



Juan L. Lugo

Juan L. Lugo's Legacy: Puerto Rican Pentecostalism

By Benjamín Alicea-Lugo

Juan León Lugo¹ left his native Puerto Rico in 1900 as a ten-year-old Roman Catholic island boy, and he returned in 1916 as a twenty-six-year-old missionary and ordained minister of the newly-formed Assemblies of God.² His missionary journey to bring the Pentecostal message to his native land brought him almost 7,000 miles — from Hawaii to California and St. Louis to New York, and ending in the small and remote Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. His destination was Ponce — also known as “La Ciudad de Leones.” It is interesting that a young man named León would be the first one to preach Pentecost in Ponce, Puerto Rico.

The Lugo Legacy

During his twenty-five-year tenure with the Assemblies of God, Juan Lugo was not only responsible for the importing of Pentecostalism to Puerto Rico, but also the exporting of a contextualized and indigenous Puerto Rican Pentecostalism that has influenced Spanish Pentecostalism in many places outside of Puerto Rico as well. The ecclesiastical patterns he set and the convictions that he formulated³ are still the norm in many Spanish-speaking Pentecostal communities in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Latin America, Central America, and Spanish-speaking communities of the United States. Although he was not alone,⁴ there is consensus that Lugo played a seminal and apostolic role in the planting, development and exporting of Puerto Rican Pentecostalism.⁵

Puerto Rican Pentecostals consider him the pioneer of the Pentecostal movement on the island and the primary reason why the Pentecostal message arrived so early after the Azusa Street revival, from California to Hawaii, and finally to Puerto Rico. Historian Carmelo Alvarez states: “From these humble beginnings, tiny Puerto Rico became a Pentecostal powerhouse, exporting evangelists to all Latin America.”⁶ Lugo did his pioneering work as a minister and missionary of the Assemblies of God, but his breadth of influence reached other major Puerto Rican Pentecostal denominations.⁷

This article will explore the early life and ministry of Lugo including: the call on his life, his missionary journey, his early Pentecostal ministry on the island and finally, the enduring and

lasting elements of his legacy that have earned him the respect and admiration of a grateful Puerto Rican nation.

Religious Life in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico underwent significant sociopolitical and religious changes around the turn of the twentieth century. The island, discovered by Columbus in 1493, remained a Spanish possession for over 400 years. The Roman Catholic Church arrived with the Conquistadores, and Catholicism had exclusive rights of evangelization. The scenario changed in 1898 as Spain ceded Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Cuba to the United States. Puerto Rico came under US control by the Treaty of Paris signed on December 10, 1898. Puerto Ricans have been US citizens since 1917. The US gained possession of an island of nearly one million inhabitants with an illiteracy rate at 87%. Puerto Rico had a small educated upper class, an almost nonexistent middle class and a large population of *mestizos*.⁸ The Puerto Ricans received the Americans with the hope conditions would change significantly for the better.⁹ This was the Puerto Rico of Lugo's childhood.

Religious life in Puerto Rico changed upon becoming an American territory. The Catholic Church, which had enjoyed its status as the state religion, had to adapt to being one faith among many. Hundreds of Roman Catholic clerics, no longer salaried, returned to Spain and were replaced by American priests of Irish descent. The lack of native clergy made it difficult for the Catholic Church to respond to its constituency's



Isabel and Juan Lugo (front, center) with their six children in New York city, 1948.

needs during this season of sociopolitical change.

American Protestant churches began directing a significant number of missionaries to Puerto Rico. Protestant missionary activity arrived with the advent of American sovereignty over the island. In a Comity Agreement, American Protestant churches divided the missionary field in Puerto Rico among four and eventually nine Protestant denominations: Presbyterian, American Baptist, Congregational, Methodist Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, Christian and Missionary Alliance, United Brethren in Christ, the Christian Church of the United States, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America.¹⁰

The agreement gave each denomination an exclusive territory. The first denomination to enter a field (town or village) was given the exclusive rights to evangelize, with the exception of the two major metropolitan areas (San Juan and Ponce) which were open to all groups. They hoped to minimize the friction and competition that characterized 19th century missionary activ-

ity and “to seek the best economy of operations, and far above all, to impress upon the people of Porto Rico the essential harmony and unity of our common Christianity.”¹¹

The Episcopal Church, though not a formal part of the Comity Agreement, accepted responsibility for the Anglican churches in Ponce and Vieques¹² and began additional missionary activity.¹³ It is unlikely that the young Lugo and his family had any contact with the start-up Protestant church in Puerto Rico. However, when he returned he found a Protestant witness that was maturing and growing, yet void of the Pentecostal witness.

