

Revival or Reformation

How the Latino church is transforming Christianity

To say that the Latino Pentecostal community is impacting America would be an understatement. The ethnic church, particularly the Hispanic segment, leads a reformation that at the end of the day will provoke Catholics to be more Charismatic, Evangelicals to embrace diverse worship, and main-line denominations to return to biblical orthodoxy. Latinos exhibit little interest in capturing a former Glory and reviving old models, patterns, and narratives that died or faded. Rather, the Hispanic Church seeks to present a distinctive brand of Christianity, a 21st century reformation.

Worship Reformation with *Sabor*

Rev. Saturnino Gonzalez pastors a Hispanic Mega Church in Orlando, Florida. The 4,000 member congregation exhibits the very DNA of a church committed to reforming the collective body. "I do not lose my culture when I come to Christ, I incorporate it", stated Gonzalez. Accordingly, Pastor Nino, as his congregants call him, believes that Worship is the key to ministering and attracting Hispanics and that the Latino community is transforming how America worships. "We are adding *sabor* or flavor to the songs we sing and how we praise", explained Gonzalez. The Recent Pew Research validates that very point. According to the research *Religious expressions associated with the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are a key attribute of worship for Hispanics in all the major religious traditions -- far more so than among non-Latinos. Moreover, the growth of the Hispanic population is leading to the emergence of Latino-oriented churches across the country.*

Catholic Reformation with *Tongues*

When Martin Luther posted his grievances on the doors in Wittenberg, the Protestant Reformation began. Today, Latinos lead a new reformation but not by opposing the Catholic church but by injecting it with a Charismatic/Pentecostal Thread. Above all, the most striking fact is that there are more Latino Catholics who speak in other tongues or identify themselves with a Pentecostal/Charismatic experience than non Catholics. Pew surveyed over 4,000 Latinos and discovered that *Renewalist Christianity, which places special emphasis on God's ongoing, day-to-day intervention in human affairs through the person of the Holy Spirit, is having a major impact on Hispanic Christianity. Among Latino Protestants, renewalism is more than twice as prevalent as among their non-Latino counterparts. A majority (54%) of Hispanic Catholics describe themselves as charismatic Christians, making them more than four times as likely as non-Latino Catholics to identify with renewalist Christianity. The implications of this are particularly important for the Catholic Church, given that the rapidly growing Latino flock is practicing a distinctive form of Catholicism.* Recently, Pope Benedict addressed the Brazilian faithful and identified Evangelicalism as the greatest threat to Catholicism. How does this change the

way Evangelicals perceive Catholics? “As a Latino Pentecostal, I grew up believing that Catholics were doomed to hell because of the idolatry and prayers to Mary. Today, I understand that the majority of those same Latino Catholics pray in tongues like I do, worship with the same enthusiasm and desire the same personal distinctive relationship with Christ we all long for”, explained Rev. Israel Bermudez, Associate Pastor of the Pentecostal Church of God in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. According to Bermudez, this phenomenon facilitates the bridging of the gap between Catholics and Evangelicals. Catholics no longer represent the anathema to evangelicalism. In the Latino Community, Evangelicals and Catholics are Charismatic brothers.

Biblical Reformation with Orthodoxy

As Latinos become card carrying members of congregations, one distinctive contextualizes the impetus and bases for the faith experience; biblical orthodoxy. “Hispanic Christians believe that the word of God is the final authority. Any deviation is deemed as heretical and unacceptable”, stated Dr. Angel Nunez, Senior Pastor of a Multi-cultural congregation in Baltimore, Maryland. Nunez added that while the Anglo church debates whether miracles, healings and Pentecostal experiences exists today, the Latino church sees these arguments as futile because they exists in the daily narrative of Hispanic believer. “We do not need someone to water down the Gospel for us. We don’t need the Gospel to be presented as for the spiritually impaired, we need rhema word that will reveal biblical truths and transformative principles”, added Nunez.

In conclusion, Revivals demand the resurrection of dead and forsaken models, patterns and experiences. Reformations demand a declaration, an abrupt and confrontational demand against the status quo. Today, across America, the ethnic church approaches the Wittenberg doors of America’s religious institutions and posts the demands for Worship that will lift the soul, experiences that will empower The Spirit and a biblical journey that will catapult a life. While the non ethnic church seeks to revive the old, the ethnic church arises and declares “Behold, I do a New Thing.. Saith The Lord.”

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez is the President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, The Hispanic NAE, serving 15 million Latino Born Again Christians and 18,000 Churches by providing Leadership, Fellowship, Networking, Partnerships and Public Policy Advocacy.