic Theological Initiative. These three programs have been the bedrock of Latinx Christianity in the United States by creating a theological, practical, and socio-cultural movement that has put Latinx scholars on the map of theological education. Nevertheless, one of the biggest shortcomings of this movement was the creation and demise of APHILA.

This article approaches APHILA through the lens of cultural memory to examine how Latinx Protestant historians and theologians attempted to move a fragmented and largely unwritten past into a more durable historiographical form. It asks three interrelated questions: What historical conditions made APHILA possible in the early 1990s? How did the organization's internal debates over methodology, language, institutional placement, and participation shape its attempt to build a Latinx historical canon? And what does APHILA's collapse reveal about the fragility of projects that seek to preserve and authorize marginalized religious memory? Using archival records from the Justo L. González papers,

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the article reads APHILA not simply as a failed organization, but as a contested site where archive, canon, and forgetting intersected in the making of Latinx Protestant historiography.

Aleida Assmann points out, "Memory capacity is limited by neural and cultural constraints such as focus and bias. It is also limited by psychological pressures, with the effect that painful or incongruent memories are hidden, displaced, overwritten, and possibly effaced" (Assmann 2008, p. 97). For her, there are two forms of forgetting, active and passive. Active forgetting is intentional in its outcome of erasing and destroying the memories of the past, while passive forgetting is related to neglecting or hiding the past or leaving things behind. She refers to active memory as the *canon* that keeps the past present, and passive memory as an *archive* that preserves the past as past. The archive, in both metaphorical and literal senses, accentuates the parameters of what could be valid or essential in a narrative. Assmann argues, "As the paradigmatic institution of passive cultural memory, the archive is the opposite of the memorial space of the church: it is the unhallowed bureaucratic space of a clean and neatly organized repository" where memories wait for someone to recover and interpret them (Assmann 2008, p. 103). This article's methodology and framework are based on the definition of the archive as a repository of cultural memory that needs to be retrieved and interpreted for future generations within Latinx Christianity. First, it describes the processes that led to the creation of the Academy of Latinx Church History and the people involved in such a process. Second, it describes and analyzes the Association of Latinx Church History's first and only conference. Third, the article describes and analyzes the reasons for the Association of Latinx Church History's demise. The conclusion illustrates the shortcomings and challenges to engage in a project that could have been a unique contribution to Latinx Protestant church history but failed in its implementation.

2. The Expansion of Latinx Theological Education in the 1990s

This section reconstructs the conditions that made APHILA possible by situating the project within the broader expansion of Latinx theological education in the early 1990s, the growth of grant-supported initiatives, and the desire to create a more self-conscious historiography of Latinx Protestantism in conversation with the historiography produced by Enrique Dussel and CEHILA. It shows how APHILA emerged from a network of scholars, church leaders, and institutional actors who sought to move beyond denominationally bounded histories toward a more collaborative and interdisciplinary historical project. In the early 1990s, APHILA emerged at the height of a broader surge in Latinx theological education in the United States, shaped by new funding streams, shifting church demographics, and ethnic-identity politics. The Hispanic Summer Program, the Association of Hispanic Theological Education, and the Hispanic Theological Initiative were all part of this wave.

Since 1976, the Fund for Theological Education (FTE) has funded endeavors in Latinx theological education. After a decade, in 1986, FTE decided to revisit and assess its efforts in Latinx theological education showing that 198 students had participated and received fellowship stipends for both the ministerial and doctoral programs totaling $570,000 in money invested. This prompted FTE to seek a $70,000 grant to conduct a study with the following objectives: increasing support for training Hispanic pastors and academics in an effort to integrate them into the fabric of U.S. society; establishing a program for part-time ministerial students because many people were pastors already, but had little or no formal education; providing funds to recruit Hispanic students to colleges and universities across the U.S.; continuing education for pastors after they finished their academic degree; and creating a post-doctoral program for research projects. FTE also appointed Justo González as the major researcher for the project that resulted in the 1988 booklet *The Theological*

Education of Hispanics and a $1.2 million dollars grant from the Pew Trust Fund. Of the twenty-five recommendations in the Report, none was more important, creative, and impactful than the establishment of the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP).

The Hispanic Summer Program was the birthchild of Justo González. The program was open to all Latinx graduate students in theological education and was held each summer for two to four weeks in different facilities, alternating regions, and denominational connections in the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico. The program was an experiment in ecumenical practices as it welcomed students from all Christian traditions. Its aim was to "supplement and enrich theological and ministerial education through academic courses and other activities that directly address Hispanic history, ministry, and theology, to build bridges by healing divisions caused by denominational and theological differences in Hispanic communities, and to enhance awareness and appreciation in non-Hispanics of Latino/a contributions to church and nation" (Maldonado-Pérez 2013, p. 66). The creation of the HSP was of immense significance because it helped ease tensions between Christians from different confessions. When Protestantism arrived in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean, Protestant missionaries taught new converts that Roman Catholicism was a corrupt form of Christianity. The animosities between Protestants and Roman Catholics run deep, but the HSP provided a space for healing and reconciliation. Another important contribution of the HSP is that it provided women with educational and ministerial formation. The first feminist/mujerista contributions of Latinx theology are traced to the HSP. For example, in its second year, when the program was at Oblate School of Theology, Jeanette Rodríguez, then a PhD student at the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, taught the course "Toward a Hispanic Feminist Theology of Liberation." In 1994, Teresa Chávez Sauceda taught the course "Una Teológia Feminista hispana." These courses reveal the first contributions of Latinx women's theological constructions based on an analysis of the feminine symbols, collective memory, and Chicano literature of the Hispanic community in the United States geared to proposals on a feminist pastoral project (Santiago-Vendrell 2026, pp. 150, 157).

