

## THE SOUTH AND THE LATIN AMERICAN PARADIGM OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT<sup>1</sup>

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They are from the South...do not hold them back. They are His witnesses so that others may hear and say, "It is true!"<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

This study represents an attempt to identify some of the new paradigms and opportunities generated recently in the expansion of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America. It also attempts to identify some scholars who have contributed significantly to the definition and identity of Pentecostalism in the area. At the same time, the study proposes a descriptive and reflective analysis of emerging contemporary issues such as church growth and the mobilization and contextualization of the gospel within the Latin American culture. Finally, it explores certain opportunities afforded by some of the newly identified paradigms related to the Pentecostal mission of the church, its theological and ministerial formation and its social concerns.

### 1. A Researcher's Account

Recent research has generated an earnest reflection upon the role of Pentecostals in the body of Christ in Latin America. A good example of

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this study was presented at the International Symposium on Non-Western Pentecostalism, Anaheim, CA, USA, in May 2001.

<sup>2</sup> This an approximation of the author to the words of Isaiah 43:5-7, "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back! Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth'" (NIV).

this is Harvey Cox's "sympathetic" book, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*,<sup>3</sup> that has made an enormous contribution among respected scholars in the West. This work started a debate on the role of Pentecostalism in the third millennium. His report on Latin American Pentecostalism is significant because it has opened the eyes of those who are especially interested in critical reflection, particularly in the broader Latin American context.

Other scholars have made important contributions, like Juan Sepulveda, Norberto Saracco, Manuel Gaxiola, Luis Segreda and C. René Padilla.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Latin American scholars frequently cite the works of Emilio Willems, Christian Lalive D'Espinay, Francisco Rolim and Jean Pierre Bastian.<sup>5</sup> Willems works include *Followers of the New Faith* and his article, "Protestantism and Cultural Change in Brazil and Chile."<sup>6</sup> These studies contributed to such an open discussion that *Time* even as early as 1962 began to call Latin American Pentecostalism "the fastest growing church in the western hemisphere."<sup>7</sup>

Another scholar who has earned the respect of most Latin American thinkers is Samuel Escobar. He has written many important studies on a large variety of topics ranging from ecumenical organizations, sociological and anthropological studies, and has published them in a broad range of academic publications. However, for Escobar and other scholars the new proscenium for scholarship in Latin America started in

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<sup>3</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See C. René Padilla, ed., *Bases Bíblicas de la Misión: Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Nueva Creación, 1998), pp. 5-8.

<sup>5</sup> An extensive survey on Latin American Pentecostalism can be found on Jorge Soneira, "Los Estudios Sociológicos sobre el Pentecostalismo en América Latina," *Sociedad y Religión* 8 (March 1991), pp. 29-47.

<sup>6</sup> See Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967). Also see Emilio Willems, "Protestantism and Cultural Change in Brazil and Chile," in *Religion, Revolution, and Reform*, eds. William V. D'Antonio and Frederick B. Pike (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 33-38.

<sup>7</sup> "The Fastest Growing Church in the Western Hemisphere," *Time* (November 2, 1962), pp. 55-56. See also "The Pentecostal Breakthrough," *America* (January 31, 1970), p. 42.

1990.<sup>8</sup> Edward L. Cleary, in a recent article, “Latin American Pentecostalism,” points out that the first comprehensive studies on Latin American Pentecostalism and politics appeared in 1990.<sup>9</sup> Cleary also implies that these were the first documents that appealed to a wide readership in their nature and content.<sup>10</sup> Among others there are two outstanding works done by David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* and David Martin’s *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*.<sup>11</sup>

A number of other scholars have contributed to this new discussion and have offered different views and opinions concerning the challenges and opportunities for the Pentecostal church in Latin America.<sup>12</sup>

Bernardo Campos, a young scholar, introduced the concept of “pentecostality,”<sup>13</sup> which he defines as “the universal experience that expresses the Pentecostal event” (*el acontecimiento Pentecostal*)—the key event that characterizes the life of those who identify themselves with the historical Pentecostal revival. Campos also sees the different historical Pentecostal events as only historical and different

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<sup>8</sup> See Samuel Escobar, “The Promise and Precariousness of Latin American Protestantism,” in *Coming of Age: Protestantism in Contemporary Latin America*, ed. Daniel R. Miller (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 26-38 (31).

<sup>9</sup> Edward L. Cleary, “Latin American Pentecostalism” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Peterson (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1999) pp. 127-45 (133).

<sup>10</sup> Cleary, “Latin American Pentecostalism,” p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> See David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), and David Martin *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Some noticeable works among Latin American scholars include Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll, eds., *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Selected Bibliography on Latin American Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 13:1 (Spring 1991), pp. 193-97. See also Russell P. Spittler, “Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists? A Review of American Uses of These Categories,” in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 103-16.