Juan Lugo's Youth

Juan León Lugo was born in Yauco, Puerto Rico on October 26, 1890. When Lugo was 10 years old, his mother, Juana, gathered him and his two sisters and left Puerto Rico in 1900. They set sail for Hawaii, seeking better economic opportunity and employment. They were not alone. Thousands of Puerto Ricans exited their homeland because of depressed

economic conditions, resulting from a confluence of political changes, the devastation of the hurricane of 1899, and poor market conditions for sugar and coffee crop exports. The Hawaiian sugar industry sought labor worldwide, and recruiters promised comfortable accommodations for the trip and good jobs when they arrived. Lugo commented that his mother was apprehensive about this relocation, which made her a pilgrim and a stranger in a foreign land.¹⁴

For young Juan Lugo, it seemed like one big adventure. He dreamed that he would be able to experience a life not afforded to him in Puerto Rico. The voyage and the ensuing years in Hawaii proved difficult, however. One of Lugo's sisters died en route to Hawaii. Once in Hawaii, Juana worked long hours as a housekeeper for a salary of \$10 per week to support Juan and his surviving sister, while her children received a public education.

In 1913, after thirteen years of difficult life and labor in Hawaii, Lugo's mother had contact with Pentecostal missionaries who were en route to Japan

and China. The missionaries came from the interracial Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, which had become a focal point in the emerging Pentecostal movement.

These traveling missionaries saw the opportunity to sow Pentecostal seeds in the lives of Puerto Rican farm workers.¹⁵ Juana was receptive to the Pentecostal message, accepted Christ, and quickly told her son, Juan, about her spiritual discovery. She wrote to Juan, excited that she had finally found the joy that she had hoped to find when she left Puerto Rico.

Lugo initially rejected his mother's witness, but she continued to pursue him. When he visited his mother, he was struck by the changes he saw. Juana had been a chronic smoker, but after her conversion she stopped smoking and her countenance had changed. She was now joyfully singing and praising God as she cooked and performed other household tasks. Juan's mother was a changed woman, and she attributed it to her Pentecostal experience.¹⁶

Lugo recounted in his autobiography that a friend, Abad Vélez, who could not read, asked Juan to read the Gospel of John to him. Juan reluctantly agreed, and this became a daily lunchtime activity. One day, Juan felt something "strange in his being" while reading John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

He wrote that on that day, June 13, 1913, "I turned over my life to the Savior and placed my life at the Lord's feet."¹⁷ Soon afterward, Lugo was baptized in water and filled with the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. It was then that Lugo received a call to ministry.¹⁸

Lugo's pastor, Francisco Ortiz, announced that he and his son, Francisco Ortiz, Jr. (Panchito), were planning to move to San Francisco. Lugo decided to follow them across the ocean. On

November 9, 1913, Lugo bid farewell to his home church in Oahu and traveled with the Ortiz family to San Francisco. In his autobiography, Lugo recounted his early ministry experiences in San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Castroville and Los Angeles, California. The move from Hawaii to major urban centers in California provided an important setting for ministry formation and maturation, and the honing of skills for evangelism and church planting.¹⁹

Ortiz mentored both his son and Juan Lugo for the ministry. Both father and son had been ordained on November 15, 1911, in Hawaii by Pentecostal missionary Thomas Anderson (Panchito was only about 15 years old at his ordination). They transferred their credentials to the Assemblies of God in early 1916. The elder Ortiz encouraged Lugo to apply for credentials, and he received his ordination from the newly-formed Assemblies of God on January 30, 1916.²⁰

In preparation for ordination, Panchito and Lugo traveled to Santa Rosa, California, where they studied at a Bible school under the tutelage of Elsie Johnson, an Assemblies of God missionary to Mexico. George and Carrie Judd Montgomery also mentored Lugo and taught him Scriptures. The Montgomerys, a wealthy Pentecostal couple in Oakland, California, operated a rest home for missionaries called the Home of Peace and also published the widely-circulated *Triumphs of Faith* magazine.²¹

Lugo and Panchito next traveled to Los Angeles, where they made contact with Bethel Temple, a prominent Assemblies of God congregation pastored by George Eldridge.²² Bethel Temple would become the catalyst for Lugo's return to Puerto Rico. The congregation aided him financially and emotionally to cross the United States and to break new missionary ground. Lugo later recalled that, during a visit to Bethel Temple's youth service, he stood up and shared that he had a call to

bring the full gospel to Puerto Rico. The youth group president, Hulda Needham, approached Lugo and told him they would pray for him and his calling to return to his native land.