The creation of the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI) came about when Justo González and Edwin Hernández, a sociologist at the University of Notre Dame, submitted a proposal to the Pew Charitable Trust presenting the general demographic, socioeconomic, educational, and religious reality of the Latinx population in the United States and the expressed needs of Latinx religious leaders in the 1990s. The official announcement from Candler School of Theology celebrated the $3.3 million grant, the largest grant in religion given by Pew at the time, as an important initiative in the development of highly trained Latinx scholars in a partnership between Candler and the newly formed Hispanic Theological Initiative (Elaine Justice). The HTI was the first program directed by Latinx scholars dedicated to building a Latinx religious intelligentsia, as it provided Latinx doctoral students with substantial fellowships for daily living expenses, while the sponsoring university provided full tuition. HTI accompanied students throughout their coursework, comprehensive exams, and dissertation process until their graduation. The creation of the HTI matters because it served as a mechanism for many Latinx students who were economically challenged to afford a doctoral program in a prestigious university or seminary. The emergence of the HTI reveals how structural inequities, such as economic, educational, and institutional disadvantages, have long limited Latinx access to advanced theological training, necessitating targeted intervention at a national level. It also demonstrates a strategic shift toward cultivating an autonomous Latinx scholarly voice within theological education, moving from marginal participation to intentional intellectual leadership and institutional presence (Santiago-Vendrell 2026, p. 177).

The study *The Theological Education of Hispanic* found that most Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Fundamentalist Latinx pastors were trained in Bible colleges, Bible institutes, and a range of community-and church-based programs operated by denominational bodies and independent churches. Recognizing the need for greater collaboration among these diverse educational efforts, González sought funding to create a theological initiative through grassroots participation. The goal was to foster dialogue, share resources, and envision a unified mission for strengthening theological education among Hispanic communities. Since its inception, The Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH) has served as a vital resource for popular theological education grounded in the lived experiences of Latinx churches. AETH emerged from the demanding work of González and others connected to the Fund for Theological Education (FTE), supported in part by a $1.2 million grant. It was established to amplify a grassroots theological movement within Latinx communities. Numerous barriers had long limited Latinx access to accredited seminary education. Many independent and Pentecostal churches, for example, do not require a Master of Divinity for ordination of Word and Sacrament, while others already serving as pastors have received only minimal formal training. Still others face financial constraints that make seminary education unattainable. This grassroots project reveals that González's vision was not just for an elite movement of well-trained academics, but also a project cemented in the daily realities of most lay people or pastoral agents without a proper theological education. Taken together, the HSP, HTI, and AETH provided Latinx Christians with a forum of theological education rooted in their own contextual realities and helped to develop a Latinx religious intelligentsia. However, the creation of APHILA did not follow this model of preparing Latinx students for ministry, academic, or popular theology. APHILA was a different type of organization. It was an organization that would preserve the historical memory of Latinx Protestant Christianity in the United States by creating a guild of professional historians that would dedicate their time and expertise for such task. One of the models that members of APHILA recognized as useful for their project was the Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia en Latinoamerica (CEHILA).

3. A Relative Model: Comisión Para El Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en Latinoamérica

CEHILA inspired a parallel Latinx Protestant historiography attentive to colonialism, migration, and exile. The origins of CEHILA trace back to 1968, at the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellín, Colombia. The Latin American bishops called the Catholic Church to be involved in acts of justice, strived for peace, and be immersed in a preferential option for the poor. It is out of this context that CEHILA was born when Enrique Dussel organized a conference in Quito, Ecuador, on 3 January 1973. His talk, "*Reflexiones sobre la metodología para una historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*," proposed a methodological reorientation of ecclesiastical historiography grounded in historical consciousness, theological interpretation, and the socio-political reality of Latin America. He argued that historical writing is neither neutral nor purely objective but always shaped by the historian's horizon of interpretation; therefore, the history of the Church must explicitly acknowledge its epistemological and theological presuppositions (Dussel 1975, p. 35). Situating Latin America within a global structure marked by colonial expansion and the emergence of a center–periphery relationship, he contended that the Catholic Church's historical development cannot be understood apart from processes of conquest, dependency, and cultural formation. Against traditional narratives that privilege institutional continuity, episcopal structures, and elite actors, Dussel called for a critical historiography attentive to the experience of Indigenous peoples, blacks, women, and the poor (Dussel 1975, p. 39). This new methodology revealed the dissatisfaction among young

academics with classical historiography in Latin America that pretended to be objective and scientific.

