

Book Review

*The New Pilgrims: How Immigrants are
Renewing America's Faith and Values*

Joseph Castleberry, Ed.D.

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There can be very little doubt about it, America today is undergoing one of its most dramatic periods of xenophobia in its history. With opposition to immigration, along with Islamophobia at an all-time high, Americans are grappling with issues of diversity, ethnic and ideological divide, as well as questions about its future viability as a nation. Rarely has this country (including the Church) experienced such a political and cultural divide, often along existing political lines. These issues have also become fodder for the 2016 presidential elections.

Castleberry's latest work, *The New Pilgrims: How Immigrants are Renewing America's Faith and Values* is a provocative, new work that dares to challenge the long-held assumption that the increase of immigrants coming to the United States is a negative trend, and posits that many of these new Americans are renewing our work ethic, patriotism, and, most importantly, the centrality of the Christian faith in American life.

What Castleberry brings to the table is a sharpened worldview and awareness of international trends, and how they are impacting the United States during this volatile season. His world class education and many years of international experience give him a unique vantage point on American culture. Because of this he is able to see that which is not obvious to more casual observers of cultural phenomena. Whereas many other conservatives are looking

at the glass of America's future and seeing it as "half empty", Castleberry optimistically challenges the reader to see that the glass is indeed half full and even continuing to fill!

Divided into fourteen chapters, this work shows how many of the immigrants coming into this country, in particular those from Latin America, are people of faith and values, and they are bringing these with them. His examples include the present day "Latino Reformation" whereby many Evangelicals from Latin America have come to the United States looking for greater opportunities, and are finding them while at the same time bringing with them a surge of spiritual vitality that is renewing the United States as well. Castleberry cites the examples of Dr. Samuel Rodriguez and Wilfredo "Pastor Choco" de Jesús as two of the many Hispanic Evangelical leaders who represent a new breed of Hispanic leader: passionately committed to the Great Commission, well-educated, and ready to challenge long-standing cultural assumptions on social justice. They, along with earlier Hispanic Pentecostal pioneers like Dr. Jesse Miranda, are in a unique position to serve as catalysts for seismic cultural shifts since they can comfortably navigate the intricacies of both American, and Hispanic and Latino cultures. Indeed, Latin American Pentecostalism (the vast majority of Latin American Evangelicals) is a powerful force for change, and contemporary church historians are taking notice of its growing impact at the international level.¹Castleberry

posits that not only will our churches change, but society will change as well as many of the new immigrants will not be constrained by traditional political lines and will be more ably adept at working both sides of the political aisles. Many of the Hispanic and Latino church leaders are willing to engage in the political conversation and do not have the same historical loyalties to the traditional blue or red. This may be exactly what is needed at this time in order to break through the current political morass.

The author repeatedly challenges American Christians to rise above petty political squabbles and to work alongside the “new pilgrims” in bringing about a cultural and political renaissance that can only occur if people work together. Castleberry clearly indicates that we have a duty and responsibility to welcome new

pilgrims to our “city set on a hill” making use of John Winthrop’s and Ronald Reagan’s descriptive metaphor.

Does he make the case convincingly? The author cites many examples of immigrants from abroad who are helping America to become a more noble society. Although I am intrigued by much of what he says, I think we’ll have to wait and see if all of this is premature optimism or an efficacious shift in axiology. I, for one, hope that Castleberry is right, and that in the years ahead we will see a cultural and spiritual renaissance brought on by these newest Americans. *The New Pilgrims: How America’s Immigrants are Renewing America’s Faith and Values* is a worthy read, and brings a fresh perspective and hope to a topic that has divided this country for too long.

¹ See for example, Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. This fairly recent work gives a comprehensive view of the impact that Latino Pentecostals are having upon America. Espinosa carefully chronicles the scope of Latin American Pentecostalism historically beginning with the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and moving to the present time. Focusing largely on the Assemblies of God, Espinosa crafts a case for the emergence of Latino Pentecostalism as a force to be reckoned with, a group that is unlikely to “go away” any time in the near future.