The Evolution of the RITA Database and Informational Resources

By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES

2 March 2013

RITA is an acronym for "Religion-In-The-Americas," and it was chosen to communicate the broad scope of our study of ethnic and religious diversity in Latin America and the Caribbean regions, which includes all identifiable religions and religious groups in each country and dependent territory of the Americas. However, our study of ethnic and religious diversity in the USA and Canada was limited to the Hispanic and Portuguese population as a complement to our larger study.

Although I am the intellectual author, designer and developer of this study, it was very much a team effort by members of the PROLADES staff in Costa Rica, which has been my home and base of operations since 1972. As the founder and director of PROLADES (Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos – Latin American Socio-Religious Studies Program) since 1977, I have been involved in numerous socio-religious studies in at least 25 countries in terms of field work, although -- thanks to the Internet -- information about all of the independent nations and dependent territories of the Americas is now available with a few key strokes.

The latest update of the RITA Database began in April 2012 after we signed a partnership agreement with representatives of Fuller Theological Seminary (FTS) in Pasadena, California, that had been negotiated in conversations with Dr. Juan Martínez, Director of Hispanic Studies, between October 2011 and the date of signing the agreement in late March 2012. FTS provided PROLADES with a research grant to cover part of our expenses for this study for a period of six months, 1 April to 30 September, although it took us until 26 February 2013 to complete this update. The latest Excel file of the RITA Database is now in the hands of my technical support person, Mr. Alan Young, for final processing and import into the online RITA database and search engine at:
http://www.prolades.com/FTS/!new_rita_home_page_FTS.htm

 The FTS research grant enabled me to hire several research assistants on a part-time basis to help with the process of updating our existing RITA Database, which we had developed progressively since the time that we first acquired Internet access in Costa Rica in the late 1990s. Assisting me in this updating process were Nayud Mena, Dorothy Bullón, Stefani Aguilar and Linda Holland (my wife, administrative assistant, translator, editor and facilitator). Nayud, Dorothy and Stefani did the majority of the work required in researching, reviewing and processing the information for the respective countries/ territories, using a variety of informational resources: my encyclopedia articles, hardcopy files, computer files, other published documents, webpages, etc.

They began by reviewing my encyclopedia articles and cross-checking references to each religion and religious group in each country/territory (a total of 54) with the existing listings in our RITA database (stored and developed in MS Excel) and adding new entries. Each research assistant was assigned a specific geographical area or language-cultural area for further research via the Internet: North, Central and South America and the Caribbean; and English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch-speaking areas. We created separate columns in our Excel database for each of these geographical and language-cultural areas so that we could sort the information accordingly as needed. After completing the first stage of this process (review of the existing RITA documents and files), they searched for new informa-tion via the Internet on religions, religious groups and churches in each of their assigned areas (geo-graphical and or language-cultural regions) of responsibility, as well as the headquarters' webpages of

each denomination or religious group in our updated RITA database to confirm, add or modify our existing information with the latest information available from "official sources" as much as possible. Our researchers examined the online Yellow Pages, church and religious group directories, and every other source of information available via the Internet in order to locate and add new listings to the RITA database. Some of our friends, family members and colleagues who traveled to other countries collected information for us from local sources (sections of the Yellow Pages, books and other literature, electronic media, etc.). In addition, many of our "country research associates" helped us verify and update our existing database information as well as providing us with information about other religious groups in their respective countries.