Dussel and CEHILA had their detractors. Criticism of CEHILA focused primarily on its methodological assumptions, ideological orientation, and ecclesial positioning. Opponents contended that the project did not meet the standards of historical objectivity, insofar as it organized and interpreted its material through a clearly ideological framework rather than through neutral historiographical criteria (Alcaide 1998, p. 399). Critics argued that CEHILA privileged a liberationist reading of church history that foregrounded the poor, social conflict, and future-oriented transformation, thereby displacing a more strictly descriptive account of the past (Alcalá Alvarado 1996, p. 158). Related objections also targeted what critics perceived as an uneven distribution of historical emphasis, with disproportionate attention given to CELAM, the Vatican, and contemporary Latin American political concerns at the expense of other periods and regions. A further line of critique concerned the relationship between history and theology (Alcalá Alvarado 1996, pp. 157–61). Detractors maintained that CEHILA blurred these disciplinary boundaries by combining historical reconstruction with theological and pastoral interpretation, thus producing not a balanced ecclesiastical history but an explicitly ideological history of liberation. Finally, the project's ecumenical openness and the composition of its collaborators generated suspicion among its critics, some of whom argued that CEHILA admitted individuals in tension with ecclesiastical authority and employed ecumenism in a politically ambiguous manner (Alcaide 1998, p. 401). Taken together, these critiques framed CEHILA as a historiographical initiative whose interpretive commitments were seen to compromise historical impartiality. The critiques further reveal the complicated relationship between the Catholic Church's hierarchy and lay historians such as Dussel, who was not bound to the Magisterium like other theologians sanctioned by the Curia. The case of Leonardo Boff has been one of the most prominent. Nevertheless, Dussel and CEHILA were received in the United States with open arms by Latinx theologians and historians.

In the summer of 1975, Dussel convened several scholars in San Antonio, Texas, at the Mexican American Cultural Center, directed by Father Virgilio Elizondo, who was also the rector of the San Fernando Cathedral. Dussel wanted to include the history of the Catholic Church in the USA in the *Historia General de América Latina.* Moises Sandoval became the leader among a group of scholars who would write the history of Hispanic Catholicism in the USA. Dussel requested that they finish their work in one year; however, it took the team of writers eight years to publish the book (Sandoval 2003, p. 5). After eight years, *Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in* the *United States since 1513* was written using CEHILA's methodology, concentrating on an alternative history in which the poor and marginalized took center stage while the triumphant Catholic Church was criticized for its elitist and sometimes racist actions against Hispanics.

CEHILA USA had been operating since 1975, but with few members and little participation. It was not until 1989 that a larger symposium took place at the University of Notre Dame with the collaboration of Jay P. Dolan, director of the Cushwa Center for the Center of American Catholicism. The papers written at the symposium were published in the journal *U.S. Catholic Historian* in 1990. Ten articles dealt with historical analysis of the cultural interactions between friars and natives in the San Antonio Mission, the historiography of the Catholic Church in the Southwest under the Spanish and Mexican period, the first Franciscan missionaries in Texas, the emergence of Catholicism in Arizona, the American Church and the Puerto Rican people, the spirituality of Hispanics in the United States, and a history of PADRES. There were also articles on oral history by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, Hispanic life in Aurora, Colorado, and the Cuban ecclesial enclave in Miami. All the articles followed CEHILA's methodology, lifting the voices of

the excluded from official historiographies of the official Catholic Church by insisting on a historiography from below, in this case, the poor, indigenous and Black communities, and women (Sandoval 2003, p. 3). In 1990, Moises Sandoval wrote a shorter solo book titled *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* based on the same periodization presented in *Frontera*, but this project was not part of CEHILA. Jay P. Dolan and the Cushwa Center were at the forefront of Latinx Roman Catholic historiography at that period that in conjunction of the History Department at University of Notre Dame produced three volumes on Latinx history in 1994: Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto Hinajosa, eds., *Mexican Americans in the Catholic Church, 1900–1965;* Jay P. Dolan and Jaime Vidal, eds., *Puerto Ricans and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900–1965*; and Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, eds., *Catholic Hispanic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns.* (Sandoval 2003, p. 7). The most comprehensive history of Latinx Roman Catholic Christianity is *Presente: U.S. Latino Catholics from Colonial Origins to the Present* (2000), a volume in the series "American Catholic Identities: A Documentary History" edited by Christopher J. Kauffman. It is obvious that the episcopal unity of the Roman Catholic Church facilitated a unifying historiography that Protestants lack. This reveals the organizational reach and concerted efforts by members of CEHILA USA. Considering liberation theology's negative reception from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it can also reveal that the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. was less scrutinized than in Latin America. Latinx Roman Catholics never took the option for the poor as the main interpretative lens. This means that a Marxist critique has never been implemented by Latinx historians or theologians. Instead, Latinx theologians had opted to replace the preferential option for the poor with a preferential option for culture (Espín and Díaz 1999, p. 3).

