

Orlando Enrique Costas



Orlando Enrique Costas (1942-1987) was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. At twelve years of age his family moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut, in the United States, an experience that marked him for life. He lived first-hand the situation of a minority: “I experienced the awfulness of ethnic prejudice, the harshness of poverty (in a country where the great majority have over and beyond their needs), and the oppression of an impersonal, culturally alienating educational system.” Even though his parents were from the Methodist tradition, he considered that his spiritual pilgrimage started on June 8, 1957, during the Billy Graham crusade at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

His educational journey took him through the Bob Jones Academy in Greenville, South Carolina, a period he labeled the “most unecumenical experience” of his life. “Under the influence of Bob Jones teachers and general environment, I, too, became a fundamentalist and devout anti-ecumenical Christian. I joined the band-wagon of those who, without knowing what the National or World Council of Churches actually stood for, began to cast stones at them on account of their so-called apostasy.”¹ During a short pastorate in a Disciples of Christ church in Bridgeport, Connecticut,

¹ Orlando Costas, “Ecumenical Experiences of a Hispanic Baptist,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17, no. 2 (1980):119.

Orlando felt a deep need for formal theological and pastoral training. For this, he went to Nyack Missionary College in Nyack, New York. During that time he married Rosa Feliciano. Their friend Guillermo Cook described their marriage in the following way:

Certainly Orlando could not have functioned as he did without his lifelong lover, companion and executive secretary, Rosa Feliciano Costas. She steadied him, carried out research, typed and retyped his manuscripts, handled all of his correspondence, managed the office, kept track of his busy schedule, endured his explosive temper and Latin machismo—and somehow found time to be an efficient wife and the mother of two lovely daughters, Annette and Dannette.²

After their first daughter was born, the Costas family moved to Puerto Rico where Orlando enrolled as a student of Latin American history and politics at the Inter-American University while accepting the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Yauco, in the southwestern part of the island. He was ordained on February 13, 1965 in Yauco. His return to Puerto Rico as well as his opportunities to travel through the region helped him to develop a “deep Latin American identity,” and to “discover our larger motherland—Latin America.”

The next year, following his graduation, the family moved back to the United States for Orlando to continue his theological studies. He studied at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, the Winona Lake School of Theology in Indiana, and Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. To support his studies, he

² Quoted by Samuel Escobar, “The Legacy of Orlando Costas,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25, no. 2 (2001):50.