In addition to collecting and processing new information from all of these sources and adding it to our existing RITA database, it was my task to review all of the listings in each of the component databases that my research assistants had processed and add the proper religious classification and geographical codes, correct spelling errors, merge the various pieces of the database into one master dbase, eliminate duplicate entries in each country/territory, and generally clean up the entire combined dbase to correct and standardize the listings. All of this complicated process of updating the entire RITA database was completed on 26 February 2013. Currently, there are 8,238 listings compared to 5,386 on 9 September 2003 when we first made this dbase available online at: http://www.prolades.com/

Below is a breakdown of the contents of the updated RITA Database by countries, as well as by geographical regions, for both the original dbase of 2003 and the updated dbase of 2013:

TABLE OF THE RITA DATABASE, 2003 COMPARED TO 2013 BY COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	REGION	TOTAL NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS 2003	TOTAL NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS 2013
ANGUILLA ISLAND	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	11	24
ANTIGUA Y BARBUDA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	28	56
ARGENTINA	SOUTH AMERICA	189	268
ARUBA	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	22	51
BAHAMAS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	34	84
BARBADOS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	33	95
BELIZE	CENTRAL AMERICA	78	96
BERMUDA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	20	100
BOLIVIA	SOUTH AMERICA	154	448
BONAIRE	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	13
BRAZIL	SOUTH AMERICA	263	254
CAYMAN ISLANDS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	19	73
CHILE	SOUTH AMERICA	106	230
COLOMBIA	SOUTH AMERICA	215	295
COSTA RICA	CENTRAL AMERICA	262	376
CUBA	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	56	138
CURACAO	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	27	80

DOMINICA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	15	39
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	149	243
ECUADOR	SOUTH AMERICA	105	193
EL SALVADOR	CENTRAL AMERICA	96	149
FALKLAND ISLANDS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	8	10
FRENCH GUIANA	SOUTH AMERICA	18	20
GRENADA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	26	72
GUADALUPE	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	21	23
GUATEMALA	CENTRAL AMERICA	258	333
GUYANA	SOUTH AMERICA	40	125
HAITÍ	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	137	154
HISP-CANADA	NORTH AMERICA	19	60
HISP-USA	NORTH AMERICA	147	163
HONDURAS	CENTRAL AMERICA	129	169
JAMAICA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	104	225
MARTINIQUE	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	22	23
MEXICO	NORTH AMERICA	1686	1774
MONTSERRAT	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	11	21
NICARAGUA	CENTRAL AMERICA	27	172
PANAMA	CENTRAL AMERICA	149	177
PARAGUAY	SOUTH AMERICA	85	146
PERU	SOUTH AMERICA	112	194
PUERTO RICO	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	110	207
SABA	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	5
SINT EUSTATIUS	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	10
SINT MAARTEN	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	11
ST BARTS	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	--	3
ST KITTS-NEVIS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	15	43
ST LUCIA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	28	43
ST MARTIN	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	--	2
ST VINCENT-GRANADINAS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	21	38
SURINAME	SOUTH AMERICA	46	70
TRINIDAD-TOBAGO	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	60	149
TURKS-CAICOS ISLANDS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	9	32
URUGUAY	SOUTH AMERICA	53	120
VENEZUELA	SOUTH AMERICA	109	198
VIRGIN ISLANDS-BRITISH	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	16	40
VIRGIN ISLANDS-USA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	38	100
TOTALS	ALL	5386	8238

TABLE OF THE RITA DATABASE, 2003 COMPARED TO 2013 BY REGIONS

COUNTRY	REGION	TOTAL NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS 2003	TOTAL NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS 2013
ARUBA	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	22	51
BONAIRE	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	13
CURACAO	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	27	80
SABA	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	5
SINT EUSTATIUS	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	11
SINT MAARTEN	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	--	11
SUBTOTAL	CARIBBEAN-DUTCH	49	171
ANGUILLA ISLAND	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	11	24
ANTIGUA Y BARBUDA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	28	56
BAHAMAS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	34	84
BARBADOS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	33	95
BERMUDA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	20	100
CAYMAN ISLANDS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	19	73
DOMINICA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	15	39
GRENADA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	26	72
JAMAICA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	104	225
MONTSERRAT	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	11	21
ST KITTS-NEVIS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	15	43
ST LUCIA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	28	43
ST MARTIN	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	--	2
ST VINCENT-GRANADINES	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	21	38
TRINIDAD-TOBAGO	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	60	149
TURKS-CAICOS ISLANDS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	9	32
VIRGIN ISLANDS-BRITISH	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	16	40
VIRGIN ISLANDS-USA	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	38	100
SUBTOTAL	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	496	1236
GUADALUPE	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	21	23
HAITÍ	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	137	154
MARTINIQUE	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	22	23
ST BARTS	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	--	3
SUBTOTAL	CARIBBEAN-FRENCH	180	203
CUBA	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	56	138
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	149	243
PUERTO RICO	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	110	207
SUBTOTAL	CARIBBEAN-SPANISH	315	588
TOTAL	CARIBBEAN	1040	2198