4. The Creation of APHILA

González and his team envisioned a Latinx Historical Society at the same level as CEHILA. Most histories of Latinx Protestantism were denominational and often written by pastors with no academic historiographical background. According to Daisy Machado, one of the few Latinas trained in history at the University of Chicago, "If one is to uncover the Latino church, both its past and present, one must recognize that research for this endeavor cannot begin in the center of the established scholarly world. Nor can it begin in the center of denominational structures. Instead, the religious history of Latinos in the United States is researched and written in the margins of both academic and denominational worlds" (Machado 1993, p. 84). Therefore, Latinx Protestant historiography tends to be denominational. For example, Machado wrote a dissertation at the University of Chicago under Martin Marty on the history of Hispanic Disciples of Christ in Texas from 1888 to 1945. The dissertation was later published in 2003 by Oxford University Press as *Of Borders and Margins: Hispanics Disciples in Texas, 1888–1945.* Another example of denominational historiography comes from the Presbyterian Church in Southern California. To commemorate its one-hundred-year anniversary in 1988, the Presbyterian Church commissioned Jane Atkins-Vásquez to write its story (Vásquez). A final example of denominational historiography is Justo L. González's *Each in Our Own Tongue: A History of Hispanics in United Methodism,* published by Abingdon Press in 1991. The only comprehensive history that is not denominational is *The Story of Latino Protestants in the United States* by Juan Francisco Martínez, published by Eerdmans in 2018. This reveals that the lack of Latinx Protestant historiography was a challenge many community members perceived as problematic, pushing them to create a historical narrative centered on a methodology that would be inclusive of all Protestant denominations without being denominational.

González submitted a grant proposal to the Louisville Institute for the Study of Protestantism and American Culture asking for $15,000 to conduct preliminary research

in the field of the history of Latinx Protestantism by identifying libraries, archives for primary sources, and meetings with local historians and church leaders involved in projects on Hispanic Protestantism in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Canada. González visited Puerto Rico twice in January and March of 1990 to locate primary sources in the University of Puerto Rico, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, the National Archives, the archives of the Missionary Alliance, and the Evangelical Seminary—sources that identified the influence of Puerto Rican Protestantism on the development of Latinx Protestantism through migration and missionary activity from islanders to the mainland. This trip and seven others to New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Chicago allowed him to begin building a network of people interested in the history of Latinx Protestantism in the United States. This mattered because it was the first time that a concerted effort to produce a comprehensive Protestant Latinx history brought together dispersed archives, local leaders, and historians across multiple North American sites into a single research agenda. It also helped establish Latinx Protestantism as a transnational field of study shaped by Puerto Rican migration, mainland church networks, and regional archival recovery.

González wanted to include local leaders and non-academics to collaborate and be part of the vision of producing a Latinx church history. His goal was to create a guild to formulate several hypotheses about the historical study of the Latinx churches by creating an autochthonous historiography. By creating a network of people interested in retrieving their historical memory, he and others planned the first conference of the nascent historical organization (González 1990). In this same period, Daniel Rodríguez, an associate professor of church history at McCormick Seminary, was thinking of developing an extensive project on the history of Latinx Protestantism in the United States. He suggested to González that it would be wonderful if they could work together on this endeavor (D. Rodríguez 1990). From that moment on, they collaborated on the formation of the Academy for the History of the Latinx Church.

The first consultation of people involved in the project took place at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, on 25 August 1991. The consultation formed a steering committee and an advisory group, with González as moderator, with Aida Rosa, Felipe Martínez, and Daniel R. Rodríguez-Díaz on the steering committee, and Juan Feliciano, David Traverso, Luís Cortez, and Roberto Rivera as an advisory group. This conference was to serve as a springboard for academic endeavors that would create a polycentric historical project, meaning it located regional centers for the study of denominational, congregational, ecumenical, oral, and women's history in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. At this first meeting, González was commissioned to write a proposal to Pew for additional funding of the Latinx Church History Program (J. Rodríguez 1991). This reveals an effort to build a decentralized, collaborative, and institutionally grounded research initiative rather than a single-author project. The emphasis on a steering committee, advisory group, and regional "polycentric" centers shows that the project was designed to distribute authority across multiple scholars, geographies, and historical traditions. González and collaborators were not just documenting history; they were helping create an academic field with its own infrastructure, agenda, and funding strategy.