Lugo returned to the youth service the following Wednesday and a man told him, "Brother, at the Saturday night prayer meeting, there was a message in tongues. God gave the interpretation and instructed us to send you immediately to the mission field." The Bethel Temple



Juan and Isabel Lugo wedding picture, July 29, 1917.

youth went a step further and provided the means to go. The man told Lugo, "We have already allocated the funds so you can leave whenever you are ready."²³ Those words expressing confidence and support surprised Lugo since the Bethel Temple youth barely knew him. Lugo received this message as the Word of the Lord that he should obey. On August

17, 1916, Lugo left Los Angeles bound for Puerto Rico with the funds he would need for his journey.²⁴

Lugo made several important stops on the way to Puerto Rico. He traveled north to San Jose to say good-bye to his sister and stepsister, Carmela and Angela, who had also come to California from Hawaii. He then returned to Los Angeles, and the Bethel Temple youth escorted him to the train station where he began his cross-country journey. He stopped in St. Louis, then headquarters of the Assemblies of God, and met with J. Roswell Flower, founding secretary of the Fellowship. Lugo commented, “He

In addition, Jamieson gave Lugo the name and address of Sister Michael, a convert of Jamieson’s who lived in Santurce, Puerto Rico. This contact would prove fortuitous, as she opened her home to Lugo upon his arrival and remained a lifelong friend and supporter. At every stop along the journey from Los Angeles to Ponce, Puerto Rico, Lugo received confirmation of his call, which encouraged the budding missionary.

When Lugo left Puerto Rico with his family in search of a better life, he did not think he would ever return — certainly not with a calling to preach a mes-

also learned how to organize and grow local congregations, he honed his public speaking skills, and he gained experience in working with both English and Spanish-speaking congregations.

A Spiritual Hurricane

The effects of Juan Lugo’s return to Puerto Rico in 1916 could be compared to a hurricane. It seemed that God worked through Lugo’s ministry like a tropical storm, with increasing winds that affected everything in sight. The Protestant churches did not see it coming. And the Roman Catholic church viewed Lugo as a Protestant hybrid that it did not understand. Lugo arrived with intensity and a spiritual mandate. Another Assemblies of God missionary to Puerto Rico, Frank Finkenbinder, later recalled:

Among the pioneers, perhaps it was brother Lugo who preached with the most fire and power. Wherever he preached, multitudes followed him. Some other evangelical pastors were filled with envy and looked for a way to make him leave Puerto Rico. They offered to help him go to the Dominican Republic. They offered him free passage, and even offered to give him a house, because they said there was more need in the Dominican Republic. Brother Lugo had his call to Puerto Rico, and politely refused.²⁶



Group picture of Pastors of La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal in Puerto Rico, 1937.

greatly encouraged me in my mission. I left his office feeling stronger and cheerful about the work God had called me to do.”²⁵

Eventually, Lugo arrived in New York City and stayed at the missionary house operated by Glad Tidings Tabernacle, the large congregation led by Robert and Marie Brown. There he met Robert Jamieson, a visiting Canadian Pentecostal missionary to the Virgin Islands. Jamieson’s accounts from the mission field spurred Lugo to expect great things.

sage he had not known in Puerto Rico. In retrospect, the Lugo migration to Hawaii provided the context for the reception of the Pentecostal message and the redirection of his life toward missionary work in his native land. He was mentored in the ministry by Francisco Ortiz, his pastor in Hawaii and California, and he gained experience from the churches and missions where he attended and served during his two years in California. Lugo’s formative experiences in Hawaii and California taught him how to lead people to Christ and to disciple them. He

Lugo met with a government official and received verbal approval to preach on the street corners and in the plazas of Puerto Rico. He received the clearance to do what he came to do — preach ¡Pentecostés!

The first street corner service was in Santurce on the corner of La Parada 18 ½ and Figueroa Street (near the home of Sister Michael).²⁷ The street corner preaching service became the staple of the Puerto Rican Pentecostal evangelism strategy. Lugo started an open-air evangelism event on a street corner,

drew a crowd and then moved indoors with those who responded. This move indoors created a more intimate setting for discipling and seeking the Holy Spirit (“la promesa del Espíritu Santo”).

Although Lugo was dynamic, eloquent and relentless, the result of the first event was discouraging. He recalled, “Comencé solo y terminé solo” (I started alone, and I ended alone).²⁸ After a few discouraging nights, a group of Christians from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, who worshiped in a nearby storefront became daily attendees at the street corner services. They asked Lugo to visit their church and to preach the Pentecostal message to them in English.

For twenty-four consecutive days, Lugo preached in Spanish on the same street corner accompanied by these Christians, and afterward they returned to the storefront for study and prayer. The street corner crowds grew in number every night. Lugo knew he could settle into this growing ministry in Santurce but his calling was to Ponce, in the southern portion of Puerto Rico.

The need was great in Santurce and the community responded,²⁹ but he felt he had to complete his journey to Ponce. He briefly stopped in his hometown of Yauco³⁰ to meet with his sister and other family members whom he had not seen for 16 years, and then traveled several miles to his appointed destination, Ponce.³¹

Lugo arrived in Ponce on November 3, 1916. He met with Sister Lucena, whom Lugo knew from California. She surprised Lugo by telling him that Salomón Feliciano, a Puerto Rican friend who lived in Hawaii, had arrived the day before. Feliciano, like Lugo, had experienced Spirit baptism in June 1913.

