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“SPIRITED” ENGAGEMENT: LATIN AMERICAN FAITH
AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EMANCIPATIVE PENTECOSTALISM

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“SPIRITED” ENGAGEMENT: LATIN AMERICAN FAITH
AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EMANCIPATIVE PENTECOSTALISM

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the
Dedman College

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with a

Major in Religion and Culture

by

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December 21, 2019

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Pentecostalism is a prominent form of Christianity around the world that is increasingly pervasive in the Global South. One of the persistent issues that obscures accurate understanding of the movement is the question of whether such a spiritually-oriented faith gives attention to social realities. This dissertation identifies a broad spectrum of Latin America Pentecostal social-ethical engagement in order to complicate stereotypes and reveal a natural orientation toward public witness. It shows that Pentecostalism is too complex for broad generalization, and it draws on leading voices from within the movement to articulate a call to increasing efforts for social justice.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was raised a Pentecostal. Since childhood in the 1980s, I recall my dad encouraging me to speak in tongues at early-morning prayer meetings. He had been ordained by the Assemblies of God in 1977, and pastored several Pentecostal congregations. Our family made up the worship leadership team: my mother played the piano, my three older sisters sang, and I played the drums. I grew in the tradition myself and ended up at a Pentecostal-Charismatic Bible college in the late 1990s. It was there in 1998 that I met a beautiful Colombian girl named Martica and as of this writing have celebrated twenty years of marriage with her. I also had the opportunity to travel across Latin America as a musician with a well-known Mexican-Christian artist during those years (1997-2002), and Martica and I spent the next seventeen years or so (1999-2016) in full-time service of several Neo-Pentecostal congregations.

Something changed. In September of 2011, I decided to pursue further academic training. Years of vocational ministry had left me with more questions than answers, so I returned to undergraduate work in the spring of 2012. I desired first to understand my own religious roots and determine my way forward from there. The undergraduate study led to a master's program, and then to a Ph.D. I thought that I had "read myself out of the tradition;" however, encounters with Latin American liberation and Pentecostal theologians helped me see Pentecostalism in both an old and a new light, allowing me to live into a transformed faith identity.

This work, then, represents my own curiosity about my religious roots, the challenging navigation of balancing confession and academic religious study, about the country and culture of my wife and all those beautiful people I met while traveling across Latin America, and about making sense of a faith that is easily reduced by many to nothing more than escapist spirituality offering false hope to uneducated people. Though scholars have sought to disambiguate the stereotypical images of this tradition, I find it is often persistently misunderstood by both lay observers and scholars who equally view it as socially and ethically anemic. I disagree with this understanding and I hope to offer forceful arguments to the contrary.

At the end of the day, I view Pentecostal faith as a potentially potent force for holistic living for millions from all walks of life and across the globe. I see it as a particularly empowering movement for the poor and marginalized who are perpetually dehumanized by relentless social, political and economic forces. It is my hope that this work will shed light specifically on aspects of what it means within Latin American communities and how that meaning shapes the ways they live in their precarious worlds.

I offer my deepest gratitude to my mentor, committee chair, and friend, Dr. Harold Recinos; were it not for his steady guidance and encouragement I would never have made it this far. Thanks to my wife Martica for listening to me carry on about this project for years, and for offering me the most wonderful window onto the beauties of Colombian culture. I am grateful to all the faculty members who have guided my efforts and cultivated my abilities. Many thanks are also due my family and friends who are too many to enumerate here. Finally, I would be remiss were I not to mention my wonderful Latin American brothers and sisters who shared moments of their lives with me so that I could catch an empathic glimpse of their worlds.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Pentecostalism is often stereotypically envisioned as a form of Christian faith so concerned with “other-worldly salvation” that social, economic, and political realities are entirely overlooked, or at least seriously underemphasized. This supposed soteriological fixation is said to negate the importance of lived historical realities and vital civic engagement. “One of the most common criticisms against Pentecostal missions,” according to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “is its alleged lack of social concern.”¹ At its origins Pentecostalism was a millenarian movement focused on the imminent return of Christ, thus it was not primarily concerned with corporeal realities as much as it was centered on the salvation of souls. Amos Yong acknowledges that “pentecostals who have been shaped by dispensationalist eschatology have emphasized missions and evangelism over political engagement.”² Despite its roots in millenarianism, Pentecostalism today, in some of its forms, diverges from its past. There is a growing concern for the historical realities Pentecostals face, especially within contexts such as Latin America where impoverished socio-economic realities foster crushing conditions of marginality.

¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 179.

² Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 5.

Today, there are “Pentecostals” which are far too complex to be generalized as socially disengaged and politically conservative, so it is inaccurate to paint its adherents with such broad strokes. Pentecostals, according to Allan H. Anderson,

have been accused of an apocalyptic spirituality and isolation that withdraws from ‘worldly’ issues like politics and the struggle for liberation and justice, and of proclaiming a gospel that either spiritualizes or individualizes social problems.³

This study explores how Pentecostalism shapes the socio-ethical and civic action of its adherents, and examines ways its influence can be observed at the ideational, material, and behavioral levels. It centers specifically on Latina/o forms of Pentecostalism in Latin America (Colombia) and Latinx Pentecostalism in the United States. Providing examples of Latina/o Pentecostalism in Latin America with Latinx Pentecostalism in the immigrant context of the United States allows one to view cultural and contextual distinctions: to observe ways that socio-cultural contexts impact and shape lived religion. The examples provide opportunities to observe ways that Pentecostals respond socially and civically from their faith-based world-views within different cultural contexts. I argue: 1) that dimensions of Pentecostal theology, coupled with aspects of Latin American cultures, are inherently oriented toward life within human history, and 2) Pentecostal material practices are embodied and lived publicly beyond the confines of religious spaces. My examination of lived religion among Latin American communities in Colombia and the U.S. reveals examples of these orientations in relationship to social, civic and political engagement in the world.

³ Allan Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 283.

Pentecostal faith saturates the entirety of the lives of its adherents. Pentecostals do not distinguish between “sacred” and “profane,” but understand the world to be within the domain of the “kingdom of God.” They also understand themselves to be empowered by the “Spirit of God” within this domain, and to be divinely equipped by the “Spirit” to perform all of life’s functions as a means of spiritual devotion to God. Speaking of the piety of early Pentecostals, Wacker states: “When believers entered the realm of daily affairs, they considered themselves aliens at best, pilgrims passing through foreign territory.”⁴ There is a sense that even the mundane choices of the everyday can and should be guided by the voice of the Spirit. In light of this understanding, *all* aspects of life begin to take on spiritual significance. Pentecostal pneumatology centers on “a distinct work of the Spirit which effects charismatic activity in the life of the believer.”⁵ Consequently, every part of the “Spirit-filled” believer’s life, both individual and social, is profoundly shaped by faith in the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

Early Pentecostals longed for “personal holiness,” and “power for service.”⁶ They desired the “gifts of the Spirit” along with supernatural healing. “These yearnings fueled interest in a Holy Spirit who was neither abstract nor remote but constantly and personally active.”⁷ The intention was not to diminish the work of Christ in any way, but rather, to underscore the prominent role of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the other two persons of the Trinity. These

⁴ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below, Early Pentecostals And American Culture*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 19.

⁵ Harold D. Hunter, *Spirit-Baptism: A Pentecostal Alternative* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), xi.

⁶ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana, IL: University Of Illinois Press, 1993), 25.

⁷ Ibid.

emphases of “holiness” and “empowerment” remain central to Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Neo-Pentecostal identities. It is precisely this empowering work of the Spirit which is understood to equip the Pentecostal believer with divine capacity for any and every vocation, be it work within the church or beyond the church walls.

1.1 Terms

Since the late nineteenth century, a movement variously known as Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement, and Neo-Pentecostalism has taken a place at the forefront of Christianity, and world religions, across the globe. Second only in size to Catholicism, Pentecostalism has become mammoth in number and is often regarded as the fastest growing religious movement in the world. “According to often-quoted, controversial and undoubtedly inflated estimates, there were over 600 million adherents worldwide in 2010 found in almost every country in the world.”⁸ It is this explosive growth that has drawn the attention of scholars from within the young tradition, as well as interested outsiders. In short, this is a relatively new field of study, and consequently it is drawing a great deal of attention. It is to this burgeoning body of scholarly attention that this dissertation is intended to contribute.

Before going further, it is important to define some key terms in order to determine the parameters of this project. Pentecostalism itself is difficult to define. Here I adopt an intersubjective approach. I define Pentecostalism as a vibrant expression of the Christian faith characterized by certain theological markers. Among these are: speaking in tongues, and the belief in divine healing; the expectation of the in-breaking of the divine into everyday life as

⁸ Allan H. Anderson, 1.

manifested in both the mundane and the miraculous, and an experiential approach to worship characterized by an understanding of intimate union with God as a tangible reality within the present which is accessible by means of the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.⁹

Pentecostals vary widely in the ways they engage in the public sphere. I will use a three-part conceptual apparatus I developed as a typology to articulate a broad range of variation across Latin American Pentecostalism. This is important because

Latin American Pentecostalism is not some monolithic, homogenous bloc across the continent, and such views are unsophisticated and lack nuance. Rather, there are several expressions of Pentecostalism . . . leading to a diversity of political outlook and responses.¹⁰

First, there are increasing numbers of those who exemplify *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.¹¹

Many of these adherents engage in rigorous religious reflection from both academic and confessional perspectives. These Pentecostals often draw upon theological traditions such as liberation theology to critique and guide Pentecostalism from within the tradition. They articulate pointed analyses of corrupt social structures, and suggest ways to appropriate Pentecostal faith as a means of addressing those structures. They also reclaim the radical boundary-crossing DNA of the early church and early Pentecostalism. The outspoken witness of these adherents issues forth

⁹ I am aware that practices such as speaking in tongues are often associated with Classical Pentecostalism in the U.S. context, but I have included this practice here because the Pentecostals I observed incorporate it into their ritual lives.

¹⁰ Calvin L. Smith, "Pentecostal presence, power and politics in Latin America," *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, v.30:3, 223.

¹¹ Pentecostal scholar-leaders such as Eldin Villafañe, Samuel Solivan, Arlene Sanchez-Walsh, Sammy Alfaro, Elizabeth Ríos, Gastón Espinosa, Darío Lopez, and Raymond Rivera provide examples of *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.

in an *emancipative Pentecostalism*.¹² Secondly, there are also those who practice a *spirituality of near engagement*.¹³ These Pentecostals lean toward social justice initiatives, but do not necessarily identify and articulate their progressive orientations overtly. While it may be difficult to locate their progressive tendencies under cover of conservative theological positions and certain political perspectives, the latent potential for instigating sociopolitical change is underlying. They tend toward progressive social ethics and civic engagement, but have not come into the full articulation of a socio-politically radical voice. Still another type are those who do indeed appropriate their faith tradition for public life, but often practice a *spirituality of the status quo*.¹⁴ Rather than critiquing the structures of power responsible for the perpetuation of injustices in the world, these Pentecostals choose to comply with such systems. What is more, it is precisely their interpretation of biblical scripture that underpins their compliance. These multiple layers of Pentecostal identity point to the complexity and ambiguity of social-ethical orientations within the movement.

¹² Emancipative Pentecostalism mirrors the prophetic character of the Old Testament prophets and the Jesus of History who boldly spoke against structures of violence in favor of justice and God's shalom. I will refer to this kind of emancipative witness as social engagement, public engagement, and public witness. See Norman K. Gottwald, "From Biblical Economies to Modern Economies: A Bridge over Troubled Waters," *Churches In Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, William K. Tabb, ed. (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1986); Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001); Bruce C. Birch, *Hosea, Joel, and Amos* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love* (1963; repr., Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

¹³ Donald Miller and Tesunao Yamamori identified many Pentecostal ministries across the global south that could be characterized by a *spirituality of near engagement*. My ethnographic examples in chapter six also fall primarily into this category.

¹⁴ Some Pentecostals exhibit a *spirituality of the status quo*. For example, Sam Rodriguez, President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), advises Donald Trump and speaks out in support of his immigration policies.

The term *social ethics* here refers to human awareness of and responsibility for human and civil rights, as well as civic responsibility. As Wariboko puts it, “social ethics is about identifying concrete problems that threaten the moral fabric of a community and seeking to address them with the best of theological, philosophical, and social scientific resources.”¹⁵ These dimensions of responsibility are precisely those which Pentecostals are stereotypically accused of neglecting. It will be seen, however, that the Latin American Pentecostals who participated in this study are acutely aware of violations of human and civil rights and are concerned with addressing these violations through the lens of their faith. In short, this study will explore the inherent potential of Pentecostalism to foster ethical and civic engagement among Latin Americans by giving attention to leadership postures and religious practices, and by exploring ways such postures and practices give rise to social and civic action.

The term *civic* must also be examined given its use under the broad rubric of social-ethical responsibility. This word is typically understood in terms of political engagement; however, its basic meaning refers to “the duties or activities of people in relation to their town, city, or local area.”¹⁶ Such a definition encompasses far more than political action alone, for it points to community responsibility at any and every level. Ruano draws on the work of Putnam, Wuthnow, and Loveland to articulate the breadth of this concept:

For Robert Putnam civic engagement is “people’s connections with the life of their communities, not merely with politics.” Robert Wuthnow defines it as behavior understood by actors as engaging and maintaining the civic order in pursuit of the common good. Loveland goes further and proposes that civic engagement is “individuals working toward a shared vision of a good society, and engaging in the social, public acts

¹⁵ Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 157.

¹⁶ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, “Civic,” accessed April 11, 2019.

that are required to achieve the desired ends while at the same time submitting to the basic authority of a yet more broadly shared civic culture.” More specifically, Loveland adds that much civic engagement is directed at causing change.¹⁷

Ruano captures the reach of civic engagement as that which is driven by an impulse to shape society at every level. Such an impulse certainly encompasses political action, yet it does not find its limits therein. Any efforts intended to shape and cultivate society for the better, be they charitable, structural, or political, may be swept beneath the umbrella category of civic engagement.

The term *charitable* is utilized to describe efforts to address social problems such as hunger, homelessness, health care, and illiteracy through assistance programs. These laudable efforts are vitally important and needed, yet they often fail to foster systemic solutions that would ultimately lead to the cessation of the structural causes underlying the social problems.¹⁸ Structural efforts point to the exertion of energies to fundamentally change economic, academic, and healthcare systems and transform the prevailing conditions of life on the margins by addressing the perpetuating structures head-on. Transforming societal structures calls for robust public engagement.

In explication of the term *political*, Yong points to the “Greek root polis” which refers to “. . . human life in the public square, where the various dimensions of religion, culture, society, economics, and government converge and interface.”¹⁹ I appropriate this understanding of the

¹⁷ Norman Eli Ruano, “The Holy Ghost Beyond the Church Walls: Latino Pentecostalism(s), and Civic Engagement,” A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School Program in Sociology at Loyola University Chicago, 2011.

¹⁸ Anthropologists refer to this as structural violence.

¹⁹ Yong, xix.

term with a particular focus on political action. This understanding of political action indicates engagement with various levels of public life that go beyond “spiritual” approaches to structural change. Such public engagement involves methods which marry spirituality with concrete action for social justice.

Lastly, when referring to Latin American communities I will use the terms Latino/a, Latina/o, and Latinx. Latino/a and Latina/o are used interchangeably to refer to communities specifically within the context of Latin America. I alternate between the different endings in an effort to give equal treatment to gendered language. I utilize Latinx as a gender neutral term to refer to Latin American communities specifically in the context of the United States. Using Latinx allows me to distinguish between Latin American communities in South America and the U.S., and avoid using the term “Hispanic” which I will show in chapter three is a freighted and problematic label. As is evident here in my terminological explanation, I also sometimes use the term “Latin American” to broadly refer to both South American Latino/as and the U.S. Latinx community.

In summary, throughout this dissertation I will deploy the typology and terms I have outlined and defined here. The definitions of these terms and the typological distinctions between various and different forms of Pentecostalism will provide me with an analytical framework within which to interpret a range of public engagement across variations of the tradition.

1.2 Methods

This work is not concerned with the veracity of Pentecostal claims, or the efficacy of this form of Christianity as a faith system. It does not center on qualitative claims regarding

Pentecostal spiritual traditions. The task here is to observe how this religious tradition inspires adherents to work for justice in the world. From an anthropological perspective, there are no grounds for assertions about the validity of any religious claims concerning the transcendent or the veracity of “sacred” texts, given that such claims can in no way be verified empirically.

While it is important to understand the claims of Pentecostals on their own terms, this exploration centers on the potential potency of these claims for results within material human realities. This work does not grapple with the veracity of theological claims, but rather seeks to discover whether such claims have the potential to move human beings toward action for social justice. In other words, it seeks to answer the questions: “what is the concrete resulting value of Pentecostal faith? And, what latent potential for justice is contained therein?”

To these ends, field research deployed anthropological methods that included participant observation in public Pentecostal events, and informal conversations with pastors, church leaders, and lay people in order to uncover dimensions of Pentecostal faith which are vital for grasping a more robust understanding of its capacity for shaping social ethics. In addition, the research also included textual analysis of the current body of Pentecostal literature to seek a deeper understanding of the ideational, material, and behavioral dimensions of Pentecostalism. While I draw on insight from anthropological literature and approaches to the study of culture, this work is interdisciplinary rather than ethnographic. I endeavor to engage in a theo-cultural reading of Pentecostalism by looking at its expression in two Colombian and a Latinx religious context. To sharpen the knowledge content that arises from my participant observation in these settings, I draw on a wide body of interdisciplinary literature focused on Pentecostalism.

I engaged in participant observation over the course of three years (2016-2019) in both Colombia and Dallas. I made two trips to Cali, Colombia to participate in services and engage in conversations in order to examine Latino/a Pentecostalism in the context of Latin America. I followed up on these two trips with phone calls to certain key respondents with which I was able to develop rapport while in Cali. In addition to participating in many services at the Dallas location, I also visited the church offices several times for informal conversations with staff members and congregants.

In Dallas, the research focused on a first-generation Latinx immigrant Neo-Pentecostal congregation. For a period of approximately ten months I engaged in participant observation several times a week as a pianist for the church, and I had many opportunities to engage in informal conversations during that period. At times the line between participation and observation was blurry, but the opportunity to engage as a “member” of the community provided me with insights that have been included in this dissertation.

Some words about reflexivity and the response affects potentially fostered by my presence in the ethnographic space are warranted. My perspective has been shaped by a twenty-year marriage to a Colombian immigrant who has shared her lived experience of cross-cultural identity with me. Our relationship has provided me with an interesting vantage point from which to observe the immigrant experience and to empathically internalize both the positive and negative dimensions of her experiences to the degree possible. Furthermore, my music career has allowed me the privilege to travel extensively in Central and South America, underpinning my perspective of Latino/a cultures in various “organic” environments, providing a backdrop against which to contrast the immigrant experience in the U.S.

In summary, participant observation provides a vantage point from which to observe the lived experiences of Pentecostals in context and see their beliefs and practices illustrated. This holistic approach comes out of an awareness that religious traditions do not exist in isolation, but are inextricably linked to historical-cultural contexts and material realities. Rather than focusing on texts alone, these embodied dimensions of field research help to uncover the lived realities of faith in action. I will draw on anthropological insights to uncover the contextual nuances of various aspects of the lived experiences of my particular research communities.²⁰ My approach amplifies the internal self-understanding of Pentecostals in order to allow their voices to be heard in fresh ways.

I will endeavor to uncover examples of Pentecostal faith that center on care for the whole of human lived realities, or what Miller and Yamamori refer to as a “holistic” approach to ministering to humanity. Through participant observation in public events and through informal conversations, it has become apparent that there are certainly exceptions to the stereotypical image of Pentecostals as entirely “spiritualistic” while socially anemic. By exploring the ways that Latin American Pentecostals teach, preach, worship, and live, both within the context of the U.S. and in Latin America (specifically in Dallas, Texas and Cali, Colombia, respectively), one discovers an immense concern for the lived realities of the poor, the embattled identities of Latin American humanity, and human and civil rights. There is no singular concern for the “salvation of souls,” nor is there uniformity of thought in the proper order of how human needs should be addressed (i.e. first the “spirit” then the body). The fact is, these Pentecostals are acutely aware

²⁰ My anthropological approach is influenced by the work of scholars such as Arlene Sanchez-Walsh, Caroline Brettell, and Harold Recinos. Their perspectives will be considered in the coming pages.

of their social realities, and they appropriate their Christian faith as a means of addressing those realities.

1.3 Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two explores a range of theoretical perspectives concerning Pentecostalism and its public trajectory. I will engage with interlocutors of broadly differing views regarding Pentecostalism's potential to exhibit social ethics. Pentecostal voices will be amplified in order to illustrate *a spirituality of outspoken witness*, and I will draw upon various disciplinary perspectives to elucidate a natural orientation toward public engagement.

Chapter Three provides a terse overview of the historical and cultural underpinnings of Pentecostalism in both the United States and in Colombia, South America. Brief attention will also be given to prominent aspects of the current social contexts. Given my participatory engagement within these two contexts for this project, it is important to examine holistically the converging influences which underpin the Pentecostal tradition in these locales.

Many economic, political, and religious factors converged to underpin the emergence of Pentecostalism in the U.S. Each of these dimensions will be considered in turn, and the specific involvement of Latin American immigrants in this process will also be considered. The prominent issues in the current social context will also be examined, such as the mounting tensions regarding immigration and anti-Latinx political rhetoric. I will give attention to the ways in which Pentecostal theological identity among Latinx immigrants in the U.S. dictates how they comport themselves in relationship to society.

The economic, political, and religious dimensions of Colombian society are also considered. Pentecostalism is spreading rapidly among the Colombian poor, and it provides adherents with a means of addressing the prevailing conditions of life. Nearness to abject poverty in the Latin-American context fosters social concern and action. Furthermore, I look at the protracted bipartisan political violence in the Colombian context, and the complicity of the Roman Catholic church with the Conservative political party which has given rise to politically engaged Pentecostal communities.

Chapter Four explores the ideational dimensions of Pentecostalism at the levels of self, community, and society. It is concerned with the inherent potential of Pentecostal faith to foster social and civic justice efforts. It takes communal aspects of Latin American cultures into consideration in order to grasp the meaning of “self” in relationship to family, faith, and society.

In consideration of the community level, I explore the central beliefs and practices of many Pentecostals as essentially oriented toward material realities. Particularly dimensions of glossolalia, divine healing, and prosperity are considered as practices specifically oriented toward corporeal existence. I also take into account the ongoing conversation regarding the ethnic, racial, and socio-economic diversity of early Pentecostalism, and consider the potential of this early Pentecostal DNA as a source for reclaiming boundary-crossing diversity.

Lastly, I examine Pentecostal thought in relationship to society by considering different Pentecostal assessments of social structures and a variety of ways those structures are addressed.

Pentecostal interpretations of these structures range from spiritual principalities²¹ to concrete social powers, yielding very different methods of engagement.

Chapter Five considers the material and ritual life of Pentecostalism through an exploration of ritual worship practices, icons and sacred space, and the inherent social orientation of praise and worship. It argues for a robust and polyvalent understanding of Pentecostal worship as the vehicle for establishing identity and constructing an atmosphere in which adherents are believed to have transformative encounters with the divine. The shaping force of such encounters is not limited to the confines of religious space, but provides identity that permeates the entirety of day-to-day life. I conclude by considering the material context of poverty as foundational for an emancipative Pentecostalism.

Chapter Six takes up examples in the U.S. immigrant context and Latin America that illustrate the behavioral outflow of the ideological and material dimensions of the faith. Participant observation opens a window onto the lived experience of adherents and reveals snapshots of embodied faith as praxis in the world. These snapshots provide examples of *a spirituality of near engagement* that is leaning into outspoken witness.

²¹ Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV) “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL SCOPE

A growing number of Pentecostal scholars forcefully refute accusations of social-ethical anemia, mis-directed radical impulses, ignorance, and apoliticism. The voices of Pentecostal scholars will be amplified in this chapter to illustrate this refutation. In addition to giving attention to the outspoken witness of these scholars, I will consider the counter-cultural and revolutionary orientation contained within the very DNA of Pentecostalism in order to identify its revolutionary potential. I will examine some of the theoretical explanations of the ostensible weaknesses of Pentecostalism, and draw upon emerging Pentecostal scholarship to complicate that narrative. I argue that “social strain,” the “romanticism of the poor,” and “extractive salvation” provide inadequate theoretical explanations of Pentecostalism, and I will show that Pentecostal scholars are indeed formulating and articulating a pointed political language with revolutionary potential. Latina/o and Latinx scholars are at the forefront of those articulating more thorough explanations of Pentecostalism and the range of its public potency. I will show that these scholars exemplify *a spirituality of outspoken witness*, and that Pentecostalism itself contains the necessary ingredients for the formulation of forceful ethical voices.

2.1 Social Strain

Scholars have posited various theoretical explanations in attempts to elucidate the ostensibly anemic public ethics of Pentecostals. In his controversial book, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*, sociologist Robert Mapes Anderson asserts that early Pentecostals were impoverished economically and marginalized culturally and socially, creating social strain.¹ Their supposed status anxiety drove what could have been revolutionary action, but instead was turned inward toward their own movement. For Anderson, “Not society, but the individual; not reform, but escape—that has been the heart of Pentecostal social theory.”² Since Pentecostals’ critiques were relegated to religion, according to Anderson, their opportunity to articulate political and social concern was misdirected.

Anderson contends that Pentecostals were hostile and aggressive as a result of frustration due to their imposed position within the class structure. If their discontent had been targeted at the forces responsible for creating their social circumstances, he believes they would have engaged in social reform as “revolutionaries.”³ However, they mistakenly aimed their “aggressive impulses” at other religions. He suggests the Pentecostal attitude toward authority

¹ Anderson was theorizing in reference to the early Pentecostal community in the United States. It is well documented that this community exhibited ethnic diversity; however, the historical data emphasize racial diversity in terms of black and white, largely disregarding the Latinx community.

² Robert M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 201.

³ Ibid., 195.

reflects ambivalence between submission and rebellion, which he identifies as the typical posture of “the lower social classes in capitalist society.”⁴

Discussion of the Pentecostal movement has frequently led to the perception that social discontent was the root of its growing ranks.⁵ Anderson interpreted Pentecostalism as a “long-term protest” against the trajectory of modernity’s urbanization, industrialization, and capitalism.⁶ However, due to a lack of resources and education, Pentecostals ostensibly withdrew from political and economic action in order to address their problems through religion. He claims Pentecostals both “protested” and withdrew by criticizing the church for accommodating itself to “the world.” He viewed their protestation of Higher Criticism, Darwinism, the Social Gospel, and ecumenism as a protest against “scientific rationalism, bureaucracy, and secularism.”⁷ Essentially, what Pentecostals were fighting against within the modernizing church were the same characteristics typified in modern culture. Due to the separation of church and state, however, the Pentecostal critique of other religions is to no avail in engendering any real social change.

There are problems with Anderson’s theory, however, since it has not been concretely established that early Pentecostals fit neatly into the “lower classes,”⁸ nor that their aspirations were for social advancement. If indeed they sought secular social status, it seems counterintuitive for them to engage in a largely unaccepted religious sect. Furthermore, Pentecostalism has

⁴ Ibid., 221.

⁵ Ibid., 195.

⁶ Ibid., 223.

⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁸ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 197-216.

increasingly spread throughout all classes, and in virtually every cultural setting, so his social strain theory as an explanatory model falls short. If indeed Pentecostalism can be explained as a religion that appeals strictly to the poor, predicated upon social strain, what is the attraction for the middle classes and the affluent upper class? Additionally, the appropriation of capitalism into Pentecostal brands of prosperity gospel, and the employment of modern techniques of presentation belie an anti-capitalist and anti-modern disposition.

In addition to material poverty, Anderson also claims Pentecostals are intellectually impoverished. Furthermore, “Their intellectual and material poverty,” he says, “sharply diminished their means of resistance.”⁹ Of course such a sweeping claim about the dearth of intellectual capacity among any group cannot be substantiated, and the growing number of Pentecostal scholars forcefully belies such a reductive claim. What is more, material poverty does not inhibit pentecostal resistance; rather, it provides fuel for revolutionary action.

2.2 Revolutionary Potential

What is needed is a broader view of engagement in social “revolution.” To be revolutionary does not necessarily imply overt political action. Revolution, “a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people's ideas about it,”¹⁰ can be enacted subtly through patient positioning. Antonio Gramsci noted the distinction between the overt revolutionary action of the proletariat in Marx’s view, and the more subtle approach to revolution through long-term counter-hegemonic positioning led by organic

⁹ Robert M. Anderson, 221.

¹⁰ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, “Revolution,” accessed May 17, 2019.

intellectuals. Though he claimed “Gandhism and Tolstoyism are naïve theorization’s of the ‘passive revolution’ with religious overtones,”¹¹ he nonetheless theorized about a gradual approach to revolution as a viable way for the “subaltern” class to acquire socio-political power. He even identified the emergence of early Christianity within the Roman Empire as “passive revolution.”¹² Though Pentecostals may not necessarily agitate for political change precisely in the style of, for example, Gandhi, they are certainly engaged in seeking “wide-reaching change” in society with long-term positioning strategies.

Leadership from within the subaltern class is a crucial ingredient for Gramsci’s “war of positioning.” From his perspective,

All men are intellectuals . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. . . . Each man . . . carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a “philosopher”, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.¹³

According to Gramsci, the organic intellectual rises within her or his own class not as a “professional intellectual,” but as one who “functions in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.”¹⁴ Organic leadership may loudly articulate the counter-hegemonic voice of their community, or may agitate for social change through long-term, patient

¹¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, ed. and trans. (New York: International Publishers, 2014), 107.

¹² Gramsci, 107.

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

positioning strategies that ultimately undermine hegemony. Rather than violent revolt, this approach is a war of positioning.

Hegemony refers to “the consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society.”¹⁵ “Consent” does not necessarily point to acquiescence to the status quo, but social savvy and strategic response. Hegemony is not necessarily about violent domination, but civil and political position and influence. In Gramsci’s view, physical force is rarely necessary for the enforcement of power by the dominant class since the implied threat is typically sufficient. Any effective subaltern engagement with such hegemony “points to the need for the proletariat to develop political strategies which undermine the consent of the present ruling class.”¹⁶ Contrary to Anderson’s view of Pentecostals as intellectually inept, the organic intellectuals noted in this study do indeed formulate strategies that undermine hegemony through political consciousness and patient engagement in a “passive revolution” or “war of position.”

In their book, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, sociologists Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori identify three ways in which Pentecostalism may potentially serve as “an agent of social transformation.”¹⁷ First, they consider the Marxist notion that the proletariat does not revolt due to hopelessness; hopelessness is the crippling agent which ostensibly prevents agitation for change. However, Pentecostalism, particularly in its Prosperity Gospel iterations, advocates “worldly success” or the divine promise of prosperity in

¹⁵ Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci’s Political and Cultural Theory* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books & Media, 2014), 170.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 32.

this life. Such an understanding of God-ordained socioeconomic ascendancy may be all that is needed to engender the missing hope, and if this hope is not satisfied religiously it could eventually lead to politically organized efforts. In other words, Pentecostals might pursue a political path toward hope if religion does not provide satisfactory results.