The second meeting took place at the Riverside Church and Union Seminary Campus on 13 October 1991. The main objective of the meeting was to decide on the optimal type of relationship between CEHILA and the Latinx Church History Project. González suggested that the relationship should be organic, fraternal, but independent. Thus, CEHILA's methodological achievements were to serve only as models to guide historiographical questions. Juan Feliciano suggested that one of the first steps should be to invite Latin American historian/theologian Enrique Dussel and his team to offer a workshop on their methodology. Daniel Rodríguez also suggested a more robust interchange with historians

from CEHILA. González's final words reminded the group that conversations were at such an early stage that it was premature even to think about a theoretical framework. For him, it was more important to bring into the group people who were researching and writing at the local church level and those writing doctoral dissertations and academic monographs. He wanted to bring people like the *abuelitas* to tell their stories. From the records, it seems that González convinced the team to consider a historiography from below from a Latinx perspective rather than a Latin American one. González wanted to engage historians of CEHILA, learn from their accomplishments, but maintain a distance from them to allow the new group to develop its own methodology (González 1993). This reveals the hesitation, mostly of González, to engage the methodology of CEHILA. Even though Latinx Protestants were not bound by a hierarchical structure that would limit or oppose their scholarship, the shadow of Marxist historiography was present as a cautionary example of how such identification could be counterproductive in the new endeavor, especially in the United States. The meeting also reveals the tension between a more academic-oriented constituency of scholars and the aspirations of González, who wanted to include lay people who were not career historians, such as the *abuelitas*.

The final meeting took place at McCormick Theological Seminary on 21 March 1992. Daniel Rodríguez was a professor of church history at McCormick Seminary at the time, and because of McCormick's continued support of Hispanic causes, the group decided that Rodríguez would be the program's director and that McCormick would serve as the academic institution managing the grant. The team members read the proposal for the first time that McCormick Seminary planned to submit to Pew. The grant application was submitted to Pew on 10 February 1992. Pew responded by approving the grant of $135,000 to the Association of Latino Church History Project. The meeting addressed the need to promote regional centers for the investigation, preservation, and formation of historians at all levels, from academic professionals to lay historians in churches. González also envisioned a program for mentoring students in Latinx historiography in collaboration with the Hispanic Summer Program. In his mind, the HSP would include a three-year curriculum for students to take courses on subjects such as the discovery of a Latinx historical methodology and how to write oral, congregational, denominational, and ecumenical history. Another important topic that the participants were eager to address was the role of women in the history of Protestant Latinx Christianity in the United States. Women had played a strategic role in the shaping of Latinx Christianity, but their voices were seldom recognized. The participants wanted to situate women at the center of the history of the new methodology for Latinx Christianity by insisting that it was a contradiction in terms to study the history of Latinx Christianity without positioning women at the center of such a story. These topics became part of the workshops for the conference that was scheduled for the spring of 1993 (J. Rodríguez 1992). This matters because the project sought to institutionalize Latinx church history by creating regional centers, training historians at both academic and church levels, and developing a three-year mentoring curriculum through the Hispanic Summer Program. It also shows a clear methodological and feminist agenda: participants wanted to define Latinx historiography through oral, congregational, denominational, and ecumenical history, while insisting that women be placed at the center of Protestant Latinx historical interpretation.

At the group's fourth meeting at Columbia Seminary from 19 to 21 August 1992, the participants approved the constitution and bylaws and selected an executive committee. The participants voted unanimously for González as Executive President, Daisy Machado as Vice President, José Rodríguez as secretary, Benjamin Alicea as treasurer, and Sandra Mangual, Juan Feliciano, Osvaldo Mottessi, Eldin Villafañe, Roberto Rivera, Jesse Miranda, Rubén Almendáriz, Aida Rosa, and David Traverso as the advising committee. The

assembly adopted the name *Academia para la Historia de la Iglesia Latina*. The purpose of the organization was to unite professional church historians and community church leaders in common tasks of researching and writing the history of Latinx Protestantism in the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico. The group adopted the idea of promoting regional centers at which to investigate, preserve, and distribute of projects on Hispanic Protestant history, to promote the training of local church leaders in historical methods, to organize a databank of all Hispanics engaged in historical studies, and to retrieve Hispanic Protestant women's history through a specific plan of publications, to serve as an ecumenical historiographical forum, and to promote dialogue and cooperation with historians in Latin America and the Caribbean. The group also agreed to produce an informational and analytical newsletter dedicated to the historical development of Hispanic Protestantism, with the first issue appearing in October 1992. The final important decision of the meeting was the use of Spanish as the official language of APHILA. This strategy worked at one level, as APHILA had a common language, but it became problematic as all meetings of the executive and steering committees had to be translated into English for staff at Pew and McCormick Seminary. This reveals the tension of trying to institutionalize a project in the U.S., where English is the second language. Even though the group wanted to be faithful to their cultures through Spanish, this decision was counterproductive and time-consuming due to the translation.