That night, Lugo and Feliciano joined with another believer, Sister Dionisia, and held their first street corner service in Ponce. When the service ended, Feliciano asked if someone would open the doors of their home to continue the service. A couple opened up their house, and a number of observers

accepted the invitation to continue meeting in the home. At that first Saturday night service, which lasted until 2:00 a.m., eleven persons accepted Christ, including the owners of the house!³²

This was the beginning of a revival in Ponce and the surrounding region that became like a spiritual hurricane. Despite denominational opposition, governmental interference and pressure, open hostility and public cynicism, Juan Lugo and the other pioneers baptized their first nine converts. They held the baptismal service in el barrio Los Meros on the Ponce shores.

Francisco D. Ortiz, Sr. and Panchito Ortiz, the father and son who worked with Lugo in California, arrived in

Lugo founded an indigenous Puerto Rican church that altered the Puerto Rican religious and social landscape.

Ponce and joined the evangelization efforts along with Salomón Feliciano and Lucero Lucena. They moved in different directions from Ponce in response to requests from new converts and Spirit-filled believers for preachers and pastors to help them spread the message. The winds of Pentecost blew throughout the southern parts of the island.

By 1920, in just over three years, Pentecostal preaching points and chapels had been established in Playa de Ponce, Monte Llanos, Ponce, San Antón, Nuevo Bélgica, Playa of Mayaguez, Esperanza of Arecibo, Tibet and Galicia de Juana Díaz, Pasales de Utuado and Paris de Lajas, Aibonito de Hatillo, Islote, Pastales and Don Alonso.

During his first year of ministry in Ponce, Lugo made a life-changing discovery. He met a young woman, Isabel

Ortiz, who came from a God-fearing Roman Catholic home and had accepted Christ during one of Lugo’s services. They married on July 29, 1917. Isabel came from a privileged family in Ponce, and her father was a respected medical doctor. Lugo loved to tell the story about how Isabel’s mother came to a revival meeting, intending to convince her daughter to leave the Pentecostals. Once there, however, she changed her mind.

Deeply impressed by the sincere and demonstrative Pentecostal worship, she told Isabel that she saw no wrong in her decision to join the Pentecostals and affirmed her in her conversion.³³ La Hermana Isabelita, as she was fondly called, served as a wife, homemaker, counselor, teacher, a respected Christian leader, and a co-laborer with Lugo throughout his ministry in Puerto Rico, New York City and other places in the United States where he traveled and served. She was one of the first teachers of the Mizpa Bible Institute — founded by her husband in 1937 as the first Pentecostal Bible school on the island. She was an exemplary pastor’s wife in a denomination that consisted primarily of young ministry families who benefited from her maturity, acumen and example. Puerto Rican historian Roberto Domínguez commented about this “distinguished woman”:

This unique worker of God had been a “mother in Israel.” Along with her domestic responsibilities, she made personal home visits, organized women’s organizations, and prepared programs. In reality, she was the power behind the throne, to express it as it was. It is impossible to conceive of Juan L. Lugo apart from Isabelita Lugo. Together they planned and decided, after they both sought the throne of God asking for wisdom. Isabel was a faithful and worthy companion, the counselor in times of affliction.³⁴



Ecos de Pentecostes record album cover.

In four years, the Puerto Rican Pentecostal Church grew in number and influence and saw the need for institutional organization. On September 1-6, 1920, the first meeting of the newly-formed Pentecostal church took place. In attendance at this initial meeting were 27 missionaries, pastors and delegates. They reported 600 members, 6 (5 native) missionaries, 2 ordained ministers, 8 local preachers, 6 chapels and 11 congregations. Delegates elected Lugo to serve as president and Feliciano and Panchito to serve as presbyters.³⁵

In October 1921, Henry C. Ball, the superintendent of the Hispanic work for the Assemblies of God, came to inspect the work of the new Puerto Rican Pentecostal church. Ball was favorably impressed by the young church. He reported in a *Pentecostal Evangel* article,

When I arrived I found a full-fledged Pentecostal meeting in progress, with the hall full and

running over. How I enjoyed myself that night! The Porto Ricans surely know how to sing, and they put their whole soul into it. And they can testify as well as they can sing. I found the Porto Ricans very acceptable to the full gospel. In fact, I would say that the entire island seems to hunger for God.³⁶

On November 4-7, 1921, delegates gathered from around the island and, with Ball present, formally identified with the Assemblies of God. The minutes record this meeting as the “First Annual Conference of the Assemblies of God in Puerto Rico.” Delegates elected Lugo to serve as the first president and Panchito as secretary. The other outstanding question resolved at this national meeting was the name of the Puerto Rican church. The government of Puerto Rico would not approve the legal incorporation of a body whose name included the word “assembly,” apparently in order to avoid confusion

with a political entity. The organization, therefore, became known as La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal and functioned as the Puerto Rico District Council of the Assemblies of God.³⁷

Exporting Pentecost to the Mainland

Lugo began exporting Puerto Rican Pentecostalism to the mainland in the 1920s when he made several trips to the United States. He traveled to maintain friendships with people at Bethel Temple in Los Angeles, and to take a break from the arduous task of founding La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Lugo traveled through New York City, the port of entry to the United States, and visited Puerto Ricans who had been part of La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal on the island.