<sup>13</sup> See Bernardo Campos, *De La Reforma Protestante A La Pentecostalidad de la Iglesia: Debate Sobre el Pentecostalismo en America Latina* (Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones CLAI, 1997), pp. 90-106.

manifestations of that pentecostality.<sup>14</sup> Campos also contends that pentecostality must be understood as “a pluralistic and dispersed movement.” Christologically, pentecostality is the “strength of the Spirit” that makes possible the church as the body of Christ and as the people of God in the concrete history of humankind.<sup>15</sup> And in principle, pentecostality transcends any historical Pentecostal event (experience) that would claim to be the unique model of Pentecost, denying to others the uniqueness of their own Pentecostal experience.<sup>16</sup>

Another young Latin American Pentecostal scholar is Darío López. He has introduced an urgent message seeking to make the Pentecostal experience relevant to the marginalized people in their deepest human integrity.<sup>17</sup> He argues that Pentecostals are now facing a new historical and formidable task. The fact that most Pentecostal churches in Latin America are located in marginal areas tends to belie the church’s commitment to promote and defend the dignity of all human beings. López pleads for a change of mentality to one that will seek as its final result the spiritual and social transformation of the poor and marginalized.

## 2. A Look at the Stereotype Portrait of Latin Americans

To understand Latin American Pentecostalism will require the revision of traditional stereotypes that have been established historically, specifically of what most scholars identify as a typical person from Latin America. It is well known that Pentecostals in the region comprise a vast community with different expressions across the continent. Hence, the

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<sup>14</sup> Campos, *De La Reforma Protestante A La Pentecostalidad de La Iglesia*, pp. 90-106.

<sup>15</sup> See also Bernardo Campos, “In the Power of the Spirit: Pentecostalism, Theology and Social Ethics,” in *In The Power of the Spirit: The Pentecostal Challenge to Historic Churches in Latin America*, eds. Benjamin F. Gutiérrez and Dennis A. Smith (Guatemala City, Guatemala: CELEP, 1996), pp. 41-50 (50).

<sup>16</sup> Campos, *De La Reforma Protestante A La Pentecostalidad de La Iglesia*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>17</sup> Darío López, *Pentecostalismo y Transformación social: Más allá de los Estereotipos, las Críticas se Enfrentan con los Hechos* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2000), p. 29; also *Los Evangélicos y Los Derechos Humanos: La Experiencia Social del Concilio Nacional Evangélico del Perú 1980-1982* (Lima, Perú: Centro Evangélico de Misiología Andino-Amazónica, 1998), pp. 65-75.

movement has been affected historically by a rich and multicolored tapestry of race, language and geography including history and politics. William D. Taylor described very well the symbolic changes in the basic image of Latin American people in his book *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*.<sup>18</sup> Taylor reflects on this generational transformation saying:

The traditional image of a man [was] asleep under his sombrero; with that man's guerrilla son, having tensely grasped a machine gun in recent years, but perhaps the grandson today holds a cellular phone to keep contact with his own business.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Houtart and Pin remind us that in recent years Latin American Pentecostals lived in the midst of a spawning ground of liberation theology. This approach unsuccessfully sought to combine Marxist ideology and Christian theology in a way that both fascinates and repels, but that now is facing its own crisis, due to the collapse of European Marxism at the end of the so-called "Cold War" at the close of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

In recent years, Latin American Pentecostals have lived in a region in crisis—a continent where political, economic, cultural, social and spiritual factors conspired to create instability, uncontrolled change, violence and chaos. But they have also been participants in a scenario of God's providence; with Pentecostals on the move, evangelizing and establishing new churches mostly in remote and marginalized areas.<sup>21</sup> They have been committed in their own hermeneutics, to obedience to the great commission of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>18</sup> Emilio Antonio A. Núñez and William D. Taylor, *Crisis and Hope in Latin America* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Núñez and Taylor, *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> For a better understanding of the Latin American theology and its impact on the religious circles of the region, see Francois Houtart and Emile Pin, *The Church and the Latin American Revolution*, trans. Gilbert Barth (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

<sup>21</sup> See John J. Considine, M.M. ed., *The Religious Dimension in the New Latin America* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1966). This work exemplifies the pre-liberation theology analysis of Latin America that favored social transformation through the political process.

### 3. Pentecostals' Participation in the Expansion of the Church

For a better understanding of the role Pentecostals have played in the development of the Christian faith in Latin America, it is necessary to review those historical facts that eventually may be summarized as an account of historical strengths. The following is intended as a description of some of the key characteristics that the movement has exhibited in recent years.