Secondly, Pentecostalism may gradually impact the social welfare of adherents. There is potential for “social uplift” due to the “moral proscriptions” which prohibit the use of alcohol and drugs, and require abstinence from gambling and womanizing. These prohibitions may “produce surplus capital” and thus possibly open the door to socioeconomic ascendancy.¹⁸ Surplus funds may also be used to patronize Christian-owned businesses and help “brothers and sisters” in need. Constraints on sexual activity among young people may also contribute to higher levels of education.

Thirdly, they cite the Pentecostal emphasis upon human rights. Pentecostals believe all of humanity is created in the image of God and should consequently be afforded equal value in the sight of God. Furthermore, every Christian is believed to have direct access to God, the ability to interpret scripture, and a distinct place in the Christian community without discrimination, regardless of racial or ethnic identity, socio-economic or class status, or family background.¹⁹ Miller and Yamamori believe “The social and political implications of these theological views are quite radical,” making Pentecostalism a potentially “subversive political force.”²⁰ Each of

¹⁸ Ibid., 33. (See Brusco and Santos below)

¹⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁰ Ibid.

these potential sources of transformation are viewed as “*indirect* results of the religion. That is, they are not explicit goals of Pentecostalism, but instead function as latent corollaries.”²¹

During their four-year international study of Pentecostalism in the Global South, Miller and Yamamori discovered that many Pentecostals are directly engaged in socially transformative efforts. They refer to these adherents as “Progressive Pentecostals” because they practice a “holistic” Christianity based on the idea “that it is impossible to divorce moral and spiritual needs from physical and economic needs.”²² Among these Pentecostals, they observed a range of activities from relief programs to efforts aimed at effecting “systemic change.”²³ Their findings reveal that these social ministries often emphasize relief efforts rather than addressing oppressive systems; however, there are an increasing number working to address systemic problems, as well.

2.3 Formulating A Political Language

In contrast to the findings of Miller and Yamamori discussed above, and the Gramscian notion of organic intellectuals, political scientist André Corten asserts that Pentecostals are “‘simple people’, that is those who do not aspire to intellectual elaborations, but shout alleluias.”²⁴ Pentecostalism, in his view, is unable to formulate an effective “political language” which addresses public, social concerns. He identifies this supposed inability as the result of the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 62.

²³ Ibid., 43.

²⁴ André Corten, *Pentecostalism In Brazil: Emotion of the Poor and Theological Romanticism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), xvii.

Pentecostal emphasis on praising God as the primary object of verbal performances. Corten claims Pentecostalism is a “religion of emotion” or “theological Romanticism” that “produces politically unacceptable utterances.”²⁵ He draws on J. L. Austin’s categories of linguistic function to elucidate his point. He claims praise is only “illocutionary,” but neither locutionary nor perlocutionary because it “transmits no information” and “does not cause the addressee to act.”²⁶

Despite Corten’s claim to draw on extensive ethnographic data, his ethnocentric gaze obscures the emic Pentecostal understanding of praise as a vehicle for motivating God to move providentially, and as a means of “Holy Spirit empowerment” for all aspects of life. Pentecostals believe God responds to their praise by acting in the world precisely through their lives. They also understand praise as a means of access to the divine power of the Holy Spirit to fuel a victorious life. It is accurate to say that God is the “primary object of verbal performances,” but the voices of Pentecostals are not limited to a “Godward” orientation alone, nor does their spiritual orientation negate their capacity for social awareness and action. In fact, Pentecostal worship, it will be demonstrated below, has decidedly social dimensions in addition to its focus on God, and the Pentecostal identity that is shaped through experiences of worship is believed by insiders to empower action in the world. Pentecostals are not “simple people.” They certainly “shout alleluias,” yet they also engage in social analysis, political critique, and intellectual reflection.

²⁵ Ibid., xviii.

²⁶ Ibid., 86

2.4 Pentecostal Voices

Eldin Villafaña provides one important forceful voice from within Pentecostalism that dismantles the reductionist assumptions of Corten in regard to the supposed intellectual ineptitude of Pentecostals, and the inability of Pentecostal language to address public life. From a theological perspective, Villafaña offers a constructive critique of Pentecostalism intended to illuminate a pathway for Latinx Pentecostals to draw upon their cultural and spiritual identities to cultivate a robust social ethic. He posits a “social spirituality” that harmonizes “with Hispanic Pentecostal experience.”²⁷ In his view, a “pneumatological paradigm coheres with Hispanic Pentecostal experience and seeks to extend its self-understanding as the community of the Spirit *in* the world and *for* the world, but not *of* the world.”²⁸ In Villafaña’s view, it is precisely the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit that empowers ethical action in the world. He further claims that such action encompasses political engagement and the pointed address of structures of power.²⁹

Douglas Petersen underscores the remark of several observers “that ‘Pentecostals do not *have* a social policy, they *are* a social policy.’”³⁰ In his view, Pentecostals attempt to make changes in social structures locally by creating a kind of “alternative society” to facilitate the

²⁷ Eldin Villafaña, *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 193.

²⁸ Ibid. (emphasis in original)

²⁹ Ibid., 196-201.

³⁰ Douglas Petersen, *Not by Might Nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Irvine, CA: Regnum, 1996), 119. (emphasis added)

construction of a more tolerable reality. However, the “substitute society” is not directly identified as a protestation of the injustices of the larger society.³¹ Petersen explains:

In societies where one has difficulty finding identity and security, Pentecostal groups offer alternative survival mechanisms, precisely because they distribute risks and opportunities. Contrary to the traditional critiques that Pentecostals do not adequately demonstrate a social conscience, typically congregations provide social welfare services to needy families, the sick, the abused and the aged.³²

Both Villafañe’s and Petersen’s remarks, along with Miller and Yamamori’s, reveal legitimate Pentecostal social concern; however, despite recognizing examples of progressive Pentecostal engagement in the public sphere, these scholars argue Pentecostals do need to cultivate a broader understanding of social issues predicated particularly upon a thorough analysis of societal power structures. Charitable models of engagement provide much needed aid on the ground; however, they fall short of addressing the deeper structures that perpetually produce the conditions that give rise for the needed charity. Allan Anderson asserts “that many, if not most, Pentecostals demonize social problems and seek spiritual solutions rather than structural ones.”³³

Pentecostal scholar Samuel Solivan also addresses this issue from a theological perspective. He claims “[s]in as a strictly personal transgression is inadequate for addressing our modern world and is incomplete in representing the biblical understanding.”³⁴ Consequently, Pentecostal hamartiology gives rise to structural short-sightedness. When sin is understood as the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 120.

³³ Allan H. Anderson, 285.

³⁴ Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 44.

breach of personal moral strictures rather than the collective structural sins perpetuated by corrupt systems of power, charitable efforts become a viable option for addressing social problems.³⁵ Yong points to “the charismatic worldview” that gives rise to this myopic view of sin as a breach of personal morality that displeases God and “ruins the nation.”³⁶ Because of this personalized view of sin, individual morality is considered more important than addressing structural, political and economic issues. Many

remain wary of the governmental approach to solving social problems because they place little hope in institutional remedies. . . . [C]onverts become convinced that government programs can never solve their problems . . . [because] outside Jesus, there is no salvation.³⁷

However, as Pentecostal theologians Villafañe and Solivan articulate, if the focus remains centered on personal salvation and a personal relationship with Jesus there is a failure to recognize the larger systemic forces at work. Pentecostal theologies must include an understanding of “sin” in terms of that which denies social justice at the societal level. This more thoroughgoing perspective shifts away from a view of sin as the breach of a personal moral contract, to a view of sin as the complicity of political, economic, and ecclesiastical systems of power in the creation and perpetuation of poverty, marginalization of the poor, and dehumanization. A more nuanced understanding of “sin”, then, could assist Pentecostals in shifting from a charitable model to a systemic model of social transformation.

³⁵ Elizabeth D. Ríos, “‘The Ladies Are Warriors’: Latina Pentecostalism and Faith-Based Activism in New York City,” *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, eds. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 203.

³⁶ Yong, 6.

³⁷ Arlene Sanchez-Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, Self, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 126.

The examples examined in chapter six illustrate the ambivalence of Pentecostals in regard to these charitable and structural approaches to social transformation. There is an undeniable emphasis on first transforming individuals, then families and communities, and ultimately nations and the world, yet they also invest energy into structurally transformative efforts, as well. From encouraging engagement in participatory democracy, to emphasizing the vital importance of education, and the cultivation of political strategies, there is no denying the efforts that extend beyond the individuation of social change through “spiritual” and charitable means.

Arlene Sanchez-Walsh provides another forceful voice from within the Pentecostal tradition. Employing historical and ethnographic methods, she explores the potential of “broadening out the categories” of liberation through a Latinx Pentecostal Christology. In her view, looking at Jesus as healer/liberator makes sense within Latinx communities because of their unequal access to health care relative to the general population, so they are in great need of liberation through physical, mental, and behavioral health services. So while “liberation” in this sense does not take on the overt politicization of liberation theology, it addresses a vitally important social-ethical and very public issue faced by the Latinx community in the U.S.³⁸

Another important perspective concerning a specifically Latin American Pentecostal Christology is presented by Sammy Alfaro in his book, *Divino Compañero: Toward a Hispanic Pentecostal Christology*. As a Pentecostal theologian, Alfaro distinguishes between the abstract Euro-American perspectives regarding the person of Jesus as Christ, and points to a specifically Latin American understanding of the “Jesus of history.” He argues that Latin American

³⁸ Arlene Sanchez-Walsh, “Cristology from a Latino Perspective: Pentecostalism,” Harold Recinos and Hugo Magallanes, eds. *Jesus in the Hispanic Community: Images of Christ from Theology to Popular Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 97.

reflections on Christology must consider the “praxis” of Jesus as one who exemplified a liberating mission to the poor. The proper way for Latin American Pentecostals to engage in Christological reflection, then, is by living into the “orthopraxis” modeled by Jesus through the full range of his missional, ministerial, social and ethical activities within his social context.³⁹

Gastón Espinosa’s impressive work, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action*, argues that Latinx Pentecostals do not separate the work of social justice and evangelism into disparate ministries; rather, they combine the two into “evangelistic social work and outreach.”⁴⁰ In his view, Latinx Pentecostals blend social, civic, and political participation with charitable efforts to “incarnationalize” Jesus’ love for the poor and suffering. Following on the “orthopathos” of Solivan, and the “liberating Spirit” of Villafañe, he identifies this emphasis as a two-fold “focus on righteousness and justice.”⁴¹ This two-pronged focus centers on relationship with both God and people as inextricably linked. He also points to examples of Latinx Pentecostals engaged in the reformation of society not only through ministries of mercy, but by directly challenging political systems.

Adding to these theological perspectives from within the tradition, Pentecostal ethicist Nimi Wariboko suggests that “Ethical methodology (engagement) must assume the mode of cultural criticism, social creativity, and political engagement in which we should resist commitment to any knowledge machinery that only works to understand the world but not to

³⁹ Sammy Alfaro, *Divino Compañero: Toward a Hispanic Pentecostal Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 94-102

⁴⁰ Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 322.

⁴¹ Ibid., 323.

change it . . .”⁴² Wariboko is concerned with formulating a Pentecostal ethic that draws on all of these tools (cultural criticism, social creativity, and political engagement) to broaden and deepen the Pentecostal understanding of social-ethical issues and address them actively in concrete yet ever-evolving ways.

In addition to the socio-economic theories, assumptions regarding intellectual poverty, and critiques of charitable vs. structural approaches to social issues, it is the charge of dualism that underpins notions of “otherworldliness” within the tradition. Nordlander identifies what he calls “The Pentecostal Paradox,” which he asserts is an inherent “. . . tension within the pentecostal tradition between the affirmation and the rejection of the world—of materiality, embodiment, [and] culture.”⁴³ In his view, the “theologizing” of Pentecostals has tended toward dualism and been suspicious of material, embodied life.⁴⁴ He suggests Pentecostals consider the non-dualistic theology of Tillich as a means of articulating the “basic pre-theoretical commitments embedded in pentecostal practice,” such as the materiality of physical healing and financial “blessings.”⁴⁵

Nordlander also points to the work of scholars such as James K.A. Smith and Margaret M. Poloma that complicate the narrative regarding the dualistic tension within the tradition. Smith suggests that the Pentecostal view of “liberation from sin” includes “material effects” that

⁴² Wariboko, 156.

⁴³ Andreas Nordlander, “Pneumatological Participation: Embodiment, Sacramentality, and the Multidimensional Unity of Life,” *Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology: Spiritual Presence and Spiritual Power*, Nimi Wariboko & Amos Yong, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 101.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

address “illness and disease, as well as oppression and poverty.”⁴⁶ In Smith’s view, there is a holistic dimension intrinsic to Pentecostal belief and practice that transcends a dualism between the material and the spiritual through “the affirmation of bodily healing” and the “prosperity gospel’s” emphasis on addressing poverty.⁴⁷ Paloma also affirms that the divine healing which is central to Pentecostalism entails “spiritual, inner, and emotional healing,” and is thus a holistic healing not limited to either spiritual or physical cures.⁴⁸

2.5 Anthropological Perspectives

Anthropologist Kevin Lewis O’Neill critiques Pentecostalism’s perceived inability to address social issues based precisely on this kind of dualistic tendency to privilege the soul over the body. Based on nine years of research, O’Neill’s ethnographic work is concerned with the turn to “soft security” in post civil-war Guatemala, and the way in which Christian piety underpins preventative approaches to dealing with gangs. O’Neill provides evidence of the deplorable conditions of correctional facilities which are nearly void of oversight, and grossly overpopulated. He is critical of the efforts of prison chaplains to engender self-esteem in inmates through an inward turn to the salvation of the soul.

⁴⁶ James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 42.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 42-43.

⁴⁸ Margaret M. Paloma, “Divine Healing, Religious Revivals, and Contemporary Pentecostalism: A North American Perspective,” *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 28-29.

O'Neill also takes up a discussion of programs in which North Americans sponsor individual children. In his view, these kinds of programs emphasize the "subject" rather than society, generating "an extractive geography of salvation" that saves some while abandoning others.⁴⁹ He also examines Pentecostal rehabilitation centers that lock up drug users in order to liberate them, something O'Neill refers to as "the slavery of salvation."⁵⁰ These centers proliferate, yet no therapy is administered apart from preaching, leaving many "forsaken."

In contrast to O'Neill, anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco offers a very different perspective regarding the socio-economic efficacy of Pentecostalism to impact day-to-day life in the Latin-American context. In her book, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia*, Brusco provides an insightful ethnographic study based upon her research in Colombia in the early 1980s. For Brusco, Colombian Pentecostalism proves transformational in the realm of gender relations and household construction "by reattaching males to the family."⁵¹ The moral proscriptive dimensions of Colombian Evangelicalism radically transform the machismo-defined masculine identity by replacing the usual activities of drinking, smoking, and extramarital sexual relations, with a new commitment to the domestic life of the family. In addition to increasing men's presence in the domestic sphere, resources typically spent outside the home are appropriated for family needs, improving the quality of life for women and children. "Quite simply," according to Brusco, "no longer is 20 to 40 percent of the household

⁴⁹ Kevin Lewis O'Neill, *Secure the Soul: Christian Piety and Gang Prevention in Guatemala* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 143.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 3.

budget consumed by the husband in the form of alcohol.”⁵² The asceticism inherent within Evangelical moral standards also effectively prohibits other costly masculine behaviors typical in Colombia such as visiting prostitutes and gambling.⁵³ Essentially, the primary problematic issues for women are redressed as the aspirations of men become aligned with the female household agenda.⁵⁴

These ethnographic examinations provide distinctly contrasting perspectives on the foci and efficacy of Pentecostal faith in addressing impoverished conditions of life in the Latin-American context. In both cases, however, it is clear that Pentecostal adherents are *not* withdrawn from public life. On the contrary, both accounts reveal the active engagement of Pentecostals in efforts to address social justice issues. The fact that Pentecostals are engaged in different ways of addressing these issues, along with Pentecostal theologians reflecting on ways to more effectively bring about social change, illustrates the inaccurate picture of anemic Pentecostal social ethics, and any ostensibly prohibitive intellectual poverty.

In addition to these ethnographic examinations, this work will draw on the ritual and material aspects of Pentecostalism to consider ways they influence and shape behaviors. Albrecht asserts that “ritual functions as a vital component of Pentecostal spirituality,” though the term ritual itself is not an indigenous term.⁵⁵ Thus, in addition to ideological considerations, an

⁵² Ibid., 5.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jose Leonardo Santos uncovered similar findings in his book, *Evangelicalism and Masculinity: Faith and Gender in El Salvador* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012).

⁵⁵ Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 21.

exploration of the material aspects of Pentecostal worship through key literature and participant observation will provide an increasingly clear picture of the polyvalent forces of Pentecostalism to shape life in the public sphere. Pentecostal worship services are central to this form of spirituality, so aspects of these rituals will be examined, including consideration of worship music, sacred space, and icons.

Additionally, drawing on the ritual theory of Victor Turner, Wolfgang Vondey points to the role of ritual in the formation of

communitas marked by undifferentiated unity and equality in which the structural assertions of the established society are suspended and transformed. When the community has been thus transformed, the participants can *return to society equipped* by the ritual process.⁵⁶

While Vondey's discussion centers on the deconstruction and modification of liturgy, he also points to an important aspect of ritual, namely, its equipping function within society. It is the contention of this work that Pentecostal ritual practices are ontologically transformative in the lives of adherents, shaping behaviors beyond the confines of religious space.

Such shaping potential leads to consideration of another important theoretical ingredient underpinning this work: the *latent potential* within Pentecostal Christianity to prepare its adherents for public engagement at various levels. Anthropologists Caroline Brettell and Deborah Reed-Danahay examined the impact of religion on civic engagement among Indian and

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 133. (emphasis added)

Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S., and discovered that the participation of citizenship is not necessarily characterized by “overt political acts.”⁵⁷ They assert that

Religious assemblies are communities of practice for the acquisition and enhancement of civic skills by immigrants and their children. Moreover, the identities and moral values associated with particular forms of ethnoreligious expression shape both formal and informal citizenship practices.⁵⁸

Their study examines institutional, congregational, and familial levels of relationship between religion and civic engagement, with an eye toward activities, networking, and leadership as key foci. They emphasize “the civic skills learned,” and ways in which those skills translate into broader contexts beyond the “religious realm.”⁵⁹ As Robert Putnam put it, “Churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment.”⁶⁰ This framework may also be applied within the Latin American community in order to discover ways Pentecostal religion may contain the latent potential which is preparatory for active citizenship. Emilio Willems also argues, along these lines, that

All Pentecostals . . . *symbolically subvert* the traditional social order. Political challenge spills over as an *unintended consequence* from Pentecostal religious life. . . . The poor come to see themselves as having a status altogether different from and higher than that awarded them in the secular society or in the Catholic church. They learn how to organize

⁵⁷ Caroline Brettell and Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Civic Engagement: The Citizenship Practices of Indian & Vietnamese Immigrants* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 78.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁰ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), 66.

themselves without traditional hierarchy and acquire both the skills and the confidence to demand a more egalitarian order in society at large.⁶¹

Thus, like Brettell, Reed-Danahay, and Putnam, Willems points to the potential of religion—specifically Pentecostalism in this case—as a means of shaping social and civic action in the world.

2.6 Conclusion

In summary, this work centers primarily on the *potentiality* of Pentecostal ideology and materiality specifically as sources for social-ethical behavior and civic action, as well as pointing to concrete examples of its potential. Wariboko refers to this notion of potential or perpetual becoming as the “pentecostal principle,” which he claims “is the capacity to begin.”⁶² The pentecostal principle, in his view, is not exclusive to Pentecostals, however, for “It encapsulates the notion that no finite or conditioned reality can claim to have reached its destiny.”⁶³ He asserts that

The pentecostal spirit [“a group’s creative self interpretation”] is a way of being that is radically open to divine surprises, always at work resisting obstacles to human flourishing, and committed to creating, broadening, and deepening new possibilities for life.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Rowan Ireland, “Pentecostalism, Conversions, and Politics in Brazil,” Edward Cleary & Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, eds. *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (New York: Westview Press, 1997), 126. (emphasis added)

⁶² Wariboko, 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 130.

This perpetual potential is concretized in social life, yet it never ceases to begin anew. This is the nature of Pentecostal potential, to draw on socio-cultural and historical contexts as a means of developing strategies that open doors to “human flourishing” and meaningful human life. With this principle in mind, and drawing on the foregoing theoretical considerations, the following chapters will explore the potential of Pentecostalism as a force for effective engagement in the world.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL HISTORY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The complexities and particularities of Pentecostalism(s) suggest a holistic cultural perspective is needed to elucidate the contours of its development among the Latin American communities explored here. Consideration of the historical-cultural and social contexts in which these communities are shaped will provide the underpinnings for thinking about their ideological, material, and behavioral aspects. The many layers of a religion cannot be understood in a vacuum. Rather, any religion must be examined in the context of its interrelationships within an intricate web of cultural forces. As Geertz put it, “culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described.”¹ It is precisely the contextual layers of culture that provide the focus of this chapter. Though certainly not exhaustive, a glimpse of the cultural complexities will provide important perspectives for subsequent chapters centered on the interpretive task of “thick description.”

First I explore the emergence of Pentecostalism in the United States, and consider the particularities of its influence on the construction of a Latinx Pentecostal identity. Social, political, economic, and religious dimensions of cultural history will be briefly discussed, and aspects of the current social context will be examined. Then I turn to a consideration of the

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 14.

Colombian context and the cultural layers within which Pentecostalism emerged in that country. Particular attention will be given to political, ecclesiastical, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions in order to more fully grasp specific ways in which Pentecostalism provides for the construction of identity and a means of addressing the prevailing conditions of poverty, violence, and marginalization. By examining these geographic locales, and attending to important cultural forces by which they are characterized, a more thorough portrait of Latin American Pentecostal identity emerges.

3.1 Pentecostalism in the U.S.

The origins of Pentecostalism are contested. Many scholars, however, agree that Pentecostalism in the United States emerged in its “classical” form at the Azusa street revival in Los Angeles, California in 1906. However nondescript its origins, it has grown explosively across the United States and around the world over the past century, and it has profoundly impacted the Latinx community in the United States. The Latinx population in the U.S. is comprised of 53 million people, of which 27 percent are Protestant. Eighty percent of those Protestants are Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and/or non-denominational.²

3.1.2 Socio- Economic, Political, and Religious Context in the U.S.

As modernity seemed to betray the very fabric of United States’ society, passionate Christians longed for the restoration of the New Testament church complete with the miraculous, supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the waning years of the nineteenth century, millenarian

² Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 4. Note: the majority are Catholic.

fervor seized upon many who believed without equivocation that Christ's return was imminent. The rapidly changing cultural and social structure of the U.S., the dizzying pace of industrialization, the rampant "worldly" passions and materialism of the Gilded Age, all served as "signs of the times," and the mores that had so prominently marked the "Protestant Century" seemed to be quickly deteriorating. The "end times" were rapidly approaching, and that reality generated an urgency toward "Godliness" that trumped any "worldly" concerns. A glimmer of hope accompanied this apocalyptic belief, however, a hope rooted in an ancient Jewish prophecy claiming that in the last days God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh. This "latter rain" outpouring signified that the long awaited restoration of New Testament apostolic Christianity had ostensibly arrived, and God, in standard biblical fashion, had selected the least likely folks to be his ambassadors, much like Jesus's disciples present at Pentecost. Gradually, Pentecostalism developed as a distinct religious movement among believers who were convinced they were living "in the days of prophesied restoration, revival, and consummation."³

Radical change frantically rushed through the agrarian fields and burgeoning cities of Gilded-Age America. Agriculture had been the life-blood of the nation's business, but the Industrial Revolution and the gravity of the urban centers pulled society into an entirely new way of life. Agriculture was the dominant business of the nation until roughly 1870, but by 1900 it had dwindled to half of the national economy.⁴ Contributing significantly, the advent of the railroad profoundly impacted many aspects of American life. The railroad industry became the

³ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana, IL: University Of Illinois Press, 1993), 11.

⁴ David M. Kennedy and Lizabeth Cohen, *The American Pageant*. fifteenth. 2 (Boston: Wadsworth-Cengage Learning, 2010), 512.

signature big business of North America, aiding in the cultural shift to urban centers, as well as making a select few fabulously wealthy. These “moguls of manipulation”⁵ enjoyed a virtual plutocracy, while the majority of society struggled to find their way in a structurally changing world of new uncertainties. Along with these changes came a shift from independent production to reliance upon wage earning. Fully half of the workforce was self-employed in 1860, but two out of three working Americans became dependent wage earners by the end of the century.⁶ The power of independence and self-reliance was wrested from the hands of the individual and placed under the relentless control of the wealthy.

This new world of wealth was led by the likes of steel king, Andrew Carnegie, oil tycoon, John D. Rockefeller, and finance mogul, J.P. Morgan. Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison also wrought “miracles of mechanization” that changed the functions of society down to its very fabric. Edison’s light bulb is said to have altered the average person’s sleep patterns from nine hours to a little over seven per night. Bell’s telephone, introduced in 1876, served to facilitate a profound development in communication and resultant social evolution.⁷

This Gilded-Age milieu also gave rise to a “gospel of wealth” that placed blame squarely on the poor for their underprivileged circumstances. Some suggested those with wealth and power were simply more capable than the poor, and that wealth accompanied a true life of piety. Reverend Conwell of Philadelphia exclaimed, “[t]here is not a poor person in the United States

⁵ Ibid., 518.

⁶ Ibid., 530.

⁷ Ibid., 520-521.

who was not made poor by his own shortcomings.”⁸ What is more, a depression struck in 1893 marking the most devastating economic crisis of the nineteenth century, and precipitating the collapse of approximately eight thousand U.S. businesses in a six-month period.⁹ These conditions certainly affected the early adherents of Pentecostalism, because they were most often from the working class. There were some exceptions, but most were uneducated and living under conditions of economic hardship. “Few, if any, held positions of social or cultural influence.”¹⁰ These working-class folks, including African-Americans, Latin Americans, immigrants from across the globe, and women, comprised the leadership and community of early Pentecostalism.¹¹

In the postbellum South, the reality of African-American existence in a Jim-Crow world overwhelmed the fragile freedom and short-lived taste of life apart from oppression. Having at long last been emancipated from the lash and shackles of slavery, African-Americans working to assert their new-found rights encountered eviction, unemployment, and increasing violence with lynchings reaching record highs in the 1890s.¹²

These unthinkable human rights’ violations extended to foreign immigrants as well. Asian immigration in California became so significant that by 1880 these newcomers accounted for

⁸ Ibid., 525.

⁹ Ibid., 508.

¹⁰ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Pentecost in My Soul* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 14.

¹¹ See Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*.

¹² Kennedy and Cohen, 496. Also, see James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011).

nine-percent of the population.¹³ Treated as less than human, these immigrants endured incredible hardships at the hands of white America.

Blacks, Orientals and Mexicans--all considered 'non-white' by standards then prevailing--accounted for 5.6% of the population in Los Angeles in 1910 . . . together, the 'non-whites' and all immigrants made up about 22% of the population.¹⁴

Of the almost 76 million Americans at the turn of the twentieth-century, nearly one out of seven was foreign-born.¹⁵ Heavy immigration resulted in the constitution of an incredibly diverse racial and ethnic mixture of people.

Women also endured abuses and deprivations in the androcentric North-American culture of the day. With industry exploding, and inventions such as the telephone, women were forced into menial jobs and paid wages far beneath that of men. They were also denied equal rights of citizenship with men, and tirelessly fought the battle for suffrage, in addition to ardently agitating for systemic social reform.

In the years between 1901 and 1912 a progressive reform movement emerged as the "specter" of the Populist party of the 1890s. This progressive movement "waged war" on social injustice and corruption.¹⁶ A social gospel also emerged within this progressivist ethos and served to uncover the inextricable fusion of the Christian message with social concerns. Goff

¹³ Ibid., 498.

¹⁴ Robert M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 62-63.

¹⁵ Kennedy and Cohen, 638.

¹⁶ Ibid.

suggests rural and farming communities viewed Populism as a socioeconomic solution, but when it failed some turned to holiness religion and Pentecostalism.¹⁷

According to Harvey Cox,

Christianity has never completely shed the millennial hopes with which it came to birth, and the conviction that the climax of history is imminent has reappeared time and time again, especially during wrenching social dislocation and cultural collapse.¹⁸

In these turbulent times, many sought to grasp tightly the traditional socio-religious mores that had characterized rural-agrarian society. The very fabric of the family unit changed dramatically as a result of urbanization. The urban environment introduced unprecedented pressures upon the family unit. It was during this era of urbanization that divorce began to become commonplace due to the emotional and psychological pressures of shifting from agrarian to city life.¹⁹ Farm life had encouraged the growth of the family unit, as well as cooperative labor efforts, but city life demanded smaller families and working conditions that often separated family members.

Following the devastation of the Civil War, there was a period of rapid industrialization, growing materialism and corruption, and intense social dislocation.²⁰ A renewed call to holiness was the response of the Church. It was a clarion call to return to biblical holiness and primitive apostolic religion. It was a movement of “holiness” that emphasized a renewed level of

¹⁷ Augustus Cerillo Jr., “The Origins of American Pentecostalism: A Review Essay of James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*.” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1993): 77-88. <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.libraries.smu.edu> (accessed November 19, 2013), 81.

¹⁸ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁹ Kennedy and Cohen, 562.

²⁰ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 29.

commitment among converts.²¹ Organizations, camp meetings, and publications proliferated, and the Holiness movement spread like wildfire.

A class shift within the mainline denominations took place over time during the nineteenth century. Inculcation of the Protestant ethic and the influx of immigration provided upward thrust for those of the lower class, and fed into a growing middle-class membership among mainline churches; consequently, the materialistic tendencies and secular ideas of popular culture found their way into the Church.²² Those within the Holiness movement looked askance at this shift toward “worldliness,” as well as rejecting the higher biblical criticism that “liberalized” religion. The driving impulse of the Holiness movement was the desire to recapture the values of Christian piety and restore them to the Church and the larger culture. However, the aversion of the Holiness faction to the perceived increasing sinfulness of the middle-class mainline Church, and the response of the majority of believers who viewed these Holiness “fanatics” as an embarrassment, brought about a widening fissure between these groups.²³

At its core, the Holiness movement was a reaction to the social crises of the 1890s.²⁴ Denominational leaders, however, criticized the Holiness camp for disregarding ecclesiastical structures and authority. The gap continued to widen between the mainline church of the middle-class, and the more radicalized sectarian group of Holiness adherents of the lower-class portion

²¹ James R. Goff Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 62.

²² Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

of society. In 1895, the Holiness Movement was expelled by the Methodist church and 100,000 Holiness-Methodists launched their own ministries independent of the denomination.²⁵

These economic, political and religious underpinnings significantly shaped the emergence of the Pentecostal movement. In addition to these cultural forces, there are multiple contributing theological influences, as well. According to Henry Knight, various segments of Methodism, the Holiness movement, and Pentecostalism have so much in common “that they constitute a distinct theological family.”²⁶ Much attention has been given to the roots supporting the growth of the movement, and the particularities of its origins, be they the outflow of Azusa Street as a single source, or the result of multiple, global points of origin. Either way, Latin American Pentecostalism includes “proto-evangélico, Catholic, indigenous, and Afro Latino strains.”²⁷

Latin Americans have been present from the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in the U.S.²⁸ Though, as Espinosa points out, “their story has long been overshadowed by the larger narrative on black-white race relations and Pentecostal origins.”²⁹ The fact that Pentecostal history has often excluded or scarcely addressed Latinx involvement and contributions is telling

²⁵ Gastón Espinosa, *Azusa Street Revival & Its Legacy*, eds. Harold D. Hunter & Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *Ordinary Prophet: William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 32.

²⁶ Henry H. Knight III, “The Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Family,” *From Aldersgate to Azusa Street: Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Visions of the New Creation*, Henry H. Knight III, ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 1.

²⁷ Daniel Ramírez, *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico in the Twentieth Century* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 11.

²⁸ I am identifying the Azusa Street revival beginning in 1906 as the outset of the movement.

²⁹ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 1.

in light of their prejudicial and exclusionary treatment in the U.S. context, but contemporary scholarship is increasingly pointing to their presence and importance within the movement from its inception onward. “From the very beginning,” according to Alexander, “Latinos flocked to the Azusa Street Mission in search of a transcendent God.”³⁰ They participated during the opening week of the revival, and in fact it was a Mexican-American worker who was first “touched by the power of the Holy Spirit” through an encounter with several women cleaning the mission the day before it even opened.³¹ The stories of early Latinx Pentecostals have not dominated the conversation, but they are every bit as central to the narrative as the “prominent” cast of characters. Figures such as Francisco Olazábal (1886-1937) who converted thousands of Latin Americans to the Pentecostal movement through his work in the U.S., Mexico, and Puerto Rico,³² and Rosa and Abundio de Lopez who were the very first to bring Spanish-speaking Pentecostal evangelism to the North-American world.³³ In a sense, Latin Americans made the Azusa Street revival more legitimately “Pentecostal” on the order of Acts 2 by contributing to linguistic and ethnic (every nation) diversity.³⁴ The Latinx community has been present from the

³⁰ Estrela Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Laurel, MD: Seymour Press, 2012), 105. The Lopez’s arrived at the Azusa Street mission in May of 1906.

³¹ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 22 & 35.

³² Gastón Espinosa, “Francisco Olazábal: Charisma, Power, and Faith Healing in the Borderlands,” *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders*, James R. Goff, Jr. and Grant Wacker, eds. (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 177.

³³ Estrela Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Laurel, MD: Seymour Press, 2012), 105-106.

³⁴ See Chapter Four below for a more detailed discussion of Acts 2 and the meaning of “nation.”

beginning and made what has been characterized as a primarily biracial, English-language prayer gathering a multilingual and multiethnic revival movement of global proportions.³⁵

Due to the Roman Catholic background of the many Latin Americans present at the Azusa Street revival, the Pentecostal movement, characterized by the charisms of the early church, was not unusual.³⁶ One could argue that Pentecostalism naturally flowed from “indigenous” Latino/a religious identity, rather than being the imposition of Euro-American traditions. This is because the expectations of mystical union, divine healing, and supernatural appearances of transcendent figures are inherent within the Latina/o Catholic faith. Latino/as have also contributed their own flavor to Pentecostalism through culture, language, art, ritual, and music. Ramírez does well to articulate aspects of the uniqueness of Latina/o Pentecostalism by pointing to the creativity of their musical artistry, for example, which drew from *lo cotidiano*, or their day-to-day lives, and fostered innovations such as the implementation of instruments not typically incorporated into other forms of Christian worship.

Pentecostalism, then, takes on a decidedly Latin American flavor from its earliest days in the U.S. context. These characteristics are apparent in contemporary Pentecostal churches, as well, from language, to the affirmation of a plurality of Latin American cultural identities, to musical styles, and approaches to ministry and public life.

There are some Pentecostal leaders, however, who ignore this deep heritage by practicing *a spirituality of the status quo*. Sam Rodriguez, for example, a Puerto Rican born and raised in New York, repeatedly defends the immigration policies of Donald Trump. Rodriguez is the

³⁵ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 36.

³⁶ Alexander, 99.

President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), yet he often appears on Fox News as an advocate for Trump and his dehumanizing border policies. Having recently visited a border detention facility, he found no cause for concern regarding the deplorable living conditions. Fox News turned Reverend Rodriguez's response into a rebuttal of the report made by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.). Ironically, it is the long history of Latinx activism and social engagement that paved the way for the platform Rodriguez enjoys;³⁷ yet, he denies the progressive impulses inherent within the Pentecostal tradition, and ignores the criminality of the current immigration crisis in the "Trumpian" age.

3.1.3 Persistent Social Forces in the U.S.

Several persistent forces within U.S. society—racism, poverty, and anti-immigrant sentiment—should be considered within the discussion of the construction of Latinx social-ethical identity in order to illuminate the current cultural climate and Latinx responses. Racism is a deeply embedded structural evil that profoundly impacts the lived realities of minority groups. As Bonilla-Silva puts it, "actors in racialized societies . . . participate in race relations as either beneficiaries (members of the dominant race) or subordinates (members of the dominated race or races)."³⁸ This dynamic creates an inequality of "social rewards" and a struggle between the

³⁷ The work of Gastón Espinosa challenges narratives that exclude Latinx contributions. He lifts up the civic outreach and faith-based social programs of Latinx Pentecostals going back to the early 1960s.

³⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy & Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 11.

privileged who seek to preserve their position, and the “subordinate race” who struggle to change the system.³⁹

These social conditions of inequality have significant economic implications, as well. Particularly in reference to Latinas, Isasi-Díaz claims oppression results in “anthropological poverty,” which has profound affects at the “ontological” level. She says “Human nature, in a way, is always being altered by the context in which it lives. Poverty, precisely because it limits possibilities and options, alters what human nature is capable of becoming.”⁴⁰ Thus, the structures of racism and the concomitant anthropological and economic poverty of the U.S. context forcefully shape and limit the Latinx community.

Another contextually important and potentially problematic factor is the use of the term “Hispanic” to characterize Latinx identity. Villafaña asserts that “the name Hispanic is a collective designation of significant political utility which has emerged as a national umbrella”⁴¹ under which to categorize the incredible variety of “twenty-two Latin American countries and Spain.”⁴² This classificatory generalization is understood by some as a glossing over or even erasure of the complexity of Latin American identities by lumping them together without any recognition of the distinctions being ignored. The term Hispanic also points to the Spanish roots of ancient Hispania as opposed to the designation of Latino/a or Latinx which points more immediately to Latin America and the incredible diversity of indigenous, black, Spanish, and

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 44.

⁴¹ Eldin Villafaña, *The Liberating Spirit*, 2.

⁴² Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 10.

multi-ethnic identities.⁴³ This moniker, then, is sometimes viewed as a failure to recognize Latinx diversity through the application of a hegemonic and homogenizing label under which all Latina/o diversity is swept.

Part of the colonial heritage of the U.S. has been the homogenization and racialization of identities in order to subjugate groups of people for purposes of power, profit and nation building. Europeans invented the category of race to advance the political agenda of “social, economic, and territorial domination.”⁴⁴ Race is a classificatory category used to segregate specific populations, and has historically been “a socially symbolic rule for distributing status, power, and wealth to individuals and groups.”⁴⁵ The term “Hispanic” is also a socially constructed category like “race” or “ethnicity”, and has no scientific or biological significance. In the same way that identifiers such as race and ethnicity are used “to mark boundaries”⁴⁶ the term Hispanic has been socially constructed in the North-American context as a means of “othering.”

After attempting to homogenize Latinx identities into one fixed category, Donald Trump’s political discourse then disparages that identity. His racist, hegemonic discourse criminalizes Latinx identities in order to justify xenophobic nationalism and to keep “Hispanics”

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Harold J. Recinos, *Who Come in the Name of the Lord?: Jesus at the Margins* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Craig R. Prentiss, ed., *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 7.

relegated to “illegal” status and cheap labor. Consider the now infamous remarks of Donald Trump during his “presidential” announcement speech:

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. . . . They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.⁴⁷

Trump’s totalizing claims lump Mexican immigrants into a singular category of criminality, almost completely precluding the possibility that any Mexican immigrants could be productive contributors to U.S. society.⁴⁸ What is worse, Trump’s rhetoric helped garner incredible support from the Republican constituency, and ultimately the oval office. Clearly, there is grave misunderstanding regarding immigrant identity, the value of Latin-American cultures, and the true nature of Latinx immigrant contributions to U.S. society. The amount of support Trump has garnered is a strong indicator of the xenophobic and racist sentiments that continue to fester beneath the cultural veneer of political correctness. One cannot dismiss Trump’s views, therefore, as singular, but at the very least excusable by multitudes of U.S. citizens. The overwhelming support of Trump elucidates the racial and ethnic prejudices that stubbornly persist within U.S. culture.

Some argue that Trump’s statement quoted above has merely been taken out of context; however, the immigration policies he has proposed make clear in no uncertain terms that he meant precisely what he said. His published proposition for immigration reform said: “[f]or many years, Mexico’s leaders have been taking advantage of the United States by using illegal

⁴⁷ Donald Trump, “Presidential Announcement Speech,” June 16, 2015, *Time* <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/> (Accessed May 4, 2016).

⁴⁸ See Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2014).

immigration to export the crime and poverty in their own country (as well as in other Latin American countries).”⁴⁹ He also claimed immigrants place an undue financial burden upon the nation, and “the Mexican government has taken the United States to the cleaners.”⁵⁰ There is nothing ambiguous about these claims, and they fully affirm the anti-immigrant sentiments expressed in the statement quoted above.

Racism in the U.S. has traditionally been dominated by black-white dualism, largely ignoring Latinx identities, but “[r]ace matters in more than black and white.”⁵¹ The erasure of Latin American identity allows for persistent discrimination. To add insult to injury, the anti-immigrant rhetoric, specifically aimed at Latin Americans, demonizes Latinx identities and stirs reactionary vitriol. As LaRosa and Mejía point out,

Mr. Trump’s entire Latin American policy discourse was predicated on a simple assertion: he claimed he would build a two-thousand-mile wall to keep people out, and then deport eleven million people living in the United States with non-regular immigration status.⁵²

The current imprisonment of Latina/o children fleeing to the U.S. from Central-American violence is a vividly heart-wrenching portrayal of this ongoing crisis.

⁴⁹ *Trump: Make America Great Again!*, “Immigration Reform That Will Make America Great Again: Make Mexico Pay For The Wall” <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions/immigration-reform> (Accessed May 4, 2016).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Harold J. Recinos, *Good News From The Barrio: Prophetic Witness for the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 10. Also see, Harold J. Recinos, ed., *Wading Through Many Voices: Toward a Theology of Public Conversation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

⁵² Michael J. LaRosa and Germán R. Mejía, *Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 228.

Specifically in Texas, the Pew Research Center found that the median “annual personal earnings of Hispanics” is \$22,000, compared to \$39,000 for “non-Hispanic whites” and \$26,400 for “non-Hispanic blacks.”⁵³ Twenty-one percent of “Hispanics 18-64” and 34 percent of “Hispanics 17 and younger” live in poverty, while only 10 percent of “Non-Hispanic whites” in the same age categories are impoverished. Statistically then, this economic disparity points to the position of the Latinx community on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder, and the glaring role race persistently plays in the stratification of society. There is also a major dearth of healthcare. Thirty-one percent of “Hispanics,” 21 percent of “U.S.-born Hispanics,” and 53 percent of “Foreign-born Hispanics” are uninsured.⁵⁴ It is no wonder, then, that a religious faith offering status increase and divine health and wealth could be appealing to the Latin American immigrant community in the U.S.

It is upon these historical-cultural underpinnings, and within these persistent socio-cultural dynamics that Latinx Pentecostalism emerges and continues to thrive in the U.S. context. Latinx Pentecostals draw upon their faith as a means of constructing themselves within this highly discriminatory context, and they understand themselves based upon their Christian and Latinx identities rather than in reaction to hateful and dangerous rhetoric.

3.2 Pentecostalism in Colombia

Christianity was imported and imposed by Spaniards on the indigenous inhabitants of what is now Colombia. Christianity was an intrinsic part of an armed European assault inflicting

⁵³ *Pew Research Center: Hispanic Trends*, “Demographic profile of Hispanics in Texas, 2014,” <https://www.pewhispanic.org/states/state/tx/> (accessed June 29, 2019).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

death and disease upon indigenous people. African slaves were also targets of violent evangelization, and sometimes the sacrament of baptism was even administered on slave ships.⁵⁵ Christianity's arrival with the Spanish marked the beginnings of a protracted relationship of politico-religious conflict and violence that has persisted throughout Colombian history. Ironically, Protestant Christianity was later appropriated by the poor and marginal as a means of subverting political and religious power, and the most violent period in Colombian history would yield both the persecution and explosive growth of Pentecostal faith.

Pentecostalism emerged in the Colombian context in 1932, when missionaries Adah and Edward Wegner began their work in Sogamoso, Boyacá. Their efforts marked the beginning of the *Asambleas de Dios* (Assemblies of God) in Colombia, which now has more than twelve hundred churches throughout the country.⁵⁶ The *Asambleas de Dios* represent one of many Pentecostal denominations in the nation. The “Oneness” Pentecostals entered the Colombian context in 1936 with the arrival of Canadian missionary Verner Larsen and his family under the auspices of the Pentecostal Assembly of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ The Larsen family's work in Bucaramanga was slow-going and marked by tragedy; nevertheless, it hailed the beginnings of what is now the *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia* (United Pentecostal Church of Colombia), which is now entirely independent of the United Pentecostal Church USA.

⁵⁵ Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios, and Ana María Gómez López, eds., *The Colombia Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 97.

⁵⁶ Victor Hugo Cuartas, “Pentecostalism in Colombia: Hope Amongst Violence and Adversity,” *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future*, Vinson Synan, Amos Yong and Miguel Álvarez, eds. (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016), 146.

⁵⁷ Cornelia Butler Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia: Baptism by Fire and Spirit* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1976), 33.

Though Pentecostalism in Colombia may be understood as “imported” to some degree, it has developed independently to a great extent, and may thus be largely understood as organic and indigenous. Espinosa refers to this as the “indigenization” of Pentecostalism in Latin America and the U.S. He cites the early missionary push for autonomous churches, the evangelization efforts of early independent Latino/a preachers impacted by Azusa, and the fragmentation of the movement into many disparate groups as causes for the indigenization.⁵⁸ Generally speaking, Latin American Pentecostalism developed its distinct character with little-to-no influence from North America.⁵⁹ The independent development of Latin American Pentecostalism is also due in part to the fact that “the founding experiences of Latin American and North American Pentecostalism were occurring more or less simultaneously in a number of countries.”⁶⁰ In addition, the cultural adaptability of Pentecostalism within the Colombian context allowed for its distinct Colombian character to emerge.

Of the nearly fifty million people populating Colombia in 2015, Cuartas claims 31.5 percent identified as Pentecostal or Charismatic,⁶¹ while others suggest the number of evangelical Christians comprised fewer than 15 percent.⁶² Labeling these groups is complex

⁵⁸ Gastón Espinosa, “The Pentecostalization of Latin American and U.S. Latino Christianity,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, v.26, no. 2, (Fall 2004), 275-276.

⁵⁹ Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino and Everett Wilson, “Latin American Pentecostals: Old Stereotypes and New Challenges,” *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals In Latin America*, Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 229.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 228.

⁶¹ Cuartas, “Pentecostalism in Colombia,” 140.

⁶² Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, *The Colombia Reader*, 157.

given that non-Catholic⁶³ Christians in the Colombian context may be broadly referred to as “*evangelicos*” (evangelicals). Consequently, denominations such as the Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Baptists may also be identified under this moniker. To complicate matters further, “Pentecostal” and “Charismatic” teachings and practices also often characterize these denominations, making it difficult to make distinctions. Brusco relates the dismay of Gilberto Vargas, who was at one time the director of the *Colegio Americano* in Bogotá, as he noted that the Colombian Presbyterian church was so profoundly impacted by the Charismatic movement that the sacraments were no longer as important, “and the whole style of worship” changed.⁶⁴

Pentecostalism is highly mobile and culturally fluid given its lack of need for institutional support,⁶⁵ so it is heavily symbiotic with its given context. In Brusco’s words, “Conversion must serve the needs of individuals in the specific social and cultural context of their lives . . . In so doing the doctrine itself is transformed in culturally appropriate and meaningful directions.”⁶⁶ So, in addition to the organic development of Pentecostalism(s) within the Latin-American context, the cultural adaptability of “imported” Pentecostalism(s) allows for the absorption of local cultural elements. The Pew Research Center asked Andrew Chestnut, scholar of Pentecostalism, why there has been such a significant shift from Catholicism to Pentecostalism in the Latin-American context, to which he replied:

⁶³ The term “*Protestante*” or “Protestant” is avoided here because in the Colombian context it is used by the Catholic Church as a pejorative for Evangelicos. Additionally, any Christian denomination outside of Roman Catholicism is referred to as a “*secta*.” (See Brusco)

⁶⁴ Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo*, 28.

⁶⁵ Daniel Ramírez, *Migrating Faith*, 14.

⁶⁶ Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo*, 29-30.

One reason is that Pentecostalism has very successfully absorbed Latin American culture. So, for example, the music that you hear in Pentecostal churches has the same rhythms that people enjoy outside of church. In fact, in only a century, Pentecostalism has become indigenous, or “Latin Americanized,” to a greater extent than Roman Catholicism has in its four centuries in Latin America.⁶⁷

So, whether organic or imported, Pentecostalism takes on a decidedly Latino/a character given its context. It is therefore important to elucidate the Colombian socio-economic, political, and religious context within which Pentecostalism has emerged and thrives.

3.2.1 Colombian Socio- Economic, Political, and Religious Context

During the trouble-fraught stages of Colombia’s struggle for independence during the nineteenth century (July 20, 1810 is the date Colombians recognize as the beginning of their independence from Spain), most inhabitants maintained agrarian vocations as sharecroppers, contractors, and day laborers. Though slavery was not prevalent, laborers were vulnerable to many abuses. Bushnell asserts that

Centuries of subordination to the Spanish state and church as well as to the small upper class of European descent had instilled in the Indian and mestizo peasantry an instinctive deference that caused them to address an employer as “mi amo” (“master”) and those of higher social standing as “su merced” (“your mercy”).⁶⁸

A French observer in 1840 said “every man calls ‘master’ any individual whiter or better dressed than himself[.]”⁶⁹ These labor divisions inherent within the structure of colonial life have proven

⁶⁷ David Masci, “Why has Pentecostalism grown so dramatically in Latin America?,” *Pew Research Center*, November 14, 2014 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/14/why-has-pentecostalism-grown-so-dramatically-in-latin-america/> (accessed June 14, 2019).

⁶⁸ David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 78.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

persistent across many generations.⁷⁰ The class stratification, economic disparities, and racialized hierarchy are persistent survivals in Colombian culture today.

Slave labor was used in certain areas such as plantations on the Caribbean coast. There were also a substantial number of black slaves in the Valle del Cauca, of which the city of Cali is the leading center. Sugarcane is an important crop that grows well in the tropical climate and rich soil of the Valle, thus slave labor was well suited to the local economy. New Granada (as Colombia was named during the colonial period) “was sorely marked by social and economic underdevelopment—or, more precisely, acute poverty and stagnation.”⁷¹

Dating back to the colonial period, the Catholic Church had provided both religious and social services including education.⁷² Liberals were displeased, however, with Roman Catholic control of education and began developing private schools beyond church control. Bushnell asserts that

Colombian Conservatives preferred to base their rule on the strength of social and religious tradition—on the natural deference of the lower orders toward their social betters and, above all, on the pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic church.⁷³

The Conservative party and the Church were inextricably linked, making any resistance to the Church a political affair, and any political liberalism a challenge to ecclesiastical authority. Pablo Richard refers to this relationship between church and civil society as a “Christendom,” and argues that “[w]here Christendom is in place, the church seeks to safeguard its presence and

⁷⁰ Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, *The Colombia Reader*, 243.

⁷¹ Bushnell, 74.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 167.

expand its power in civil society, particularly by making use of the state.”⁷⁴ Such was the control of the Catholic church in public affairs that it was not until 1973 that children were permitted to attend public schools without a Catholic baptismal certificate, and Protestant marriages were not considered legitimate.⁷⁵

The period referred to as La Violencia (1946-1957) in Colombian history began with the Conservative reclamation of power in 1946 and was fueled by the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Though violence slowed somewhat when the Liberal Party returned to a coalition with the Conservative administration, the two-party violence persisted into the 1960s at the cost of somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Colombian lives.⁷⁶ Long standing political rivalry fueled the protracted hostilities of La Violencia, and it was predominantly the rural poor who suffered the most. The violence most often pitted Liberal and Conservative peasants against each other, while wealthy landowners, politicians, professionals and business people enjoyed relative safety in the urban centers.⁷⁷

Protestants experienced persecution in various ways during La Violencia. Violent acts were carried out against them, and the Laureano Gómez administration (1950-1951) limited their activities by denying the use of radio and prohibiting literature distribution.⁷⁸ Though Protestants

⁷⁴ Pablo Richard, *Death of Christendoms, Birth of the Church: Historical Analysis and Theological Interpretation of the Church in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 1.

⁷⁵ Brusco, 33-34.

⁷⁶ Bushnell, 201-205. (Safford and Palacios put the range of lost lives between 80,000 and 400,000.)

⁷⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

comprised fewer than 1 percent of the total population by 1950, “all Colombian Protestants were Liberals (as a natural reaction to the historical association between the Roman Catholic church and the Conservatives);”⁷⁹ consequently, they were both politically and religiously subversive. However, it was not the membership of the more established Protestant denominations such as the Presbyterians that were the primary targets of violence; it was often Pentecostals because they were the most boldly outspoken against the Catholic Church.⁸⁰ Thus, Pentecostals were political dissidents pushing against the complicity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Conservative political party.

The socioeconomic standing of Pentecostals also positioned them for progressive engagement. As Richard Shaull put it, those occupying the lowest positions in society are the most strongly driven to “change the existing order of things in the direction of greater equality and justice.”⁸¹ Pentecostalism provided the poor with a means to push back against economic violence and anthropological poverty.⁸² Drawing upon the wealth of their experiences of “God’s presence,” they became agents of struggle for social and political change.⁸³

In the wake of La Violencia, a bipartisan political coalition called The National Front took power. In an effort to stem the bloodshed, all political appointments were shared equally between the Liberal and Conservative parties, and the presidency was to be granted to each

⁷⁹ Ibid., 207.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 211.

⁸² Recall Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha In the Struggle*.

⁸³ Cecília Loreto Mariz, *Coping With Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities in Brazil* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 160-161.

respective party on an alternating basis. The coalition finally put a stop to La Violencia by granting amnesty to hold-out guerrilla groups of the Liberal persuasion, and due to the conciliatory effects of the equally shared benefits of bipartisan governance.

Religious conflict also dissipated—though it did not cease entirely—as restrictions on Protestantism were lifted and animosities between Catholics and Protestants diminished. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) contributed significantly to this ecumenicity, and to an acute sense of urgency in addressing the prevailing conditions of life in Latin America. The second meeting of the council of bishops (Episcopal Council of Latin America or CELAM II) in Medellín in 1968 also centered on pointedly addressing the conditions of poverty in Latin America. Both Vatican II and CELAM II contributed to the birth of liberation theology, an ecumenical movement across Latin America. According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, father of liberation theology,

The name and reality of “liberation theology” came into existence at Chimbote, Peru, in July 1968, only a few months before Medellín.[] Ever since Medellín, the development of liberation theology in Latin America has been accompanied by a continual awareness that we have entered into a new historical stage in the life of our peoples . . . [t]herefore we cannot separate our discourse about God from the historical process of liberation.⁸⁴

This liberative focus on historical realities fostered ecumenicity among clergy, as both Catholics and Protestants from across Latin America began carrying the torch of liberation. No longer were Catholic priests strictly defenders of the status quo carrying the standard of conservatism, but many, in solidarity with those on the margins, adopted the “preferential option for the poor.” Some priests, such as Father Camilo Torres Restrepo from Bogotá, even joined in armed

⁸⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, 15th Anniversary Ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xviii.

guerrilla struggle and were martyred seeking social justice for the poor. Indeed, “Christendom” across Latin America was beginning to unravel, as both Catholics and Protestants engaged in analysis and critique of the complicity of political and ecclesiastical authorities in perpetuating the concentration of power and resources in the hands of a few, while engaging in violence and the persistent subjugation of the poor. Father Torres said,

I have given up the duties and privileges of the clergy but I have not ceased to be a priest. I believe that I joined the revolution out of love of my neighbor. I have stopped saying Mass in order to fulfill this love of neighbor in the temporal, economic, and social world.⁸⁵

Father Torres was martyred during his first experience of armed conflict on February 15, 1966.

Pentecostalism developed and even thrived within the context of La Violencia and in the subsequent years of Christendom’s slow erosion. Despite the life-threatening risk of publicly declaring one’s faith during this period, the number of evangelicals grew explosively.⁸⁶

Consequently, the roots of Colombian Pentecostalism are deeply planted within the soil of political and religious resistance, and the impetus for empowerment of the marginalized.

Pentecostals in Colombia today often continue to identify themselves as Christians over against Catholics, a likely result of a deeply painful past. Indeed, La Violencia created a deep resentment for the Catholic Church.⁸⁷ Even today, to be a non-Catholic is to identify oneself as a religious minority and likely feel the need to defend one’s own alternative religious choices.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Camilo Torres Restrepo, “As a Colombian, as a Sociologist, as a Christian, and as a Priest, I Am a Revolutionary,” *The Colombia Reader*, 142.

⁸⁶ Brusco, 39.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, *The Colombia Reader*, 157.

Safford and Palacios assert that during the latter half of the twentieth century secularization marks perhaps the most prominent cultural shift in Colombian society.⁸⁹ They identify urbanization, education, increased literacy, cinema, television, and sports as purveyors of “new cultural patterns.”⁹⁰ Despite these secularizing forces, Bushnell claims “Colombians still [go] to mass more than most Latin Americans,” and surveys of public opinion show greater trust in the church than in the armed forces or civil authorities.⁹¹ Overall, the monopolization of the Catholic Church slackened making increasing space for religious pluralism and the growth of Protestantism. In the waning years of the twentieth century, Protestants finally enjoyed freedom to worship without the obstacles and intimidation they had faced for so long.⁹²

3.2.2 Persistent Social Forces in Colombia

The latter half of the twentieth century marked significant strides and persistent struggles. The disparity between the rich and the rural poor became increasingly pronounced during the 1960s, and the wealthy elite continued to retain the best lands as well as controlling interest in industry, commerce, and finance. In 1970, “almost two-thirds of rural Colombians were living in what has been defined as ‘absolute poverty.’”⁹³ The television was introduced in Colombia in 1954, but had very limited reach. By the 1970s most Colombians had access, by one way or

⁸⁹ Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 342.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 342.

⁹¹ Bushnell, 278.

⁹² Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, *The Colombia Reader*, 98.

⁹³ Bushnell, 241.

another, to TV programming and thus could witness the comforts of affluent lifestyles well beyond their reach.⁹⁴ There has been a fundamental disparity since the founding of the republic: “the distance between the dreams of constitutionalism and real social practices.”⁹⁵

Despite braggadocios rhetoric from political leaders, progress was slow going and growing dissatisfaction fanned the flames of labor unions as well as leftist groups such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Ejército de Liberación (ELN), and Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19). Revolutionary violence emerged in the 1960s, and narco-traffic related violence erupted in the 1970s. By the 1980s, homicide rates tripled within the whirlwind of poverty, criminality, and political and narco-traffic violence. The inability of government and police to address these issues gave rise to the development of private security services that also proved inadequate. Confidence in the government seriously declined, and violence escalated.

The constitution promulgated in 1991 fostered new optimism, but ultimately has not delivered the desired changes. The constitution emphasizes human rights with attention to the ethnic diversity of the Colombian population, ecological awareness and responsibility, fiscal decentralization, and a strengthened judiciary.⁹⁶ However, high urban unemployment, abuses of children (including lack of access to education), human displacement due to violence, and harassment by the armed forces directly contradict the ideals set forth in the new constitution and have deeply frustrated Colombians.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid., 242.

⁹⁵ Safford and Palacios, 339.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 337.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 338.

Poverty remains a massive problem in the Colombian context, and though there is a growing middle class, economic disparity is glaring. According to the World Bank, demographic studies show a national poverty rate of 27 percent in 2018, which is a very significant improvement over the 42 percent ten years earlier.⁹⁸ However, conditions on the streets of Cali and in surrounding rural areas display levels of poverty beyond what some could imagine. The World Bank's statistics are predicated upon household surveys and, like most statistical data, provide a limited picture of lived conditions. In addition, methods for measuring and defining poverty vary widely, so attempts to compare poverty between different countries would provide an inaccurate picture. Poverty is relative to context, so it would be a mistake to make a comparison between the U.S. and Colombian contexts in this regard; however, it is safe to conclude that large segments of Latin American communities in both contexts struggle against severe economic hardships.

Healthcare was highly inadequate in Colombia throughout the twentieth-century, and was not readily available to most (conditions that would certainly have impacted Pentecostals). A recent plan, however, has significantly improved healthcare provision. Colombia's "10-Year Public Health Plan 2012-2021 (PDSP) aims to attain equity in health, positively influence the social determinants of health, and mitigate the impact of the burden of disease on years of life."⁹⁹ Compulsory enrollment in the General Social Security Health System has resulted in 97.6 percent participation as of 2015, and the ten-year plan identifies healthcare as a basic human

⁹⁸ The World Bank: Data, "Colombia," <https://data.worldbank.org/country/colombia> (accessed June 29, 2019).

