

## **Kingdom Culture Christianity**

How the church must address ethnocentricity and nativism

The greatest mosaic in all of existence is the Kingdom of God. Diversity and multi-ethnicity is not an attempt to incorporate politically correct ideas into the Church but rather a manifestation of the Love of God towards all his children. Thus, all congregations and ministries have a moral and biblical impetus to constantly reflect upon the biblical narrative found in Acts 2. The formation of the church came via the avenue of empowering the early leaders with diversity of languages permitting the successful outreach to various communities. Pentecost was a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual experience.

Today, many congregations incorporate nativist threads within Sunday morning liturgy. Many white, Latino and African American congregations celebrate the cultural context as well as the faith experience. Although, in itself, such celebration does not harm the collective purpose of the church, emerging American nativism within the church does concern many scholars.

As we continue to thread the Hispanic American and ethnic Narrative, we find ourselves negotiating a historical juxtaposition between the preservation of our cultures and the building of His Kingdom. Can the next generation of church planters focus on a DNA that includes a multi-ethnic component? As a Pastor friend in Ohio once declared, we do need a multi-ethnic church with one culture, The Kingdom culture not necessarily a multi-cultural church. Pastors who dare to address multi-ethnicity find backlash not just in white dominated congregations but also in ethnic congregations.

## **The Latino Elephant in the Room**

Hence, the Latino Church is strategically and prophetically situated to provide leadership to the collective Evangelical church in America by both incorporating the tenants of the Good Samaritan Parable and nullifying the MYSPACE.COM version of Christianity. Yet, the elephant in the room is the amount of consternation and angst that exists in the Latino Church particularly in Pastors and leaders who see the exodus of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Hispanic American Christians( especially leaders who leave Hispanic Churches to non Latino congregations), as wrong and egregious behavior. Simply stated, the concern in the hearts of many Latino Christian leaders was expressed recently by a Pentecostal leader addressing hundreds of Latino Pentecostal Pastors when he stated "We must take whatever steps necessary to stop the exodus of our young leaders to Anglo churches. It is wrong and we must address this issue". Ergo, are some in the Latino Church harboring a segregationist spirit that focuses more on the preservation of the culture than the Building of His Kingdom.?

Pastor Steve Perea believes so. Rev. Perea is an Assemblies of God ordained Hispanic American Pastor from Manteca, Ca. Undoubtedly, one of America's

premier church planters with church plants throughout different parts of the country. Steve's own congregation of approximately 2500 worshippers, reflects the mosaic of diversity he wholeheartedly believes in. "I have been ostracized and looked down upon because I ventured to plant churches beyond the Hispanic community", declared the Pastor. " I have been called a traitor to our people only because I wanted to see churches planted that gathered all races, backgrounds and tongues in one place to Know God and make him Known", stated Steve. "The only reason I facilitate a Spanish service is because of the language barrier" he added. Rev. Perea expressed his concern of an ethnocentric mindset by emphasizing that segregating congregations for any thing other than language is against the very heart of the Gospel.

Key Evangelical leaders see the forcing of 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Hispanic Christians to stay within the confines of a Spanish speaking only church as a detriment to the incorporation of a Kingdom mindset. "We are doing a great disservice to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Latino Young People by forcing them to stay within the confines of a First Generation Latino Church", declared Rev. Dr. Sergio Navarrette, Superintendent of The Southern Pacific Latin American District. "We must present a Global perspective of the Gospel rather than an ethno exclusive version. This is why we are encouraging our Pastors to begin English services, and cater not only to Latino who are learning English but all in the community who speak the language. In our District, we have added an English Executive Presbyter to minister to the needs of our 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Pastors and ministers", added Navarrette.

In conclusion, Latino leaders need not fear when our young people venture into congregations where Hillsong and "Great is Thy Faithfulness" fill the sanctuary rather than Marcos Barrientos and "En la Cruz". At the end of the day, the Latino Church may very well be sending Ambassadors who will not abandon their Hispanic Heritage at the door of First Assembly but rather expose it in full and rich color in order to add to the Mosaic of this great collective we call the Kingdom of God.

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