With the exception of some classical denominations from North America,<sup>22</sup> most indigenous Latin American Pentecostals are large, self-supporting, self-governed and self-multiplying churches.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the church is rooted among the poor masses, while most of the historical Protestant and Evangelical churches are confined to middle-class enclaves.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, twenty-first century Pentecostals face problems of leadership, education, division and social alienation. It will take the action of the local people as they assume their responsibility to transform

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<sup>22</sup> Some of the most influential classical North American Pentecostal denominations in Latin America are the Assemblies of God and the Church of God. Both denominations have grown numerically, but their constituency eventually has become dependent on the mother church in North America. Very little have they done to develop grass-root leadership committed to the social, political, economic and cultural challenges of the region. Concerning this issue, see Carmelo E. Alvarez, "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*, eds. Benjamin F. Gutiérrez and Dennis A. Smith (Guatemala City, Guatemala: CELEP, 1996), pp. 29-40 (35).

<sup>23</sup> Very similar to the three-self core of values of the Chinese church, but within a different context and methodologies. A couple of works can be found on this subject: Philip Lauri Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). Raymond Fung, trans. ed., *Households of God on China's Soil* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Exact figures on Pentecostal churches for all countries of Latin America do not exist yet. This data comes from different sources, see William R. Read, Víctor M. Monterroso and Harmon A. Johnson, eds., *Latin American Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 313-25; Also Patrick Johnston, *Operation World* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1993) p. 65; and Emilio A. Núñez and William D. Taylor, *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*, p. 112. Also updated percentages and figures can be found in Population Reference Bureau, *1995 World Population Data sheet* (Washington, DC: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1995).

themselves and their communities through the living experience of the gospel. There is no doubt that they have a significant place in the future of Christianity in Latin America, but these indicators uncover some of their typical characteristics.

In connection with the above, Berg and Pretiz have offered several indicators that identify the core values of Pentecostals in Latin America,<sup>25</sup> with each one playing its own role in their conversion process and Christian commitment. Notice that these characteristics are typical of the Latin American context, although some similarities may be found in other regions of the world.

### 3.1 A Background of Christian Knowledge Already Acquired in the Roman Catholic Tradition

Many Latin American Pentecostal believers today converted from nominal Roman Catholicism. One of the reasons Latin American Pentecostals have been very fundamental in their theology is their background of Christian knowledge first acquired in the Catholic tradition.<sup>26</sup> Although some may disagree on this analysis, the truth is that most Pentecostals built their theology upon their previous knowledge of the Christian faith by way of the Roman Catholic Church.

### 3.2 A Worldview That Accepts the Supernatural and Is Not Over-rationalized

Latin American Pentecostals accept the baptism in the Holy Spirit as an event that unveils a new reality. The believer is radically reoriented to experience a new relationship with God and is empowered for effective service. The different gifts of the Holy Spirit are expected to operate in the life of the faithful, who are enabled either to suffer for the cause of Christ, or simply experience the power of renunciation in order to advance the establishment of the kingdom of God. Most Pentecostals envision a new-world order where justice and peace will be

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<sup>25</sup> Mike Berg and Paul Pretiz, *The Gospel People* (Monrovia, CA: MARC/LAM, 1992), pp. 118-20. See also Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, p. 22; Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, p. 9; and Guillermo Cook, *Let My People Live: Faith and Struggle in Central America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988) p. 65-70

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

experienced,<sup>27</sup> however they believe this will not occur until the consummation of the work of Christ when he returns.

### 3.3 Disenchantment with the Roman Catholic Church and Search for Other Alternatives

Latin American Pentecostals identify the Roman Catholic Church as a fallen religious system. Most of them resent the fact that the Catholic Church kept them, for centuries, alienated from the new experience they have now discovered. The Catholic Church also represents, in their mind, an agent of alienation, oppression and compromise with the demonic powers of the world.<sup>28</sup> The spirit of Pentecost is the “new wine” that must be preserved in “new wineskins” in order to keep it sound and effective (Matt 9:17). For Pentecostals in Latin America to witness is to unveil the truth to those who have remained deceived or neglected by an obsolete religious system.<sup>29</sup> Conversion then occurs when the individual understands the gospel as revealed by the scripture and the Holy Spirit, and joins the Pentecostal family followed by the new paradigm of the community of believers and the life in the Spirit.