⁹⁹ *Pan American Health Organization and World Health Organization Regional Office for the Americas*, "Health in the Americas: Colombia," <https://www.paho.org/salud-en-las-americas-2017/?p=2342> (accessed June 29, 2019).

right centering focus on society rather than healthcare providers and insurers.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the U.S. should take notes on these Colombian advances, given the common notion that it is the more “developed” nation. Despite making great strides, access to physicians is still a problem in some rural areas given topographical challenges and limited access to transportation. Interpersonal violence remained the number one cause of premature death in 2017, something which points to the bull-doggish persistence of conflict and confrontation as a means of addressing issues in the Colombian context.¹⁰¹

For centuries, the structure of Colombian society has been economically stratified with stark class disparities and racial inequality.¹⁰² The racial/ethnic issue in Colombia is very complex because there are eighty-seven indigenous communities that speak sixty-seven languages,¹⁰³ the obvious European influence of the Spanish (the so called “peninsulares” during the colonial period that were distinguished from “creoles,” or native-born whites), Afro-Colombians (resulting from the Atlantic slave trade), and mestizos representative of the blending of any combination of these ethnic/racial identities. Though state officials have argued racial discrimination and conflict do not exist in Latin America due to the prevalence of *mestizaje*, these societies remain stratified racially and linguistically. For example, “in 2005, black Colombians were nearly twice as likely to be impoverished; their infant mortality rate was twice

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ IHME: *Measuring What Matters*, “Colombia,” <http://www.healthdata.org/colombia> (accessed June 29, 2019).

¹⁰² Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, *The Colombia Reader*, 243.

¹⁰³ LaRosa and Mejía, 30.

as high, and they had much shorter life expectancy than the rest of the population.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, being black in Colombian society puts a large segment of the population at a verifiable and dangerous disadvantage. Even the Catholic Church historically engaged in racial discrimination against those with darker skin. Dating back to colonial frontier missions, the Spanish were less interested in the African slave population.¹⁰⁵ Thus, racism is deeply rooted within Colombian society, and persists in the popular imagination even today.

Perhaps the four years of peace negotiations that took place from 2012-2016 are another “silver lining” in addition to improvements in healthcare. These negotiations recently passed through Congress November 30, 2016, and brought a long-awaited cease-fire between the Colombian government and the FARC.¹⁰⁶ There are varying perspectives regarding the peace agreement, but it certainly signals important and constructive efforts toward peaceful change. While many Colombians are ambivalent regarding the validity of FARC members as political actors, there is a general optimism in the air about the trajectory of the nation.

Pentecostalism actively addresses these historical-cultural realities by providing adherents with tools to cope with poverty, by reattaching men to the family and empowering women, providing validation and agency to believers regardless of race, ethnicity, and social status, and giving hope within hopeless circumstances. It provides adherents with a means of engaging in the project of transforming their society economically, politically, and religiously, through “Spirit” empowerment.

¹⁰⁴ Tianna S. Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 7.

¹⁰⁵ Bushnell, 20.

¹⁰⁶ LaRosa and Mejía, 228.

3.3 Conclusion

A brief exploration of the cultural histories and social contexts of the United States and Colombia provides important perspective regarding the emergence of Pentecostalism within Latin American communities. Both contexts present major challenges for Latin Americans predicated upon economic hardship, class struggle, and all manner of discrimination. Pentecostalism addresses these challenges because it is a religion *of* and *for* the poor that imbues them with a sense of hope and validation. The poor and marginalized become both agents and subjects of divine mission.¹⁰⁷ Pentecostalism offers communities of solidarity, divine promise of prosperity and good health, and the potential to elevate social standing; thus, it pointedly addresses many of the challenges Latin Americans face from day-to-day.

Pentecostalism is well suited to these socio-cultural contexts because it pointedly addresses the lived conditions of poverty and discrimination and their constituent realities. Pentecostalism provides a prescription for hope in the midst of hopelessness just as liberation theologies center on the uplift of the poor within historical realities. In Lancaster's view "[t]he stimuli that trigger conversion to Protestantism are not dissimilar to those that also generate liberation theology. . . . drugs, delinquency, and crime; despairing poverty and social disorganization."¹⁰⁸ While it would not be accurate to reduce causality entirely to these social conditions, they are certainly conducive to Pentecostal faith. Moreover, it is precisely the ability

¹⁰⁷ Darío L. Rodríguez, "The Liberating Mission of Jesus: A Reading of the Gospel of Luke in a Missiological Key," *Transformation* v.14, no.3 (1997), 23-30. (also Kärkkäinen 182)

¹⁰⁸ Roger N. Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 104.

to address such lived realities that makes this form of faith particularly meaningful within these contexts.

It is also important to note that both liberation theologies and Pentecostalism “entail a strong conception of Christian praxis in daily life.”¹⁰⁹ Those looking for hope in hopeless situations need a faith that provides “traction” on the precariously treacherous path of impoverished life in which they suffer discrimination and marginalization. Formal, institutional religion mediated through clergy complicit in the political status quo simply will not fit the bill. Consequently, as clearly evidenced in the Colombian context, Latino/a Pentecostals do not align uniformly with conservative politics, as is often stereotypically suggested of Pentecostals generally.

As Richard put it,

The religious and Christian dimension takes on a new rationality in history when the starting point for interpreting it becomes economic and material realities such as work, bread, shelter, the reproduction of the body and of life itself, or their negation through unemployment, hunger, dire poverty, and all those oppressive and repressive mechanisms that produce death.¹¹⁰

These lived historical realities foster engaged and holistic Pentecostalism among Latin Americans. Where together ecclesiastical¹¹¹ and state powers subjugate, oppress, demean, ostracize, and even demonize, Pentecostal faith promises freedom, uplift, elevated status, community belonging, and “holiness.” In short, the range of structural layers within social reality

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Richard, 10.

¹¹¹ Ecclesiastical is used here in Pablo Richard’s definition as the institutional church complicit with political society in comprising a Christendom.

—economic, political, social, cultural, and religious¹¹²—are addressed through the constructed faith identity of Latina/o Pentecostals. By addressing these dimensions of materiality, Pentecostalism can provide pointed critiques of structurally problematic dimensions of social realities.

It should be noted that Martin Lindhardt's *New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America* complicates the discussion of Pentecostalism as a religion of the poor. He does acknowledge Pentecostalism as a potential source of identity, improved social status, and a means of coping with difficulties.¹¹³ He also notes that Pentecostals remain below average economically and are often less educated. However, he asserts that members of these communities are not uniformly marginalized. Specifically, the generations following the first converts do not necessarily share the experiences of hardship, poverty and deprivation that motivated the first generation of converts to this religion of the poor. My focus in this work, however, centers primarily on an older generation of Pentecostals whose beliefs and practices reflect early aspects of Pentecostal faith, and whose communities are comprised primarily of the poor on the margins of U.S. and Colombian societies.¹¹⁴

One final caveat should also be noted. Stewart-Gambino and Wilson point out, not all Pentecostals are impoverished members of the lowest social classes. While the greatest number

¹¹² Richard, 6.

¹¹³ Martin Lindhardt, ed., *New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), xiii.

¹¹⁴ For future research, I would like to explore younger generations of Pentecostals who do not share the same experiences of marginalization and poverty as their forebears in order to discover whether they will indeed adopt a preferential option for the poor, or choose complicity with power expressed through a spirituality of the status quo.

of adherents are among the poor, there is ample evidence of the spread of Pentecostalism across the socio-economic and class spectrum, meaning it “is not exclusively a lower-class phenomenon.”¹¹⁵ It can be problematic to think of the movement’s adherents as exclusively impoverished because such notions have sometimes led to explanations of Pentecostal growth based on the ostensible “ignorance” of the poor, or the “instrumentalism” employed by the poor to leverage benefits from Pentecostal religious practices.

The next chapter addresses the *ideational* aspects of Pentecostalism. By considering Pentecostal beliefs in relationship to Latin American perspectives regarding self, community, and society, it will explore the latent potential for Pentecostal beliefs and Latin American cultures to blend together and potentially generate *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.

¹¹⁵ Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, eds. *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 241.

CHAPTER 4

IDEATIONAL ORIENTATION: SELF, COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

This chapter explores the ideational dimensions of Pentecostalism by considering aspects of Latin American cultures and their interplay with theological identity. I examine essential beliefs and their functions and potential in the lives of adherents, and consider ways Latin American Pentecostal believers assess social structures. This exploration will take into account individual, communal, and societal dimensions of these ideas and practices to determine what latent potential they have to generate social/civic engagement in the lives of adherents. I also compare and contrast different theological perspectives within Pentecostalism to illustrate an emerging corrective voice lifted up by Latin American Pentecostal theologians who exemplify *a spirituality of outspoken witness*. Exploring this ideational level will allow for connections to be made with the material and behavioral dimensions that form the foci of subsequent chapters.

First, Pentecostal understandings of theological anthropology and salvation are considered along with aspects of Latin American cultures in order to articulate a particular understanding of the self. This is followed by an exploration of the dimensions of certain Pentecostal beliefs in order to discover how they might potentially shape the social-ethical and civic engagement of communities. And finally, a Pentecostal “infiltration” approach to society

will be considered as a social “war of positioning” in order to examine ways Pentecostals orient their lives in relationship to society.¹

In this chapter I argue that the Latin American context permits the emergence of a particular understanding of the cultural actor in the community that, combined with early Pentecostal Christianity, results in an orientation toward engagement. I will further argue that the beliefs that characterize Pentecostalism inherently advance an emphasis on life that understands history as a central context of human redemption. And lastly, I suggest that Pentecostalism does not ignore problematic societal structures, but provides strategies for addressing those structures.

4.1 Self: Latin American Pentecostal Theological Anthropology and Salvation

For this work theological anthropology is understood as

the Christian teaching regarding human beings relative to scriptural tradition that describes persons as created and creators of ordered systems of meaning to guide conduct that is observable and open to theoretical interpretation by religious intellectual disciplines and the human social sciences.²

For theologians, humans have the capacity for relationship to/with something/someone “Divine,” which is central to conceptions about what gives life value and meaning for many religious traditions. The question is whether that union is understood as an other-worldly or posthumous consummation of the soul with the divine, or viewed in more concrete terms as a manifestation of God’s love and justice in the world through the outspoken witness of engaged human agents.

¹ See Gramsci above.

² Harold J. Recinos, informal conversation August 9, 2019.

4.1.2 An Otherworldly Anthropology

Many Pentecostals consider the material life of human existence to be a temporary journey leading to the ultimate end of union with God. The struggles of this life within history are often understood as preparatory for the more important subsequent life in a celestial place of eternal communion with God. The pathway of salvation through Jesus of Nazareth—understood specifically as Christ the messiah—is put forth as the avenue by which one achieves this ultimate end. Thus, it is precisely this notion of salvation that becomes a point of intense focus for many adherents. This fixation on salvation of the soul is a common point of criticism leveled against Pentecostals because of the stereotype that they consider such salvation to be a higher priority than caring for the physical needs and human rights of suffering humanity in this world.

Elevating the importance of the soul can lead to a view of the body as insignificant and even evil. Such hierarchical ordering of soul and body also has social and political implications. Considering the soul or mind as separate from and more important than the body leads to the notion that intellectual work is superior to physical labor, contributing to the stratification of labor and the diminishment of “menial” work. Such ordering has also born deleterious results by contributing to the relegation of women and people of color to work of “lesser” importance, while white men are considered better suited to intellectual endeavors.³ It is the division of the self into disparate parts—body, soul, spirit—that opens space for such gradation.⁴

³ Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 128-129.

⁴ Again, this is what Nordlander refers to as “The Pentecostal Paradox,” the internal Pentecostal tension between affirming and rejecting the world.

Given the emphasis on the imminent return of Christ early in the Pentecostal movement, Pentecostals have also traditionally coupled millenarianism with their belief in salvation. Sanchez-Walsh claims “Pentecostals generally remain disengaged from social justice faith work because of the premillennial eschatology that many adopt upon conversion.”⁵ Since it was believed that Jesus was returning at any given moment, it made sense that the salvation of souls, rather than physical concerns, would be of utmost importance. In short, preoccupation with the end times “blurred the meaning of social improvement” during the early years of Pentecostalism.⁶ Although this millenarian fervor has cooled among Pentecostals, perhaps contributing in part to increasingly engaged forms of Pentecostal spirituality, the quest for individual salvation fueled by the belief in the pressing return of Jesus often persists.

4.1.3 A Grounded Anthropology

Despite these tendencies toward individualistic salvation in preparation for an imminent afterlife, Latin American Pentecostal theologians exemplifying *a spirituality of outspoken witness* pointedly critique such salvific individualism and eschatological preoccupation. Alfaro points to an image of Jesus as a liberator of the poor, and thus a purveyor of a salvation that directly delivers them from the harsh realities of material life. What is more, he believes true discipleship requires the same commitment to “liberative praxis that was modeled by the Jesus of history even unto the point of martyrdom.”⁷ Thus, Latin American Pentecostalism is not about

⁵ Sanchez-Walsh, “Christology from a Latino Perspective: Pentecostalism,” 99.

⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology*, 181.

⁷ Alfaro, 99. For a detailed discussion of martyrdom, see Harold J. Recinos, “The Politics of Salvadoran Refugee Popular Religion.” Also, Anna L. Peterson (1997).

individualistic salvation for some distant afterlife, but rather promotes a self-sacrificial life on behalf of others in the here and now.⁸

Solivan emphasizes the need for Pentecostal theologians to keep this hermeneutic in view by staying close to suffering. He argues that maintaining a sociological and theological reading within the context of the poor, along with ongoing proximity to suffering and marginality, will increasingly assist Pentecostals in addressing social-ethical action beyond charitable models. He believes this approach engenders the cultivation of a voice that pointedly addresses systems of injustice.⁹ Latin American Pentecostalism, then, demonstrates ways in which an emancipative hermeneutic may shape the social-ethical dimensions of Pentecostal thought, and push the sense of self and salvation well beyond the boundaries of egocentricity and the attainment of an “extra-earthly paradise.”

Religions are always situated within social contexts and engaged in conversation with cultures.¹⁰ An emancipative hermeneutic, then, may be shaped by the poverty lived every day by so many Pentecostals, coupled with a sociological awareness of the structures perpetuating poverty. The context in which Pentecostalism is preached and practiced, along with the interpretation of the given context, profoundly influence the ways its adherents address notions of self and salvation. Sometimes the response issues forth in *a spirituality of outspoken witness*, by which the self is seen as an integrated whole in need of holistic care, and salvation is

⁸ See Elizabeth Ríos, “The Ladies Are Warriors,” 198.

⁹ Lancaster (1988).

¹⁰ André Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism,” *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 195.

considered something presently attainable in the form of justice. The realities of poverty, struggle, and injustice, can foster a very different kind of Pentecostalism than those forms often found among the middle class in the U.S.,¹¹ and those who persist in *a spirituality of the status quo*.

Throughout the twentieth century, for example, the Latinx Pentecostal community in the U.S. has actively engaged in faith-based socio-political and civic action.¹² Latino/a Pentecostals engage in these activities because it is part and parcel of their faith identities to engage in work for the justice of the kingdom of God in the world. The realities of poverty and anti-immigrant sentiment, and the outright criminality currently being perpetrated at U.S. borders most certainly drives this action. On the other hand, some Pentecostal leaders reinforce the “Pentecostal Paradox” by choosing the economic and political insularity of complicity with corrupt power. This *spirituality of the status quo* results from an emphasis on moral conversion rather than social change, as well as the individuation of salvation. Rather than addressing the Latinx contextual realities in a Trumpian age, such leaders carry on with evangelistic efforts aimed at saving souls without addressing the structures of sin.

Salvation of the soul alone, however, does not address the current suffering faced by so many adherents. Pentecostalism must speak to the circumstances of struggle-laden humanity and provide hope in the middle of hopelessness.¹³ Poverty is dehumanizing because it blocks access

¹¹ Villafañe (1993), Mariz (1994), Solivan (1998), Alfaro (2010).

¹² Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 322.

¹³ Everett A. Wilson, “Redemption From Below: The Emergence of the Latin American Popular Pentecostals,” Calvin L. Smith, ed., *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 9-35.

to basic human rights, and relegates the individual to the lowest social position. The affirmation of identity and human value offered by Pentecostal faith can be transformative. Jose Miguez

Bonino asserts that

[i]n a society that systematically denies them access to the basic human rights and marginalises them in huge slums and shantytowns, the Pentecostals, through the impetus of their spiritual experience, have been endowed with a sense of dignity and worth. . . . Their vibrant faith gives them the courage and hope to demand a better existence for themselves.¹⁴

As a religion of hope and empowerment, then, Pentecostalism is inherently appealing for the poor because it offers salvation within the prevailing conditions of life. When one becomes imbued with hope against oppressive systems that belie basic human value, that hope may engender the fortitude to stand against such social stigmas and push back against anthropological poverty.¹⁵ The poor find good news in the Pentecostal message of hope because it affirms them as children of God, which serves as a means of psychological and social uplift. Such elevation provides a strengthened sense of identity infused with purpose.

4.2 Community: Pentecostal Beliefs and Their Implications for Community Life

Individual identity among Latin Americans is also significantly shaped by cultural orientation toward family and community. Rather than emphasizing individuality, Villafañe

¹⁴ Shaibu Abraham, *Pentecostal Theology of Liberation: Holy Spirit & Holiness in the Society* (Bali Nagar, New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2014), 29. Also see, Protestant theologians Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar. These are South American Protestant theologians that pioneered the liberation hermeneutic within the protestant moral camp, and to whom progressive Pentecostals would turn to evaluate theological literature.

¹⁵ See Ismael García, *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997).

argues that the Latinx reality is more accurately referred to as “Person-in-community.”¹⁶ From his “dialectical anthropological perspective,” identity is constructed within the matrix of self, family, and community. Isasi-Díaz claims that even the term “individual” reflects an egocentric and selfish meaning that is intrinsically detrimental because it “works against what is of great value to us, our communities.”¹⁷ Therefore, the community orientation of Latin-American notions of self inherently leans toward social engagement.

In Colombia, for example, the self is often understood in relationship to the family.

One’s family is the most important aspect of life for most Colombians. It tends to have a major influence on the individual, providing a sense of identity, community and support. It also forms the basis for many people’s social circles. There is a general expectation placed upon Colombians to be loyal and committed to their family by putting the interests of the family above their own. People will often go out of their way to support their relatives. Close-knit family relations provide Colombians with a network of security and support, particularly in times of need. This is especially relevant to the lower classes as the extended family can act as an indispensable source of support for coping with hardships during difficult times.¹⁸

The long history of conflict in the Colombian context also contributes to this family solidarity.

Colombians often seek to move beyond the day-to-day socio-political conflicts by sharing time in community with friends and family as much as possible—“a style of endurance influenced by Colombia’s unique historical and cultural development.”¹⁹ This interplay between Colombian culture and Pentecostal faith has the potential to fuel *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.

¹⁶ Villafañe, 134.

¹⁷ Isasi-Díaz, 55.

¹⁸ “Colombian Culture,” *The Cultural Atlas*, <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/colombian-culture/family-d72b2758-d49b-4d6c-808a-852351f03d0e> (accessed February 8, 2019).

¹⁹ Michael J. LaRosa and Germán R. Mejía, *Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 103.

Family patterns in Latin America are gradually changing relative to the productive structure of households, shifts in patriarchal power, and changes in sexual norms and practices.²⁰ In comparison with the U.S., Latin America has shown greater resistance to familial reformation,²¹ though household patterns vary widely depending on a range of factors within a given social context.²² Brusco shows that Pentecostalism is a powerful force in the reconstruction of the family unit in the Colombian context, and a significant means of empowerment for women. By challenging traditional notions of masculinity, Pentecostalism motivates men to invest their energy and resources into their families rather than indulging in alcoholism and prostitution. Given that the Colombian household is the domain of power for women, Brusco argues they are empowered with an increase in resources that can be applied to improving quality of life for them and their children. Similarly, notions of masculinity in El Salvador also drastically change following Pentecostal conversion, and these changes mark a decline in violent aggression, substance abuse, and womanizing.²³ These examples illustrate the interplay between Latin American family cultures and Pentecostalism: The cultural context influences the theology of self in the direction of community, and the religious conversion influences culture in the direction of empowering those on the margins, in this case women and children.

²⁰ Vania Salles and Rodolfo Tuirán, "The Family in Latin America: A Gender Approach," *Current Sociology*, January 1997, Vol. 45(1), 142.

²¹ Brígida García and Orlandina de Oliveira, "Family Changes and Public Policies in Latin America," *Annual Review of Sociology* v.37 (593-611), 2011, 595.

²² Salles and Tuirán, 141-152.

²³ Leonardo Santos, 71-72.

The cultural orientation toward community shapes Latin American Pentecostal identity and agency. Faith communities provide networks of fictive kinship as fellow adherents become “hermanos y hermanas in the Lord.” Pentecostal communities of faith also serve to anchor immigrants who often find themselves destabilized through social and cultural alienation.²⁴ Any Pentecostal stereotype pointing to an elevation of the soul to the detriment of the body and the physical needs of communities does not give adequate attention to the innate holistic care and nurture often shared within these communities. Being a Latinx Pentecostal includes care for the community because “that is what Christians are supposed to do on a daily basis for their ‘hermanos/as’ and as a way to demonstrate the love of God to unbelievers.”²⁵ In short, the relational orientation of Latin American cultures lends itself to a theological anthropology that is communally rather than individually focused. The priority of influence for Pentecostals points to the *koinonia* of the early church as a model for solidarity, equality, and justice. Pentecostalism’s recovery of aspects of the early-church community in Acts, coupled with Latin American culturally structured relational patterns, has a fundamental orientation toward social engagement.

Having considered Pentecostal notions of self in relationship to Latin American community culture, I now turn to the function of Pentecostal beliefs in order to consider their latent potential for generating engagement in the world beyond the church. One may argue social justice initiatives have no concrete correlation to the beliefs explored here, but a closer look will uncover underlying potential for an ideology of social concern.

²⁴ For more on the function of religions in the maintenance and change of cultural identity among immigrants see Brettell & Reed-Danahay (2012), Ebaugh & Chafetz (2000), Vásquez & Friedmann Marquardt (2003), Warner and Wittner (1998).

²⁵ Espinosa, 322.

4.2.1 Conversion

Conversion or “salvation,” the experience of being “born again,” is only the entrance into Pentecostal identity. Since the early days, Pentecostals have been concerned with a holistic mission. Even though evangelism was first priority, “Pentecostals were never oblivious to social concern, even though that myth exists among outside observers of Pentecostalism.”²⁶ Though early Pentecostalism was not characterized by direct action to influence state legislation, it very pointedly addressed the impoverished conditions of marginality lived by its working-class adherents.²⁷ Archer argues that, like liberation theologians, early Pentecostals employed a “hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval” because they looked askance at any form of Christianity that did not exemplify the “Full Gospel,” and they drew from the scriptural narrative of Luke and Acts²⁸ to retrieve examples of women preaching, shared wealth and property, pacifism, and counter-cultural community.²⁹ He expresses concern that the early Pentecostal emphasis on holistic mission has been lost in many cases in the U.S. because of church-growth strategies targeting the middle class. In his view, these Pentecostals have become detached from a

²⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Pentecostal Mission and Encounter with Religions,” *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 301.

²⁷ Kenneth J. Archer and Richard E. Waldrop, “Liberating Hermeneutics: Toward a Holistic Pentecostal Mission of Peace and Justice,” *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, vol. 1, 2011, (pp. 65-80), 66.

²⁸ It is fascinating that the author of Luke-Acts was himself a Syrian and he provides a very different Christology than the author of Matthew. The Jesus of Luke declares it is the poor that are blessed rather than the poor in spirit. Luke also presents Jesus’ death in terms of martyrdom initiated by the criminality of both religious and political leaders rather than framing it as a divinely willed atonement for sin.

²⁹ Kenneth J. Archer, *The Gospel Revisited: Towards A Pentecostal Theology of Worship and Witness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 145-146.

commitment to “the radical call of the Gospel of peace and justice as embodied in the ministry of Jesus.”³⁰ He suggests that Pentecostals return to the early roots of their faith by looking to the example of Pentecostal communities outside the U.S., in Latin America for example, that exemplify a holistic mission.

Pentecostals emphasize the importance of cultivating a robust Christian life of intimate relationship with God subsequent to salvation, and an expectancy that an empowered lifestyle will result from that relationship. Salvation is believed to impact both the “inner” and “outer” person. Volf puts it this way:

For Pentecostals the question whether salvation is “essentially concerned with the spiritual and interior life of man or with his political organisation and economic relations” cannot be answered because it is falsely posed. That question can be asked only in a debate between classical Protestants and liberation theologians. While Pentecostals may disagree with liberation theologians for making salvation partly a matter of socioeconomic change, they will not side with classical Protestants in claiming that salvation is spiritual and inward only, since that would be opting for only half the gospel. Salvation concerns both the inner and outward “man”; the gospel is good news for both soul and body.³¹

The question, then, is whether the salvific transformation issues forth in holistic engagement out of a theological reading from the margins. Though the life of salvation for Pentecostals may not prioritize overt political action, it shows signs of addressing the material conditions of life when its adherents recapture the emancipative hermeneutic of the early church, the early Pentecostals, and those communities still practicing their faith on the margins. While the primary emphasis often centers on individual corporeal needs, it does not exclude social and political issues.

³⁰ Archer and Waldrop, “Liberating Hermeneutics,” 66.

³¹ Miroslav Volf, “Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 26:3, Summer 1989, 479.

With the above considerations in view, I will explore prominent aspects of Pentecostalism often present across its wide variety of forms. Namely, speaking in tongues, and the twin promises of divine health and wealth.³² I will show that these beliefs and practices which are so often intrinsic to Pentecostalism are specifically centered on life *within history*. In fact, according to the biblical text, they serve no posthumous function and will cease to exist. Consequently, it is inherently contradictory to characterize Pentecostalism as a form of Christianity entirely preoccupied with moral conversion excluding concrete efforts to address social concerns. Indeed, if these essential components of Pentecostal theology serve only to equip the believer for this life they provide an inherently grounded foundation for social orientation.

4.2.2 Pentecost & Pentecostalism: Cross-cultural & Multi-lingual

Glossolalia, or “speaking in tongues,” has garnered much attention as one of the notable markers of Pentecostal faith. Glossolalia has several different forms and applications that serve both individual and community functions. According to the Book of Acts, glossolalia—or more specifically xenolalia—was miraculously gifted to the one-hundred and twenty followers of Jesus waiting in the upper room fifty days after his ostensible resurrection (Pentecost). The text

³² I am aware that identifying glossolalia as a central doctrine may point to “Classical” Pentecostalism in the context of the U.S. However, I am focused on tongues as a practice common to the Pentecostals I observed, but not necessarily considered “uniform evidence” as folks such as Parham understood it. I am aware of Allan Anderson’s work, and the critique of D. Dayton’s articulation of Pentecostal theology as particular to turn-of-the-twentieth-century Pentecostal faith in the U.S. context.

recounts that there were Jews from every *nation*³³ present, and each one heard the gospel in *his* (the involvement of women is unclear) own language.³⁴ This supposed miracle points from the outset to a cross-cultural, multi-lingual, inter-religious event that served as the inauguration of the church (*ecclesia*).³⁵ Perhaps speaking in tongues in the contemporary Pentecostal church may also serve some of these initial boundary-crossing functions?

Before proceeding further with a discussion of speaking in tongues, the cross-cultural, multi-lingual dimensions of early Pentecostalism (specifically in the context of the U.S.) require some consideration. It is well documented that early Pentecostalism, in the context of the United States, was notably multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and in some ways gender- and age-neutral. Since its beginnings, Pentecostalism has also been a religion of healing and hope. “Pentecostal preaching and teaching have, since their inception, voiced a message and a practice of liberation to those bound by sin or illness.”³⁶ Solivan refers to this tradition as a “rich heritage of

³³ “**Nations** (Heb. *gôyim*, *ammîm*; Gk. *éthnē*).† Specific cohesive groups of people, generally bonded by political or geographical considerations. In the ancient world the history and relationships of nations frequently are expressed through genealogies; such reckonings often reflect ethnic and linguistic factors as well (cf. the Table of Nations, Gen. 10). The Hebrew and Greek terms are generally rendered “Gentiles” when specifying non-Jews and “nations” when all peoples are designated.” W. H. Gispen, et. al., *Eerdmans’s Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987).

³⁴ Acts 2:5-6.

³⁵ See James K. A. Smith, “‘The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets’: Global Pentecostalism and the Re-enchantment of Critique,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109:4, pp. 678-693, Fall 2010. Also, Zachary Michael Tackett, “As a Prophetic Voice: Liberationism as a Matrix for Interpreting American Pentecostal Thought and Praxis,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, vol. 1, pp. 42-57, (2013). And, Joseph Davis, “The Movement Toward Mysticism in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Thought: Is This an Open Door to Pentecostal Dialogue?” *Pneuma*, vol. 33, pp. 5-24, (2011).

³⁶ Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation*, 10.

liberation.”³⁷ Though some forms of Pentecostalism have steered away from an emancipative hermeneutic and liberative praxis, the very “DNA” of the movement contains the seeds of liberation.

Charles Parham, the progenitor of Pentecostal theology, ostensibly experienced divine healing in his body.³⁸ He and his wife Sarah subsequently opened a “healing home” (1898) that “served as an infirmary for those awaiting the culmination of their faith cure.”³⁹ The Parhams desired to provide a comfortable environment for the ill to seek a physical cure by spiritual means and they offered this service for the meager cost of room and board, or free of charge for the very poor. This early example of philanthropy belies the stereotype of a Pentecostal lack of social concern.

At the Azusa Street revival (1906-1908/9), a variety of working-class folks gathered in an old AME church on a dirt floor with a cardboard podium to experience “empowerment by the Holy Spirit.” The movement began within an interracial, multi-ethnic, and multi-gendered community of people seeking hope through the “liberating Spirit” they believed empowered them to attain a better life, a life in which they could find healing, hope and power.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Solivan also experienced healing in his body. He was diagnosed with hearing loss as a child and underwent four unsuccessful surgeries. To make matters worse, his face became disfigured as a result of the final surgery. Years later he was attending a Pentecostal service where he prayed in tongues and another believer interpreted. The message was a promise from God to heal him. Over time he regained his hearing and recovered from the facial paralysis. <https://www.westernsem.edu/rev-dr-sam-solivan/>

³⁹ James R. Goff, *White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 45.

The founder of the Azusa Street revival, William Seymour, would have been the most unlikely candidate, according to the societal standards of the day, to ignite the revival fires that would burst into what is now a world-wide conflagration. As an African American born to slaves in Centerville Louisiana in 1870, Seymour would certainly make a very unusual prospect for prominent leadership within the Jim-Crow United States of the early twentieth-century.⁴⁰ For Seymour, the significance of Pentecost was not about speaking in tongues, but about overcoming “the hatred of a whole nation.”⁴¹ That was the revolutionary nature of the early Pentecostal movement that crossed over barriers of class and race.

Another radical aspect of early Pentecostalism was the prevalent leadership of powerfully gifted women. Estrela Alexander claims that “In those earliest years, there appeared to be almost absolute freedom for women to pursue whatever course they felt God was leading them to follow.”⁴² Women were functioning as pastors and missionaries, they were preaching and teaching, and even occupying positions in church government.⁴³ Latinas such as Susie Villa Valdez and Rosa de Lopez were engaged contributors within the early revival community.⁴⁴ Women such as Neely Terry, Julia Hutchins, and Ophelia Wiley also made vital contributions to

⁴⁰ Gastón Espinosa, *Azusa Street Revival & Its Legacy*, eds. Harold D. Hunter & Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *Ordinary Prophet: William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 36.