In 1928, Lugo sent Tomas Alvarez to New York City to open a work among the Puerto Ricans who had settled in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn. This was one of the earliest-known Spanish-speaking Pentecostal churches in New York City. By 1931, fifteen years after Lugo’s return to his homeland, the indigenous Assemblies of God fellowship that he led had grown to 37 organized churches. He felt his presence was no longer critical in Puerto Rico, and he set his sights on the Spanish-speaking communities in New York and elsewhere in the United States.³⁸

In 1931, Alvarez returned to Puerto Rico, and Lugo and his family moved to Greenpoint to pastor the small congregation in Brooklyn. Lugo saw the importance of opening a new church in East Harlem (known as Spanish Harlem), where many Puerto Ricans had begun to settle. Lugo left the Greenpoint congregation (Milton Donato succeeded Lugo in the pastorate) and began a new church on 104th Street in Manhattan in Spanish Harlem.

The church eventually moved to 115th Street and purchased a former synagogue. The powerful congregation, well-known in “El Barrio” as La

Sinagoga, sent missionaries to Spanish-speaking countries and gave birth to the Spanish American Bible Institute (1935) and the Spanish Eastern District Council of the Assemblies of God (1957).³⁹

At the urging of Assemblies of God missions leaders, Lugo returned to Puerto Rico in 1936 to establish a Bible school to train ministers. Mizpah Bible Institute opened in October 1937 with sixteen students. Lugo chose Julia Valentine, a recent graduate of Latin American Bible Institute in California, and Johnny Perez to serve as instructors along with him and his wife. Mizpah trained future generations of Puerto Rican evangelists, pastors, teachers and missionaries.⁴⁰ Upon his return, Lugo was elected once again to serve as superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Puerto Rico. Lugo swapped positions with the former superintendent, missionary Frank Finkenbinder, who became the pastor of La Sinagoga.⁴¹

Enduring Aspects of the Lugo Legacy

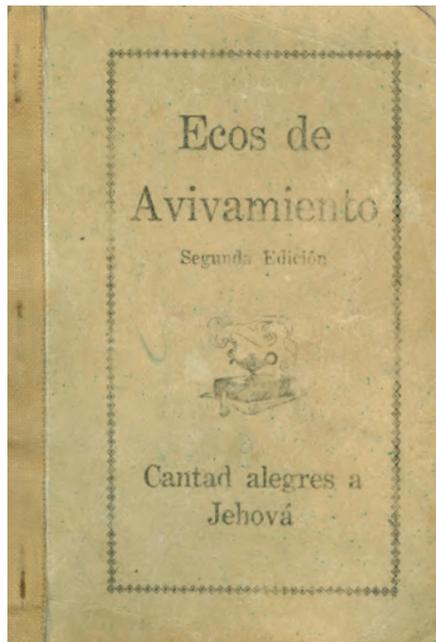
Lugo founded an indigenous Puerto Rican church that altered the Puerto Rican religious and social landscape. The church respected his unwavering demonstration and proclamation of the Pentecostal distinctives, even when faced with persecution and ridicule. Assemblies of God scholar and Puerto Rican social ethicist Eldin Villafañe summarized Lugo's legacy:

The spirit of Juan L. Lugo speaks to us of total commitment and sacrificial service in church planting. He met head-on every opposition whether by other Hispanics of different religious persuasion or of Anglo racism and insensitivity in the cold metropolis.⁴²

Juan Lugo was not just a historical figure, coldly sitting on the pages of history books. He was my grandfather, "mi abuelito" and I remember him teach-

ing and living out what it means to be a Pentecostal Christian. My grandfather insisted that a true follower of Christ must not compromise core Pentecostal values. He taught that holiness was the standard for the Spirit-filled believer and without it, one would not see God. This conviction fueled the church's emphasis on holiness practices that defined the dress, comportment and mores of Puerto Rican Pentecostals.

He believed that the proclamation of truth, grounded in a Pentecostal reading of scripture, was what the people needed to hear and would set them free. He held



***Ecos de Avivamiento*, a songbook edited by Juan Lugo.**

that once the Word was proclaimed and the invitation given to obey that Word, those who said "yes" should and would be filled with the Holy Spirit, receive "la promesa del Espíritu Santo," and speak in tongues as the Spirit directed.