### 3.4 Expression of Religious Liberty in a Religious Space Not Used to Pluralism

The twenty-first century has found Pentecostals in Latin America with a great deal of freedom to practice their faith. More than ever people express their respect for Pentecostal teachings and practices. They are now facing the need to explore other fields, as the demand for expansion requires it. Thus a new attitude toward education, Christian service and church life must be developed.<sup>30</sup> The church will now focus on new

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<sup>27</sup> See Dario López, *Pentecostalismo y Transformación Social: Más allá de los Estereotipos, las Críticas se Enfrentan con los Hechos* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2000), p. 29

<sup>28</sup> Cf. David M. Howard, “Great Things to Come,” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992), p. 39. See also Andrés Tapia, “Why is Latin America Turning Protestant?” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992), pp. 28-29.

<sup>29</sup> Andrés Tapia, “Why is Latin America Turning Protestant?” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992), pp. 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> See Tito Paredes, “The Many Faces of Los Evangélicos,” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992) pp. 34-35.



possibilities in order to give way to adjustment in a rapidly changing society.

### 3.5 Poverty and Insecurity about the Future Which Lead to a Search for Ultimate Answers

It is no secret that Pentecostals in Latin America come from the most marginalized segments of their society. The movement was born in the midst of the poor masses and it represents their voice in articulating the revelation and hope that the Holy Spirit has given to those who had no other voice. In Latin America, Pentecostalism is the revolution of the poor. For them there cannot be a dichotomizing between theory and praxis in a world of poverty and insecurity.<sup>31</sup> Here theory arises from the praxis to further praxis that eventually leads to change and to the building of a different society. It is the community of faith that determines the destiny and ultimate answers that both edify the believers and send a prophetic message to the world to find the answers in the incarnated Pentecostal Jesus.

### 3.6 The Use of Mass Media to Communicate the Gospel

Most Pentecostals in Latin America do not have direct access to the mass media, however some of the most influential indigenous organizations have begun to use it with dramatic results. The media serves as an instrument of both education and mobilization, and the result is the experience of significant numerical church growth.

### 3.7 A Church Structure Providing Lay Participation at All Levels

One of the primary characteristics of the Pentecostal church in Latin America is its emphasis on lay participation in the structure of the church. This is very unlike the structure of the Catholic Church and some of the North American born Pentecostal denominations in which the hierarchy has relegated the laity to a very low or insignificant participation in the ministry.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, the indigenous

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<sup>31</sup> For more information on the integration of theory and practice in Pentecostalism, see Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Pentecostals and the Praxis of Liberation: A proposal for Subversive Theological Education," *Transformation* 11:1 (January/March, 1994), pp. 11-15 (14).

<sup>32</sup> Campos, *De la Reforma Protestante a la Pentecostalidad de la Iglesia*, pp. 47-50.

Pentecostal Churches have adopted a different attitude and fully embraced the laity in the structure of the church. On this issue Cheryl Bridges Johns has rightly stated, “the active presence of the Holy Spirit ‘in the Pentecostal congregation’ calls for a radical balance in ministry of males and females, black and whites, rich and poor.”<sup>33</sup>

### 3.8 Mobilization of All Believers in Obedience to Christ

Pentecostals have sought to fulfil the truth of 1 Peter 2:9. The priesthood of all believers becomes the attitude, the objective and the ultimate goal of Christian service. Most prominent Pentecostal leaders in Latin America are lay people. Some of them are professionals who left their field of expertise to dedicate completely to the ministry. Most of them are practitioners in the ministry and did not attend any formal theological school at all. However their success is evident, they have been able to establishment mega-churches across the continent. This is in itself a phenomenon worthy of further study.

### 3.9 Faith in God’s Power to Perform Miracles and in the Gifts of the Spirit

When supernatural phenomena is experienced, Pentecostals are sure that they are under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Signs and wonders are portents that confirm the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.<sup>34</sup> Thus their hearts glow with expectation and conviction that this kind of experience is the revival that leads to the fulfillment of God’s promises before Jesus returns. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are both pursued and exercised for the benefit of the community of faith and as a sign for the unbelievers.

### 3.10 Contextualizing of the Gospel and Church Community

The baptism in the Holy Spirit fills the believer with the love of God for lost humanity, and makes her or him able to leave home, friends and all to share the gospel with his immediate community. When the believer receives the Pentecostal power she or he is enabled to carry the gospel to the hungry, the poor, the needy and the lost. This thrust emerges as a

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<sup>33</sup> Johns, “Pentecostals and the Praxis of Liberation,” p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> More information of this subject can be found in L. Grant McClung, Jr, “‘Try to Get Them Saved’: Revisiting the Paradigm of an Urgent Pentecostal Missiology,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, pp. 30-37 (31).

natural consequence of the Pentecostal experience and the message is quit straightforward, “solo Cristo salva.”

