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Wired for Worship

By Sammy Rodríguez

Why is the emerging ethnic church so open to charismatic/Pentecostal expression?

In the next 20 years, the ethnic church will become more charismatic and continue to emphasize the experiential, supernatural and prophetic elements of the Christian faith, while the nonethnic church will embrace the practical, cognitive and rudimentary components of the faith. The question is, "Why?"

Is there embedded in the multicultural church a "spiritual DNA" or affinity that embraces the Spirit-filled, prophetic and supernatural elements of the gospel? Gaston Espinosa, one of America's pre-eminent evangelical scholars, believes so.

"Latinos are attracted to Pentecostalism because it offers salvation, healing and the promise of hope for a better tomorrow," Espinosa notes.

In addition, Espinosa argues that the Pentecostal narrative offers ordinary men and women the opportunity to become prophets—men and women who seek to make a difference in this life.

"Practically speaking, Pentecostalism affords men and women the opportunity to start their own unique ministries and to take God at His Word by practicing the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14."

The evangelical scholar also believes that the Pentecostal movement is making these inroads because it offers a home, a family and a strong sense of community where everyone is counted. Emerging ethnic leaders are becoming more charismatic while white emerging leaders are becoming more seeker-sensitive. *Why?*

Espinosa sees the emerging diversity in the gospel presentation as a result of both groups of leaders being driven by their parishioners and communities. He notes that Latinos and other ethnic leaders serve congregations that want direct, unmediated experiences with God while white leaders are moving toward a more seeker-sensitive church because they believe that's what society is looking for. Nonethnic leaders believe that if they offer the same kind of direct experiences with God found in Pentecostalism that people will be turned off.

"They are right to the degree that some Pentecostal churches do allow extreme practices that are not done decently and in order," Espinosa admits. "However, when a Pentecostal service is led by the Holy Spirit and a deeply spiritual but disciplined pastor and worship team, the experience can truly usher you into what seems like the very presence of God."

Espinosa also acknowledges that there is a very fine line between powerful worship and extremism, and for this reason a pastor and a worship leader must work very diligently to make sure that the Holy Spirit is given free reign and that God is given the glory.

Finally, Espinoza reflects on the historical and cultural differences between the church leaders by pointing out that Euro-Americans tend to be more rational, propositional and critical of the church,

while Latinos tend to be more open to spirituality and things religious. The Protestant-driven Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries never took place in Latin America. Faith is part of our Latin American identity, a constituent part of who we are as an individual, a community and as a people.

Others see the emerging Latino church as the Peter and John of the 21st-century world.

"We do not have silver or gold, but we have the Spirit", declares Jesse Miranda, a prominent Hispanic evangelical leader. "Whether we like it or not, the future will be Pentecostal, prophetic and practical."

Miranda also believes that the emerging Latino church can bridge the gap between suburbia and the barrio.

"It's time that Latino believers transition from being consumers to being producers," he notes. "More than ever, America needs Latino born-again leaders to arise and contextualize our absolutes."

We can all learn by looking across the great ponds. In Africa and Latin America, churches are becoming more open to the charismatic, Spirit-driven discourse, while in America we find ourselves at a fork in the road. We have a choice in this early 21st-century story. Multiethnic and immigrant community congregations will no longer be the consumers in the church but the producers of leaders, ministries and viable relationships that will save our nation, protect our faith heritage and usher in a revival of unbridled proportions.

Hence, at the end of the day, the Latino and ethnic church may emerge as the prophetic community that will bridge the black and the white, rich and poor, evangelical and Pentecostal, while simultaneously embracing William Seymour, Aimee Semple McPherson and Katherine Kuhlman with Charles Spurgeon, Charles Finney and John Wesley. Thus emerges a church not characterized by color or creed, denomination or theological affinity but rather by one earth-shattering and heaven-provoking descriptor: glorious.

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