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## foreword

Hispanics are a diverse people. We have our roots from many different countries—from Mexico and Latin America, from Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, from South America and even Spain. Many of us speak Spanish but not all, and even among those who speak Spanish, we have different names for different things. We have different histories, nationally, regionally, and individually, histories that determine our values, beliefs, traditions, and customs. Our origins are particularly complex because they include multiple layers of conquests, each of which introduced to us a different religion. You see, a conqueror seeks to gain power over the people not only militarily but morally, and religious conversion has the potential to change the patterns of life and worldviews as the conquered people willingly give themselves up to the control of the new power.

A religion usually includes a set of symbols, stories, and beliefs that gives meaning to the practitioner's experiences, setting the framework for law, ethic, and lifestyle. Core religious symbols provide the ultimate root of the group's identity. This is why it is important to understand the roots of one's religious practices.

In the creation of this bilingual resource, pastor and author J. Manny Santiago acknowledges both our diversity as a Hispanic people and the power of religious faith in the formation of our identity. Our journeys of immigration and migration have created a mosaic of religious experiences, practices, and idiosyncrasies along the way. In these six studies, Pastor Santiago seeks to nurture us in our identity as Baptists and to give us tools for understanding our beliefs and practices.

What is the alternative if such a foundational identity as Baptist Christians is not solidly laid? We know that people who migrate are constantly caught in the interplay between continuity and

change. Second and subsequent generations of Hispanics must come to terms with these tensions and ambiguities if they are to grapple with their identity. As young people grow they come to a place of abstract thinking and they begin to ask questions about how to live and move and have being in two worlds. How should they choose between the two? Can they create a world that is both and yet neither?

These questions of identity must be connected with their faith formation. Where is God in these two worlds? How do the Scriptures inform this journey of identity? What beliefs support and nurture them? How might a congregation address the questions of the parents and of maturing children as well? How young people answer these questions will influence their theology and identity for years to come. Relying heavily on the biblical text and its collection of narrative, prophecy, and wisdom gathered from migrant peoples over a range of times and cultures, Pastor Santiago offers valuable guidance for asking the questions and discovering the answers together in a community of faith.

Why is this important? For Hispanics, many experiences shape the questions we ask when we pray, study the Bible, or speak about our faith. Our histories of conquest and journeys of migration have taught us to adjust to new ways of living, to expand our customs and create new ones, to question unjust laws, to shape an ethic of dignity and justice—all of which are very much a part of our identity as Baptists. Our migrant experiences have taught us how to live in two cultures, to adapt and to adopt. This process is what some would call border crossing—a continual walking out of one culture and into another. It is the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Because we live between the two worlds and not just in one or the other, then we create a borderland—a place where two worlds collide and produce a multiplicity of views. It is here that we come to understand how opposing ideas can interact with one another, how to tolerate ambiguity, and how to keep opposites in tension. It is a whole other way of making meaning. In this practical and accessible volume, Pastor Santiago helps Hispanics of all generations—first, second, and

beyond—to formulate their identity and their faith through a meaning-making process. Perhaps even more exciting, through these biblical studies, Pastor Santiago helps us to reflect on our practice and understanding of mission so that we can begin to articulate a coherent understanding of the Hispanic church.

All of this speaks to a process of doing theology—a process necessary for maintaining the relevancy of our Christian faith in different cultural and historical contexts. Christian theology is the discourse about the content of the faith and its implications for life. The discourse takes place as the people of God seek to understand the revelation of God in their daily experiences. The task of theology is to ask and answer questions pertinent to one's experience of God in relevant ways to one's culture and communal journey of faith. In this slim volume, Pastor Santiago equips today's Hispanic Baptists to craft their own theology and to become the people of God in this time and in these places, straddling two worlds and ushering the reign of God into the borderland of our lives.

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