BELIZE	CENTRAL AMERICA	78	96
COSTA RICA	CENTRAL AMERICA	262	376
EL SALVADOR	CENTRAL AMERICA	96	149
GUATEMALA	CENTRAL AMERICA	258	333
HONDURAS	CENTRAL AMERICA	129	169
NICARAGUA	CENTRAL AMERICA	27	172
PANAMÁ	CENTRAL AMERICA	149	177
TOTAL	CENTRAL AMERICA	999	1472
HISP-CANADA	NORTH AMERICA	19	60
HISP-USA	NORTH AMERICA	147	163
MEXICO	NORTH AMERICA	1686	1774
TOTAL	NORTH AMERICA	1852	1997
ARGENTINA	SOUTH AMERICA	189	268
BOLIVIA	SOUTH AMERICA	154	448
BRAZIL	SOUTH AMERICA	263	254
CHILE	SOUTH AMERICA	106	230
COLOMBIA	SOUTH AMERICA	215	295
ECUADOR	SOUTH AMERICA	105	193
FALKLAND ISLANDS	CARIBBEAN-ENGLISH	8	10
FRENCH GUIANA	SOUTH AMERICA	18	20
GUYANA	SOUTH AMERICA	40	125
PARAGUAY	SOUTH AMERICA	85	146
PERÚ	SOUTH AMERICA	112	194
SURINAME	SOUTH AMERICA	46	70
URUGUAY	SOUTH AMERICA	53	120
VENEZUELA	SOUTH AMERICA	109	198
TOTAL	SOUTH AMERICA	1495	2571
GRAND TOTAL	ALL	5386	8238

Prior to conducting the recent update of the online RITA Database, we had added only 475 new listings between 2003 and 2013, whereas we have added 2,377 new listings since April 2012. This does not mean, however, that some of these new religious group listings did not exist prior to 2003 but that we were unaware of their existence until now. Until we know the date of origin of each of the respective religious groups in each country, we will not have an accurate picture of their origin and development by country and region throughout the Americas. This is one of the new tasks before us during the next phase of our research, whether by the PROLADES Team, professors and students at FTS, or other researchers.

One of the previous areas of research by the PROLADES Team was to discover the date of origin of each Protestant foreign mission agency or denomination in each country of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the date of origin of each Protestant denomination founded by national leaders in each country, including those national denominations that were linked historically to Protestant foreign mission agencies or denominations and later became independent. Chile and El Salvador are two of the

countries where multiple divisions occurred among denominations founded originally by Protestant foreign mission agencies or missionaries affiliated with foreign-based denominations. Not all the foreign missionaries who began work in each country were supported officially by Protestant missionary societies; some missionaries were supported by one or more local churches of a particular denomination or fellowship of autonomous local churches, whereas others were supported by a variety of churches and individuals of several denominations or fellowships of autonomous local churches, and other missionaries were freelancers (probably called tent-makers today) or "faith missionaries" who had no regular means of financial or logistical support in their respective countries of service.

