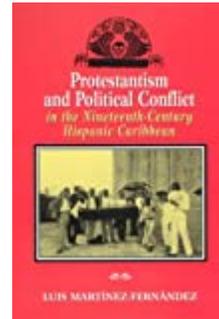


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Luis Martínez-Fernández. *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth-Century Hispanic Caribbean.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002. xiii + 246 pp. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8135-2994-3; \$60.00 (library), ISBN 978-0-8135-2993-6.



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Protestantism has evolved to become an important and complex cultural force in Latin American societies. Only in the last thirty years, however, have scholars begun to examine Protestantism in the broader context of its relationship to civil society. Understandably, Catholicism, one of the most decisive influences in Latin American history, has long held sway in studies of the role of Christianity in the region. The same has been true for the Hispanic Caribbean: Protestantism is an important and influential force but, relative even to studies of Protestant churches on the mainland, remains an understudied area of Latin American history. *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth-Century Hispanic Caribbean*, the most recent work by Luis Martínez-Fernández, professor and chair of the Department of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies at Rutgers University, makes a very important contribution to the field of the history of religion in Latin America in general and in the Hispanic Caribbean in particular.

As is characteristic of the author's previous works, Martínez-Fernández adopts a comparative approach in examining the ways in which Protestantism penetrated and spread through Spanish colonies formed in no small part under the centuries-old authority of the Catholic Church. The study concentrates on nineteenth-century Cuba and Puerto Rico and is divided into two parts: part

1, "The Era of Catholic Exclusivism, 1815-1868," which focuses on the changing nature of the Catholic church and its responses to crises at a number of levels, including the perceived threat to its dominion by incipient Protestantism; and part 2, "The Revolutionary Cycle, 1868-1898," which examines the evolution of Protestantism in the context of the ongoing struggle with a defiant Catholic Church, and in the context of a growing political and even revolutionary struggle by Cubans, and to a lesser extent, Puerto Ricans, to shed the fetters of imperial Spain in order to gain independence.

The nineteenth century was a period of crisis for the Spanish colonial Catholic Church, as for the Spanish empire generally. As Martínez-Fernández points out, by the beginning of the century, the Catholic Church in Cuba and Puerto Rico had become a moderate, even progressive, institution. It functioned along reformist and even nationalist lines more or less consistent with the values and aspirations of the island's Creole elites. This, however, would not last. The eruption of the Latin American wars of independence and concomitant formation of independent nations and anticlerical states generated a virtual exodus of peninsular clergy to the islands. By the 1830s, the author notes, these priests swelled the ranks of Spain's remaining New World colonies and became willing instruments of imperial rule. A formerly reformist

and native-dominated Catholic clergy was eclipsed by a strongly conservative, imperial, and very defensive Spanish church that now distanced itself from the aspirations of Cuban and Puerto Rican Creole nationalists. Whatever openings had been made at the beginning of the nineteenth century were, by mid-century, tightly closed as a more imperialistic Catholic church closed ranks and moved to tighten its hold over the Spanish empire's remaining American possessions.

As political allegiances on the islands became polarized between conservative Spanish colonialists and proponents of political, economic, and religious reform, the Catholic church could not but become enmeshed in the struggle. Nor could the island's growing numbers of Protestants, as their rights became entangled in political and religious agendas promoted either by colonialist forces who wanted Spanish imperial retrenchment, or progressives and annexationists who, for their own reasons, sought reforms in religious and secular spheres. In addition to this, we have the international element: British abolitionist and United States expansionist influences who, with their Protestant religious components, tended to make things even more complicated for the island's few but growing numbers of Protestants.

Protestantism's earliest entry into the Spanish Caribbean was largely the function of trade between Spain's Caribbean colonies and Protestant nations including Britain, Germany, and the United States, as well as other West Indian Islands. By the 1850s, visitors and immigrants from these places came to both Cuba and Puerto Rico, many establishing themselves by the 1850s. Practicing one's religion as a non-Catholic, however, took a considerable amount of effort and no little subterfuge in an environment of enforced religious intolerance. Unable to worship openly, Protestants lived by engaging coping mechanisms. This included becoming "crypto-Protestants" who worshipped secretly, attending or holding private ceremonies in homes, in hotels rooms, or on board visiting ships, or practicing as "pseudo-Catholics," publicly taking part in Catholic services and sacraments, while in fact privately retaining Protestant beliefs and values. As Martine Fernndez vividly points out, for most of the nineteenth-century Spanish Caribbean, the freedom to live and die as a practicing Protestant was virtually nonexistent. Death became a tragedy in yet another sense as the Catholic Church forbade the burial of heretics either in Catholic cemeteries or, in a number of instances, on the island.

Independence wars begun in Cuba and Puerto Rico

in 1868 paralleled the emergence, albeit short-lived, of constitutional governments in Spain. In turn, Madrid issued a religious tolerance decree, one grudgingly issued by colonial authorities that fuelled the optimism and determination of Protestants on the islands toward plans for the establishment of a Protestant church. This opened the way for the organization of the first Protestant assemblies in the colonies. The first congregations in colonial Puerto Rico were convened in Ponce and Vieques under foreign Anglican leadership. In Ponce, the congregation "mirrored the socioeconomics of the sugar industry in which a foreign-born, white minority precariously dominated over a multiracial labouring mass" (p. 91). The Vieques congregation was somewhat slower to organize because poorer, being comprised primarily of immigrant laborers.

In the case of Cuba, the first Protestant congregation was organized in Havana under the aegis of the mission of the Episcopal Church in the United States, Edward Kenney presiding. Alert to the sensitivities of a colonial government embroiled in war (Kenney arrived in Havana in November 1871, on the same day that eight medical students were executed by the Spanish), the recently ordained deacon initially set up headquarters on board the *Terror*, a U.S. warship stationed in the Bay of Havana. The church under Kenney was reflective of a relationship that would become the norm in a young republican Cuba after 1901: a U.S. mission backed at least in part by U.S. businessmen, in an economy dominated by U.S. interests. A major result of the Ten Years' War in Cuba was an exodus of Cubans to the United States, which in turn facilitated the growth of congregations of Cuban Protestants increasingly led by Cuban pastors and lay workers. In considerable contrast to the first Protestant congregations of foreigners in Havana and Matanzas, "the first native Cuban Protestant congregations emerged in New York City and Key West among exiles escaping the Ten Years' War" (p. 130). These congregations, in contrast, again, to the segregated U.S. churches in Cuba, were characterized by working class composition and racial diversity. After the end of the Ten Years' War, the exiles returned. Specifically, Cuban colporteurs and pastors, and colporteurs-become-pastors, under the auspices of the Methodists and Southern Baptists, among others, returned to evangelise in a Cuba that, by the 1890s, was once again ripe for rebellion and even revolution. Cuban pastors possessed of a Cuban Protestantism that did not preclude a sense of patriotism in various capacities joined ranks with the mambises and their cause for independence. At the same time, the conservative colonial Catholic Church continued to lose credibility among

the Cuban population.

Protestantism and Political Conflict is a work of incisive analysis, eloquently written, and therefore also eminently readable. Both the body of historical evidence

gathered by Martínez-Fernández and the way in which he marshals it is impressive. This is a substantial study, and is bound to become a standard source of reference in the field.

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