Those present discussed the format of the conference and the topics. They agreed that there would be five major workshops, namely: (1) for professional historians dealing with methodological issues for the criteria of a scientific history of the Hispanic churches, (2) on topics related to how Hispanic church history has been written in the past; (3) for the presentation of historical case studies in the preservation of local history, (4) a professional track to develop regional centers of research, and (5) for the integration of the professional and lay workshops into a synthesis for the formulation of a Hispanic church history. There were also three panel discussions: (1) on the common ecumenical heritage of Hispanics, (2) Protestant popular religiosity, and (3) how to write oral history. Daisy Machado, Martin E. Marty's student at the University of Chicago at the time invited him to deliver the meeting's keynote address. Rodríguez emphasized that the address should take into consideration how Hispanic church history was excluded from the major books on American religious historiography (J. Rodríguez 1992). Even though the meeting generated great positive energy, by December Daniel Rodríguez was complaining to González about the difficulties of working with McCormick's secretary Sally Sharp, facing program structural problems because of some irregularities with the previous report, and no one from the commission had written anything so far for the program. In other words, there was no communication between Rodríguez and the team about the preparation of the conference (J. Rodríguez 1992). It was a rocky start for Rodríguez as Director of the whole project, but the program went ahead. This matters because from its start, APHILA faced the expectations of a White seminary and the allocation of funds. The disconnect between Rodríguez and McCormick would become conflictive in the future, especially on issues related to money and time spent on the program.

What makes the creation of APHILA structurally raveling rather than merely episodic was the number of resources allocated to the project, and the consolidation of a larger critical project rather than what had been written so far by Latinx Protestants. APHILA was distinct because it was neither a program dedicated to the formation of ministers nor a program to create Latinx scholars in theological studies. Rather, the aim was to create an autochthonous guild of professional Latinx historians with a distinct periodization on Latinx Protestantism in the United States and regional centers that would encompass histories in a larger project, such as the ten volumes of the history of the Roman Catholic Church by CEHILA. APHILA

was also structurally revealing rather than episodic because the historiography of Latinx Protestantism was fragmented with very few academic histories like the one Machado wrote, but rather they tended to be hagiographical of the great events of how Latinx Protestant churches started which were mostly frame in denominational victories while ignoring the traumas and travails of how most of the time the members of such churches were poor and marginalized by the larger U.S. society and culture. APHILA sought to overcome a hagiographical approach based on a critical and scientific methodology closer to the one advocated by CEHILA, in which the poor, marginalized, and excluded were the primary subjects. The passive memories of APHILA stored in archives show the internal dynamics of its ambitious plans to create a historical guild that would become a canon but never materialized. As Herbert Grabes observes, "And for everyone, be it author, critic, or general reader, the canon serves the basic and most indispensable function of turning the overwhelming plenitude of what has survived into a usable past, a corpus of texts that can be surveyed and retained in collective memory" (Grabes 2008, p. 314). This reveals that canon formation is a power-laden process, as the canon organizes memory, but it also shapes what a community could see as its literary or cultural heritage. The failure to establish a Latinx Protestant historical canon by APHILA reveals what happens when an organization cannot interpret and transform its values, priorities, and historical vision into a visible standard.

5. First and Only Conference of the Academy of Latinx Church History

This section examines APHILA's first and only conference as the moment when the organization's ambitions, internal tensions, and methodological uncertainties became most visible. It highlights how questions of historiographical method, bilingual practice, lay participation, and institutional authority shaped the conference's structure and exposed the difficulty of translating a shared vision into a coherent scholarly program. Seventy-eight people registered for the first and only conference at McCormick Seminary in Chicago from 13 to 16 May 1993. Among them were historians, theologians, sociologists, pastors, denominational leaders, and laypeople interested in recovering the contributions of Latinx Protestantism to their own communities and the larger U.S. society. There were four main plenary addresses. The conference opened with a keynote address by Martin Marty, a professor at the University of Chicago, who praised Hispanic efforts to recover their history but cautioned against creating an ethno-history that would further ghettoize Latinx religious communities. He challenged the audience to consider an entire revisioning of American history through the lens of the Hispanic experience but cautioned that such experience is never static but always changing (Marty 1994). Daisy Machado gave the second plenary address entitled "A Borderland's Perspective." In it, she revealed the voices absent from history, namely those of Hispanics in the United States, by recounting the Hispanic story that has always been a part of the nation, even though it has been erased as unimportant (Machado 1993). Luís Rivera-Pagán lectured about the Capitulations of Burgos, a document that set the first secular/civil decrees in the New World. He connected the Capitulations with the prophetic ministry of the first Dominican monks and to Bartolomé de las Casas, envisioning them as having brought a liberating form of Christianity in contrast to the exploitation of the *encomienda* system (Rivera-Pagán 1994). Taken together, these plenaries formed a fragmented program that did not clearly advance APHILA's original objectives. Rather than building a cumulative framework for Latinx Protestant church history, the sessions moved across disparate historical and theological registers, making the conference appear more like a set of adjacent interventions than a unified scholarly project. This fragmentation also suggested that APHILA had not yet resolved whether its central task was archival recovery, communal affirmation, or broad

reinterpretation of Latinx history. As a result, the conference exposed a mismatch between the organization's ambitious vision and the lack of a shared methodological center to sustain it. This is quite ironic because the steering committee members' primary concern was about how to develop a Latinx methodology for the study of history, but no such approach was provided, with only Samuel Silva-Gotay's presentation touching on methodological issues.