However, along with their strengths, Latin American Pentecostals have observed their own weaknesses. There are notable shortcomings, some of which most of them acknowledge. The lack of well-trained leadership is noticeable. They also bear the problem of numerical growth without the proper biblical teaching and discipleship. In some areas they also tend to center too much power in authoritarian leaders. Therefore, an artificial spirituality may develop, particularly in the charismatic circles. In addition, their liturgy, if there is one, becomes redundant, and there is also a tendency to develop a spirit of legalism in the Christian life.<sup>35</sup>

At this point, if Pentecostals want to continue to experience a sustained church growth, they will have to deal with the above weaknesses, objectively. A qualified training system of leadership, taking all of these elements into serious consideration, must be developed. The truth of the matter is that this process should have been already underway and strategically planned.

#### 4. Emerging Contemporary Issues

It is estimated that Latin America has about fifty-three million evangelicals out of a population of over 400 million.<sup>36</sup> God’s people are on the move, evangelizing, establishing new churches, developing new

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<sup>35</sup> Some characteristics and weaknesses of the Pentecostal faith are observed in two classic studies by Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1967) and Christian Lalive D’Espinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*, trans. Marjorie Sandle (London: Lutterworth, 1969). An Evangelical perspective comes from the writings of the late Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982); *The Church and its Mission: A Shattering Critique* (Wheaton: IL: Tyndale House, 1974); and *Theology of the Crossroads in Latin America* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopoi, 1976). For information on Brazil, see William R. Read and Frank A. Ineson, *Brazil 1980: The Protestant Handbook* (Monrovia: CA: MARC, 1973).

<sup>36</sup> Some estimates surge to sixty-five million out of which seventy-five percent are Pentecostals. Samuel Escobar and other trusted observers rated the general Protestant population in Latin America at forty million. Of these, 75-90% are Pentecostals. See Cleary, “Latin American Pentecostalism,” p. 134. See also David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 768-76.

sensitivities to the social implications of the gospel, and increasingly involved in the political arenas (with mixed results). Pentecostals are committed to self-theologizing and are also obedient to their share of a globalized mission vision.<sup>37</sup> Indeed this is an optimistic account of what the Holy Spirit has been doing among Pentecostals in the Latin American continent.

However, the word of God does not guarantee to the church that peace, prosperity, power and privilege are necessary to her growth. On the contrary, Christ promised that his church would be built in spite of the conflictive forces of Hades. Latin American Pentecostals have lived this reality, and from a context of poverty and powerlessness God has blessed them.<sup>38</sup> Ironically, in the near future, due to internal and external factors, they will face a growing secularism and materialism that may shake their attitude and core of values. In recent years Pentecostals have imported attitudes, habits and leadership styles from the mother churches in North America. They are experiencing the current influence of the Charismatic and neo-Charismatic movements in the midst of a fast changing society. These are some of the newly arising questions. Will this context eat up and neutralize their Pentecostal core of values? Are we seeing a new and dangerous triumphalist<sup>39</sup> "Pentecostal subculture?"

What is more significant is that the growth of the Latin American church is taking place on multiple fronts, with congregations of many denominations growing very fast. "I would say that the church has grown more in the last two years than in the last twenty," says Jose Minay, a

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<sup>37</sup> Núñez and Taylor, *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*, p. 4; see also Daniel E. Grey, "Revive, Argentina!" *Eternity* (July-August 1987), pp. 22-26 (24), and Loren Entz, "Challenges to Abou's Jesus," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 1:1 (January 1986), pp. 46-50 (46). On emerging contemporary issues in Latin America, see *Paz y Esperanza*, Bulletin of the Peace and Hope Commission of the National Council of Peru (1985), and Stephen Sywulka, "A Latin American Evangelical View of Base Communities," *Transformation* 3:3 (July-September 1986), pp. 20-32 (29).

<sup>38</sup> On the subject of contextualization, one excellent book is by John R. W. Stott and Robert T. Coote, eds., *Gospel and Culture* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> I have inserted the word "triumphalist Pentecostal subculture" deliberately. My purpose is to insert a question mark to make Pentecostals think on their attitude towards success and prosperity. The last part of the twentieth century witnessed the development of a dangerous prosperity-oriented mentality, particularly among the emerging prosperity Charismatic geared movement born in prosperous America.

Pentecostal leader whose churches in Chile are growing at forty-five percent a year.

Even the Argentine revival has had its own critics. There are those who are concerned over theology—the validity of supernatural manifestations and practical issues—the desperate shortage of equipped leaders to handle the growth. Yet the hottest and toughest opposition comes from the secular and the Catholic press. Moreover, the false cults are also exploiting the situation, particularly the Mormons who have already sent thousands of new missionaries across the continent. The Jehovah's Witnesses are also quite active.<sup>40</sup> Even spiritism imported from Brazil flourishes in the climate of spiritual hunger and personal emptiness.

