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Latino Migration to Protestantism: A Historical, Socio-cultural, Ecclesiastical Analysis

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The “browning of America” in the 21st century has brought about many social changes within the heterogeneous group known as Latinos and among the general U.S. population and its other ethnic groups. One notable change is religious preferences among recent immigrants and second and third generation Latinos in favor of Protestantism. Although Latinos have for many years had a limited presence among Protestant groups, over the last decade or two there has occurred a significant defection from the Roman Catholic Church to evangelicalism in particular. The implications of this are quite unknown to social workers and social scientists but are slowly unraveling in light of this organic social trend. This paper examines this social phenomenon through cultural, historical, sociological and ecclesiastical lenses and argues for an understanding of this trend from an anti-essentialist position rooted in an intersectionality perspective.

Key words: *Latino Protestants; Latino church; Latino political preferences; immigration;*

A drive through most any rural town or urban area throughout the United States will reveal the clear signs of what Richard Rodriguez (2002) termed the *Browning of America*. Whether the area be small rural towns such as Mt. Olive, North Carolina, or famous urban enclaves such as Compton, California, one will most certainly observe the growth and presence of businesses such as *restaurantes*, *tiendaes*, and *carnicerias* that cater to Latinos. Dotted the landscape one also finds *Iglesias*, not just traditionally Roman Catholic, but increasingly a wide range of Protestant ones, from Baptist to Pentecostal to mainline churches that now have immigrant Spanish-speaking congregations that replace older Anglo congregations that have long

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since either died off or moved to more affluent areas of the communities. These churches are bustling centers of activities which are open and operating most days of the week that not only include worship, praise, and Bible study, but offer other services catering to community needs.

Latinos are gravitating to Protestant faiths and away from the Roman Catholic Church (the Church) at high rates. This religious movement and population growth are simultaneous social trends. The Pew Hispanic Center (2011), citing 2010 census data, summarizes the growth of Hispanics in the United States at 50.5 million, or 16.3 percent of the population; this number does not include the estimated 11.9 million (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008) unauthorized immigrants. Combining both those counted and the estimated uncounted number of undocumented residents places approximations of the Hispanic population at over 61 million. While published reports indicate Latino population density as highest in five southwestern states—California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Texas—four other states—Florida, Illinois, New Jersey and New York—continue to have large long-standing Latino communities. However, eight southern states experienced a triple-digit increase in the Latino population since the 2000 census. In order of growth they are: South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, North Carolina, Maryland, and Mississippi (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011), with the largest Latino growth concentrated in small towns of the rural south (Ames, Hancock, & Behnke, 2011).

While the Latino population is growing, the movement in religious faiths is in part, but not entirely, related to population growth. Latinos remain Catholic in large numbers. The Pew Forum (2007) stated that 68% of Latinos identify themselves as Catholic. In addition, while their numbers on the Church's membership rolls will continue to be high and over the decades account for white and other racial group membership losses, Latinos are also leaving the Church in record numbers. Current estimates of Latino defections from the Church are at 600,000 annually (Espinosa, 2007a; Vasquez, 1999). Espinosa is quoted in the Economist (2009) as saying "that for every one (Latino) who comes back to the Catholic Church, four leave it" (p. 31). The Pew Forum (2007) found that 20 % of Latino respondents surveyed in their study (n = 4600) identified as Protestants,

of which 75% reported they were born again or evangelical Protestants (5); hence falling into such denominational categories as Pentecostals, Baptists, and non-denominational Bible churches. Mainline faiths, (e.g., Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran) are well represented among Latino religious growth, but not at the same rate of expansion as evangelicals. Not included in this number are other Christian groups (e.g., Church of the Latter Day Saints and Jehovah Witnesses), which reflect another 3% of the non-Catholic Latino population. This shift in religious affiliations is not confined to the United States, but has been on the horizon in Central and South America for longer than two decades (Maduro, 2004; Vasquez, 1999). Immigrants alone do not account for this trend in religious observances; rather, second and third generation Latinos are also filling the pews of Protestant churches (Pew Forum Hispanic Trends Project, 2007)—many of them favoring the infusion of culture and language in the services, even among those who are monolingual English Latinos.

Why, then, is this social movement important for social workers? There are several reasons. Religion and spirituality are an integral part of Latino culture and life. Only 8% of Latinos responding in the Pew survey (2007) reported they were wholly secular as compared to 20% of the U.S. White population (Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, 2012). Unlike the strict separation of public and private life (with religion considered a part of the private life) that is embedded in Euro-American culture, the same is not true in Latino cultures. *Mestizos*, the racial group befitting most Latinos, are a new people born out of two cultures and races, Indigenous and European typically Spanish, hence their histories are not given to strict dichotomies or categorizations. As "both-and people" *Mestizo* ways of knowing have a rhythm not confined by artificial distinctions of the secular and the sacred (Elizondo, 1995; Gonzales, 2002; Goizueta, 1995). Therefore, the sacred and the secular, the physical and the spiritual are not dichotomized, but are integrated throughout the lived experience. Social workers would do well to be cognizant of the notion that while a Latino might be inclined to accept a scientifically based theoretical explanation of an event, they may also very well not foreclose on a supernatural explanation. Social workers seriously committed to engaging in culturally

appropriate services with Latinos need to fully understand this aspect of cultural life and be willing to work with it. It is also important to consider that similar to the African American experience of civil rights, which was birthed and nurtured in the church, so, too, there is a tradition for empowerment and social transformational movements in the Latino community (Espinosa, 2007a). Examples from Mexico, Central and South America and the United States of revolution or social movements that were based in the church or with church blessings reach back to Emiliano Zapata and the Mexican Revolution. However, most notably the liberation theology movement, a largely South American movement of the 50s and 60s, gained visibility and popularity with large segments of populations in Latin America in the 70s. It is founded on the premise of

reject[ing] the separation between spirituality and worldliness, the supposed apolitical character of the Church...[which was] supporting the status quo and hence the wealthy...[and, advanced the idea]...that the Kingdom of God could be established here on earth by trying to accomplish social justice and fighting poverty. (Gooren, 2002, p. 29)