⁴¹ Shaull and Cesar, 211.

⁴² Estrela Alexander & Amos Young, eds., *Phillip's Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Angel Santiago-Vendrell, “Not by Words Alone!: Mujerista and Pentecostal Missiologies of Liberation from the Latina/o Margins,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2009), 293.

the early Pentecostal movement at Azusa Street. This was indeed counter-cultural since women did not even achieve the right to vote in the U.S. until 1920. These amazing women contributed just as significantly as their male counterparts, though history has largely neglected to recognize the full significance of their leadership.⁴⁵

Though disenfranchised by society, African Americans, women, and even children assumed visible leadership roles in the worshipping community. They enjoyed the liberty of speaking freely, and they were respected “because saints assumed that the Holy Spirit spoke through them.”⁴⁶ One eyewitness at Azusa exclaimed,

It is noticeable how free all nationalities feel. If a Mexican or German cannot speak English, he gets up and speaks in his own tongue, and the Spirit interprets through the face, and people say amen . . . God recognizes no flesh, no color, no names . . . [but] is uniting His people . . . by one Spirit in one body.⁴⁷

Clearly then, early Pentecostalism hearkened back to the cross-cultural and multi-lingual character of the day of Pentecost depicted in Acts chapter two, and also added additional layers of diversity. It was a movement of grass-roots theological reflection on the prevailing conditions of life lived in marginality, and it provided a pneumatic theology that empowered the powerless in ways that defied the dominant culture.

⁴⁵ Estrela Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Laurel, MD: The Seymour Press, 2012).

⁴⁶ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 105.

⁴⁷ Cox, 29.

4.2.3 Glossolalia

Pentecostals have, from the beginning, been concerned about the “fallen” condition of the world, and much of the early emphasis of the movement, and the purpose of xenolalic tongues, was oriented toward a missiological imperative. Pentecostal prayer is also often centered upon mission and the evangelization of the “lost.” Among early Pentecostals “[p]revailing prayer manifested itself in many contexts, ranging from the trivial (making a lost pen appear) to the amazing (driving mosquitoes from a prayer meeting) to the momentous (forcing the weather to change).”⁴⁸ There is a persistent expectation that prayer provides access to the miraculous, and what may be impossible in the “natural realm” becomes attainable “by the Spirit.” Pentecostals believe in the power of prayer to effect pervasive change, and glossolalia is often a central practice within the prayer life of adherents.

II Chronicles 7:14 provides motivation and intent for Pentecostal prayer. The verse reads, “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”⁴⁹ Pentecostals view the world as fallen and corrupt, and believe that society is in an increasing state of deterioration and separation from God; these tendencies are interpreted as “signs of the times.” The above passage is often prayed in hopes to activate the Holy Spirit to bring about systemic societal change. The Holy Spirit will move and bring about change if “His people” will pray fervently and repent. So, while prayer and “praying in tongues” are certainly individual practices, they also have a decidedly social orientation.

⁴⁸ Wacker, 26.

⁴⁹ 2 Chronicles 7:14, NRSV.

Praying in tongues is considered particularly efficacious in such instances when it is unclear how to deal with seemingly insurmountable difficulties. It is understood that the Holy Spirit is actively praying through the human being, bypassing the mind, and praying pointedly for the given situation through the human spirit. Romans 8:26 is foundational for an understanding of this approach to Spirit-guided prayer: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”⁵⁰ Thus, the Spirit is said to bypass the human mind and pray with great precision through the human spirit for the situation at hand. This view can be problematic when believers choose only to engage in prayer without attaching social action to their vision of living out God’s work of justice in the world.

Acts 1:8 underscores the purpose for the infilling of the Holy Spirit: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁵¹ It is this “infilling” of the Spirit that is said to infuse the Pentecostal believer with power and purpose for every endeavor. These endeavors are incumbent upon the person of faith who has been empowered to achieve them, but being a “witness” must include the full range of holistic mission rather than a myopic vision for “soul winning.”

⁵⁰ Romans 8:26, KJV.

⁵¹ Acts 1:8, NRSV.

Holy Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues are considered to be a tool of Holy Spirit empowerment equipping the believer to effect change precisely *in the world*.⁵² Paul said: “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; *where there are tongues, they will be stilled*; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”⁵³ According to the text, the gift of tongues has no relevance outside of the current reality. The operation of this practice, then, is intended to imbue the adherent with supernatural power to make an impact *in the world*, and it is precisely an empowerment *for service*. For Pentecostals, service entails understanding of a divine mandate for evangelization and mission, praying for the divine healing of the sick and destitute, and praying for God’s will to be done in a sinful world. Thus, it is clear that Holy-Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues have an orientation toward impacting the prevailing conditions of human life, but a grounded theological anthropology must be employed along with a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval to ensure that such practices do not become detached from the realities of the poor.

The practice of speaking in tongues serves a range of functions from personalized prayer to the edification of the community. In the context of community, speaking in tongues offers adherents opportunities to transcend social limitations. Pentecostals believe that anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, or class, is capable of receiving divine communication directly through the Holy Spirit and becoming the very mouthpiece of God to the community. Pointing to the early days of the Azusa Street revival, Sanchez-Walsh asserts that “Speaking in

⁵² Although the doctrine of “uniform evidence” is no longer accepted by all Pentecostals, charismatics, and Neo-Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is still expected by all to possess and empower believers. Speaking in tongues is also accepted as a legitimate part of the gifts of the Spirit.

⁵³ I Corinthians, 13:8, NRSV. (emphasis added)

tongues transcended the temporal boundaries of human language and introduced the mostly working-class Mexican immigrant population to the ethereal world of the Spirit.”⁵⁴ Such an understanding of the human capacity to channel the Spirit of God may have a profound impact on the self-worth of the otherwise disenfranchised. For a believer to live into such a notion of divine embodiment has the potential to give them a confidence (or boldness) to speak out not only within the context of religious assemblies, but also in public forums outside the church. Speaking in tongues, then, may have the latent potential for emboldening Pentecostal believers to address civic and social issues beyond the confines of the religious assembly.

William Seymour’s belief regarding the “in-filling” of the Holy Spirit changed significantly in the wake of his experiences at Azusa, and in relationship to the early Pentecostal community. He said,

Finding that some people could speak in tongues and continue to abhor their black fellow Christians convinced him that it was not tongue speaking but the dissolution of racial barriers that was the surest sign of the Spirit’s pentecostal presence . . . White pentecostals disagreed, they did not wish to submit to black leadership, and were ashamed to be “worshipping with niggers.” [Ultimately, they] opted to reject the interracial fellowship and keep the tongues.⁵⁵

Seymour came to understand the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to be unity. It was not the glossolalia or other charisms restored to the Church, it was the true spirit of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The true *sign* at the inaugural day of the Church was the unity of “Jews from every nation.” Xenolalia would serve as a vehicle for the dissemination of the Gospel, and an agent of unification and universality. The church began with this miracle of unification and the erasure of

⁵⁴ Arlene M. Sánchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, self, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 17.

⁵⁵ Cox, 63.

ethnic, linguistic, and religious boundaries. Whether interpreted literally or metaphorically, the locus is clearly *unity*. According to this view, the true value of Pentecostal experience is the capacity to cross boundaries of difference. If indeed this Pentecostal perspective is carried forward in crossing cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, gendered, and religious boundaries, its inherent potential for social-ethical and civic engagement is present and accessible to the faithful.

4.2.4 Prosperity Gospels: Health and Wealth

Prosperity gospels are an intrinsic part of the community-shaping ideologies of Neo-Pentecostalism. There are far too many iterations of this message to broadly generalize, but I will briefly identify aspects of the origins and tenets of these teachings.⁵⁶ I will then explore how a particular understanding of prosperity lends itself to a *spirituality of the status quo* by promoting self-aggrandizement, and contrast that understanding with a reading of prosperity “from below” that fuels a *spirituality of outspoken witness* within Pentecostal communities.

The so-called prosperity gospel, or health, wealth, and prosperity gospel, ostensibly addresses the economic and health conditions of Pentecostal believers. Adherents of prosperity teachings appropriate certain scriptures they believe can be activated by faith to claim the promise of complete victory over sickness, disease, and poverty. They believe Jesus “came that they may have life, and have it *abundantly*,”⁵⁷ and that they should “prosper in all things and be

⁵⁶ See Amos Yong, “A Typology of Prosperity Theology: A Religious Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics?” *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong, eds. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁵⁷ John 10:10 (NRSV). (emphasis added)

in health.”⁵⁸ They also look to the Old Testament enjoiner, “you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth,”⁵⁹ as an indication that it is God’s desire to bless them with economic prosperity.

Essek W. Kenyon (1867-1948), a key influencer in the development of prosperity gospels, preached a message of “dominating faith” emphasizing the human capability to activate a wide array of blessings he believed were secured through Christ’s atonement. He encouraged Christians that the cross did not indicate distant promises, but pointed to “benefits *already* granted.”⁶⁰ Kenyon claimed, “what I confess I possess. . . . It is what we confess with our lips that really dominates our inner being.”⁶¹ He also identified disease as a result of spiritual rather than physical causes.⁶² He believed one would receive healing when they recognized the spiritual nature of an ailment, and that the “Word of God” provided the only remedy because God “sent His Word and healed them.”⁶³

William H. Durham (1873-1912), an influential leader within early Pentecostalism, was likely influenced by Kenyon’s teaching on the atonement. In 1910, Durham began to preach the “Finished Work of Calvary” which effectively collapsed salvation and sanctification into a single

⁵⁸ 3 John 2:2 (NKJV).

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 8:18 (NKJV).

⁶⁰ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17. (emphasis in original)

⁶¹ E. W. Kenyon and Don Gossett, *The Power of Your Words: Walking with God by Agreeing with God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, reprint 1981), 4, 27.

⁶² E. W. Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer: Multitudes have been healed while reading this book*, thirty-fifth printing (Lynnwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, reprint 2010), 27.

⁶³ Ibid.

soteriological event. Durham's message was clear: Salvation through Jesus Christ provides both salvation and sanctification, and scripture does not necessitate any "second work of grace."⁶⁴ Many Pentecostals believe the finished work of Christ on the cross not only purchased their salvation, but also divine healing of all sickness and disease. Combine Kenyon's belief in the power of confession for claiming divine blessings with the understanding of divine health guaranteed in the atonement and the fundamentals of the prosperity gospels emerge.

4.2.5 Individual vs. Community Prosperity

A prosperity gospel of self-aggrandizement promulgates a message that guarantees the believer spiritual, emotional, and physical health and wealth contingent upon their faith and the appropriation of certain interpretations of scriptural principles. According to this view, prosperity is defined by affluence and conspicuous consumption, and is expected to be accompanied by complete freedom from sickness and disease. The message claims total health as a divine right given by God, and financial provision which overflows beyond mere needs into the realm of abundance. According to Katie Day,

The central message is that God intends believers to have abundance. Through faithful acts—prayer, living an upright life, attending church, and tithing . . . —one will be rewarded by God with wealth and the accoutrements of the good life, such as good health, big houses, nice cars, and lucrative jobs.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ D. William Faupel, "William H. Durham and the Finished Work of Calvary," *From Aldersgate to Azusa Street: Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Visions of the New Creation*, ed. Henry H. Knight III (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 239.

⁶⁵ Katie Day, *Faith On The Avenue: Religion On A City Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 95.

This understanding of the message is characteristic of the perception of prosperity among the middle class in the U.S. It elevates the idea that wealth is a sign of godliness and faith, which in turn problematizes poverty as the result of ungodliness and weak faith.

This form of the prosperity gospel is also profoundly impacting and shaping Latinx Christianity. According to a 2008 Pew study of Latinx communities across all Christian denominations in the U.S., three out of four believers affirmed the truth of the statement: ““God will grant financial success and good health to all believers who have enough faith.””⁶⁶ The problem with this claim is that it blames the poor for their poverty. It suggests that the problem of poverty is the result of their lack of faith rather than identifying the social structures that perpetuate economic disparities. Instead of employing a hermeneutic of suspicion to identify and problematize the social injustices perpetuating poverty, it directs believers inward toward an ostensibly deficient piety. Such an individualized view of prosperity denies the communal nature of the early church and early Pentecostalism, and fails to identify and address problematic social structures. It mirrors capitalist ideology by elevating the importance of self over against community. Rather than fostering an orientation toward community concern, it promotes the individuation of acquiring health and wealth.

Prosperity takes on a different meaning among the poor whose more meager concerns center on access to basic human needs rather than conspicuous consumption. In the context of the poor the prosperity gospel has inherent potential to encourage social engagement because of its orientation toward the physical needs of the community; however, its value is contingent upon a careful reading of prosperity from the margins. Prosperity “from below” signifies access to, at

⁶⁶ Bowler, 6.

the very least, a baseline standard of human development including health and nutrition, adequate housing, and access to education. This is not a prosperity of self-aggrandizement, but a promise for the provision of basic human rights. Prosperity must also be understood as a means of addressing the realities of poverty as the result of pervasive structural systems that create and perpetuate economic injustices. This orientation toward prosperity hearkens back to the early church community upon which Pentecostalism is modeled, one in which all things were shared in common.

In an extensive ethnographic work entitled *Inheriting The City*, a young Dominican man in New York was asked to define success for someone of his ethnicity and race; he replied, “[b]eing able to say that you’re alive.”⁶⁷ He considered a Dominican man in his mid-twenties living in New York to be enjoying a degree of prosperity simply by being alive. This differs starkly from the middle-class perception of prosperity. For those on the extreme margins to have an answer to their existential dilemma is a life-giving prospect, and for many who live a life on the edge of starvation and death, some assurance of a way out lends a degree of calm in the tumult of their living conditions. Though temporal circumstances may not immediately reflect significant change, being part of a community of refuge and receiving a promise of hope in the midst of hopeless circumstances is transformative.

Belief in divine healing also pointedly addresses a prominent concern among the poor. Broadening the categories of “liberation” to include different forms of healing makes sense for

⁶⁷ Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway, *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 90.

those who do not enjoy the same level of access to health care as the general population.⁶⁸ If Pentecostalism is offering a means of coping with sickness and suffering it is doubtless a vehicle of “liberation” for the struggling and marginalized. In fact, “Latino/a Pentecostals view Jesus as key to their liberation from a whole host of physical, emotional, and spiritual ills.”⁶⁹ While this may sound like nothing more than a spiritual placebo, it reveals an orientation toward the lived realities of Latin American Pentecostals and efforts motivated by a desire to address the crushing realities faced by the poor. While the means by which Pentecostals act on this orientation may be geared toward spiritualized modes of action, the orientation itself underscores awareness and concern for social realities. Coupled with the inherent impulses of early Pentecostalism, this concern may also lead to more concrete efforts to engage in holistic mission.

The moral strictures of Pentecostalism also have the potential to generate economic lift for families and communities.⁷⁰ Nolivos noted that the “Pentecostal ethic” shares a great deal with the Protestant ethic because it encourages “this-worldly asceticism, hard work, frugality, and delayed gratification.”⁷¹ This Pentecostal ethic leads Peter Berger to claim that Pentecostalism is “a positive resource for modern economic development.”⁷² These moral guidelines are also accompanied by a high anthropology because the believer is considered to be

⁶⁸ Sanchez-Walsh, “Cristology from a Latino Perspective: Pentecostalism,” 97.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁰ Brusco (1995), Leonardo Santos (2012).

⁷¹ Eloy H. Nolivos, “Capitalism and Pentecostalism in Latin America: Trajectories of Prosperity and Development,” *Pentecostalism and Prosperity*, Attanasi and Yong, eds., 93.

⁷² Peter L. Berger, “Faith and Development: A Global Perspective,” paper presented for The Centre for Development and Enterprise Public Lectures, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2008. (Accessed September 6, 2019). <https://www.cde.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Faith-and-development-A-global-perspective-CDE-Lecture.pdf>

the temple of the Holy Spirit, and have the power to appropriate the promises of God through confident declaration. Some of the reported results of prosperity faith particularly in the African context include an increase in self-confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline, determination, and sense of agency.⁷³

Many find hope in these gospels, experiencing various levels of comfort, peace, healing, and financial increase. Prosperity gospels are oriented toward addressing the lived conditions of humanity and center on solutions for real-world problems that plague the poor. As such, they contain latent potential for social engagement. If by no other means, they may offer a sense of psychological uplift for adherents by empowering them to rise above feelings of inadequacy and social constraints, and emboldening them to aim higher in their day-to-day lives. Such mental uplift may well foster positive results and underpin efforts to expand the reach of Pentecostal ministries to assist those in need beyond the walls of the church.

4.3 Society: Pentecostal Assessments

Pentecostals generally understand themselves to be responsible for impacting society. They are concerned for social justice, human rights, and civic engagement, but their approaches to addressing these issues vary widely. Latin American Pentecostal theologians living into *a spirituality of outspoken witness* present a challenge to the individualizing faith of *a spirituality of the status quo* that fails to adequately address concrete social realities. There are also those

⁷³ The Centre for Development and Enterprise, South Africa, “Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and Its Potential Social and Economic Role,” Ibid., 71.

whose *spirituality of near engagement* provides them with long-term strategies for addressing social reformation. In this section I will briefly consider aspects of these different positions.⁷⁴

4.3.1 The Spiritualization of Society: *a spirituality of the status quo*

What has hindered the socio-political engagement of Pentecostals has been the image of the church as a “pilgrim traveling through a sinful world, a sense of foreignness, and a premillennial vision of the future.”⁷⁵ As a result, some Pentecostals have tended to focus on individual rather than social change. These emphases, however, do not give adequate attention to underlying structural problems. As Kärkkäinen puts it,

The structural change is not the point of departure, but rather the change of individuals and Christian communities to facilitate the changes in [sic] a larger scale. . . . For Pentecostals, social justice is not a cause but a consequence of successful evangelistic efforts. Therefore, the perceived lack of stress on structural change does not imply a lack of interest in social issues *per se*, but a distinctive approach to social problems.⁷⁶

Social justice, then, is vitally important for these adherents, yet they believe the larger society will ultimately be (re)shaped through the change of individuals. These believers focus on the “great commission” of Jesus to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, but their understanding of the gospel as good news narrowly centers on moral conversion. The impulse for reaching the world with a gospel of soul salvation is thought to be the most effective means by which to transform society because it is believed that changing individuals will

⁷⁴ It is unrealistic for these categories to neatly organize Pentecostals into bounded disparate groups because they often share overlapping characteristics (more so between the second and third groups); however, I find the labels useful for organizing important distinctions.

⁷⁵ Kärkkäinen, *Toward A Pneumatological Theology*, 184.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 185. (emphasis in original)

generate social justice as a byproduct. Thus, the overarching goal becomes “conversion first, service later.”⁷⁷

These Pentecostals do give attention to problematic societal structures by characterizing them in spiritual terms as “principalities and powers,” “rulers of darkness,” or “demonic forces.”⁷⁸ Consequently, structurally problematic dimensions of society are often identified as the work of Satan and spiritual forces of evil. Since these structures are perceived to be driven by spiritual forces, spiritual means are believed to provide recourse for addressing them. Rather than engaging in concrete measures to agitate for change, they engage in “spiritual warfare” as an ostensibly effective means of generating social reform. These Pentecostals understand themselves to be divinely called to reach the world with the gospel, but the notion of gospel has been narrowed to such a degree that it fails to encompass what constitutes good news for the poor. Good news must couple pneumatic spirituality with concrete social action.

Another prohibition limiting the prophetic voice of these Pentecostals is the view that all political leaders are ordained by God. A literal reading of Romans 13:1 allows adherents to conclude that even leaders such as Donald Trump are divinely ordained: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”⁷⁹ As a result, it is unusual to find Pentecostals of this ilk speaking ill of political leaders. More often they will be heard saying believers should fervently pray for those in political office. This literal reading of scripture leads to the passive acceptance of poor and even

⁷⁷ Sanchez-Walsh, “Cristology from a Latino Perspective: Pentecostalism,” 98.

⁷⁸ Ephesians 6:12 KJV.

⁷⁹ Romans 13:1 NIV.

dangerous political leadership rather than an outspoken prophetic critique of political rhetoric and deplorable behaviors that blatantly deny the very essence of Christianity. You will, however, find these Pentecostal leaders encouraging adherents to vote based on biblical principles and to keep political leaders “in their prayers.”

4.3.2 The Concretization of Social Address: *a spirituality of outspoken witness*

Exemplifying *a spirituality of outspoken witness*, Argentinian Pentecostal theologian Norberto Saracco suggests the mission of Pentecostalism must include more than individual healing, but healing for society.⁸⁰ Pentecostal theologies must expand the understanding of healing to include redressal of social ills. This view broadens the notion of healing as liberation even further by identifying the illness of social inequalities as systemic disease that must be treated structurally. Any myopic theological lens centering attention on the individuation of healing has not captured the essence of the all-encompassing justice of the reign of God.

According to Puerto Rican Pentecostal theologian Miriam Figueroa, one of the root causes of inequality is bad theology, and she prescribes conscientization, a rereading of scripture, and a reconstruction of theology as the antidote.⁸¹ This calls for the awakening of conscience to the realities of the poor, and the mandate of the gospel to address those realities through a prophetic voice and concrete action. Such an awakening is born out of a rereading of scripture from below, and the consequent formulation of a theology of holistic justice.

⁸⁰ Wilmer Estrada-Carrasquillo, “¿Y los pentecostales? ¡Presentes!: Public Theological Contributions from Latin America,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, vol. 24, 2015, 236.

⁸¹ Ibid., 235.

Peruvian Pentecostal theologian Darío López Rodríguez looks to the Jesus of Luke for a missional objective that is liberating not only for individuals and communities, but “on all social fronts and in all culture contexts.”⁸² López claims the Lucan notion of salvation includes liberation from oppressive systems and underscores the divine love expressed specifically for the poor and marginalized. In keeping with the “Spirit-Christology” of Alfaro, who emphasizes the Lucan characterization of Jesus’ entire holistic mission as Spirit-infused,⁸³ López and Waldrop suggest a true Pentecostal life in/of the Spirit necessarily includes unrestrained social engagement:

The basic premise of our theological reflection is that the defense of human dignity and the struggle for social justice are two legitimate forms of living in the Spirit, and concrete expressions of the social and political dimensions of Christian holiness which is modeled by the Spirit of life. We affirm that the God of life is the God who loves and defends life, and liberates human beings from all oppression. In this sense, for Pentecostals who have been liberated by God from the chains of oppression, it should not be strange that they be involved in the defense of the dignity of all human beings as God's creations. This is a concrete form of living in the Spirit, and for this reason, they must denounce all forms of personal, social and structural sin.⁸⁴

The voices of these theologians very pointedly articulate a Latin American Pentecostal understanding of a concrete social mission. They believe that the gospel is the good news of salvation, healing, and deliverance, and that these categories encompass both individual and

⁸² Darío López Rodríguez, *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: The Message of the Gospel of Luke (Pentecostals, Peacemaking, and Social Justice Series)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 2.

⁸³ Alfaro, *Divino Compañero*, 59.

⁸⁴ Darío López Rodríguez and Richard E. Waldrop, “The God of Life and the Spirit of Life: The Social and Political Dimension of Life in the Spirit,” *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2011), from abstract.

social justice, multi-dimensional healing both individual and social, and spiritual and physical deliverance in the form of freedom from addiction, poor health, and poverty.

4.3.3 Leaning Into Social Address: *a spirituality of near engagement*

A third approach to society, and one I noted recurrently among Pentecostals I have observed, illustrates *a spirituality of near engagement*. These Pentecostals address social issues through an “infiltration” model. This strategy for social influence is predicated upon infiltrating society throughout the various levels of the “market place.” The market place includes business, government, arts and entertainment, education, and media. This can be understood as a function of the empowering of the Spirit to impact society from within. The underlying rationale is that the more Spirit-filled believers take on the responsibility of filling positions of authority and influence, the more societal transformation will take place.

According to Roger Lancaster, this sense of individual responsibility actually lends to revolutionary engagement, so he complicates the discussion related to the tendency of Pentecostalism toward individualism. He notes that the orientation of liberation theology is communal, while the emphasis of Pentecostalism is the individual; however, Pentecostalism’s “emphasis on the individual is not to exalt his social role but to apply more rigorous criteria of individual responsibility and accountability.”⁸⁵ He asserts that Pentecostalism indirectly influenced the Nicaraguan revolution because of the sense of “individual responsibility and accountability” rather than any overt political intent.⁸⁶ Seen in this light, Pentecostal

⁸⁵ Roger N. Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 111.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

individuality fosters a greater sense of social concern by emphasizing the responsibility of each individual to engage in revolutionary social action.

Recall the Gramscian theoretical perspective that points to a long-term, consensual relationship between the political system and civil society. The powerful dominate, and the poor find ways to live consensually within the given social structure, while also strategically seeking to improve their position. Recall that such positioning may not include overt political action, *per se*, or radical revolutionary measures, but patient infiltration of society at various levels.

The leaders of Pentecostal communities often encourage the faithful to pray, believe, and work toward positions of greater authority and influence, and to trust in God for the necessary provision to fulfill the divine mandate to “go into all the world.” Recall that, according to Gramsci, the organic intellectual rises within her or his own class not as a “professional intellectual,” but as one who “functions in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.”⁸⁷ This is the kind of leadership exemplified by many Pentecostal leaders, and particularly by Pastor One⁸⁸ in an example presented below (chapter six). Pastor One is an organic intellectual who teaches a strategy for undermining hegemony through a proletariat political consciousness that subverts the consent of conservative Republican anti-immigrant leadership. Drawing on an interpretation of Old-Testament scripture, he teaches patient engagement in “revolutionary” action that contradicts the prevailing anti-Latinx political discourse in the U.S. and encourages congregants to patiently transform society by aspiring to achieve greater influence at various levels of public life.

⁸⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 3.

⁸⁸ A pseudonym.

Pastor One enjoins his immigrant congregation to fully engage in the social context of the U.S. The kind of infiltration he advocates is not characterized by Marxist notions of proletariat revolution, but a calculated strategy of individual and communal responsibility to undermine the hegemonic limitations imposed by the Republican conservative “ruling class” of the Trump White House. Though never overtly revolutionary, Pastor One’s strategy posits a gradual “war of positioning” intended to elevate the subaltern cultural group, and it certainly emphasizes the importance of individual piety and accountability as underscored by Lancaster. This form of “revolutionary” action is calculated resistance against those in power who would relegate and subjugate the Latinx community to inferior status, and it underscores individual responsibility as a significant means of contributing to the community and society.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined ideational dimensions of Pentecostalism through the lenses of self, community, and society, and focused on the latent potential for Pentecostals to become increasingly engaged in efforts for social and civic justice. Section One reflects on Latin American Pentecostal notions of self, along with considerations of Pentecostal theological anthropology and salvation. It argues that Pentecostalism within Latin American contexts has an inherently communal orientation influenced by Latin American cultures, and by the overwhelmingly impoverished conditions so prevalent among Latin American communities. Thus, the self is understood in relationship to community at the familial, ecclesial, and societal levels, and is intrinsically concerned with the prevailing conditions of struggle that so often characterize Latin American lived experience. This understanding of the self lends itself to

social-ethical and civic engagement rather than being fixated on the self as hyper-individualized with a central focus on the salvation of the soul for an afterlife.

Section Two examines the beliefs that arguably compose the central “DNA” of Pentecostalism, namely, speaking in tongues, prosperity and healing and how these beliefs function within and orient Pentecostal communities. It was argued that these beliefs function only within the historical reality of adherents, and it is believed by Pentecostals that these functions will cease in the afterlife; therefore, the very teachings that are so often central to Pentecostalism function precisely for this material reality alone.

It was noted that speaking in tongues, according to the scriptural narrative, created a miraculous cross-cultural, multi-lingual, inter-religious event, and that early Pentecostalism in the twentieth century also reflected various aspects of such diversity. Though some scholars believe this diversity to be a romanticization of the conditions at the Azusa Street revival, it remains an interesting dimension of both the scriptural account of Pentecost and the modern advent of Pentecostalism. This is the case first because it points to a biblical model of the way the church was initiated, namely as a culturally and linguistically diverse community; and second because the undeniable evidence of the diversity that existed at Azusa points to the latent potential of Pentecostalism to be a force of multi-level diversity in a world that so often resists such hybridity, regardless of whether that diversity is overstated.

Prosperity gospels are then considered for their potential to foster social concern and public engagement. In agreement with Sanchez-Walsh, it was argued that broadening the category of liberation to include healing makes sense given the limited access to healthcare among the poor. Pentecostal faith is believed by adherents to provide liberation from physical,

emotional, and spiritual illness, so it is certainly oriented toward addressing the vitally important human-rights issue of access to healthcare. What is more, the Pentecostal view of the body as the very residence of the Holy Spirit has the potential to heighten the sense of value placed upon the body and lead to increased efforts to address social concerns regarding access to healthcare, proper nutrition, and adequate housing.

Prosperity gospels were also considered for their potential to address the economic deprivation faced by so many of its adherents worldwide. While it is clear that this aspect of Pentecostal Christianity may serve nothing more than the self-aggrandizing agendas of those in leadership, it may also provide psychological uplift for the poor that empowers and motivates them, as well. Either way, it centers on reality within this life and seeks to offer solutions to the real-world problem of poverty.

Section Three considers ways Pentecostals view the larger society beyond the self and the community. It considers the limitations of Pentecostal thought for addressing societal structures given its stereotypically-characterized “other-worldly” orientation. It was argued that the Pentecostal emphasis on salvation does not necessarily negate concern for societal structures, but rather points to a particular understanding of how to address those structures. Some understand these structures of society in spiritual terms, so they seek to address them in terms of spiritual action. Others construct a perspective “from below” in conversation with liberation theologies and raise a prophetic voice to pointedly address social injustices. Still others utilize an infiltration approach to gain influence at every level of society and restructure it from within. While it may seem dubious that such engagement will actually yield results, this patient war of positioning is

precisely what Gramsci points to as a means by which subaltern groups may find a means to elevate themselves in society.

I now turn to the material aspects of Pentecostal ritual practices to explore their potential to generate social concern and action. I will consider worship spaces, iconography, bodies, and rituals, asking how they might shape Pentecostals as agents of social change. Are these practices merely emotional performances that have nothing more than cathartic value? Or do they shape communal identity and issue forth in legitimate holistic action in the world?

CHAPTER 5

MATERIAL RELIGION AND RITUAL LIFE

I have considered the ideological dimensions of Pentecostalism and their latent potential to generate social engagement; in this chapter I will examine the material and ritual life of Pentecostalism by exploring worship practices, sacred space and iconography, and by considering the context of poverty as the incubator for Pentecostal public witness. I will focus on the material dimensions of the faith because religion “is much more than thoughts and beliefs, . . . rather religious thoughts and beliefs are entwined with the sensorimotor, with a profusion of smells, sounds, sights, tastes, emotions, and movements.”¹ Pentecostalism is rich with these various material dimensions and they often differ significantly from those that characterize Catholic and Mainline worship spaces, rituals, and congregations.