Regarding these issues, theologians Samuel Escobar and Guillermo Cook have interacted at length with the broad gamut of matter concerning the social and spiritual life in Latin America that of course includes Pentecostals.<sup>41</sup> Escobar's essays have appeared in a variety of journals and interviews, and his perspective is highly valued in sociological and religious circles. He combines an unusual insight into sociological and religious phenomenology and dynamics, while remaining faithful to the scripture as well as his Latin American roots.<sup>42</sup> Cook, on the other hand, has recently edited *New Face of the Church in Latin America: Between Tradition and Change*, a very profitable series of essays ranging across the ecclesiastical, theological and thematic spectrum of the continent. Cook argues, "the new face of the Church in

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<sup>40</sup> This data can be found in a variety of sources, but primarily from William R. Read, Víctor M. Monterroso, and Harmon A. Johnson, eds., *Latin American Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969) pp. 313-25.

<sup>41</sup> See for instance, Guillermo Cook, "Growing Pains," *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992), pp. 36-37.

<sup>42</sup> The following are some of the articles written on this subject by Samuel Escobar, "A New Reformation," *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992), pp. 30-34; Escobar, "Protestantism Explodes," *Christian History* 11:3 (1992), pp. 42-45. This issue of the journal carries a heading, "What Happened When Columbus and Christianity Collided with the Americas?" Also Escobar, "Mission in Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective," *Missiology: An International Review* 20:2 (April 1992), pp. 241-53; Escobar, "Catholicism and National Identity in Latin America," *Transformation* 8:3 (July/September 1991), pp. 22-30; and Escobar, "Latin America," in *Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Christian Mission*, eds. James M. Philips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 125-38.

Latin America is also largely a Pentecostal story.” However, Cook acknowledges that there is no single face to the Latin American church.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.1 Rapid Numerical Growth

Pentecostal growth in Latin America comprises 75% of the total evangelical growth rate in the continent. The statistics are clear, and although one may quibble over the figures, the record demonstrates unprecedented church growth.<sup>44</sup> While the general population grows at an annual rate of 2.2%, Pentecostals grow at a rate twice that and in some countries three times as fast. This truly is a movement of the Spirit of God. It is also growth with few financial resources, mostly lay participation, relatively few paid pastors, and the general scarcity of formal preparation of those pastors. However, these elements may not continue to be effective in the future as the Pentecostal faith faces a newly and heavily informed world. Perhaps the top priority of the Pentecostal movement of Latin America today is the right equipping of its leadership for the next generation.

Among the most renowned Latin American scholars, Samuel Escobar has suggested some indicators that have made Latin American Pentecostals grow very fast numerically.<sup>45</sup>

- ? Spiritual facts: the free action of the Spirit,
- ? Anthropological reasons: hunger for God,
- ? Sociological elements: they provide identity, and a sense of shelter, security and community in a hostile world,
- ? Pastoral methodology: lay participation,
- ? Psychological and cultural factions: freedom of worship and emotion, and the use of folk music.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Guillermo Cook, ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America: Between Tradition and Change* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), pp. xiii, 268.

<sup>44</sup> All statistics are estimates, plus or minus twenty percent. The total ranges between thirty-seven to forty-five million. We rather err on the side of conservative figures. See Thomas S. Giles, “Forty Million and Counting,” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1992), p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> An account of these elements is found in Samuel Escobar, “Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective,” *Missiology: An International Review* 20:2 (April 1992), pp. 241-53 (247); and John Maust, “Revival in Zacatecas,” *World Pulse* 29:2 (January 20, 1994), pp. 1, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Escobar, “Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective,” p. 247.

These elements have been so successfully observed at Pentecostal congregations, that Protestant, Evangelical and even the Catholic Church have adopted them in their community life and liturgy, particularly in praise and worship. Truly Pentecostals have tremendously influenced the life and ministry of Christianity in Latin America.

#### 4.2 From a Mission Field to a Mission Force

A Pentecostal missionary, Rudy Girón, prophetically stated that the church in Latin America, as well as the church in the two-thirds world has come of age and eventually shifted “from being a mission field to becoming a mission force.”<sup>47</sup> The thrust for world evangelization, on account of the end of the second millennium, also mobilized the Latin American Pentecostals. Estimates suggest that at least three thousand Pentecostal missionaries from Latin America became engaged in cross-cultural service.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, their Latin congregations were able to send most of these cross-cultural missionaries. Giron highlighted this action as a new development. Latin America has become a “mission force.” Pentecostals knew this, and they mobilized themselves, particularly as cross-cultural missionaries. However, they still lacked the desired formal missionary training, and this is their immediate challenge as they proceed to reach out to other cultures in the new millennium.