He inspired the Puerto Rican Pentecostal church to expect the miraculous, to receive healing and deliverance, and to see the power of God on display in the individual believer and the corporate life of the church. He led the church to fulfill its central calling — to reach the lost and to bring all to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Lugo and his

wife epitomized relentless and passionate church planters — preaching, teaching, and equipping laborers to move to new mission fields in neighboring towns and foreign lands where Puerto Ricans settled.

The strong sacrificial missional conviction that carried Lugo from Hawaii to Ponce was a core value for Lugo and was reinforced at every level of ministry. He fiercely promoted the mission of the church and played a large role in its growth and expansion in Spanish-speaking communities.

Many believe the success of the Puerto Rican Pentecostal church — which developed a strong foundation, grew, and extended itself into the United States and other Spanish-speaking countries — was due in part to the adoption of these core values of its pioneer, Juan León Lugo. Lugo is a common ancestor in the spiritual genealogy of untold thousands of Puerto Rican Pentecostals. For example, Michael Valcarcel, Director of Small Groups at Bethel Christian Center in Riverside California, recently stated, "Your (Lugo) family and spiritual legacy is my own spiritual heritage." Michael's family in California traces its spiritual lineage to Lugo and the Pentecostal outpouring in Puerto Rico in the 1930s, five generations ago.⁴³

Lugo's legacy extends far from his island home. Lugo is usually named, along with H. C. Ball, Alice Luce, and Demetrio Bazan, as one of the most prominent Assemblies of God Spanish-speaking pioneers in the United States. While these other three pioneers worked primarily among Hispanics in Western states, Lugo was the best-known pioneer among Spanish-speakers in Puerto Rico and the Eastern states.

Lugo and his family moved permanently to New York City in 1940 and continued to plant churches and develop leaders for the growing and expanding Puerto Rican Pentecostal church. He opened a Pentecostal congregation in East Harlem called "La Iglesia Pentecostal de la Calle 112" and by 1950



Juan and Isabel Lugo

Lugo and the congregation joined the Eastern Spanish District of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN).

In 1962 at the age of 72, Lugo and Isabel retired to Plattekill, New York. In retirement Lugo helped found the Spanish mission of the Church of God in Newburgh, New York, until his death on January 30, 1984. Two days before his death, Juan, Isabel, and their daughter Elisa Lugo Alicea were together in Lugo's bedroom praising God and singing hymns when Juan saw a vision of heaven's glory. Juan exclaimed, "Veo que se abre una gran puerta en el cielo y desde adentro una multitud clama diciendo: Bienvenido, entra Juan Lugo!" (I see a great door opening in heaven and from inside I hear a multitude crying out: Welcome, come in Juan Lugo!).⁴⁴

Dr. Hector Camacho Hernandez, a Puerto Rican theologian and churchman who knew Lugo as his pastor, teacher, mentor, and counselor offered the following eulogy of Juan L. Lugo:

To you, O man of God, who anointed so many heads, who dedicated so many temples, who initiated so many ministers, who

founded so many churches, who suffered so many disingenuous actions, and who was so faithful to the Lord of the harvest; to you, man of God, who has entered eternal glory, we pledge to you that we will continue to carry your message forth; and that we will continue your enormous missionary task, that the power that anointed you and that used you so powerfully will not be lost; that the same fire burns in the midst of the people of God, and that all of us who owe you so much, will continue down this rocky and thorny road, planting love and the blessed faith of the Crucified One. You have not died, because while the Gospel is preached, the seed you planted will remain alive, and it will be an enduring tribute to your legacy.⁴⁵

The Puerto Rican Pentecostal church still reveres its native son, Juan León Lugo, who returned home from Hawaii almost a century ago with a pearl of immeasurable value, the "evangelio completo" (the full gospel). While the church that Lugo helped to found and lead — La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I. — ceased its affiliation with the Assemblies of God in 1957, it continues on as the largest indigenous Pentecostal denomination in Puerto Rico.⁴⁶ Because Lugo obeyed the call to the "Borinquen" (an indigenous term for Puerto Rico) mission field, he is remembered, as the "Apostle of Pentecost" to Puerto Rico.⁴⁷



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higher education: founder of the New York campus ministry, Seekers Christian Fellowships; Professor and Dean of ETEP, New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Hispanic Program Officer, the Fund for Theological Education; Dean and Executive Officer of the Seminary of the East of Bethel University; and Board Chair and Executive Director, Florida Center for the Americas.