My old friend, Dr. Daryl Platt (former fellow seminary student and missionary colleague), made a major contribution to the study of the historical origin and development of Protestant denominations in Latin America and the Caribbean by writing "Who Represents the Evangelical Churches in Latin America? A Study of the Evangelical Fellowship Organizations" (School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary, June 1991), in which he produced a chronological chart of all of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America. Later, I was able to build on Daryl's work and produce my own series of chronological databases and tables on Protestant beginnings in the Americas by region and country, which are now available online at: http://www.prolades.com/historical/chron-index.htm In addition to many other historical sources (including other thesis and dissertations produced by students at FTS) that we used to produce these documents, we were greatly helped by information contained in the following: Linda J. Weber and Dotsy Welliver, editors. *Mission Handbook of U.S. and Canadian Christian Ministries Overseas (2007-2009).* Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2007 (as well as previous editions).

More recently, while conducting research and writing my own PROLADES "Encyclopedia of Religion in Latin America and the Caribbean" (still in production in English and Spanish, four volumes, about 1,500 pages), I corrected and updated many of these chronological databases and tables based on new information acquired for each country and region (many of which I discovered via the Internet). However, this is an ongoing and unending task, which will be a challenge for the present and future generations of professors, students and researchers. Prior to 1970 this was a simpler task because there were fewer Protestant mission agencies working in Latin America and the Caribbean than today, and since 1970 thousands of new Protestant denominations and fellowships of autonomous local churches have come into existence under national leadership as well as tens of thousands of autonomous local churches.

An important part of this updating process has been to assign the proper "religious classification code" to each religious group in the RITA Database. This is a task that I assumed as the creator and developer of the PROLADES *Classification System of Religious Groups in the Americas by Major Traditions and Family Types* (first edition, 30 October 1993; latest edition, 26 February 2013, 310 pages), which is available in English online at: http://www.prolades.com/clas-eng.pdf We are currently updating the Spanish edition of this document to conform to the English text. The PROLADES Classification System of Religious Groups initially was based on information contained in *The Encyclopedia of American Religions: A Comprehensive Study of the Major Religious Groups in the United States and Canada* (3 volumes, 1991 edition, first published in 1979), produced by Dr. J. Gordon Melton, founder and director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion in Santa Barbara, CA. Since our first meeting together in Chicago in the early 1980s, Dr. Melton has become a personal friend and colleague.

My first extensive use of Dr. Melton's *Encyclopedia* was during the period 1990-1993, when I was faced with the challenge of identifying and classifying all of the religious groups that I encountered in my fieldwork on ethnic and religious diversity in the Los Angeles 5-county region (which we labeled GLAMA

= Greater Los Angeles Metro Area). When we finished this intensive and exhaustive research project, the PROLADES Team (working out of the IDEA-PROLADES field office in Pasadena on the campus of the U.S. Center for World Mission / William Carey International University) had compiled the names and addresses of about 12,400 local religious groups in GLAMA of all major religions and of many of the minor ones, based on Melton's categories. However, we discovered the existence of some religious groups in GLAMA that were not listed and described by Melton, and this led us to consult with Dr. Melton and other specialists in the various ethnic communities in GLAMA in order to identify and explain, as much as possible, the origin and development of these religious groups, both in GLAMA as well as in their countries of origin.   Consequently, we were forced by the results of our research in GLAMA to add new religious groups to our updated classification system, thereby modifying and updating the categories that we inherited from Dr. Melton.

By October 1993, we had produced the first edition of the PROLADES Classification System, which has been modified and updated continuously since then, based on further research and information gathering on Latin America and the Caribbean. This expanded process began after my return to Costa Rica in late 1993, after completing the GLAMA study (1990-1993). We began by classifying or reclassifying all of the Protestant denominations in each country of Central America, where I had done fieldwork (1997-1982) for my Doctor of Missiology dissertation at FTS (1980-1981) on "The History of the Protestant Movement in Central America, 1850-1980." After the Internet became available to us in Costa Rica in the late 1990s, we began to look for information about the origin and development of all religious groups throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, which led to the creation of the first edition of the RITA Database and Informational Resources in 2000 on my office computer.