Worship music is central to the material and ritual practices of Pentecostalism so it will serve as my primary focus. Corten’s claim that Pentecostal praise is merely “illocutionary” and does not transmit information or generate action will serve as a foil for my discussion of the symbolism of praise and its potential to motivate human agency. I will draw on emic perspectives in both Colombia and the U.S. to demonstrate layers of significance within praise and worship rituals, and consider aspects of sacred space and icons. I will illustrate ways the

¹ Manuel A. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 199.

material elements and experiences of praise and worship shape agents for social change and move them toward action in the world.

In the final section, I will consider the potential of racially and ethnically diverse Pentecostal worshipping communities to aid in the formation of a boundary-crossing worldview with implications for public engagement. I will also examine the material reality of poverty as a foundation for reclaiming the essence of the early Pentecostal movement, and for shaping the prophetic voice of emancipative Pentecostalism.

5.1 Contemporary Pentecostal Worship

Pentecostalism is driven by the engine of worship music. “Whether in a storefront building with bare fluorescent tubes hanging from the ceiling or in a theater with a sophisticated sound system, the heart of Pentecostalism is the music.”² Praise and worship music provides a means through which the Holy Spirit is said to refresh, renew and equip believers. Worship is the believer’s direct spiritual lifeline to God, and the recurring context in which Pentecostal communities believe they are imbued with the inexhaustible resource of spiritual power. Authentic Pentecostal praise and worship are intrinsically oriented both vertically toward God and horizontally toward community.³

The term “Pentecostal worship” is utilized here to describe a certain approach to musical worship rituals, and I use it interchangeably with “contemporary worship” and “praise and worship.” There are myriad expressions of music as worship, so it is impossible to sweep them

² Miller and Yamamori, 23-24.

³ See Villafañe, 168.

all into a single category; however, the term here refers to contemporary approaches to worship rituals often referred to as “praise and worship” that typically involve the use of drums, guitars, keyboards, and vocals, employ choruses intended to be sung by a worshipping community, and most often utilize audio and lighting systems, and projectors and screens for visual presentations.

Contemporary worship appropriates popular styles of music, involves extended periods of congregational singing, clapping, and dancing, and prominently features musicians and singers as central leaders within the context of worship services.⁴ This approach is less formal than traditional worship and is expressed far more physically than the often stoic congregants observed in Mainline traditional settings. Audio and visual technologies also play a central role within Pentecostal worship spaces as a means of enhancing spiritual encounters. This contemporary approach is pervasive throughout the Americas and the world. While it takes on contextual nuances given different cultural locations, there are shared commonalities in song selections and lyrical themes, instrumentation, organization of ritual structures, approaches to leadership, and a general mode of enthusiastic expression.

There is a great deal of reflection that goes into both the preparation and the performance of Pentecostal worship. Musical leadership teams serve as an *axis-mundi* facilitating the convergence of the material with the transcendent. These teams consider their role to be a divine mandate, and they draw upon musical, audio-visual, and socio-cultural knowledge to achieve both spiritual and material ends. The spiritual endeavor is to facilitate the intersection between

⁴ See Swee Hong Lim & Lester Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017).

the human and divine, yielding the material results of empowering the community for engagement.

5.1.2 Material Elements of Praise & Worship

The elements used for contemporary worship services are intended to materialize a microcosmic model of the atmosphere of heaven. Various media employed as physical expressions of spirituality are what Robert Orsi calls the “medium of religious materialization—for rendering the invisible visible and present.”⁵ The material dimensions of Pentecostal worship are modeled on examples found in scriptural narratives. The textual examples provide images of worship and the atmosphere of heaven, thus supplying patterns for emulation. The Old Testament dedication of Solomon’s temple is a good example. When the temple was fully constructed and Solomon completed his prayer of dedication “. . . fire came down from heaven . . . and the glory of the Lord filled the house.”⁶ When this iconic edifice of worship was completed, fire ostensibly fell, and “glory” filled the space. These images of fire and smoke point to the power and glory of God, and they are often referenced metaphorically during worship services. The use of visual affects—fog machines, lights, displays with moving images—also alludes to these attributes in materially tangible ways.

Revelation 4 provides an example that directly references worship in heaven. It speaks of “torches with burning flames” and “a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.” These vivid depictions of a heavenly sphere provide imagery for believers to emulate. The motive is to create

⁵ Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 77.

⁶ II Chronicles 7:1 NASB.

an atmosphere in which worshippers may actually encounter God. This experience signifies more than a mere assent to ideas or conceptualizations of God, but points to an encounter in which the worshipper believes s/he is experiencing the touch of God. Worshippers speak of “feeling God’s touch,” “entering the holy of holies,” and “experiencing the presence of God,” and it is not uncommon to look out over a congregation and see many expressions of worship physically displayed through raised hands, bowed bodies, and tear-streamed faces.

Biblical references to instrumentation such as cymbals, stringed instruments, and horns also provide the basis for incorporating sounds not typically heard in more traditional sanctuaries. Other material forms such as dancing, waving banners, and marching serve as forms of material expression patterned on models found in scripture. For worshippers, the lights, video images, smoke, music, singing, and dancing are intended to facilitate worship encounters as they are depicted in scripture.⁷

5.1.3 The Social Orientation of Praise & Worship

Worship encounters are not only intended to draw adherents into heaven-like spiritual experiences, but the results of these encounters extend beyond spirituality into changed behaviors. In Colombia I attended a worship service at a center for men struggling against drug addiction. This Christian rehabilitation center typically houses about fifteen men who are admitted to the residential program in which they undergo detoxification and treatment based on

⁷ Although my study does not explore or theorize about the details of this kind of religious experience, I urge you to look at cross-cultural examples of ritual trance, spirit possession and altered states of consciousness in I. M. Lewis, “Trance and Possession,” *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ninth ed., Pamela A. Moro, ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2013).

spiritual healing. Spiritual engagement is integral to the program, and thus church services are held regularly. I attended one of their services and participated with these men in worship. Their instruments were crude, but that did not hamper their enthusiasm. One pounded out a rhythm on a bass-drum-like instrument, while one clapped a tambourine. Still another slapped a cowbell while all who were able clapped exuberantly and lifted their voices loudly in celebration. Their voices were dissonant, but their hearts found a harmonic key center which resonated beautifully in the simple sacred space. Belting out their *coritos* without the polish of a highly produced contemporary service, these sincere worshippers engaged in an encounter that involved a full range of bodily experience and expression. These services function as the cornerstone of the rehabilitation program; as a means of spiritual and physical uplift, they are believed to be a key ingredient in the rehabilitation from addiction, and instrumental in efforts to reincorporate these men into society. This is an example of a way that worship experiences believed to be empowered by the Holy Spirit drive Pentecostal social ministries.

In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus affirms the core principles of the Jewish law which elucidate the proper way to approach the Christian way of life: “. . . You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”⁸ Herein lie the keys to understanding the internal motivations of worship, namely, to live into the holistic love of both God and neighbor. Worship is inextricably linked with the love of neighbor, and it has a simultaneous emphasis upon righteousness and justice. Espinosa believes Jesus defined worship when he spoke of this love of God and neighbor, and

⁸ Luke 10:27 NLT.

that the two are encompassed by “a holistic vision of faith-based social change.”⁹ In essence, there is a built-in social-ethical dimension within worship. According to I John 4, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”¹⁰ This passage sums up the intrinsically social nature of worship: Worship of God flows from love of God, and Love of God is predicated upon love of neighbor. Simply put, no love for neighbor equals no love for God equals no authentic worship.

The manner of loving outlined in Mark 12:30 points to an all-encompassing kind of engagement, a holistic love which involves every aspect of human existence (i.e. the heart, soul, mind, and body). It does not merely call for an intellectual assent to religious or theological ideas, nor does it call for the passionate expression of love which abandons reason for fits of ecstasy. The kind of love being prescribed requires full engagement with God and neighbor. Pentecostal worship calls for the engagement of the totality of mind-body expression. What is taking place *within* the worshipper is at the same time embodied and physically expressed.

5.1.4 Pentecostal Praise As Protest

Pentecostalism stands in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets who articulated the voice of justice by criticizing corrupt socio-cultural systems. Pentecostals have always believed

⁹ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 323.

¹⁰ I John 4:20 NASB.

God speaks into the social order through divinely ordained prophetic voices.¹¹ The early Pentecostal community's emphasis on spirit baptism with tongues pointed to the eschatological hope of the imminent return and rule of Jesus Christ in the "eschatological present."¹² The imminent realization of this kingdom signaled a Pentecostal vision for the just and equitable rule of Jesus.¹³ This impulse of the early Pentecostal movement points back to the character of the early church and what is "an animating first principle of Pentecostal spirituality: the revolutionary activity of the Spirit always disrupts and subverts the status quo of the powerful."¹⁴

This early characteristic of Pentecostal Spirit-imbued revolutionary power manifests in the prophetic protest of Pentecostal praise. Believers view praise and worship as the pathway by the Spirit into the very presence of God, and the divine presence as a place of profound healing, deliverance, and empowerment. In the struggle for survival, the poor find solace there in the "presence of God." When life deals its harshest blows day in and day out, Pentecostals find hope in songs of life. Hopeless circumstances do not seem to merit singing, yet the faithful celebrate God's goodness by praising alongside their hermano/as. The music of Latin American spirituality uncovers "the groans" of oppression and "the triumph" of a faith that overcomes "anguish and

¹¹ James K. A. Smith, "'The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets': Global Pentecostalism and the Re-enchantment of Critique," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109:4, pp. 678-693, Fall 2010.

¹² Zachary Michael Tackett, "As a Prophetic Voice: Liberationism as a Matrix for Interpreting American Pentecostal Thought and Praxis," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, vol. 1, pp. 42-57, 2013, 51.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 682.

sorrow.”¹⁵ These songs of hope can be heard pouring from the storefront churches of the barrio.¹⁶ The songs of victory signal the radical impulse of early Pentecostalism as a means of pushing back against the realities of oppression.

Singing coritos provides a means of pushing back against death-dealing circumstances and of defining oneself in contradistinction to dehumanizing narratives. Coritos function symbolically to enable Latin American Pentecostals to “define themselves in light of the positive and hopeful message of the lyrics.”¹⁷ The hope-filled messages affirm the self-worth of worshippers while emphasizing the sufficiency of God’s grace and power that is available to them.¹⁸ These coritos “are signs and testimonies that despair and apathy will not have the final word.”¹⁹ One such corito, entitled The Remedy of God, points to Jesus as the answer for both personal and social ills:

When you can see in all the world
the effects of evil everywhere
when you can see that the carnal man
cannot leave his vices behind

Chorus

The remedy of God is Christ Jesus
It’s Jesus Christ the Lord

¹⁵ Villafañe, 117.

¹⁶ Solivan, 27.

¹⁷ Paul Barton, *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), 94. See Edwin Apónte, *Santos*. And Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi regarding the significance of coritos and the erotic. “*Qué Lindo Es Mi Cristo: The Erotic Jesus/Christ in the Caribbean, Latin American, and Latino/a Protestant Christian Music*,” in *Jesus in the Hispanic Community*, Recinos and Magallanes, eds.

¹⁸ Petersen, 96.

¹⁹ Solivan, 27.

When you can see social injustice
is the cause of so much suffering
when racial prejudices flourish
it's the infernal flower of error.²⁰

Singing songs like these is not a denial of the crushing realities of lived experience, but a means of protesting against any realities that contradict the promise of God's shalom believed to be present through Jesus by the Holy Spirit.²¹

Singing in tongues may also be understood as a means of protest. Contrary to Corten's claim that praising in tongues does not articulate a political language, tongues speech may be understood to serve a politically subversive function. Language is symbol, and the language of those in power often dehumanizes and marginalizes the Latin American poor. Pentecostals can transcend the language of domination by creating their own symbolic narrative from within the community. Prophetic messages in tongues are believed to be the very voice of God spoken through human agents directly to the gathered community. Such messages are often followed by an interpretation from someone within the community. Thus, the community defines itself in light of its own interpretation of language believed to be direct from God by the Holy Spirit. This is what Carolyn Cooper calls a "border clash" or "warring zone" and which Robert Beckford describes as "a social location or cultural context where competition occurs for influence,

²⁰ This and other examples of coritos may be found in Alfaro's *Divino Compañero*, 138-147, and in Edwin Apónte's *Santos*, 101-103.

²¹ Roger Lancaster illustrates ways that coritos serve to formulate theological and social identity. The various presentations of Christ as Cristo Campesino (peasant), Cristo Obrero (worker), and Cristo Guerrellero (guerrilla) portray Christ in terms of the lived realities of the people. These images allow the poor to relate God to their own suffering and live into an elevated self-conceptualization as the "body of Christ," but also to see God engaged with them in the struggle for justice. *Thanks To God and the Revolution*, 78-81.

meaning and power.”²² It is a narrative that speaks of the power of the kingdom of God to elevate the Pentecostal community beyond systems of domination and equip them as ambassadors of a kingdom of justice and dignity. Pentecostals transcend the constraints of language to articulate the in-breaking of a new reality in which God’s justice overcomes worldly ills and in which they have prominence and agency. Tongues performance points to the realization of the reign of God as a present reality that supersedes oppressive world systems.

5.2 The Materiality of Sacred Space

The spaces in which adherents experience these encounters take on sacred significance, and this sacralization takes place at both individual and corporate levels. For example, a “prayer closet” is a common place in the home for an individual to engage in activities such as prayer and worship that mark the space as sacred for devotional purposes. My focus here, however, is specifically on the community-shaping aspects of corporately shared spaces. Whether in a simple storefront church or an elaborate mega-church sanctuary, the space becomes a place where Pentecostals believe they enter the presence of the divine. Through these experiences, they come to define themselves in contradistinction to anything that denies their identities as chosen heirs of a divine kingdom that is present right now. The divine encounter provides a sense of spiritual renewal and may improve one’s sense of security and self-worth. These spaces, then, provide a training ground for shaping identity and agency.

²² Robert Beckford, *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music and Social Change* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

Pentecostal worship spaces vary widely from open-air gatherings, to home meetings, to soccer stadiums; there are no limits to the sacralization of space. Since Pentecostals believe there are no limitations to the reach of the Spirit, there can be no space in which the Spirit cannot move. Thus, the boundary-breaking power believed to be accessible by the Spirit cannot be limited to any space. Places of worship do however have great significance within Pentecostal religious life. Whether simple or elaborate, worship spaces are believed to be sacred because they provide a corporate meeting place for God and the faithful. The frequency with which these spaces provide the context for divine visitation adds additional significance. So, while the Holy Spirit is not believed to be limited to churches and sanctuaries, regular meeting places take on added layers of sacrality.

These sacred spaces are often aesthetically simple. Rather than stained glass, golden crosses, and pipe organs, the materials of Pentecostal ritual spaces typically include audio, visual and lighting systems, a wide range of musical instrumentation, the audible embodiment of fervent prayer accompanied by laying on of hands, and audibly dynamic preaching often interspersed with sung vocal performances and illustrated with visual aids. In these settings, religious identity is not composed spatially or through the placement of icons or other symbols typically found in religious spaces. Rather, it is composed of bodies, language, and shared sensorial encounters.²³ The spaces are typically oriented toward a stage where singers, musicians and preachers take prominent roles of leadership. The exuberant praise and worship experiences are expressed through singing, shouting, clapping, dancing, crying, and embracing. Other

²³ See Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, for a discussion of the relational orientation of worship spaces over against the formality of more traditional spaces.

material aspects such as language and musical styles also serve to reinforce socio-cultural identities. The congregations I observed show ethnic, racial, and gender diversity, and are comprised primarily of those on the low end of the economic spectrum.

*Comunidad de Cuidados*²⁴ in Cali, Colombia is a good example of these basic material elements, cultural specificity, and human diversity. *Comunidad* is a humble storefront facing a very busy street in the city, and from the outside it shows no visible signs of being a worship space, save the sign that bears its name. Upon entering, a heavy metal door is opened by warm, friendly greeters and the music hits you as soon as you cross the threshold. The space is dark, with the exception of some stage lighting, and the shallow stage is filled with musicians and singers lighted by a handful of can lights mounted on the low ceiling and positioned to illuminate the bodies of the worship team. The room is nothing more than a narrow rectangular space that is deeper than it is wide; thus, the stage is situated on one of the long walls and chairs are arranged in a half-moon-shaped arch wrapping around on either end. The music is similar to the contemporary worship you hear in the States, but with a decidedly Latin flare; dashes of Salsa and hints of Cumbia tell your ears that you are worshipping in Colombia. The diverse congregation expressed their worship with great enthusiasm for about forty-five minutes. Ranging from celebratory to intimate, the worship music performed within the spatial context and accompanied by additional sensory elements of lights, screens with images and lyrics, and visibly active and emotive bodies, took the community on a journey of encounter.

²⁴ A pseudonym for a church community discussed further in chapter six.

5.2.1 Icons: Bodies and Music

The icons marking these sacred spaces are quite different than those adorning many traditional sanctuaries. In traditional churches icons are often venerated as symbols of the sacred. The icons serve to foster contemplation and inspire reflection on biblical stories, persons, piety, and spiritual life. Icons function by creating “an intersection for encounter” and a pathway to the holy.²⁵ The icons themselves are not worshipped, but are venerated because they point practitioners toward God as the true object of worship.

Bodies serve the same function during Pentecostal worship rituals. Pentecostal believers worship together in community and their experiences point to divine encounter; other participants are drawn into reflection and participation through these visibly manifested experiences. Much like the use of multi-media to materialize the atmosphere of heaven within worship spaces, the body also functions as a “medium of religious materialization.”²⁶ Rather than looking to an image or statue to aid one in contemplation, human bodies illustrate spiritual engagement that draws other worshippers deeper. Given that Pentecostals are believed to be filled with the Spirit and power, they are like living icons;²⁷ their lives point to or illustrate the movement of the divine in the world. Bodies model relationship to the divine through physical expressions found in scripture (singing, dancing, lifting and clapping hands, prostration). Thus, the emotive character of Pentecostal praise and worship is not simply the pointless “emotion of

²⁵ Albrecht, 143.

²⁶ Orsi, 77.

²⁷ Joel Robbins, “Anthropology of Religion,” *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, Andre Droogers, Cornelis Van Der Laan, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 165.

the poor” as Corten claims, but a means of signaling the in-breaking of the divine *through human agents* within historical context and generating group solidarity—an important cultural accomplishment all its own when congregations are diverse. Miller and Yamamori observed a gathering of hundreds of worshippers in Kampala, Uganda in which believers “were working on their lives, beseeching God to cleanse them of sin and impurity . . . praying for their families, their neighbors, and their government.”²⁸ Here again, the emotionally charged prayer and worship of Pentecostal believers reflects social concern rather than frivolous emotionalism.

Worship services typically begin with lively music performed by a band and led by a worship leader or an ensemble of vocalists. The house lights are dimmed and the stage lights beam brightly. The worship director exuberantly encourages the faithful to set aside the cares and distractions of day-to-day life and prepare to journey into the presence of God. Everyone is on their feet ready to “enter in” and the atmosphere is celebratory. Often times congregants are encouraged to greet one another with handshakes, hugs, and words of encouragement, signaling that the journey of worship is one embarked upon as a community. Women and men of all ages, young people, children and infants are all apart of the worshipping community and encouraged to participate as they are able. Song lyrics are displayed by projectors onto screens framing the platform on either side and enabling participants to sing along. The projector screens also display animated backgrounds behind the lyrics that often thematically enhance the lyrical content. For example, a song that centers on the “rain of God’s Spirit” might depict actual rain drops pouring down as the lyrical background, “materializing” the metaphorical image. The worship director encourages physical participation through hand clapping, singing, dancing, and lifting hands.

²⁸ Miller & Yamamori, 130.

Following one or two songs of celebration, the pace of the music slows and the mood shifts into a more contemplative and intimate atmosphere. The song lyrics often transition from singing *about* God in thankful praise into singing directly *to* God with words that reflect an intimate, loving, and sometimes even sensual relationship.²⁹ During this segment of the worship ritual many hands are outstretched as if physically reaching toward the heavens, and other adherents bow or kneel in reverence to the Holy Spirit believed to be present. The music is based upon simple chord progressions and easily singable melodies that allow worshippers to focus on expressing adoration. Both women and men step forward on the platform and provide the lead vocal and verbal exhortations at different points within the services.

After about forty-five minutes of worship through music, the senior pastor takes the stage to transition the service. While the musicians continue to play and the singers vocalize, the pastor leads the congregation in extemporaneous prayer. This “season of prayer” may last from five to ten minutes, depending on the atmosphere of the moment, while the musicians continue to play progressions that build on the experience already cultivated. This prayer time often culminates with exclamations of praise and applause, signaling the conclusion of the praise and worship segment of the service. There is typically a short period of time following that includes receiving an offering and making announcements, and then a sermon lasting from thirty to forty-five minutes. At times the pastor’s words are accompanied by music throughout, usually performed by a keyboardist. After this period of impassioned preaching, an altar call is typically given to which worshippers respond by gathering in front of the stage as a means of drawing closer to

²⁹ Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, “*Qué Lindo Es Mi Cristo*: The Erotic Jesus/Christ in the Caribbean, Latin American, and Latino/a Protestant Christian Music,” *Jesus in the Hispanic Community*, Recinos and Magallanes, eds.

God. This action closes the gap between the pastor, the worship leadership team, and the congregation. Boundaries are collapsed as everyone gathers together for an encounter with the divine regardless of social markers.

Music performed as part of worship rituals within sacred space facilitates “emotional entrainment between bodies,” according to Althouse and Wilkinson.³⁰ This signifies that the bodily movements of worshippers and the accompanying emotions they express have an impact on other ritual participants.³¹ In addition, they argue music accompanying the bodily movements in the ritual context has the effect of shaping behavior and “consolidating group identity” and fidelity.³² Thus, the bodily expressions of worship and the implementation of material stimuli can contribute to the boundary-crossing unification of Pentecostal worshipping communities given their often diverse composition. The significance of this boundary-crossing potential is predicated upon the characteristic diversity within these communities, which I will explore further below.

Music itself also functions as an icon within Pentecostal ritual spaces.³³ It surrounds worshippers and draws them into reflection on and exchange with the divine images presented through the material dimensions of sound, sight and feel. Even song lyrics become materialized through visual presentation and audible performance. At the ideological level, the rhetorical

³⁰ Peter Althouse and Michael Wilkinson, “Musical Bodies in the Charismatic Renewal: The Case of Catch the Fire and Soaking Prayer,” *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, eds. Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 31.

³¹ This is also akin to Durkheim’s notion of “collective effervescence.”

³² Althouse and Wilkinson, 33.

³³ Albrecht, 143.

affect of repetitive phrases can draw participants into greater affiliation with the ideals being presented, according to Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis.³⁴ It is the material multi-modality of ritual presentation, however, that may potentially heighten the impact and embrace of the ideas within the lyrics.

5.2.2 The Social and Psychological Impact of Ritual Materials

It is difficult to isolate the social and psychological impact of music because it is always contextually experienced along with additional sensory stimuli; it brings together acoustic, aesthetic, emotional, social and bodily variables.³⁵ According to Theorell, Neurobiological studies show that the part of the brain that processes musical input, the thalamus, transmits the musical impulses to the emotional brain more rapidly than impulses that are carried to the intellectual processing center of the cortex. Consequently, the emotions process music faster than the intellect.³⁶ Brain imaging studies used to measure brain activity in adult subjects helps reveal the varied impact of material stimuli. In one study, subjects first viewed an image in silence, then listened to music without viewing the image, and finally listened to the music while viewing the image. Viewing the image alone activated cognitive function, while isolating the audio engaged areas of the brain associated with emotional experiences. Combining the visual and audio modalities activated both areas of the brain, and each to a stronger degree. There are also social

³⁴ Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays The Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 163.

³⁵ Töres Theorell, *Psychological Health Effects of Musical Experiences: Theories, Studies and Reflections in Music Health Science* (Stockholm, Sweden: Springer, 2014), 2.

³⁶ Ibid., 5.

implications that flow from this multi-modal influence given that it can be used to manipulate group behaviors.³⁷ The point is that the “iconic” materials of Pentecostal rituals shape social identity and heighten the psychological impact of the messages being conveyed. The layers of symbolic meaning contained within these ritual experiences reveal Corten’s lack of nuanced understanding regarding the complexity of Pentecostal worship expressions.³⁸

Villafañe says music “unites people, transmits social values, denounces injustices, influences human behavior, and puts to sleep or awakens for the struggle.”³⁹ Coupling music with these worship experiences, then, becomes a very potent combination for shaping and motivating public engagement. As Vásquez put it, “[t]he religious experience ‘is a template for orientation in the world, and the exercise of spiritual gifts . . . is a template for self processes that bring about that orientation’ in the flesh.”⁴⁰ If music is uniting communities and shaping their

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

³⁸ Historically, songs of praise have been used to preach and teach. Gertrud Tönsing argues “that the songs we sing shape our theology much more deeply than the sermons we hear.” Songs allow for the assimilation of ideas, and the heightening of the affectional and emotive sense of the brain enhances their pedagogical value. Many people assimilate a theological identity based on song and prayer, and this is due in part to its affectional potency. Thinking does not only include cognition; we *feel* what we think giving it an affectional dimension. Gertrud Tönsing, “‘Forming identity through Song’: How our songs in worship shape our theological identity: A study of Lutheran hymns and how they shaped German descendent Lutheran congregations,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 69(1), Art. #1303, 11 pages. In addition, see Mary McGann, *Exploring Music as Worship and Theology*, as well as Solivan’s discussion of pathos and the didactic importance of the affectional as opposed to reason alone. Also, see Peter Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*.

³⁹ Villafañe, 117.

⁴⁰ Vásquez, *More Than Belief*, 114.

values and behaviors, and spiritual rituals are orienting people toward social-ethical practices, praise and worship should provide a powerful matrix for generating public engagement.⁴¹

The public efficacy of these rituals, however, depends largely on the presence of diversity within the worshipping community, the lyrical emphasis of praise and worship songs, and the messages conveyed through sermons. Culturally homogenous congregations do not create a social model for racial, ethnic, and socio-economic boundary crossing, and songs and sermons that emphasize soul-salvation and spirituality that is divorced from material realities become fuel for *a spirituality of the status quo*. On the other hand, culturally diverse congregations provide a social model for a solidarity of difference. And when songs and sermons reflect the prophetic voice of the Old Testament, the early church, and the early Pentecostal movement, they marry impassioned spirituality with concrete social practices, generating *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.⁴²

⁴¹ This is evidenced by the social ministries of the church examples in the next chapter, and by the many communities observed by Miller and Yamamori across the Global South. Villafañe and Alfaro also point up the correlation between worship and public engagement, and Espinosa shows the growing political action of the Latinx Pentecostal community in the U.S. Also see, *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, eds. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

⁴² Here again, Pentecostal scholar-leaders such as Eldin Villafañe, Samuel Solivan, Arlene Sanchez-Walsh, Sammy Alfaro, Elizabeth Ríos, Gastón Espinosa, Darío Lopez, and Raymond Rivera provide examples of *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.

5.3 Implications for Public Engagement

In my observation, and following different informal conversations with persons in public events, the social and psychological impact of the ideological, material and ritual aspects of Pentecostalism shapes behaviors. As Douglas Petersen put it,

Pentecostal beliefs and states of consciousness translate at least at times into concrete behaviour. Pentecostal meetings, in which arousal and inspiration are recurrent, are specifically intended to influence conduct . . .⁴³

In essence, worship impacts lifestyle.⁴⁴ Pentecostals are serious about living a Spirit-empowered life. They believe God's presence is in them and with them everywhere they go. Believers become living icons. They take it seriously when scripture says "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."⁴⁵ Vásquez argues, however, that Pentecostalism "represents an incomplete recovery of the body, particularly of its embeddedness in society . . ."⁴⁶ The question is, then, how do Pentecostal believers fully embody their faith in the world.

Based on my observations, Pentecostal churches are indeed involved in a range of services from opening community youth centers, to providing benevolence and financial assistance, to engaging in random acts of kindness, providing holiday food baskets, assisting

⁴³ Petersen, 110.

⁴⁴ As Recinos put it, "cultural actors excluded from larger economic and political structures use popular religion to mold social ideas and political action structures aimed at projecting their purposes in society." Harold J. Recinos, "Popular Religion, Political Identity, and Life-Story Testimony in an Hispanic Community," *The Ties that Bind: African American and Hispanic American/Latino/a Theologies in Dialogue*, Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentin, eds. (New York: Continuum, 2001), 117

⁴⁵ Matthew 5:16 (NRSV).

⁴⁶ Vásquez, *More Than Belief*, 33.

with and contributing to disaster relief programs, and other charitable activities. Other ethnographic accounts have also revealed charitable efforts which include everything from the development of medical and rehabilitation centers, food programs, centers for women and children, and educational initiatives.⁴⁷

These service efforts are vitally important and laudable expressions of altruism that truly reflect the charitable spirit intrinsic to Christianity, but does the materiality of Pentecostal witness take on the prophetic character that outspokenly addresses social injustices? Joseph Davis argues that the early movement broke down barriers of social, racial, and gender classification because it began among the poor and dispossessed and operated on the belief that God speaks to common people of “any nation, tongue, or tribe.”⁴⁸ Thus, by nature of its early constitution Pentecostalism opposes social constructs that perpetuate injustices. This early character illustrates a prophetic voice that historicizes a demand for social justice and rejects producers of unjust suffering by caring for the poor and giving voice to the voiceless.⁴⁹

Davis also elevates the value of spiritual reflection and contemplative prayer as key ingredients in the cultivation of praxis. Highlighting the engagement of Catholic mystics he underscores the compatibility of the contemplative life with public witness. He points out that Gustavo Gutiérrez, the architect of Liberation Theology, amended his understanding of truly emancipative theology to include a *spirituality* that develops from within the context of the Latin

⁴⁷ Espinosa, *Latino Religions and Civic Activism*; Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*; Shaull and Cesar, *Pentecostalism*.

⁴⁸ Joseph Davis, “The Movement Toward Mysticism in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Thought: Is This an Open Door to Pentecostal Dialogue?” *Pneuma*, vol. 33, pp. 5-24, (2011), 7-8.

⁴⁹ Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 16-17.

American poor, and appropriates prayer as complementary to liberating praxis.⁵⁰ The practice of prayer among the poor is not simply navel gazing, but a means of persevering through afflictions, and even questioning God about suffering.⁵¹ This is prayer that inspires action for “To pray without a commitment to action nullifies the prayers uttered as faithless.”⁵² Thus, by nature Pentecostalism traverses social boundaries, and its ritual practices of worship and prayer provide ways to generate hope and cultivate praxis.