For updates on the Lugo Legacy, see: [www.Facebook.com/RevJuanLugo](https://www.facebook.com/RevJuanLugo) and www.RevJuanLugo.org

NOTES

¹Juan León Lugo was born in Yauco, Puerto Rico on October 26, 1890. He was the son of José Lugo and Juana Medina de Lugo. His father died a few months after Juan's birth. He had three sisters. Lugo married Isabel Ortiz Zavala in Ponce, Puerto Rico on July 29, 1917. They had two sons (Benjamín and John Jr.) and four daughters (Pérsida, Elizabeth, Abigail and Hulda). Lugo died January 30, 1984 in Newburgh, New York.

²Certificate of ordination for John León Lugo, January 30, 1916, signed by J. W. Welch and J. R. Flower, FPHC.

³For examples of Puerto Rican theological reflection by Puerto Rican Pentecostals on these ecclesiastical patterns and convictions see: Eldin Villafañe, *Spirit Without Borders: Pentecostalism in the Americas: A Profile and Paradigm of "Criollo" Pentecostalism in Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta and Eldin Villafañe (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 176-183, 308-310; and Samuel Soliván, *The Holy Spirit- Personalization and the Affirmation of Diversity: A Pentecostal Hispanic Perspective in Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, ed. Arturo J. Bañuelas (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 50-65; and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Hispanic Protestant Spirituality" in *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, ed. Arturo J. Bañuelas (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 125-145.

⁴The historian of La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I., David Ramos Torres, provides a list of "adalides cristianos" (Christian leaders) who worked with Lugo in the early stages of the Puerto Rican Pentecostal Church. "Entre los más destacados están los siguientes: Juan L. Lugo, Salomón Feliciano, Aguedo Collazo, Francisco Ortíz, hijo; Delfín Montalvo, John Roberts, Lorenzo Lucena, Lena S. Howe, Helena Félix, Frank y Aura Finkenbinder, Justino y Eleuterio Rodríguez y Félix Rivera

Cardona,” in David Ramos Torres, in *Historia de la Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I.: Una Iglesia Ungida Para Hacer Misión* (Río Piedras, PR: Editorial Pentecostal, 1992), 35.

⁵The secondary sources of information for this article are four books and one master’s thesis written by historians of Puerto Rican Pentecostalism. They are listed in chronological order of publication: The first is the oldest attempt of a historical account of the Hispanic Pentecostal movement: 1) Roberto Domínguez, *Pioneros de Pentecostés: En el Mundo de Habla Hispana*, vol. 1 (Miami, the author, 1971); 2) David Ramos Torres, *Historia de la Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I.: Una Iglesia Ungida Para Hacer Misión* (Río Piedras, PR: Editorial Pentecostal, 1992); 3) Rubén Pérez Torres, *Poder Desde Lo Alto: Historia, Sociología, y Contribuciones del Pentecostalismo en Puerto Rico, el Caribe y en los Estados Unidos*, Segunda Edición, Revisada y Actualizada (Terrassa [Barcelona], Spain: Editorial CLIE, 2003); 4) Donald T. Moore, *Puerto Rico Para Cristo: A History of the Progress of the Evangelical Missions on the Island of Puerto Rico — Sondeos series*, no. 43 (Cuernavaca, Mexico: CIDOC, 1969); 5) Benjamín Alicea, “Religion and Missions in Puerto Rico” (MA thesis, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, 1978).

⁶Carmelo E. Álvarez, “Historic Panorama of Pentecostalism in Latin America and the Caribbean,” in *In the Power of the Spirit: The Pentecostal Challenge to Historic Churches in Latin America*, ed. Benjamin F. Gutiérrez and Dennis A. Smith (Mexico: AIPRAL and Guatemala: CELEP, 1996), 29-40. Originally published in Spanish in 1995. Álvarez, Affiliate Professor of Church History and Theology at the Christian Theological Seminary (Indianapolis, IN), is a respected scholar of Latin American and Caribbean Christianity.

⁷The Assemblies of God ordained Lugo on January 16, 1916. In 1940, he moved his family to New York City and ended his formal relationship with La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal and the Assemblies of God. From 1941-1947, Lugo’s ecclesiastical affiliation is unclear. In 1948-9, he served as interim Superintendent of La Asamblea de Iglesias Cristianas in the United States (overseeing their work in Illinois, Colorado, Texas and California). He then transferred to the the Eastern Spanish District of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) until his death.

⁸Alicea, 23.

⁹Ibid., 21-23.

¹⁰Moore, 2/3-2/4.

¹¹Alicea, 70. The US changed the name of Puerto Rico to Porto Rico in 1899 because some people found “Puerto” difficult to pronounce. The name was restored to Puerto Rico in 1932.

¹²Moore, 1/14-1/16; Raymond L. Scheele, “The Prominent Families of Puerto Rico,” in *The People of Puerto Rico*, ed. Julian H. Steward,

et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 60, 449.

¹³Moore, 2/4-2/7.

¹⁴Juan L. Lugo, *Pentecostes en Puerto Rico: o la Vida de un Misionero* (N.p.: Puerto Rico Gospel Press, 1951), 7.

