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Book Notices

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Historia de los Mormones en Argentina: Relatos de Pioneros, by Néstor Curbelo (Munro, Buenos Aires: Gráfica Integral S.A., 2000)

Historia de los Santos de los Últimos Días en Uruguay: Relatos de Pioneros, by Néstor Curbelo (Montevideo: Imprimimex S.A., 2002)

Compared to virtually any other region in the world, Latin America has witnessed exponential LDS growth in the last three decades. And yet, scholarship for this area has lagged behind. Within the general sphere of Latin American studies, there has been much work done on religious movements beginning in the early sixties with liberation theology and continuing through the eighties and nineties with the growth of Protestantism and evangelicalism. To a small degree, the Latter-day Saints have received some attention in the latter works. However, more often than not these have tended towards oversimplifications or incorrect assessments of how Church members see themselves. For example, see David Stoll's *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (University of California Press, 1990), 103–106. Dr. Mark Grover of Brigham Young University has pointed out that Mormon scholars have not done much to clarify these misnomers. In fact, there is a paucity of literature on the subject.

Most recently, Néstor Curbelo has published two books in Spanish that deal with the Church in the Southern Cone: *Historia de los Mormones en Argentina* and *Historia de los Santos de los Últimos Días en Uruguay*. These two short histories provide a quick glimpse into the Church's beginnings and growth in Argentina and Uruguay.

Curbelo, a Church member from Buenos Aires, has worked for the

Church's magazine division, and this has availed him the opportunity to meet the veritable who's who of Argentine and Uruguayan LDS Church membership. His research for these two works was compiled by videotaping oral history interviews of Church members whenever he had the opportunity. The interviews should prove an important resource to future researchers. These works fall into what Leonard Arrington and James Allen have called the "polemical" approach to Church history. These narratives are apologetic in its purest form.

In *Historia de los Mormones en Argentina*, Curbelo begins by recounting Parley P. Pratt's celebrated arrival in Chile late in 1851 (1–11). He then moves chronologically and relates other important events such as establishing the Mexican colonies, the 1876 Book of Mormon translation by Melitón González Trejo and James Z. Stewart, and the 1948 translation of the Doctrine and Covenants (17, 22–25).

Curbelo then discusses the role of the Church in the modern era with the opening of missionary work following the arrival of Elder Melvin J. Ballard, Rey L. Pratt, and Rulon S. Wells in Buenos Aires in December of 1925 after a boat voyage of seven thousand miles. These men then dedicated the land for the preaching of the gospel on Christmas Day of 1925 (32–37).

For the most part, the book is a chronological narrative and does not provide much in the form of analysis. Curbelo provides excerpts from the many oral history interviews that he has conducted to carry the reader along. One interesting point that he fleshes out is the early missionaries' proselytizing failures to the Lamanites in the Argentine interior. Curbelo clearly explains that the early Church

in Argentina and Uruguay was in fact a Church of immigrants, most notably German members.

Noticeably lacking is any real linkage to life outside the Church. How did young LDS university students juggle their beliefs with the anti-government rhetoric of the 1970-1980s? How do Latter-day Saints today deal with the mounting economic problems facing these countries? How does their faith carry them through the lean times? Perhaps a better-trained historian might have ferreted more information from the subjects who were interviewed. Argentina's flamboyant and controversial leader Juan Peron is mentioned only in reference to an interview he had with President David O. McKay. In fact, while Argentina was embroiled in a bitter guerrilla war ("The Dirty War") during the 1970s, Curbelo ignores the political turmoil and loss of life and calls this period a wonderful time for the "great missions in South America." Certainly, more research is needed in this area. Still, this work makes an important contribution, and his second work *Historia de los Santos de los Últimos Días en Uruguay* shows an improvement in writing over his first.

In all, Curbelo has provided us with more than one hundred oral history interviews. Undoubtedly, many of these members kept journals that would probably fill in any gaps in the oral histories. One aspect of the oral histories that deserves special note is Curbelo's attention to the role of sister missionaries. It is sometimes too easy to lose sight of the role of women in the Church when writing history, and Curbelo does an admirable job of at least mentioning those early stalwart sisters even if he underestimates the roles they played as missionaries. Curbelo is also thorough in his narrative

of places, including when and where branches were created, thus providing resources for future research.

So where do these works leave future researchers? In this author's opinion, there is sense of urgency. We cannot be satisfied with only oral history. Mr. Curbelo has performed a great service and should be congratulated for his work, but there is always more that can be done. Those initial pioneers are in their waning years. It is important to maintain ties with them and verify what other resources they might be able to share with us such as journals or further interviews.

Then the researcher needs to delve deeper into the lives of those Saints in Argentina and Uruguay to find how they participate as members of the Church in countries that are often in political turmoil and a state of flux. The Saints in Latin America do not live in a spiritual vacuum, and it is time for researchers to tell their story using Arrington and Allen's pluralistic approach. It is time to bring their history in from the edges.

—Allan S. R. Sumnall

Historia de los Santos de los Últimos Días en Paraguay: Relatos de Pioneros, by Néstor Curbelo (published by the author, 2003)

This is the third volume tracing the history of the LDS Church in southern South America by Néstor Curbelo, Institute Director in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The volume briefly outlines the history of the Church in Paraguay beginning with the introduction of missionaries in 1949 when it became part of the Uruguayan Mission, through the organization of the Paraguay Asunción Mission in 1977, and ending with the

dedication of the Asunción, Paraguay Temple in 2002. It has an informative examination of missionary work among the indigenous population including the intriguing story of the village of Mistolar, where most of the inhabitants joined the Church.

As in Curbelo's previous volumes on Argentina and Uruguay, the book is not a strictly chronological history but a construction of the story of the Church using primarily quotes from oral interviews of missionaries and members conducted by the author. Copies of the oral interviews have been deposited in the BYU Library and the LDS Church Archives. There is limited

commentary or analysis and the focus of the book is on people not events. There is a valuable chronology of the history of the Church in Paraguay and good charts and maps. Of significant interest is the large number of photographs (160 of them) that provide a delightful visual history of the Church.

This is a volume for the member and missionary that may be weak on analysis but strong on spirit and faith. The Church and scholarly community is indebted to the sacrificing work of Néstor as he strives to preserve in these volumes the history of the LDS Church in South America.

—Mark L. Grover

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