5.3.1 Boundary-Crossing Formation

The social constructs of race and class serve as a means of subjugating people groups for the purposes of amassing power and economic gain. These socio-cultural mechanisms attempt to suspend Latin Americans in webs of social and economic insignificance. The narrative of domination appropriates socially constructed ideologies to materialize realities of dehumanization and deprivation. These are the material realities of injustice that Latin American Pentecostals push against through their expressions of faith.

For believers, the sacred space of corporate worship opens a window onto a spiritual dimension that transcends the material world, but is meant to impact the material world. It is a

⁵⁰ Also see Raymond Rivera, *Liberty to the Captives*, who argues that the dichotomy between piety and social action is the result of failure to pattern Christian witness along the lines of the holistic ministry of Jesus. He points to Jesus’ first sermon in Luke 4 to illustrate that Jesus addresses both spiritual and social needs as well as addressing the actions of society.

⁵¹ Pentecostal faith is not “fair weather.” Through good and bad times, Pentecostals choose to remain steadfast in their faith and say along with Job, “though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15). See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁵² Ibid., 17.

space that is “in the world, but not of the world.” Albrecht notes, a la Victor Turner, that Pentecostal rituals create liminality. Within ritual liminality the limitations of this world collapse and the community of faith experiences *communitas*.⁵³ The experience of *communitas* collapses social markers of class, race, gender, and economic status, making for an egalitarian atmosphere in which the social structures of domination are suspended. The behaviors associated with Pentecostal rituals—prophetic utterances including tongues speech, physically demonstrative expressions of worship, divine healing, and expressions of fictive kinship—are a critique of social norms.⁵⁴ Albrecht claims “Ritual liminality distances one from society’s values and structures or suspends them temporarily. Such liminal conditions create an ‘anti-structure’ that makes ‘space’ for something different to emerge.”⁵⁵ It is precisely the deconstruction of social norms in Pentecostal ritual contexts that gives it the potential to engender boundary-crossing formation.

The characteristic diversity of Pentecostal communities and the boundary-traversing aspects of their worship services serve as a foil for homogenous and institutionalized churches, as well as for racially stratified societies. The *communitas* of Pentecostal rituals allows for the transcendence of these constructed social categories. King said “the ability of [blacks] and whites to work together, to understand each other, will not be found ready-made; it must be created by the fact of contact.”⁵⁶ As stated earlier, race matters in more than black and white, but the

⁵³ Albrecht, 209-217.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 211.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁵⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here Chaos or Community?* (1967; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 28.

principle of contact remains. Diverse Pentecostal communities create contexts for contact, and the “iconization” of the “other” in a worshipping community elevates the social subaltern by demonstrating the equal value of every worshipper regardless of material social markers.

Many churches continue to contribute to societal racism by persisting in segregated worship. Culturally uniform worship perpetuates ethnocentrism and delimits one’s capacity to live in a complex world of cultural diversity.⁵⁷ Worship can produce an engaged spirituality concerned with love of neighbor, but one must ask along with the teacher of the law who questioned Jesus, “who is my neighbor?”⁵⁸ According to Recinos,

Mainline Christians who gather on Sunday morning affirm in their creeds the “catholicity” of the church with increased awareness that the community surrounding them is culturally diverse. Yet many of the congregations they belong to prefer to separate themselves from their local contexts and protect their boundaries from the people outside, who are presumed to be not “our kind of people.”⁵⁹

Jesus used the parable of the Samaritan to illustrate that a person’s neighbor is simply anyone in their path who is in need, and that religious and social conventions should be thrown out the window in order to be of service to one’s neighbor. Given the persistence of ecclesiastical segregation, culturally diverse worship has the potential to open minds to the shared humanity that exists across socially constructed barriers, and foster greater sensitivity to the complexities of multi-cultural society. By sharing a common experience of worship together with the “other,” walls erected by fear of the unknown can be dismantled, and new identities of cultural solidarity

⁵⁷ Hawn, 6.

⁵⁸ Luke 10:29 (NIV).

⁵⁹ Recinos, *Good News from the Barrio*, 89.

can be formed. Integrated worship experiences provide a context for identity formation.⁶⁰ Cross-cultural worship has the power to foster the generation of new community identities. Prejudices spring from fear, suspicion, and misunderstanding,⁶¹ so contact with the cultural “other” can open a path toward dissolving those fears and misconceptions.

Cross-cultural worship creates a mosaic comprised of many unique pieces artistically placed together to reveal a larger composition.⁶² Pentecostals often view themselves as different pieces of the body of Christ “fitly joined together.”⁶³ The metaphoric image of a mosaic composition is important because many prefer to erase distinct identities rather than celebrate them. The concept of the cultural “smelting pot,” in which distinctions are lost, is the common trope used for such cultural erasure. The mosaic analogy, on the other hand, points to solidarity of difference. Sanchez Walsh is concerned that many Latinx Pentecostals believe the Bible mandates an erasure of racial and ethnic identities, and that such an erasure is the result of efforts to assimilate them into Euro-American evangelical Christianity.⁶⁴ In the Latinx church I use as an example in chapter six, I noticed that at some point in virtually every service, members of the congregation were invited to respond to a celebratory identification with their respective national identities. Someone would call for the *Colombianas* or the *Boricuas*, for example, and those who identified with these nationalities cheered loudly. In that space the nuance of ethnic and cultural

⁶⁰ Hawn, 3.

⁶¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love* (1963; repr., Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 5.

⁶² Hawn, 4.

⁶³ Ephesians 4:16 KJV.

⁶⁴ Sanchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity*, 71.

difference was emphasized and celebrated. As worshippers participated in corporate worship they *engaged* the cultural other, rather than “erasing” the other.

Inter-ethnically and inter-culturally composed worship provides context for the development of a solidarity of difference. Culturally diverse churches are microcosmic models of the social mosaic homogenous churches and racist societies need to see portrayed. Pentecostal churches, fueled by their boundary-traversing worship, are often exemplary models. The congregations I observed exhibit a range of racial, ethnic and economic diversity, both in the U.S. and Colombia. Though these church communities do not keep demographic data on hand, church leaders readily describe a broad range of diversity within the congregations. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, boundary crossing cannot be framed in terms of black and white. The Latinx community is replete with racial-ethnic mixture, including Afro-Latino, Mestizo, and Indigenous Latino/a identities, for example. These church communities are engaged in crossing racial, national, and class boundaries. It is also noteworthy that a recent Pew Research Center study gathered statistical data to explore the racial diversity of religious groups in the U.S. The findings show that Pentecostal denominations, like the Assemblies of God, are substantially more racially diverse than Mainline churches such as the Methodist church.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Michael Lipka, “The most and least racially diverse U.S. religious groups,” *Pew Research Center*, July 17, 2015. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/> (accessed October 19, 2019).

5.3.2 The Material Context of the Poor

Early Pentecostalism had a natural orientation toward social justice efforts because they were intrinsic to the evangelistic mandate.⁶⁶ According to Tackett,

Liberationism contends that the essence of Christianity extends beyond belief systems, that praxis is foundational to theological commitments. Such an emphasis resonates with early Pentecostals' emphasis upon social engagement, in which commitments to inclusion and justice were integrated into the early Pentecostals' evangelistic message.⁶⁷

Tackett notes that uniformity on these issues did not exist; nevertheless, he identifies the intrinsic presence of these emphases as intrinsic to the DNA of early Pentecostalism. Praxis is fundamental to the early movement because it was a faith of action rather than belief. The evangelistic mission targeted all people, overcoming social distinctions of race, gender and class, providing a practical faith to replace “dead” religion.⁶⁸ The evangelistic thrust of early Pentecostalism was holistic and counter-cultural because it went beyond belief into action, and action by a racial-ethnically, socio-economically, and gender-diverse community.

The early prophetic commitments of the movement waned among subsequent generations of American Pentecostals as it became increasingly mainstream and its adherents shifted to the middle-class. This loss of connection to its roots among the poor and marginalized breeds *a spirituality of the status quo* in which spiritual practices become detached from concrete, historical realities. Latinx Pentecostal theologians such as Solivan, however, are calling for a reconnection to those origins among the poor with an “orthopathos” that bridges orthodoxy and

⁶⁶ This is akin to what Recinos refers to as “the political vocation of evangelism.” *Good News from the Barrio*, 72.

⁶⁷ Tackett, 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42-43.

orthopraxy. In his view, human suffering must inform the beliefs and actions of Pentecostals or it will become “stoic, apathetic and distant.”⁶⁹ Here again, it is within the material realities of the poor and socially dislocated that the true character of emancipative Pentecostalism is to be found and reclaimed.

Outspoken Pentecostal witnesses are calling their own faith community back to a contextual reading of the tradition from within the reality of the poor. “If the ‘world of the poor’ is a concrete reality in our world,” says Alfaro, “then the church cannot simply close her eyes with regard to their material and spiritual needs.”⁷⁰ For this reason he points the community to a materialized faith centered on the praxis modeled by the historical Jesus. A return to the teachings of Jesus elevates the ethical responsibilities incumbent upon the church as outspoken witnesses who must engage in social and political witness *along with* spreading a message of salvific hope. Jesus’ primary concern centered on liberation of the poor and oppressed.⁷¹ In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, “Jesus’ prophetic stance confronted the social structures of his day, demanding justice and calling for repentance.”⁷² The news of the gospel becomes good when it gets serious about addressing life right now. Emancipative Pentecostalism is one that draws on its early identity by locating it within the context of a primarily poor community whose mission was, by and large, a holistic one. It also captures an image of Jesus of Nazareth with a concrete mission to the oppressed that promised the justice of the kingdom of God in the

⁶⁹ Solivan, 12.

⁷⁰ Alfaro, 98.

⁷¹ Luke 4:18; Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mark 6:34; 8:2.

⁷² Alfaro, 103.

here and now. Recinos says “Latinos are talking about a Jesus who, as a poor person who knew concrete misery and hope in God, perceived and criticized . . . the way mainline religion backed social structures and rules that worked against creating a sense of real human solidarity.”⁷³ This is the “hard-hitting Jesus”⁷⁴ in solidarity with the poor who calls for Pentecostal believers to live into praxis that is informed by human suffering and social injustices. Likewise, Latin American Pentecostal theologians, intimately acquainted with the crushing realities of dehumanization, oppression, and impoverishment, are amplifying this clarion call to live *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.

5.4 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that Pentecostal worship rituals include multiple layers of materiality replete with symbolic significance. Worshippers are not the simple people Corten claimed who do not engage in reflection but simply shout hallelujahs aimlessly; instead, they strategically employ the use of material ritual elements as a means of materializing their faith. Consequently, the significance of and motivation for their ritual practices cannot be reduced to emotionalism empty of content and powerless to articulate a socio-political voice.

I also pointed to the inherently social orientation of praise and worship as a means of living into the love of God and neighbor, and that the love prescribed is not something solely internalized, but also expressed outwardly in genuine care for others. The efficacy of worship rituals is contingent upon this inherent orientation, thus it necessitates the formation of social

⁷³ Harold J. Recinos, *Who Comes in the Name of the Lord?: Jesus at the Margins* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 39.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 50.

agency. Pentecostal praise also functions as a means of articulating protest against circumstances of oppression and marginalization, and claiming a hope-filled narrative that elevates believers to dignified status. Singing in tongues also signifies the hope of an eschatologically present promise of God's shalom in the present.

I then considered the materiality of sacred space and ways bodies and music function as icons pointing toward the intersection of the human and the divine. The social impact of the emotive materials generates solidarity across boundaries of difference, and the multi-modality of material stimuli serve to generate the acceptance of religious values and ideas. The combination of these ritual spaces and materials, then, creates a context in which public agency is formed, since the values being expressed are intended to result in different forms of behavioral action.⁷⁵ Adding to this cultivation of value and agency is the integrated character of many Pentecostal churches which provide a context for the formation of inter-cultural and inter-ethnic solidarity. The contact provided in the racial-ethnically diverse congregations serves to "de-exotify" the "other." The *communitas* fostered by ritual liminality also serves to collapse forms of social stratification.

Finally, I argued that it is the material reality of the poor that serves as the seedbed for emancipative Pentecostalism. Harkening back to the character of the early movement, proximity to suffering must continue to define Pentecostalism if it is to regain its initial prophetic

⁷⁵ Drawing upon data from the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life national survey, Espinosa found Latino/a Pentecostals scored "as high or higher than did their Catholic counterparts on all six measures of political mobilization." Gastón Espinosa, "Latino Clergy and Churches in Faith-Based Political and Social Action in the United States," *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, 283.

character as opposed to becoming an otherworldly spirituality that is detached from concrete historical realities.

In the next chapter I will look at ethnographic examples in the U.S. and Colombia, and consider ways these communities are living out their faith through socially engaged practices. I will show concrete examples that illustrate the capacity for Pentecostal faith to generate social action. These examples will give me the opportunity to underscore some of the behavioral results of the theological ideas and ritual practices I have explored in the previous pages.

CHAPTER 6

FAITH AND SOCIAL ACTION

In the previous chapters I have considered aspects of the ideational dimensions of Pentecostal theology and thought, and explored examples of the material dimensions of Pentecostal ritual life; I now turn my attention to the behavioral realm. Do the ideas and ritual practices within these marginal contexts result in the emergence of emancipative Pentecostalism? In this chapter I will draw upon three ethnographic examples to consider the transformative potential of Pentecostalism as an empowering system of thought and practice to generate social-ethical and civic-political action.

These examples illustrate *a spirituality of near engagement*. They are not detached from the project of imaging society around concerns articulated in Liberation Theology such as mercy, justice, love and redemption from the material structures of sin that cause the misery and oppression of the poor. In the face of death-dealing social structures, there is a definite prophetic witness of and to the poor in ministries of mercy and community care. The racial-ethnically diverse congregations also exemplify the deconstruction of enduring social prejudices. However, these communities stop short of fully articulating *a spirituality of outspoken witness*. The leaders of the Dallas congregation demonstrate awareness of the current political crisis in the U.S., but exhibit reticence to articulate prophetic opposition. The leaders of the Colombian congregations are politically engaged, but they fall short of advocating for the full range of human rights. They

are leaning into an emancipative Pentecostalism, but have yet to claim its full liberating potential. I focus on these ethnographic examples precisely because they are representative of many contemporary Pentecostal communities.¹ They exemplify a faith identity that is caught between the radical impulses of early Pentecostalism, and the conservative evangelicalism that tends toward the spiritualization of socio-cultural and political forces rather than historicizing them through direct prophetic address.

I will first share ethnographic details about a Latin American immigrant religious community located in Dallas. The community in question displays the interplay between Pentecostalism and public life. It specifically portrays an example of ways Pentecostals conceive of engagement in the world as a result of faith-based social analysis. The church is a first-generation Latinx immigrant Neo-Pentecostal congregation. All references have been anonymized, so the church will be referred to as *Iglesia de Vida*. For a period of approximately ten months I engaged in participant observation several times a week as a pianist for the church, and shared many informal conversations with both church leaders and lay persons.

Colombia served as another context that provided ethnographic insight into Pentecostalism and public life. I made several trips to Cali, Colombia to observe the construction of Latino/a Pentecostal identity in that setting and its tilt toward social engagement. These examples will be discussed in the subsequent sections focused on community ethics and civic

¹ The Assemblies of God, for example, is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world—and notably the denomination of Samuel Rodríguez—and its tendency toward biblical literalism (concerning theological issues I discussed in Chapter Four) generates Pentecostal faith ranging from *a spirituality of near or engagement* to *a spirituality of the status quo*. I have also visited hundreds of Pentecostal churches across the Americas, participated in services, heard sermons, and engaged in many conversations that have demonstrated this “middle-of-the-road” level of public witness.

engagement. The first of these examples centers on a church in Cali that will be referred to by the pseudonym, *Comunidad de Cuidados*. This small storefront church—I briefly described its sanctuary in the previous chapter—exemplifies Latin-American community ethics issuing from a Neo-Pentecostal Caleñan community, and provides examples of civic-political engagement. The final example will elucidate the community ethics and civic-political engagement of another Pentecostal church in Cali which will be referred to pseudonymously as *Iglesia Cívica*. These two cases illuminate important dimensions of Pentecostal faith and society in the heart of the third-largest city in Colombia.

6.1 Pentecostalism & Public Life

The ethnocultural composition of Iglesia de Vida in Dallas is described by church leaders as 65-70% Mexican, along with Puerto Ricans and a mixture of immigrants from Central and South America. A good number of the members are Colombians, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans. Services are held every Sunday and Wednesday and are conducted entirely in Spanish. The church was founded in 2004 and currently touts a membership of 800, yet it does not own a facility and has rented various spaces for different intervals of time throughout its existence. Though it has now held meetings in the same location for several years it is not permanently rooted geographically, maintaining a kind of fluid and amorphous identity. The mobility of this church is a trope for the immigrant experience of impermanence and protracted socio-economic challenge.

Worship gatherings are filled with lively contemporary music and dynamic preaching, and the worship expressions of the community are anything but stoic and confined. Adherents

are emotionally engaged in worship and express themselves enthusiastically through singing, speaking in tongues, clapping and raising hands, dancing, shouting, and often tears. These services are far from a mere intellectual assent to a body of theological knowledge, but are embodied expressions of a lived and experiential faith.

The senior pastor of Iglesia de Vida, pseudonymously referred to here as Pastor One,² is a naturalized Mexican immigrant who has emerged as an “organic intellectual” leader from within the Mexican-American community. His life and work strongly contradict the “trumped” up characterization of Mexican immigrants as propagators of criminality. He and his family have been in the United States for twenty years and are citizens. They have built a thriving congregation that serves the Latin-American immigrant community. Pastor One is also a sought-after public speaker and musical artist who annually travels for hundreds of ministry engagements around the world and received a Latin Grammy nomination for one of his musical recordings. He and his wife and children moved to the United States in response to what they perceived as a divine calling to help the Latin-American community discover their purpose beyond simply subsistence living. He and his wife were part of the ministry team of a large church in Mexico City, but believe they were called by God as missionaries to the U.S., which he said is unusual since “missionaries normally travel from north to south, not from south to north.”

6.1.2 Long-Term Strategies: Missional and Positional

During conversations with other members of church leadership, it became evident that the common rationale behind their immigration to the U.S. is missional in nature. They perceive

² This pastor is also referred to in chapter four.

themselves as missionaries to the U.S., and particularly to the “Hispanic-American”³ community. They understand their immigration as a “call from God” to provide leadership primarily for first-generation immigrants, but also to make a positive impact on U.S. society. This is a significant refutation of the notion of Western superiority, and the presumption that Euro-American society is the teacher of other nations and peoples. As Orlando Costas put it,

In this new era the clarion call comes particularly to the offspring of the former missionary era to go to the land whence came many of their missionary forebears and witness there to the liberating Word of God. For third world Christians the United States has become truly a “new Macedonia.”⁴

Christians from the developing world offer a mirror of critical self-reflection for U.S. Christians.⁵ Leaders often emerge from within the communities that have been trained within the struggles of day-to-day Christian service in the context of the poor and marginalized. They also “de-Americanize” and “incarnationalize” Christianity by modeling the socio-cultural contextualization of the gospel, providing it with a prophetic edge that grounds it within history.⁶

Pastor One explained the guiding interpretation of a certain biblical text in the book of Jeremiah as a divinely-mandated program for immigrant identity and social responsibility. Predicated upon a particular interpretation of a prophetic scriptural narrative in Jeremiah, this community of faith recognizes their immigrant identity as an integral part of the culture of the U.S. The primary directive is found in the biblical passage of Jeremiah 29:11 which speaks of

³ The community often uses this term self-referentially.

⁴ Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1982), 83.

⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁶ Ibid., 82.

God's plan for God's people, to give them a "future" and a "hope." Those two words, future and hope, Pastor One claims, are very relevant to every part of the work in which Iglesia de Vida is engaged because moving to a strange land with a strange language and strange customs can make one begin to wonder if there truly *is* a future and a hope.

Pastor One referenced the Jeremiah 29:11 passage on his phone and explained that he always teaches congregants the "hope" and "future" of verse eleven cannot be accessed without paying attention to the preceding verses. These earlier verses relate Jeremiah's prophetic instructions to the children of Israel while they are living in exile, and the passage outlines the way they should live in that exilic existence. Pastor One listed three instructions he understands to be given by God: 1. build houses 2. plant gardens, and 3. take wives. The first of these he interprets as an enjoinder not to have what he calls a "renter's mentality," but to work to own property. The second he views as instruction to work hard, but also to be entrepreneurial and build businesses, not to simply have an employee mentality. The third mandate, to take wives, he interprets as instruction to marry one spouse, settle down and build a family. Essentially, he understands the text as a divine commandment to engage fully in both the public and private spheres of cultural life, to engage economically from a position of strength, to aspire to robust citizenship, and to celebrate both Latin American and U.S. cultures. In essence, the appropriation of this biblical strategy provides a means by which to engage non-violently in a long-term, strategic "war of positioning" within U.S. society.⁷

⁷ Pastor One shared this teaching with me during an informal conversation.

This teaching from Jeremiah 29:11 leans into prophetic witness by pointing up the dignity of Latinx humanity.⁸ It encourages Latinx immigrants to define themselves in contradistinction to the disparagement of their identities within the public U.S. discourse. It also provides a call to socio-cultural engagement as cultural actors with agency all their own. It teaches them to take pride in their cultural identities and demonstrate who they truly are in the face of racism, xenophobia, and white nationalism. This message of hope, coupled with the experiences of Pentecostal worship, is uplifting and encouraging to a community living within a context of fierce political and economic instability.

6.1.3 Cultural Hybridity: Resistance and Embrace

The admixture of cultures and religions profoundly informs the North-American Latinx theological and missional self-understanding.⁹ The existential reality for immigrants means living a hyphenated existence in the tension between preserving cultural and religious identity and balancing it with “host/ile” cultures. The motivations for migration are complex and many. Whether fleeing violence, poverty, lack of opportunity, or answering a “divine” mandate of mission leaving behind all that is familiar to settle in a strange land is no simple matter. In addition to the unthinkable difficulties faced by immigrants in their places of origin and on their trouble-fraught passages seeking a new life in the U.S., they find a cultural environment that is better characterized as *hostile* than *host*. The lived experience of the Latinx community in the U.S. is marked by socio-cultural and political alienation, invisibility, and crushing economic

⁸ See García, *Dignidad*.

⁹ Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation*, 22.

struggle resulting from dehumanizing jobs and unemployment.¹⁰ “To be Latina/o living anywhere in the United States,” according to De La Torre, “is to exist in a state of alienation, constantly separated from privilege, power, and whiteness . . .”¹¹ Latinx communities perpetually experience discrimination and limited access to the benefits enjoyed by the larger society.

Religious communities provide vital communities of refuge for immigrants navigating these precarious realities. They hold fast to cultures that connect them to distant homes while also embracing a new cultural context in which they work to constitute hybrid identities. Cultural hybridity is central to Latinx existential reality in the U.S. context. As Carmelo Álvarez put it,

The interconnection between race and culture as a process of *mestizaje* (a mixing of cultural, religious, and anthropological dimensions to create a new human being) becomes a hermeneutical key to understand who the Hispanics are as people in the United States. They are a people of a “diaspora,” defending their identities, reclaiming their dignity and rights, as pilgrims in a strange land or reclaiming acceptance as people of the land, and first class citizens.¹²

Within the matrix of these religio-cultural compositions is an inherent claim to identity and dignity that becomes a protest against the dehumanization and criminalization of Latinx immigrants in the U.S.

Iglesia de Vida provides a model of hybrid identity formation. By retaining sending cultures and blending them with those encountered in the U.S., cultural actors simultaneously

¹⁰ María Teresa Dávila, “The Role of Latino/a Ethics in the Public Square: Upholding and Challenging “the Good” in a Pluralistic Society,” Harold J. Recinos, ed., *Wading Through Many Voices: Toward A Theology of Public Conversation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 73.

¹¹ Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús: A Hispanic Political Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 65.

¹² Carmelo Álvarez, “Hispanic Pentecostals in the United States,” Calvin L. Smith, ed., *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 64.

preserve and blend a variety of identities. Such blending spans a broad range of complex social, economic, and political layers. Religion often provides a means of balancing this reciprocal relationship,¹³ and Iglesia de Vida is a faith community that exemplifies ways of celebrating such culture-sharing. Religion, and Pentecostal faith in particular, provides the framework for the construction of identity, meaning-making, and a sense of belonging in a completely new geographical and cultural location.¹⁴

I highlight the significance of this cultural maintenance because it demonstrates Latinx resistance against the dehumanizing and criminalizing narrative that is so prevalent in the U.S. The celebration of Latinx cultural identities lifts up a counter-narrative revealing the human dignity and value of these communities. I underscore the embrace of cultural blending as a way to show that along with resisting the lies aimed at them, Latinx communities also embrace U.S. cultures. This is to deny the demonizing narrative that portrays them as criminals who are corrosive of U.S. society. It shows instead that they contribute significance and important diversity to U.S. culture; they provide a necessary reminder that cultural complexity is precisely what constitutes the making and meaning of “America.” They also provide a corrective voice for “Americanized” Christianity that has lost its truly boundary-crossing and communal character.

In their work on religion and immigration, Ebaugh and Chafetz identify four ways that immigrant congregations reproduce ethnic identity within new cultural environments:

¹³ Vásquez and Marquardt, 29.

¹⁴ Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 5.

1) by physically reproducing aspects of home-country religious institutions; 2) by incorporating ethnic practices and holidays into formal religious ceremonies; 3) through domestic religious practices; and 4) through congregational related social activities.¹⁵

These means of reproducing ethnic identity are markedly present at Iglesia de Vida. Traditional icons and images are conspicuously absent. Latin-American bodies corporately expressing worship in their native language reproduce the key elements of home country religion transplanted into a new context. As Ramírez put it, “The corpus of welcoming music offer[s] migrating bodies rare opportunities to embrace other bodies, hearts, and minds.”¹⁶ In addition, as noted earlier, individual national identities are often identified and celebrated during services, creating a space in which the nuance of ethnic and cultural difference is emphasized and celebrated.

In several informal conversations, church staff members shared various ways the church community affirms and celebrates the cultures of the countries represented within the congregation. Pastor One said the flavors and smells, the language and literature, and the foods are wonderful aspects of culture that they celebrate. The primary avenue by which the community celebrates cultural identities is by organizing an annual *Fiesta Latina* or *Fiesta de las Americas*, at which congregants wear clothing representative of their respective countries, prepare and serve typical cuisine, and enjoy various forms of music.

I had the opportunity to attend one of these *fiestas* following a Sunday worship service. There were many booths set up on a grassy area adjacent to the parking lot, and each had a sign with the name of a different Latin American nation. It was a wonderfully festive atmosphere with

¹⁵ Ibid., 80.

¹⁶ Ramírez, *Migrating Faith*, 141.

lively music, dancing, and Spanglish conversation punctuated with laughter. This was an opportunity for each ethnic and national identity to be celebrated for its individuality as Salvadoran, Colombian, Venezuelan, Chilean, and Puerto Rican, as opposed to simply being raked beneath the category of “Hispanic.” The individuation of identities mattered, and the beauty and uniqueness of distinctions was emphasized and celebrated rather than homogenized.

In addition to a desire to preserve ethnocultural identities, respondents also readily acknowledged the need for adjustment and change. Pastor One expressed great pride in preserving cultural heritage, but he also encourages the community to embrace U.S. culture. He believes love for one’s home country is positive when it is kept in perspective. He said, “we don’t forget where we came from, but are also careful not to become an ‘island’.” He believes ethnocultural preservation and celebration can be a double-edged sword because, on the one hand, it is good to celebrate the richness of one’s heritage, but on the other, it can prevent one from connecting to other cultures. He advocates for an equal love of both the sending and the host nations. Thus within the matrix of cultural hybridity exists the tension of both resistance and embrace.

6.1.4 Responses to Power

In light of this embrace of U.S. culture I asked Pastor One and other church staff members how they felt regarding the disparaging remarks of Donald Trump directed at Mexicans. I was curious if they would take an outspokenly critical stance against Trump’s flagrant displays of prejudice and criminal treatment of Latinx immigrants. I wanted to get a sense of how far they might go to articulate *a spirituality of outspoken witness*.

When I pointedly asked Pastor One, “how do you feel about Trump calling you a rapist, a drug dealer, and a criminal?” He sat back in his chair, crossed his legs and thought for a moment. He said at first he was offended by Trump’s remarks, but after thinking about them further, he concluded that such statements make sense for Trump simply because he lives in his own well-crafted reality. Trump is clearly not existentially aware of Latin American immigrant life, and he is making accusations from an insulated position of ignorance. Pastor One is convinced that immigrants contribute far more to the economy and the growth of the nation than politicians such as Trump are willing to admit. He believes the political debate is fueled by fear that immigrants will reshape the culture of the U.S., and Trump is simply feeding that fear.

Another immigrant from Mexico City, also a member of the church staff, shared that he had obtained a law degree and was employed in the Mexican federal court prior to immigrating. He has been in the U.S. for ten years and he and his wife are legal residents. His primary purpose for moving to the U.S. was in response to what he understands as a divine calling to serve God and minister to others. Secondly, he would like to eventually practice law here in the U.S. in order to assist others in navigating the complex legalities of immigration. When asked how he felt about the way his culture is being presented in the current political discourse and the North-American media he said “Hispanics are great people, with much to give and bring to the table; Americans cannot reject them. People are what is most important in the situation. Hispanics are contributors; they are not only hard workers, but great thinkers.” Further, he feels that the authorities and others often look at him as an “illegal immigrant” even though he has proper documentation. He and his wife struggle with uncertainty because they could be deported at any time since they are not citizens; however, their faith provides comfort and confidence in the face

of this uncertainty. When I asked him directly how he felt about Trump calling him a rapist, a drug dealer, and a criminal he grinned and said he does not have a personal problem with Trump, and as a Christian he must love him. Besides, he thinks Trump is simply using a political strategy to gain support, and is merely being used for his power and influence.

Another church staff member from Mexico told me that prior to immigrating to the U.S. he earned a degree in mechanical engineering, and he turned down a lucrative position in a prestigious firm in order to respond to what he refers to as “a call from God.” When asked, “how does it make you feel when Donald Trump calls you a rapist and a criminal?” he paused and rolled his eyes with a look of frustration and disdain and said, “it makes me sad, and it makes me angry.” He said “Hispanics” are major contributors to North-American society and he cannot imagine this country without them.

Conversations with Mexican immigrants have been intentionally highlighted in order to directly address Trump’s criminalizing claims, and to create a dialogic context in which Mexican immigrants can respond to such claims. There is no doubt these examples belie the political narrative produced and perpetuated by Trump and other politicians of his ilk. Amplifying the voices of these Mexican immigrants uncovers a reality that starkly contrasts what is portrayed in the public discourse. These are people who have sacrificed much to come to the U.S., and they have come with altruistic motivations, not as instigators of criminality. Furthermore, the fact that they have often relinquished more prestigious, higher-paying careers to immigrate demonstrates that they are not chasing the illusory “American dream” of opportunity and prosperity. Their religious identities motivated their immigration, and those identities inform the ways they understand cultural hybridity and reciprocal relationship with U.S. society.