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<sup>47</sup> This statement was delivered at the Church of God International Conference in Cleveland, TN, in August 1997. Rudy Girón (Guatemala) serves as president of the Eurasian Theological Seminary in Moscow, Russia and he is former president of COMIBAM, the largest missionary organization of Ibero-America born out of the Iberoamerican Missions Congress (COMIBAM), celebrated in Sao Paulo in November 1987. The emphasis of COMIBAM has not been so much evangelism within one’s culture—but rather cross-cultural evangelism and church planting both across Latin America’s thousands of cultural lines as well as to the entire world. Regarding this issue see, C. René Padilla, “Toward the Globalization and Integrity of Mission,” in *Mission in the Nineteen 90’s*, eds. Gerald H. Anderson, James B. Phillips, and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 30-32.

<sup>48</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1993), pp. 62, 648. See the continental report on Latin America, as well as those of individual nations in the region.

#### 4.3 Theological Formation

After the Latin American era of revolution and the rise of the Internet information and communication system, Pentecostals are learning to network as individuals and as institutions for the cause of the kingdom. They have also engaged in higher education in their pursuit toward common concerns and the cause of excellence in Christian service. It is also known that some Latin American Pentecostals have developed educational programs and projects of global scope. However the truth of the matter is that Pentecostals are experiencing a shortage of biblically and theologically trained leaders. In the providence of God, however, this picture is changing, due to the participation of more Pentecostal leaders in a number of international forums for Latin American leaders. One is the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (FTL), a broadly-based fellowship, founded in 1970 and composed of a group of men and women who share a commitment to the word applied in the Latin American context.<sup>49</sup> It must be said that these men and women, participating in many and different educational organizations, offer unusual gifts, leadership and administrative skills, depth of perception and study, pastoral passion and psychological formation.

#### 4.4 Social Concerns

A great deal was said and written over the last quarter of the twentieth century about the isolation that characterized the Latin American Pentecostals *vis-à-vis* the deep socio-economic problems of the area. For example in the analysis of Chilean Pentecostalism in the years 1965-1966, Christian Lalive d'Espinay discovered, among other things, that the majority of pastors believed that the gospel should not be mixed with politics. They also contended that the Protestant church should not concern itself with the socio-political problems of the country, to the point of not even talking about them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> One of the FTL's major contributions has been in the publication of papers from theological conferences. One of the most recent books is Pablo Alberto Deiros, ed., *Los Evangélicos y El Poder Político en América Latina* (Grand Rapids, MI: Nueva Creación, 1990). Another book is C. René Padilla, ed., *Nuevas Alternativas de Educación Teológica* (Grand Rapids, MI: Nueva Creación, 1992) dealing with themes of theological education.

<sup>50</sup> Christian Lalive D'Espinay, *El Refugio de las Masas*, trans. Narciso Amanillo (Santiago de Chile: Editorial del Pacífico, 1968), p. 157.



It is well known that Pentecostal thinking reflects a polarization between the spiritual and the material, the church and the world, Christ and society. Traditionally Pentecostals rejected the present world in order to enjoy the anticipation of the future one. In Latin America this dichotomy emerged as a result of the Roman Catholic tradition allied with the upper class in its desire to subdue the lower classes. This was the spark that ignited the desire for liberation among those who longed for a better world where justice and equality would be practiced. Naturally the Pentecostal movement in its early stages was unable to respond to the injustice in the structures of the world and meekly submitted, or was forced to submit to the powers that ruled over them, whether they were political, social or religious. Now that liberation theology is no longer a threat, some Latin American scholars have begun to research and to reflect upon the commitment and participation of the Church in social concerns and the practice of justice.<sup>51</sup>

It is no secret that, because of its extreme apolitical position, the Pentecostal movement in Latin America has not properly questioned the established order. Nevertheless, there are other responses to the question regarding the role Pentecostals may have played in the continent's historical political process. A new generation of Pentecostals is emerging, with a hermeneutic concerned with the holistic needs of man.<sup>52</sup> There are voices also clamoring for social justice and opting for serving and defending the poor and the weak.<sup>53</sup> At this point, awareness and analysis of issues related to social justice and the options for the poor are still incipient, but continue to emerge among the grass-roots leadership. By the same token, theological education, pastoral formation and Christian service are now being challenged and will continue to be

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<sup>51</sup> See for instance, Darío López, *La Misión Liberadora de Jesús: Una Lectura Misiológica del Evangelio de Lucas* (Lima, Perú: Ediciones Puma, 1997), pp. 101-109; Benedicta Da Silva, *Benedicta Da Silva: An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story of Politics and Love* as told to Medea Benjamin and Maisa Mendoca (Oakland, CA: A Food First Book, 1997), pp. 193-201; Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit: Towards an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 143-62.