Samuel Silva-Gotay, CEHILA's coordinator for the Caribbean and professor of sociology of religion at the University of Puerto Rico, lectured on "A Scientific History of the Latino Church." The lecture presented the theoretical interpretations and limitations of church historians in the United States. He was critical of previous approaches to history that started with an objective understanding of God devoid of cultural contexts like the ones proposed by Philip Schaff and Kenneth Scott Latourette. As the representative of CEHILA, his own methodology consisted of rigorous argumentation to explain events that took place at one moment in relation to the present conditions, shifting to a new future. For him, history is the study of social forces in which individuals play different roles, and in their subjectivity, participate in a process of conscious raising. It is "not chronology, but rather an explanation based on evidence that exposes the events that took place in one way and not in another, or that continue to influence the events of today, in order to come to know the keys that explain the present and to shift it in the direction that we want history to take" (Silva-Gotay 1994, p. 25).

This interpretation of history is attuned to González's who argued "The fact is that, although we have been told otherwise, history is not written from the past, but rather from the present and towards the future. History, more than a mere description of past events, is narrative with an agenda—a story with a moral" (González 1994, p. 101). The story with a moral is rooted in the God of justice. Thus, justice would be an important category of interpretation in Latinx historiography. Silva-Gotay was aware of the problems of reducing church history to mere expressions of economics and politics, but nevertheless he was aware of the socialization processes that affect the Christian religion, especially Latinx Protestantism (Silva-Gotay 1994, p. 26). This means that the history of the church is the history of Christians as social beings that should lead to a methodology that takes cues from colonialism, migration, and exile. Even though Silva-Gotay was against a Marxist interpretation of history, he agreed with the basic dictum that history must be written from the perspectives of the poor and oppressed (Silva-Gotay 1994, p. 44). This matters because Silva-Gotay's lecture frames church history as an interpretive practice rather than a neutral chronology, insisting that historians explain how past events continue to structure the present and open possibilities for the future. His emphasis on social forces, colonialism, migration, and exile positions Latinx Protestantism within broader processes of historical formation, while still resisting a reductive economic or Marxist reading. At the same time, his insistence on writing from the standpoint of the poor and oppressed aligns his method with González's moralized historiography, where justice becomes the central category through which history is narrated and judged.

One month after the conference, the executive committee met on 2 July 1993, at Saint Vincent de Paul Seminary in Boynton Beach, Florida, to assess the conference and the organization's future. Even though the general evaluations of the conference had been positive, there were many negative comments about the structure, content, and cohesion of the program, of both the plenary sessions and workshops, other parallel sessions on Hispanic culture, and the liturgical celebrations. In APHILA's meeting on 4 December 1992, González raised the perceived "elitist character" of the workshops and plenary sessions. He suggested dividing the workshops between beginner and advanced students, a policy that was more difficult to implement once the participants were at the meetings (González 1990). The Spanish-only policy worked at the conferences but became one of the biggest obstacles

in the production of literature. The policy also worked against one of the grant's major priorities: to produce in book format the plenary addresses, workshops, and panels. All the papers presented at the conference were supposed to be ready for production after the conference, but in July, Daniel Rodríguez complained that people were not turning in their English translations as agreed (D. Rodríguez 1993). In the executive committee's meeting of 2 July 1992, there were concerns about APHILA's financial status, and McCormick Seminary's relationship was reassessed. Rodríguez suggested that APHILA should be integrated into AETH as one of its programs. The final decision at the meeting had to do with APHILA commissioning González to try to salvage the program. Even though Daniel Rodríguez was the Director of the program, and all decisions of management were made by him, González's title of president of the executive committee placed direct responsibility on him for project's failures. The failure of the 1993 conference functioned as a contested site of cultural memory with different visions of a future that eluded its organizers. Even though the conference produced two books, *Hidden Stories* and *Desde el Reverso*, that survive the vision of APHILA, these books never became canonical in Latinx historiography, as they are disjointed and not comprehensive efforts of the original plans to create a new Latinx historiography.

6. The Demise of the Academy for Latinx Church History

This section analyzes APHILA's collapse as the result of overlapping administrative, financial, and institutional pressures that gradually undermined the organization's goals. It argues that the failure to resolve disputes over budget, personnel, language policy, and publication expectations made clear the limits of a project dependent on short-term funding and uneven institutional support. González subsequently wrote a letter to David Ramage, President of McCormick Seminary, outlining his plans for the future of APHILA. He noted many shortcomings in APHILA's first year. The policy of Spanish-only made implementation of one of the grant's major goals problematic, namely, publishing a book of the conference proceedings. The delay in fulfilling the goals of the grant were inevitable. Even though González had written a proposal to continue with the program for three more years with a budget of $500,000, he decided that APHILA should not submit for a new grant because the organization had not completed the work funded by the first grant (González 1990). For this reason, González requested that McCormick Seminary be asked for a one-year extension to complete the project. It seems that the relationship between McCormick and APHILA was becoming fraught. There were issues regarding the amount of time Rodríguez should dedicate to the project (one-third of his time) and to his teaching responsibilities and work for the seminary's Latino Ministerial Program. APHILA graciously severed ties with McCormick Seminary and asked to reconcile the budget with that institution (González 1993).