The responses of these church leaders reveal a keen sense of Trump's failure as a leader of a nation comprised of immigrants. They recognize that Trump exhibits ignorance and prejudice, and is out of touch with cultural realities. They admit that he uses xenophobic and nationalistic fear tactics by criminalizing Latinx identities. They feel strongly that Trump and the U.S. cannot ignore the important contributions of the Latin American immigrant community, and some even expressed anger. Though finding Trump's remarks offensive, however, they stopped short of pointedly criticizing him. They exhibit an awareness and analysis of the situation, but fail to fully articulate an emancipative response.

In summary, Pentecostal religion plays a vital role in the maintenance and construction of immigrant identities and it assists them in navigating new geographic and socio-cultural spaces. In the religious space, immigrants find communities of shared experience, the embodiment of spirituality and familiar language, and affirmation of ethnocultural identities. The immigrants in this example locate their identity within the nexus of cultural hybridity and it is profoundly shaped by a religious worldview. These elements, along with a certain reading of biblical texts, assist them in the formulation of cross-cultural and transcultural identities. Furthermore, the organic intellectual belies the political discourse and subverts the ruling class ideology through engagement within the public sphere in a non-violent "war of position." The immigrant lives represented here repudiate the disparaging discourse raging in current political debates, providing a *measured* counter-hegemonic response. They appropriate Pentecostal faith to assist them in the navigation of cultural identity maintenance and change, and as a framework for the refutation and subversion of social, political, and economic limitations.

6.1.5 Behavioral Trajectory

The leadership of Iglesia de Vida could take their approach forward by engaging the paradigms of ministry implemented by Pentecostal leaders modeling emancipative Pentecostalism. Raymond Rivera, founder of the Latino Pastoral Action Center in the Bronx, NY, contends that holistic ministry calls not only for engagement with and confrontation of a church's local community, but demands they also engage and confront "the powers."¹⁷ This engagement means developing relationships with people outside the faith community in order to transform social systems, and the confrontation necessitates an outspoken demand for justice from those in power. According to Rivera, "When you confront the powers, you will call the powers and principalities to submit to God's plan and his Kingdom and renounce unjust decrees or norms."¹⁸

This outspoken witness is nothing new to Pentecostalism. Confrontation with the powers is fundamental to the prophetic character of Pentecostal identity because of the sense that God speaks directly into the social order. Historicizing the concept of "powers" will contribute impetus for a shift from near engagement to outspoken witness. Biblical reference to principalities and powers must be understood in terms of social structures and institutional entities, and these structures must include the religious, intellectual, moral and political.¹⁹ The practice of "spiritual warfare" against invisible powers must give way to the realization that the true powers of evil exist in the material structures of this world. Indefatigable Pentecostal

¹⁷ Raymond Rivera, *Liberty to the Captives: Our Call to Minister in a Captive World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 41-42.

¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹ Villafañe, 179-180.

communities have the potential to yield significant concrete results when aiming their “warring” spirit toward these material social realities.

Christian missional approaches are typically divided into two categories: those who focus on personal piety or those who emphasize social justice, or to put it another way, those who emphasize family values verses human rights.²⁰ Rivera argues that this is an unnecessary dichotomy because scripture models a holistic approach that integrates a “Spirit-filled life” *with* confrontation of “fallen powers and principalities.”²¹ The formulation of an adequate Pentecostal vision necessarily includes evangelical mission, but rather than stopping there it must also be ecumenical and contextually committed.²² This robust engagement simply carries forward the holistic praxis modeled by the person and work of the Jesus of history. As Alfaro put it, “It is not enough simply to think, speak and write about Jesus; what is needed is the willingness to carry out his mission . . .”²³ By appropriating these holistic approaches to outspoken witness modeled by leading Latin American Pentecostal scholar-theologians, Iglesia de Vida can live into a fully emancipative Pentecostalism.

6.2 Latina/o Community Ethics

After considering the public witness of a Pentecostal immigrant community in Dallas, I will now shift attention to the Colombian context to explore ethnographically an example of

²⁰ Rivera, 45.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Álvarez, 80.

²³ Alfaro, 99.

Latin American community ethics. By examining the Caleñan church, Comunidad de Cuidados, I will uncover an ethical orientation toward their local community that emphasizes the expression of love for those struggling against illness and poverty. As I mentioned earlier, this congregation meets in a very basic storefront church located in the heart of the city, so I will begin by sharing a brief reflection on the urban context in which the church exists.

6.2.1 Cali: A Short Reflection

The city of Cali has an energy, an excitement, a kind of pulsating rhythm that emanates from the people, the traffic, the shops, the clubs and street vendors. Walking through downtown is a lively, interactive experience. You can smell the arepas and empanadas from the street-vendor's carts, hear salsa music pouring out of store-front shops, and feel the hot Caleñan sun on your neck. Everyone seems busy working or urgently on their way to a place of great importance, yet people are friendly and easy to talk to.

The traffic in Cali has a unique rhythm all its own. One must actually get behind the wheel and drive through the city to grasp exactly what I mean. To observe it, the traffic seems like absolute mayhem. There is seemingly no rhyme or reason to the melange of cars, buses, and *motos* (motorcycles and scooters) darting in every direction in a sort of synchronized chaos. It is as if there are no lanes, no signs, no lights.... no rules! Nevertheless, though, when driving in the thick of it, it somehow makes sense (assuming you have the stomach for it and you are not afraid to drive "assertively").

The traffic of Cali is not unlike the crowded dance floors of the local salsa clubs. Clubs like Mulatto Cabaret and La Topa Tolondra feature dance floors so full of dancers one is hard-

pressed (quite literally) to make their way to the restroom. One must walk at their own risk while the slick footwork and fancy spins of dance partners occupy virtually every inch of the floor in constant change and at a dizzying pace. While dancers' bodies pulse and gyrate in every direction, challenging one's expectations, and with amazingly little space, I did not see one collision. There is a kind of synchronicity about it that defies explanation. It is as if the whole room is feeling the clave, the congas and timbales, the horns, the keys, the bajo, and the space, and the rhythm simply makes it work. It again is something like synchronized chaos. A large mural adorns the back wall of La Topa Tolondra. It parodies the famous DaVinci painting of the Last Supper, yet the characters seated around the table are salsa music giants. The mural provides another popular expression of the fusion of religion and culture in a creative, and likely tension-generating for some, juxtaposition.

These day-to-day aspects of city life serve as a trope for the ability of Colombians to endure an incredibly dissonant history and yet construct a national identity of which they are fiercely proud. These images of Colombian life point to a culture of community that has persisted in the midst of incredible hardships. Despite the vitriol of protracted bipartisan political conflicts, unimaginable internecine violence, and an astronomical death toll, Colombians have pushed beyond the dissonance and found ways to harmonize the chaos. Granted, they are not shy about sharing their discontent with one another, whether behind the wheel with a hand quickly on the horn, or in "high-volume conversation" if something disagreeable is said, but they somehow seem to find harmony in the tension at the end of the day. And though the safety of the city of Cali has improved dramatically in recent years, there are areas in which the locals will quickly warn you to roll up the car windows because it is not safe, and they will caution you to

avoid calling any attention to yourself by showing any signs of affluence such as wearing jewelry. Poverty is very real and very persistent, and the chasm between rich and poor is loudly pronounced. These are people who live in tightly-knit families and communities, and the great majority of them struggle against all odds to scratch out a living. From what I have observed, I would say Colombians work hard, play hard, fight hard, and love hard.

6.2.2 Comunidad de Cuidados

Pentecostalism originates in this context, as in many others, within conditions of social dislocation and the existential stance of worldly revolt. One such community church in which I participated on a hot Sunday morning in Cali provides an example of Latino/a community ethics and a philosophy of Pentecostal ministry that contrasts the stereotypical view of spiritual preoccupation. Comunidad de Cuidados has a membership of about two hundred, and is comprised primarily of the working-class poor. The leadership of Comunidad recognizes that ministry does not only involve care for the “spiritual” dimension of human lives, but for their physical needs, as well. In fact, they believe caring for people’s physical needs *first* before focusing on anything spiritual is the proper way to demonstrate God’s love.

For this example, Pastor Two will serve as a pseudonym for this Caleñan church’s senior pastor. Pastor Two was an ordained pastor with the *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia* (IPUC) for twenty-four years. He continues to share much of the doctrinal position of the IPUC, such as the unitarian view of God, but with some variations. For example, the IPUC believes one must speak in tongues as the uniform evidence of Holy Spirit baptism; Pastor Two believes one receives the Holy Spirit upon conversion. Pastor Two founded an independent church because he

wanted to be free of some of the traditional strictures of the denomination. The IPUC will not allow trinitarian believers to minister at their churches, but Pastor Two does not allow such doctrinal differences to bring division.

In conversation, Pastor Two told me the essence of God is two-fold: love and spirit.²⁴ Any other descriptors, he claimed, only indicate attributes or characteristics of God. Therefore, in his view, it is the love shown in real-life situations that demonstrates the essence of God and the reality of a spiritual dimension, and verifies the existence of God in situations in which it seems God does not exist; for example, when one's child has cancer. In such an impossible circumstance, the question is: "Where is God?" This church believes caring for the physical needs of these suffering people is the first step toward understanding that God's love is present, and that the good news of Christianity is precisely good news in bad situations within history. In worship services, Pastor Two takes up the cause of the socially dislocated classes by pointing to their position within the kingdom of God that transcends socially imposed categories. Drawing on scripture he exclaims "God is no respecter of persons;" that is to say, God shows no partiality to the wealthy and powerful.

Pastor Two's philosophy is not one of spiritual escapism, or promise of a distant future hope, but of holistic love expressed within the crushing conditions of the lived reality of suffering people. It is an understanding of divine love that is materialized within the social order. This case contrasts with the more typical disposition of Pentecostal congregations that, as

²⁴ This conversation took place July 20, 2018 while sharing a meal with the church staff and family members. The date is significant because it is the day Colombians celebrate their independence from Spain.

Sanchez-Walsh points out, have an “overarching goal of conversion first, service later.”²⁵ In many cases, Pentecostals focus primarily on conversion of the “soul” as a means of remedying all ills. Solutions for real-world problems, it is believed, will come about as the result of spiritual transformation.

Pastor Two’s emphasis on illustrating the essence of divine love first through community care points to a focus that is prioritized differently than many Pentecostals. This example complicates generalizations regarding the emphasis of Pentecostal outreach, though his approach has not fully developed into an emancipative Pentecostalism. It is my contention that because of the communal orientation of Latina/o culture, the crushing conditions of poverty that are so prevalent in the Latin-American context, and this community’s understanding of the nature of God as love manifested first within human history, that this example demonstrates a Latin American Pentecostalism with strong latent potential for a social-justice orientation that is demonstrated through certain aspects of their work in the city.

6.2.3 An Ethic of Outreach

The philosophy of Comunidad de Cuidados and Pastor Two is demonstrated through an outreach ministry to families struggling against adolescent illness. A young lady, whom I will refer to as Linda, initiated this outreach ministry specifically to help the families of children diagnosed with cancer. Linda herself suffered chronic respiratory illness from early childhood until the age of twenty-four. She was hospitalized many times with pneumonia beginning around age three. She was constantly rushed to emergency rooms and in and out of hospitals and clinics.

²⁵ Sanchez-Walsh, “Cristology from a Latino Perspective: Pentecostalism,” 98.

She told me the healthcare system can sometimes be very complex, so she often had difficulty getting a hospital room; thus, she would sometimes be held in emergency rooms. She recalled that often times her mother slept on the hospital floor while other members of her family slept in chairs. Her medical condition also heavily burdened her family financially. What is more, she saw the families of other patients in such dire straits that her mother would often share food with them.

These experiences inspired Linda to create a foundation to care for the friends and families of young cancer patients. But it was not until after joining Comunidad de Cuidados and connecting with Pastor Two that her inspiration gained traction. Linda had grown up Catholic, but she told me she did not know God. It was not until she attended Comunidad de Cuidados that she had a conversion experience. She then prayed for a revelation of God's will for her life and she was finally freed from her illness. It is noteworthy that Linda's juxtaposition of Catholic and Protestant (Evangelical-Pentecostal) traditions—the former as impotent and void of God, and the latter as the path toward God and divine healing—reflects the anti-Catholic sentiment so pervasive among “evangelicos” in the Colombian context.

Linda's experiences also motivated her to study psychology and social work, so she was able to earn a degree. Her personal struggles, her conversion experience, her “divine” healing, and her education all came together in her vision for a ministerial outreach that was realized with support from Comunidad de Cuidados. Before starting her outreach ministry she tried serving the church in various ways, such as working with the children, but never felt fulfilled. She spoke with Pastor Two and other church leaders about her vision for an outreach to families with hospitalized children and they began working together to organize the effort. Through

relationships she gained at the church she was able to connect with hospital personnel and begin meeting on Fridays and Saturdays with the children and their families.

Linda and the small team of church leaders she has organized provide meals for the families and an environment of community support. Over the past three years she and her team consistently visit these families and the suffering children and look for ways to provide for their material needs. I was afforded the privilege of accompanying Linda to the hospital in Cali, and had the opportunity to share a meal with a group of the mothers whose children were hospitalized for cancer treatment.

Even in cases where children enter remission, Linda and the team remain in contact with them through the cellular phone application “What’sApp.” Through the application, they are able to maintain community with these families and continue to offer various means of support. This growing network of families who have shared very similar struggles offers a powerful community of solidarity.

Linda noted that many of the families are from rural areas surrounding Cali because those areas lack the medical facilities necessary to care for the children’s needs. The distance makes transportation a challenge and presents a host of other difficulties. The economic pressure of transportation costs, as well as the relational strain it places on families. In many cases parents have multiple children, so one parent stays at home with the physically healthy children, while the other parent stays at the hospital. These arrangements also often generate marital problems because of the compounded challenges of geographic distance, the hardship of illness, the financial stress, and long periods of separation due to the protracted nature of the illnesses.

The goal of Linda and her team is to care for the needs of these families. Her primary focus is on encouraging those accompanying the ailing children by whatever means are available. She remembers from her own experiences that the support of friends and loved ones is imperative for the struggle against disease, so she recognizes the necessity of encouraging those persons so that they can continue to give aid and support.

What makes this case different than other outreaches to struggling families is the philosophy of Pastor Two and Linda. Pastor Two is of the mind that caring for the physical/material needs of these families is first priority. He believes that love of God is first illustrated through such care. For Linda, the care they offer is not about religion, per se, but about love and care for people. If Linda and the members of the team were to simply approach these families in order to evangelize them they would likely be unreceptive to their message; however, prioritizing their material needs first exemplifies divine love, in Pastor Two's view, which is a love that addresses historical realities. Linda is more concerned with providing encouragement and care for the family members to help them cope with the psychological pressures of these unthinkable situations. She draws upon her training in psychology to provide counseling and support, organizes ways to meet material needs for clothing, food and transportation, and all of this is underpinned by her Evangelical-Pentecostal faith.

6.3 Civic-Political Engagement

Now I will consider the civic-political action of two Colombian churches: Comunidad de Cuidados and la Iglesia Civica. These two examples allow for consideration of Colombian Pentecostalism in relationship to larger social, political and economic concerns.

First I turn to the example of la Iglesia Cívica that was founded in 1970 by a married couple pseudonymously referred to as John and Marta. They brought their Neo-Pentecostal brand of Christianity to the city of Cali and built more than fifty churches over the course of several decades. John is now deceased, so Marta is the apostle and chief leader of the organization. Her views differ doctrinally from Pastor Two in that she comes from a non-denominational background, she adheres to a trinitarian view of God, and she views the evidence of speaking in tongues as the uniform sign of Holy-Spirit baptism.

Like Comunidad de Cuidados, however, Iglesia Cívica also exemplifies social ethics through extensive work outside the confines of the church. Iglesia Cívica initiated a foundation for the express purpose of transforming Colombian society. The foundation is focused on providing education for all ages, and particularly for those living in extremely impoverished areas among vulnerable communities. Their humanitarian efforts concentrate on serving young children, single mothers, and young people in urban centers who are particularly vulnerable to gang involvement, prostitution, and narco trafficking. They also serve native indigenous communities, as well.

Iglesia Cívica emphasizes the training of leaders to cultivate the ability for transformation of self, family, community and nation. The driving impulse underlying their foundation is to provide “social, humanitarian, and spiritual support to the Colombian society.” An integral part of Iglesia Cívica’s social transformation program is to provide training for employment and the necessary skills to run successful small businesses. This practical vocational training and entrepreneurial advocacy also serves to emphasize what the leaders of Iglesia Cívica understand

as the responsibility of every individual citizen to employ their talents for the service of the larger community.

“Inclusion” is an ideal much emphasized within Iglesia Cívica’s mission. Specifically, their efforts toward societal support and social transformation are indiscriminate, they claim, in regard to “social class, race, [and] creed or political thought.” Their vision for Colombian society is nearly holistic in its inclusion of persons from all walks of life, and it centers on the agency of Colombians in the communal project of society building. However, there are limitations to their understanding of inclusion that I will discuss below.

Both Comunidad de Cuidados and Iglesia Cívica also illustrate Pentecostal civic engagement particularly within the political sphere. The leaders of both congregations strongly emphasize the importance of civic responsibility through awareness of current political issues and commitment to voting in accordance with Christian principles. Both congregations also have members who are currently running for public office (2019). The question is whether the hermeneutic lens being employed to determine accord with “Christian principles” takes up the cause of the socially dislocated classes.

6.3.1 Colombia Justa Libres: The New Right in Latin America

Both Cuidados and Cívica support a newly formed Colombian political party called Colombia Justa Libres that was initiated in 2017. This party developed as a result of several evangelical pastors’ involvement in the peace talks between the FARC—now a recognized political party called Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común or Common Alternative Revolutionary Force—and the Colombian government that culminated in the peace treaty

promulgated in 2016. These pastors believed too much attention was given to the initiatives of the FARC because Colombia Justa Libres was concerned that more allowances should be made for the diverse populace; however, in actual practice these concerns are limited in scope.

The party leaders organized four national conventions with many other Colombian leaders, and more than seventy regional meetings in which they ostensibly listened to the voices of the people. It was after hearing from victims of military violence, victimized women, members of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, educators, and other groups, that Colombia Justa Libres took shape as a political party.

According to leaders from Cuidados and Cívica, the party is expressly focused on political engagement as a means of reshaping Colombian society, and they believe such an effort should center on serving every segment of the complex demographic composition of the Colombian context. The ideology of the party's platform emphasizes human dignity, equal opportunity for "all" Colombians, and a non-corrupt democratic government for the people. Their inclusion stops short, however, of advocating for women's reproductive rights and the equal human rights of the LGBTQI+ community because they are perceived as corrosive of traditional family values. Their vision of governance is underpinned by a conservative understanding of Christian morality with a focus on traditional family values, and an eye toward advancing the initiatives of the city and its institutions along intertwined evangelical Christian and political lines.

Pastor Two is convinced that it is Christian faith that transforms people rather than political entities, so all the more reason for Christians (particularly Pentecostal Christians) to become influencers of public policy through engagement in the democratic process and by

holding positions of public authority. In conversation, he cited biblical figures such as Daniel and Joshua as examples of such national, public leadership. This is what Emerson and Smith refer to as “engaged orthodoxy” within the U.S. context, by which they mean “taking the conservative faith beyond the boundaries of the evangelical subculture, and engaging the larger culture and society.”²⁶ Pastor Two is a firm believer that Pentecostal Christianity offers the authentic transformative power to reform society. He also perceives the particularity of Pentecostal political engagement as essential given the protracted influence of Catholicism and what he perceives as pervasive corruption throughout the government along with the complicit Catholic church.

Pastor Two explained aspects of his social analysis, and offered faith-based solutions. In his view, what is currently most problematic within Colombian society is political corruption. He believes narco traffic generates so much money that it fuels this political corruption. In his view, then, it is the love of money that is the source of the issue. He believes change should begin in the homes of Colombian people. The corruption, he claims, begins in the home and spreads from there to every level of society. He believes transformation of society comes from impacting individuals and families, as well as from Pentecostal-Christian influence within the government. Members of his congregation are politically involved through voting, through direct assistance in the political campaigns of Colombia Justa Libres, and by word-of-mouth promotion of the Justa Libres party. This two-pronged approach to social change emphasizes both the individuation of social action, as well as structurally-centered efforts to foster societal transformation.

²⁶ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

These church leaders are theologically conservative²⁷ to be sure, and many aspects of their political positions are also conservative. However, they doubtless engage in social analysis, and certain dimensions of their efforts do not neatly fit beneath a conservative label. While Pastor Two prescribes an individualistic approach to addressing political corruption on the one hand, he also advocates for the pointed address of “sinful” social structures. His advocacy for structural engagement includes political organizing, promoting the civic action of parishioners, and critiquing the protracted complicity of right-wing Catholicism with conservative politics. As mentioned in Chapter Four, however, what is needed is a more complete understanding of “sin” in terms of structural systems that dehumanize and oppress marginal communities.

6.3.2 A Prophetic Trajectory?

The fact that Colombia Justa Libres developed in direct opposition to the FARC uncovers important limitations of the social vision advocated by the political party and these supporting Pentecostal churches. The FARC originally organized in 1964 for the purpose of defending poor rural peasants against right-wing militia groups during the 1940s and 50s.²⁸ Thus the agenda of the FARC is rooted in efforts to build a revolutionary coalition of the poor to advocate for transformation of Colombian society in favor of greater human dignity and equality. As noted in chapter three, however, the FARC is an integral part of a complex and violent national history.

²⁷ Conservative here implies a general adherence to what could be conceived of as the “orthodoxy” of Pentecostal-Christian faith.

²⁸ Jack Memolo and Jordi Conde, “Meet the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común: Colombia’s New Political Party,” *Council on Hemispheric Affairs* (September 25, 2017) pp. 1-7, Washington, DC, 2.

Now that the FARC rebels have traded “bullets for blazers,”²⁹ they are seeking to advance an agenda that includes a war on poverty and political corruption through the democratic system. Some of the key issues the party is working to address are rural land reform, public housing, wealth distribution, women’s rights, inequality, health care, and global warming.³⁰ Consequently, it is the FARC that more fully sides with the oppressed poor and marginal groups that so often comprise Pentecostal communities.

In their opposition to the FARC, it seems these Pentecostal communities in Colombia have disconnected, at least in part, from their early radical impulses. Rather than living into the anti-establishment Pentecostalism exhibited during *la violencia*, they grow increasingly distant from taking up the cross of the poor and denying the necrophilic politics of corrupt power. It is particularly dangerous to advocate for the human rights of *all* Colombians while excluding the rights of women and those representative of non-heteronormative sexuality. Such exclusion, in effect, necessarily categorizes these communities as non-human, and contributes to the violent and abusive treatment that naturally flows from dehumanizing narratives. This raises an important critique of Pastor Two’s conception of divine love. If God’s essence truly is divine love it must not be limited to certain segments of humanity. Pentecostal Christianity has from the beginning been a radical, boundary-crossing faith that offers the loving embrace of God specifically to despised humanity on the margins. By definition that love must reach across socially constructed boundaries of difference.

²⁹ Anthony Faiola, “Colombia’s FARC rebels launch a political party, trading bullets for blazers,” *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/colombias-farc-rebels-launch-a-political-party-trading-bullets-for-blazers/2017/09/01/86c9595e-8c28-11e7-9c53-6a169beb0953_story.html

³⁰ Memolo and Conde, 2.

The important question to ask, then, is whether these communities of near engagement will fully lean into emancipative Pentecostalism. Will the priority of influence come from the counter-cultural early church, the radical roots of Pentecostalism, the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, and a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval grounded in the social location of the poor? Or will individualized prosperity gospels appropriating a capitalist agenda complicit with the status quo and an exclusionary vision of human rights advocacy fully capture their imagination?

6.4 Conclusion

Pentecostalism in the United States and Colombian contexts cannot be labeled broadly as historically disengaged, socially anemic, or entirely politically conservative. These cases complicate those generalizations in particular ways. The U.S. immigrant congregation illustrates the reversal of religious complicity within the hegemonic relationship between Latinx Christians and state/national power by engaging in a patient “war of positioning” within U.S. society. Rather than settling for the status quo, they appropriate their Latinx Pentecostal faith identities to instruct their engagement with public life. Despite vilification by Trump and much of his administration and constituency, this community celebrates their Latinx identity along with their faith and resolve to continue contributing to public life within U.S. society. Their public witness will grow more forceful if and when they capture the truly prophetic voice that speaks into the social order and pointedly addresses material powers.

The Colombian cases demonstrate examples of the communal sensibilities and ethical orientations of Latino/a Pentecostal communities. The churches and their organizations are

acutely aware of the social realities of their context and the violations of human rights so prevalent therein, and they work indefatigably to address those material realities. Their faith dictates both individuated efforts, as well as broad-scale efforts to transform social structures. They are committed to work forcefully to engender the transformation of Colombian society, yet their social vision is exclusionary in ways that deny the human rights of certain marginal communities.

These organizations point up the complexities of applying political labels. Pentecostals' theological conservatism certainly shines through, as does their position regarding limited human rights, yet they exhibit an engaged ethic of care for struggling humanity and advocate for a broad range of human rights. These examples strongly deny the stereotypical view of Pentecostals as disengaged with social realities, since it is very clear that they are acutely aware of the issues, and engaged in both the analysis of those realities and in the formulation of strategies to pointedly address them. It is the nature of their engagement that requires attention.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Pentecostalism is a faith identity grounded in the belief that God speaks into the social order through prophetic women and men, that is to say, those who articulate a social vision in keeping with divine justice and shalom. Modeled on the early church that crossed boundaries of difference with radical resistance to the religious and political status quo, the modern movement of Pentecostalism traversed beyond the limitations of social norms. Its true essence is one of radical love and outspoken witness birthed out of the excruciating pain of poverty, rejection, and social dislocation, but punctuated by a realized eschatological hope for the imminent reign of God and Holy-Spirit empowerment available to the “least of these.” Pentecostalism persists today as a movement primarily of and for the poor and it retains vestiges of its radical impulses, but its witness has in some ways become muted. There is a growing number of scholar-theologian-leaders, however, who are reclaiming the outspoken witness that is constitutive of emancipative Pentecostalism. I hold that Pentecostalism is inherently oriented toward public life, but that claim must be nuanced in terms of hermeneutics.

I have identified a range of Pentecostal social trajectories spanning from *a spirituality of the status quo* to *a spirituality of outspoken witness*. The fundamental distinction between these groups is an ideational and material emphasis on individual piety and soul salvation versus community salvation through the address of structural evils. The socially transformational

character of truly prophetic Pentecostal Christianity must necessarily address the material principalities and powers which are manifested in religious, political and social structures. Latin American Pentecostals living into *a spirituality of near engagement* occupy a space along the middle of this spectrum, and are leaning into emancipative witness. Their social location and community orientation, along with the boundary-crossing and prophetic nature of their praise, positions them for public witness, but there is a hesitance to articulate that prophetic witness in direct address to social powers.

There are uneven levels of engagement across the different communities I have observed. There is certainly a broadly apparent and legitimate concern for social justice issues, and various beliefs and ritual practices come together with Latin American cultures to underpin a natural orientation toward ethical engagement. Yet the kind of engagement is contingent upon differing views of sin, morality, and salvation, and how it is believed that those issues should be addressed. Pentecostals of *a spirituality of near engagement* often understand these issues in terms of individual infractions and the invisible influence of spiritual entities that are believed to be most effectively addressed through spiritual practices. Emancipative Pentecostals view these issues as much larger, pervasive social structures that should be addressed with a spirituality that draws upon empowered faith to speak unadulterated truth to power.

The days of occupation with pre-millennial rapture have faded and Pentecostal communities are increasingly involved in the project of societal transformation through various means of engagement. They envision a just and equitable society characterized by the merciful and prosperous reign of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. They pray for God's shalom and they understand themselves to have agency within God's divine project of making it a reality

in the earth. Their vision, however, has taken differing trajectories that must be accounted for when exploring the movement's potential to be truly emancipative.

In terms of civic-political engagement these communities are “a mixed bag.” Latin American Pentecostals in the U.S. and Colombia are not uniformly located on the political right or the left. What is certain is that Pentecostals are increasingly politically engaged. U.S. Latinx Pentecostals tend toward progressive politics in relationship to immigration, wages, and health care, yet they are staunchly conservative in regard to women's reproductive rights and the human rights of the LGBTQI+ community.¹ Likewise, Colombian Pentecostals tend to lean to the left politically and economically, while their moral conservatism lands them on the right with a truncated vision for human rights advocacy. The apolitical stereotype of Pentecostals is out of date, but emancipative Pentecostals are concerned to see an increasing number of Pentecostals engaged in politics that veer from the radical, boundary-crossing love of the gospel expressed by the Jesus of history and the early church.

Latin American Pentecostalism has the fundamental building blocks necessary to (re)capture the elements that comprise emancipative Pentecostalism. Latin Americans are people of community solidarity and they are well acquainted with the suffering of poverty, discrimination, marginalization, and crucifixion. It is no surprise then that Latin American theologian-scholars have reclaimed the radical essence of Pentecostal DNA and are at the vanguard of the articulation of an emancipative Pentecostalism. The trajectory of Pentecostals leaning into engagement depends largely on their conversance with these theologians who are leading the way.

¹ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, Chapter 12.

Pentecostalism has the potential to be a veritable public force by virtue of the ways it imbues adherents with hope and agency, and due to the sheer size of the movement. Time will tell whether the clarion call of *a spirituality of outspoken witness* will increasingly draw segments of Pentecostals into the full realization of an emancipative Pentecostalism, or bolster the ranks of status quo evangelicalism complicit with the powers.

Hope, power, and agency are fundamental to Pentecostal faith, so it will continue to provide deeply meaningful avenues for human flourishing. The Pentecostal belief in a God whose concern is not limited, but encompasses the whole person provides a built-in orientation toward holistic social mission. In an increasingly precarious world, the masses of the world's poor and socially outcast need more than a "neck up spirituality;" they need an embodied faith that speaks comprehensively to their lived realities and provides the strength to resist structural criminality and necrophilic systems.

Emancipative Pentecostals are issuing a call for all those claiming to be empowered by the Spirit to lift a prophetic shout against all manner of social injustices. The church can no longer slumber, but must awaken to the social realities that deny the full human potential of *all* God's beloved children. In addition to the cultivation of personal spirituality and participation in charitable outreach, holistic engagement demands organizational efforts and pooling of resources to organize actions that address the powers that be. It is a great commission that calls for the full range of human rights advocacy. Pentecostals must reclaim the early belief that God had chosen them to carry out a right-now mission to change the world, and interpret that mission in terms of a radical divine love that extends to all without boundaries or limitations. The call is for truly "Spirited engagement" that is fully and radically emancipative.

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