

FOREWORD

When I opened the pages of *The Flavor of Our Hispanic Faith*, I was thrilled to enter the life of a Puerto Rican with whom, though we may have grown up at different times, I found solace, affirmation, and contentment. What a delight to discover that we are bound by the same love for our culture as well as for the Christ who speaks our language. I found myself saying, “Yes, that is how it was for me as well,” a second-generation Puerto Rican from New York who loves what our Creator God has made. Together we can hear God saying, “And it was good.”

The travels with Karen Valentin in her book are like those in Steinbeck’s novel *Travels with Charlie*—exciting and filled with new adventures and images on which to reflect. Without much effort, the author brought me into her life. There I learned about a new friend (even though we have yet to meet), and I gained a renewed look at my culture with all its ups and downs.

This volume, a devotional study of God and culture, lays out concerns and troubles that are similar to those in

my own historical reality. The injustices of society are never too far away from any of us. The flow of the words and the pictures painted in each chapter led me to contemplation and reflection on the God who loves us and protects those on the underside of history. And the helpful prayers at the end of each chapter are richly contemplative and inspiring as we kneel before our God who knows the troubles we have seen.

This book has an amazing ability to teach the reader about a culture without being entangled in social baggage or boring innuendos. In the chapter titled “Treasures in the Sand,” a beach is for fun and rest, and yet Karen adds a twist of reality. It is a reality that not only makes sense to marginalized people but also reminds us that we are still living in a very broken world, filled with prejudices and the senseless misuse of others. In so many of the devotions, the author brings a refreshing and honest look at culture as well as a new way to pray for courage and justice.

I was interested to notice that this volume has short chapters—as if the author had very little to say. On the contrary, much is communicated with words that are pregnant with visuals of life’s realities that capture the imagination and urge the reader to go on to the next chapter. After reading the first few chapters, I called my daughter and told her what I had learned and how I *must* have her read this work. “Why?” she asked, and I told her it would make her proud of who she is without haughtiness, and that she would laugh and say as she

read, “Wow, she knows me!” I am delighted that this book is available not only for Hispanics but also for all those who realize the uniqueness of their culture providentially given to them by God.

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INTRODUCTION

T*he Flavor of Our Hispanic Faith* is an armchair journey for both Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike. The destination is a deeper relationship with Christ via a path of cultural awareness, appreciation, and connection. Scriptures and prayers accompany the reflections and tie in the various spiritual metaphors addressed in each story. They are designed so that you may tailor them to your own conversations with God.

These reflections are based on my own experiences and stories from family and friends. Growing up in a Hispanic and Christian household seasoned my life with a distinct flavor, yet I often felt disconnected from those identities. It was as if my family had the ingredients to be genuine, but all I could do was enjoy the feast they prepared. I heard Spanish being spoken all around me, but I spoke only English. I saw my family's love for Christ, but my understanding was too vague to share the same passion. This book is a collection of experiences and realizations that helped me come to know Christ in a deeper way and embrace my culture as my own.

The ingredients that make up *The Flavor of Our Hispanic Faith* are issues culled from several generations and various perspectives. Unlike a meal presented on a neat platter, it is not one seamless story. As you read and discover the taste of each story, you must be the one to combine the elements that speak to you and blend those flavors to reach your own conclusions.

The making of the book was an intergenerational effort. While the reflections are from my youthful perspective, my maternal uncle, the Reverend Edwin Aymat, played a crucial role in creating *The Flavor of Our Hispanic Faith*. He brought his broad experience and wisdom to this book, wrote many of the beautiful prayers, and selected relevant Scriptures to accompany each chapter. He has been an ordained minister for thirty-five years and serves as pastor of a bilingual ministry. He has held various offices in Hispanic Christian leadership groups, and his advice and counsel—as I wrote and sought feedback—proved indispensable.

While I address Latin issues and experiences, I hope non-Hispanics will read each story as welcomed guests into this world. Hispanics are rapidly becoming the largest ethnic group in the United States; however, we have been weighed down in our society by negative depictions, stereotypes, and narrow representations. They present the bitter without exploring the true flavor. The same can be said for the portrayal of Christianity. This book presents a wide array of issues concerning both Hispanic culture and Christianity and explores how they clash or

blend with American traditions. Regardless of your cultural background, I pray you will connect with God through each and every piece.

I invite you to this feast of reflections, and whether the taste is familiar and reaffirming or exotic and new, I hope *The Flavor of Our Hispanic Faith* helps you “Taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8).