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**Lin, Tony Tien-Ren. Prosperity Gospel Latinos and Their American Dream (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).**

*Reviewed by Eric Trinkka<sup>1</sup>*

In this nuanced ethnography of Latinx migrants in the United States, Tony Tian-Ren Lin presents a thick description of those drawn to Prosperity Gospel Pentecostalism (PGP). The monograph opens with thorough yet concise introductions to the origins of the PGP movement in the US and its contours among Latinx communities. Readers are given a crash course in the primary assumptions and patterns of praxis espoused by PGP adherents, which are oriented around the formulaic pursuit of blessing via a combination of faith and action.

Chapter one introduces readers to the three communities of practitioners in Charlottesville, Virginia; Oceanside, California; and New York City, among whom Lin conducted his research. Lin presents the worship lives of each community, the institutional hierarchies of the churches, and the key doctrinal proclamations of each church's pastor. Readers become acquainted with various congregants through Lin's description of their applications of the PGP formula and their resulting successes and failures. This approach allows Lin to draw attention to the particularities of each congregation at their various stages of the PGP institutional life cycle while also crafting a larger picture of Latinx PGP adherents across the U.S.

Chapter two explores the specific elements of PGP religiosities more thoroughly, as Lin describes the internal formula by which adherents seek positive outcomes, broadly termed as blessing, (faith + action = blessing). Lin distinguishes the notion of faith as it is understood broadly within traditional Christian theological frameworks from that within PGP. He sees the latter as begin more associated with modern psychological therapeutic movements such as the positive thought movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, he also demonstrates that the second aspect of the formula (action) required from adherents, ultimately sets it apart from other positive psychology movements.

Through his analysis, Lin reveals how the characteristic PGP formula consistently results in two paradoxes for practitioners. The first of these being that participation in PGP depends on the adoption of the PGP worldview, which itself results in a form of perceived prosperity, even if tangible blessings never materialize. The second is that in order for blessings to be actualized, adherents must invest their financial, social, and human capital in their respective churches, and in endeavors intended to foster prosperity. The high-risk nature of such investments of time, labor, and money often means that prosperity remains elusive for most adherents, thus creating the second paradox of a system of demands that subverts the promised outcome.

Lin's third and fourth chapters explore why PGP is such an appealing religious system for Latinx migrants. Chapter three takes up this question in light of assimilation and religious

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conversion trends. Among a number of important observations, Lin notes another paradoxical similarity across Latinx PGP converts; although most have no desire to become culturally American, their participation in a religious system that has been predominantly shaped by American forms of capitalism and positive psychology leads many to be indirectly Americanized as they in pursue the fruits of prosperity—such as entrepreneurship and homeownership—which often reflect elements of the stereotypical American Dream.

Chapter four demonstrates how the PGP formula allows adherents to navigate the complex familial situations in which many Latinx migrants are enmeshed. Whether due to insecurities at their sites of origin, or those experienced once in the US, the configurations of Latinx migrant kinship units do not often follow the nuclear ideal with which they are presented in PGP churches; an ideal that is itself predicated on over-idealized conceptions of the American family. Furthermore, even though traditional Latino family structures tend toward patricentric configurations, Lin's research demonstrates that PGP models of patriarchal familial structures, which present the father as both the spiritual head of the household and as the dominant parent and partner, are still gentler forms of patriarchy than other traditional forms. Thus, Lin argues, they temper more aggressive forms of *machismo* that lead to domestic abuse and familial breakdown. The end result is that PGP provides practitioners with a family model that structures authority within the community and assists in the daily tasks of child rearing and familial decision making. Adherents are encouraged to emulate the model, according to which they can measure their own experience of blessing, even if it is impossible to totally fulfill in the absence of their spouse or because of their unmarried status.

The monograph concludes by revisiting some of the key observations regarding PGP's meritocratic inner logic. Lin offers a textured analysis of the promises, benefits, and shortcomings of PGP. The intrinsic intuitiveness of PGP has led to its comparatively rapid spread in a globalizing world, as well as its growing dominance over traditional forms of Christianity. By Lin's assessment, the future of PGP will be marked by continued growth.

Despite Lin's superb work, one caveat regarding his presentation of religion writ large in the lives of migrants should be named. In recognizing the significant role that religious frameworks of thought and practice can play in migrants' lives, Lin tends to overaccentuate the role of religion as a sense-making enterprise. This assumption could be tempered by a deeper exploration of how the meritocratically-rooted "action" aspects of the PGP formula have indeed become de facto elements of codified praxis among adherents.

In the end, Lin should be commended for producing an incising ethnography that represents the complex inter-workings of PGP migrant communities without offering the all-too-common disparaging account of their members. This well-measured work makes a significant contribution to the study of migrants' religiosities.