In order to plan for the development of our own website and online RITA Database and search engine, I consulted with an experienced IT developer in Southern California, my old friend Alan Young, who had provided us with technical assistance at the IDEA-PROLADES field office in Pasadena, CA, in the acquisition, training and development of our first personal computers and databases as part of the GLAMA study. Alan designed and developed a runtime version of Clarion software as a delivery system for our GLAMA Database (along with a User's Manual, developed jointly my Alan and me), prior to the availability of the first MS Windows operating system. Alan agreed to provide us with ongoing technical support for the creation and development of our various websites, online databases and search engines. Alan's contribution to the development of these Internet services has been invaluable, including the redesign and update of the online RITA Database and search engine using the latest Internet technology.

However, I would like to emphasize that the RITA Database is not an end in itself but rather a means to an end: to provide us with new informational resources for evaluating the origin, growth and development of religious movements and groups in the Americas; to provide us with an expanded genealogical chart of Major Religious Traditions and Denominational Families; and to inspire us to seek answers to a series of important research questions about the nature of alternative religious movements, the growing "religious marketplace" in Latin America and the Caribbean regions, and reasons for the significant changes taking place in religious affiliation in many countries as reported in census documents and public opinion polls since the late 1980s. In order to encourage serious study, reflection and discussion of these issues, I have produced a 220-page document on "Church Trends in Latin America," which was completed on 11 December 2012 (see attached outline).

It is my sincere hope and desire that the variety of resources developed by PROLADES under my direction since 1977 about the Protestant movement in general and all religious groups in particular, for each country and region of the Americas, will be a challenge and inspiration for future generations of professors, students and researchers to continually update and expand, so that together we can achieve

a more reliable and comprehensive understanding of the historical origin, growth and development of religious movements in the Americas. This "comprehensive understanding" should be based on a SWOT analysis of the organizational development of each major denomination in each country (or whatever country or region the researcher has defined as his/her field of study), in addition to using the various theoretical models, methodological techniques and evaluation tools of the social sciences, including the science of religious studies (especially comparative theology, church history, history of Christian missions, revitalization movements, leadership and group dynamics, conflict analysis and resolution, organizational development, etc.).

Several of the initiatives the PROLADES Team has developed in the context of Central America since 2010 have been: (1) the study of the "Historiography of the Protestant Movement" (developing resource materials, teaching intensive courses, training and mobilizing church historians and students of church history in national and regional church history commissions, and developing communications media and networks via the Internet); (2) the study of Protestant Mega-Churches; (3) the study of New Religious Movements (NRMs); and (4) the study of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in each country. Information about these programs and projects is available on our website at: www.prolades.com

I believe that my background in the field of electronics (ground-to-air communication systems and test equipment maintenance and repair during four years in the U.S. Air Force [1956-1960], and 10 years of additional experience in military and commercial electronics systems analysis, trouble-shooting and repair as a civilian after serving in the USAF) during the 1960s and 1970s, combined with my professional training (in Cultural Anthropology, Sociology of Religion, Church History and History of Christian Missions, Christian Education, etc.) and experience since 1968 as a missionary educator, researcher, project designer and manager, electronic database designer and developer, organizational development and management, etc., has uniquely prepared me to be a mentor for a new generation of missiological researchers and information managers.

During the next ten years (if the Lord tarries and my health permits), I would like to spend quality time teaching intensive courses and mentoring professors and students in the field of missiological research and information management at Fuller Theological Seminary and in other academic institutions, both in the USA and in Latin America and the Caribbean. This, of course, would include training others in the future development of the RITA Database and Informational Resources at FTS and elsewhere.

I would like to thank my friend and colleague Dr. Juan Martínez, Director of the Hispanic Studies Program at FTS, for supporting my efforts and those of the PROLADES Team in the process of updating the RITA Database and Informational Resources that will soon be housed at FTS, based on our partnership agreement (signed in late-March 2012).

Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES
General Partner, Holland International Consultants
San Pedro, Montes de Oca, Costa Rica

PROLADES

Apartado 1524-2050, San Pedro, Costa Rica
E-mail: prolades@ice.co.cr
Internet: http://www.prolades.com