From a sociology of institutions perspective, the APHILA-McCormick relationship shows how grants do not simply fund projects; they reorganize authority, labor, and legitimacy within institutions. McCormick functioned as a host institution with symbolic prestige and administrative capacity, while APHILA depended on that support to convert an ethnic-historical initiative into a fundable scholarly program. According to Chávez-Moreno and Lacayo, education is not merely a passive site that reflects inequality; it is an active institution that distributes resources and helps produce racialized outcomes (Chávez-Moreno and Lacayo 2026, p. 498). The conflict over Rodríguez's time, the Spanish-only policy, and delays in deliverables reveals a classic institutional mismatch between a community-driven intellectual project and the compliance expectations of a seminary embedded in broader funding and accountability structures. As Vargas and Villa-Palomino argue, institutions can receive racialized funding without truly centering the targeted

group, since dominant colorblind logics often allow organizational power to persist while appearing to serve marginalized communities (Vargas and Villa-Palomino 2019, p. 401). In this sense, the eventual severing of ties was not merely a budgetary dispute but a struggle over who controlled the project's mission, timelines, and intellectual direction.

Though APHILA's intention and hope had been to continue as one more program of AETH, that did not materialize either. In a letter to Daniel Rodríguez on 17 September 1993, González sounds exasperated and frustrated with the whole process because he was not receiving responses or any updates on the project. He called for an extraordinary meeting in October to discuss the future of APHILA because the program needed to take the necessary steps to clarify exactly where it is, what to do, how, and when. He asked for documents ranging from the original proposal to Pew, the budget Pew approved, a financial report, to a report outlining the steps for the publications. According to González, "One of the problems in our past meetings was that we had no reports or documentation on what was going on, and bad decisions were taken. I hope that by addressing the reports, we could have more clarity and come to concrete conclusions of who is doing what" (González 1993). This reveals a project marked by institutional uncertainty and weak internal communication. González's frustration suggests that APHILA lacked clear documentation, accountability, and coordination, which made it difficult to move from intention to implementation. More broadly, it shows that the effort to sustain the program depended not just on vision but on transparent records, shared responsibilities, and concrete decision-making.

When the meeting took place on 18 October 1993, all the requested documents were there. The financial report showed some inconsistencies because the membership money collected from APHILA were not tabulated in the report. There were other issues related to "Approved Budget Expenditures" and "PCT Approved Expenditures" with a discrepancy of $3453.49 that later was reconciled by accounting for "fringe expenses" of two computers and a printer. It seems that the meeting was quite conflictive, with one member of the committee commenting that the "meeting with Danny Cortés was an extraordinarily difficult situation." At the end of the day, Cortés was the representative of the Pew Charitable Trust, and it was clear that the program was not working well. The final recommendation of the meeting was that Rodríguez finish the book from the conference's papers. He published one small book, *Desde el Reverso: Materiales para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia.* Unfortunately, this turned out to be a disjointed book, with two articles by González, one of them on a global reading of theological education and the other on the conquest of Latin America. The other two essays are by Daniel Rodríguez, "Los Movimientos Misioneros y Colonialismo en las Américas, and Eliseo Pérez Alvarez", "La Teoria del Destino Manifiesto en Cortés" (Rodríguez Díaz and Álvarez 1993). The conference's papers were published as *Hidden Stories: Unveiling the History of the Latino Church* (Rodríguez-Díaz and Cortés-Fuentes 1994). However, APHILA ceased to exist as an organization dedicated to the development of Latino Protestant church history in 1993. This reveals that its demise did not erase the project, but it was displaced to the archive, where it remains as an unrealized project of canon formation. Since its demise, no Latinx efforts to write a comprehensive history of Protestantism have come to fruition, perpetuating a disjointed, denominational, and hagiographical historiography.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, APHILA's brief existence is historically significant not because it achieved institutional permanence, but because it exposes how marginalized communities attempt to transform lived memory into durable historical knowledge. Its formation revealed a collective desire among Latinx Protestant scholars to claim historiographical

authority, define their own canon, and recover traditions that had often been fragmented, overlooked, or filtered through dominant ecclesial narratives.

The failure of APHILA also clarifies a broader historiographical lesson: producing history from the margins requires more than good intentions or funding; it demands stable institutional support, methodological consensus, and sustained participation across lay and professional networks. In that sense, APHILA became a site where the tensions of language, authority, and representation were not incidental but constitutive of the project itself. Rather than dismissing the organization as an unsuccessful experiment, it should be read as evidence of the difficulty and necessity of building historical archives within communities whose pasts have been routinely under documented.

APHILA's greatest contribution, then, lies in what it reveals about the politics of historical production. It shows that marginalized communities do not simply recover history; they actively create the conditions under which their histories can be recognized, preserved, and interpreted. This process is itself historiographical work, because it challenges who gets to produce knowledge, which sources count as evidence, and what forms of memory are worthy of scholarly preservation. Seen from this perspective, APHILA stands as an important reminder that the making of history is inseparable from struggles over identity, institutional power, and cultural survival.

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