<sup>52</sup> López, *La Misión Liberadora de Jesús*, pp. 11-40.

<sup>53</sup> For more information on this subject, see World Evangelical Fellowship, ed., *The Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1982), pp. 43-44. Also see Peter Kuzmic, "History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views," in *In Word and Deed*, ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 130-46 (144).

challenged to adjust to the fullness of the gospel in the context of the church and society.

#### Conclusion: The Opportunity of the New Paradigms

At the end of the twentieth century Pentecostals were faced with the trends of a postmodern society. Relativism, liberalism, materialism, secularism and individualism became the common denominator of a world in continuous and accelerated change. On the other hand, there is no doubt the world started to experience a major spiritual revival as the millennium ended. Most members of the Christian church were experiencing unusual levels of concern with the natural eschatological implications of the times.

At this point, it is clear that the Pentecostal church finds itself at the crossroads. There will be a segment of the Christian church that will become satisfied, rich and established. This church will continue to emphasize prosperity as the result of a successful faith and practice of the Christian faith, particularly in the western societies. This attitude will eventually permeate the upper class of Latin America and other areas of the world. Pentecostals and Charismatics may embrace this trend, and eventually wind up in a post-Christian society in a postmodern world. Consequently, the Christian movement may experience a worldwide attrition. By that time the spiritual level may reach its lowest ebb, where secularism, supported by the explosion of incredible advances in information and technology, may endanger the health of the church.

On the other hand, there will be a solid and militant constituency of the body of Christ, mostly Pentecostals, that will remain fully committed to the practice and teachings of the Bible, and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They will interpret the arrival of the new century as the greatest opportunity ever granted to the church. However, this level of commitment may cost enormous sacrifice on the part of the great-commission committed Christians. Thus persecution may be another element that will require serious consideration in the church. In the last five years, reliable sources estimate a sustained increase of persecuted believers. Paul Marshall reports that some two hundred million Christians in the world are members of persecuted groups in countries where religious persecution includes imprisonment, beatings, torture,

mob violence and death.<sup>54</sup> In addition some four hundred million live in situations of nontrivial discrimination and legal repression, and though this persecution is increasing notably in Asia, it can also be found in Latin America under different forms of discrimination or repression.<sup>55</sup>

Historically, Pentecostals have operated successfully under persecution. In the twenty-first century, however, high levels of spirituality and success will be measured in relationship to the proper use and application of planning, organizing and strategizing in times of crisis or persecution. Pentecostals then will have to evolve into a movement that will operate maturely and in the mind of the Holy Spirit, in a new millennium of unprecedented opportunities facing enormous new paradigms.

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Marshall, "Persecution of Christians in the Contemporary World," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22:1 (January 1998), pp. 23-32 (24)

<sup>55</sup> David Barret, ed., *The World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 777 reports that by 1980, 605 million Christians are "living under political restrictions on religious liberty" and some 225 million are "experiencing severe state interference in religion, obstruction or harassment." The latter happened under the former communist countries which regimes eventually collapsed a decade later.

These movements were ideologically undernourished by the liberal and republican spirit of the Enlightenment; the European immigrants and their descendants were fundamental actors. In the second half of the 18th century, 13 British colonies in North America refused to pay the taxes imposed by the British Parliament, leading to the War of Independence (1775-1783), to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and to the passing of the constitution of the USA in 1787. This altered geopolitical situation and the postcolonial dependencies despite the formal independence of Latin American nations together with large social inequalities within society led to a second paradigm of national liberation in the 20th century which could perhaps be described as the classical one. The Italian Pentecostal movement has its own originality in the international Pentecostal setting since its origins. The contact with American Pentecostalism was only initial. Italians set their own line of conduct because of their ethnic peculiarity and, a fact held in common with all of Latin Pentecostalism, were characterized by the strong anticlerical slant resulting from the great opposition they encountered. Palma has the merit of having illustrated and demonstrated these features with a wealth of arguments. We must be very grateful to him because with his research, Italian Pentecostalis... Independence movements in Latin America and the United States have generated interesting discussions in historical circles over the past two centuries. Both wars of independence featured colonists in the New World revolting against their European overlords, eventually leading to the creation of new nation-states. Once they attained the former, they were able to achieve the latter, as opposed to South American countries, who won their political independence but did not obtain individual freedoms. Additionally, in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the signers referred to a brotherhood of sorts with the inhabitants of Britain and mostly directed their grievances towards the British Crown as opposed to British people as a whole.