¹⁵The identity of the missionaries is unknown. However, J. Raymond Hurlburt, a Pentecostal missionary in Honolulu, reported in 1912 the existence of a Puerto Rican Pentecostal congregation. He wrote, “There is also an assembly of Porto Rican saints here and God does mightily bless them at times.” He also noted, “I expect to join our beloved Brother Downing in Yokohama, Japan, when the Lord gets through with me in this place.” J. Raymond Hurlburt, “The Work in Honolulu, Hawaii,” *Bridegroom’s Messenger*, June 1, 1912, 2. Hurlburt was ordained by the Apostolic Assembly (Spokane, WA) in 1911 and transferred his credentials to the AG in 1917.

¹⁶Lugo, 9-10.

¹⁷Ibid., 14-15, translated from Spanish.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 19-26.

²⁰Ministerial files for Juan Lugo, Francisco D. Ortiz, and Frank D. Ortiz, Jr., FPHC.

²¹Lugo, 25; Victor DeLeon, *The Silent Pentecostals: A Biographical History of the Pentecostal Movement Among the Hispanics in the Twentieth Century* ([La Habra, CA?]: the author, 1979), 32-33.

²²Lugo, 27-8.

²³Ibid., 28-29, translated from Spanish.

²⁴Ibid., 27.

²⁵Ibid., 30, translated from Spanish.

²⁶Frank Finkenbinder, “The Pentecostal Work in the Island of Puerto Rico,” undated manuscript, 1.

²⁷She was the person identified by Robert Jamieson, missionary to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and referred to Lugo during his brief stopover at the missionary house of Glad Tidings Tabernacle in New York City.

²⁸Lugo, 33.

²⁹This multicultural group of worshipers and converts who responded to Lugo’s preaching ministry eventually became La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal. This congregation claims to be the first church Lugo founded in Puerto Rico.

³⁰On June 25, 2005, a major street in Lugo’s hometown was named in his honor — La Calle Juan León Lugo. This action was taken by the Municipal Government of Yauco upon the recommendation of La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I and on a street where one of the denomination’s churches, “El Hospital de Dios” is located. A commemorative plaque is front of the church also honors the accomplishments of this notable Yaucano.

³¹Lugo, 33-39.

³²Ibid., 40-42.

³³Ibid., 64-65.

³⁴Domínguez, 91, translated from Spanish.

³⁵Moore, 3/44.

³⁶H. C. Ball, “Pentecost Flourishing in Porto Rico,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 7, 1922, 6.

³⁷Finkenbinder, 5. In this report Finkenbinder states, “The first to speak after we got up from our knees was Brother Collazo, who said, ‘I believe I have the answer of the Lord. Instead of using the word Assembly, we’ll simply use the word Church. The Pentecostal Church of God!’ We all felt unanimously that this was the answer. The name was lovely, it sounded well. It never occurred to us that perhaps there could be a church in the U.S. with the same name, even though it was in English. We returned to the offices with the new name, and they had no other objection. They accepted us and incorporated us at once. Very soon, the name that was adopted in this way circulated throughout the island, and it became ‘the love name’ for this movement.” Certificate of Incorporation, Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Estado, el 13 de febrero de 1922, registro número 256, bajo el nombre de “The Pentecostal Church of God.”

³⁸DeLeon, 36-38; Lugo, 95-97.

³⁹DeLeon, 112-113; Lugo, 95-97.

⁴⁰Juan Lugo, “New Bible School, Puerto Rico,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 15, 1938, 9.

⁴¹DeLeon, 112-113. Lugo led the Assemblies of God in Puerto Rico for three non-consecutive periods: 1921-1923, 1926-1931, and 1937-1939.

⁴²Eldin Villafaña, *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 94.

⁴³Michael Valcarcel, “Valcarcel Family Tree” and “Valcarcel Family Migration to the States,” e-mail messages to author, December 28-29, 2011.

⁴⁴Antonio Collazo, “Reverendo Juan L. Lugo: Pionero de Pentecostes,” *El Evangelio* 39:7 (Julio 1984): 10-11.

⁴⁵Hector Camacho Hernandez, “Ha Muerto Un Apostol: En la muerte de Juan L. Lugo,” *El Evangelio* 39:8 (Agosto 1984): 8-9, translated from Spanish. Hernandez is a Puerto Rican scholar, author, founder and former president of La Universidad Theological del Caribe in Puerto Rico, Church of God (Cleveland, TN) minister, and former overseer of Spanish ministry in several Spanish districts.

⁴⁶After La Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I. ceased its affiliation with the Assemblies of God in 1957, Puerto Rican churches and ministers that remained in the Assemblies of God came under the authority of the Spanish Eastern District until the Puerto Rico District was formed in 1975. See *Executive Presbytery Minutes*, August 24, 1957.

⁴⁷DeLeon, 111.