In recent decades Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI sought to stomp out the movement, however, it is once again receiving credible visibility in the Vatican by Pope Francis (Spiciale, 2013).

Also in Central and South America the Christian Base Communities movement, or *Comunidades Eclesial de Base* (CEBs), fueled the Nicaraguan revolution in the 1970s and 1980s. Cristian Base Communities were small groups dedicated to faith, self-help and mutual aid by alleviating poverty and fatalism and seeking justice through their reading of Scripture into their common plight. Estimates of the size of these groups ranged from 5 to 75 members with the groups numbering in the hundreds and thousands in the northern regions of South America and throughout Central America (Anderson, 1988; Gooren, 2002; McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1988). Originally Catholic in nature, and a form of liberation theology praxis, Protestant CEBs also flourished.

In the United States, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm

Workers in the 1960s and 1970s received blessings and support from not only the Catholic Church but more progressive Protestant groups, too. And, in the early part of the 21st Century, interfaith coalitions of Catholic and Protestant groups emerged, demanding immigration reform and protesting racist anti-immigration laws. This rich history, along with spiritual and/or faith evolution, are a part of an emerging Latino/a theology with a hermeneutic, according to Gonzales (2002, p. 63) organized around themes that embrace the importance of the social context; the rich mixture of race and culture in the reality of the *mestizaje/mulatez*; expressions of faith through popular religion; *lo cotidiano*, or the living of faith in the everyday as the personal and political and the sacred and secular; and the importance of praxis in action based on reflection. Gonzales's analysis points to an emerging theology that is rooted in race and culture and integrated into the everyday life encounters of a people. Lorentzen and Mira (2005) echo Gonzales's concept of *lo cotidiano* in the Latino Pentecostal doctrine as creating an understanding of how faith informs everyday life for Latinos, many of whom view themselves as sojourners in a foreign land and immigrants as exiles from their culture and country.

The following is a review of a wide range of literature from the social sciences, religious studies, and church history, augmented by anecdotal observations of two small Latino congregations in a large metropolitan area in the Southwest. These observations, although not systematic, often confirmed the findings in literature and provide examples of Latino/a praxis theology. By examining this literature, the intention is to create both a context for understanding this social movement among Latinos and also to encourage the imagination of how social workers can become more fully engaged in culturally and contextually appropriate services to Latinos. This author suggests that working with new and emerging populations requires not only creative but also culturally and contextually appropriate social work practice that is on the cutting edge of finding new ways to meet these groups where they are by listening to and entering into their narratives and embracing the strengths within the cultural communities. This author is not convinced that we, as social workers, really know the full potential of the burgeoning Latino community. Neither do we necessarily know how to meet their existing and emerging needs. One

certainty, though, is that providing culturally and contextually appropriate service to Latinos will require us to understand religion and spirituality as an integral part of Latino life. Such understanding holds much promise for effective social work engagement, with the potential for partnerships with Latinos that is essential for responding, solving, and managing problems and crisis in their communities.

To this end, the paper provides a short historical and contemporary overview of Latino Protestantism in México and in Central and South America, along with an overview of Latino worship and the impact it appears to be making in U.S. congregations. Then, the literature is organized around exploring the functions of Latino Protestantism, focusing on three themes: spirituality, the re-creation of family and community, and a site for social capital development.

Historical and Contemporary Contexts

One of the intriguing questions about this social movement is whether it has been influenced by economic and cultural shifts (Tangenberg, 2007; Vasquez, 1999). As México and countries in Central and South America have become increasingly developed with an emerging middle class both locally and in the U.S., and as the world has entered into a globalized economy, one might ask: are we witnessing a “Latinoization” of Max Weber’s sociological analysis of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe? This is possible, but there are also important differences between Weber’s (1956) analysis of nineteenth-century Europe as discussed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and contemporary Latin America. Certainly the timing of an emerging middle class and a move away from an agrarian communally-based culture to an urban culture, along with mass out-immigration from both community and country, present an intriguing parallel between late nineteenth-century Europe and late twentieth and early twenty-first century Central America and México.

Weber observed that the growth of a middle class created by industrialization lent itself to the development of liberal capitalism whereby work was motivated by the concept of calling, which made work a sacred duty, the accumulation of material wealth, a symbol of God’s election of the person

and the concept of predestination. In Calvinist doctrine, one could not change his/her celestial fate (as was the case in Catholicism); neither could one know for sure one's election. But, God's abundance was a clue, because God certainly would not permit a "saved" person to be poor in earthly life. Weber labeled this the Protestant Ethic, which benefited the capitalist system by creating hard workers eager to show their favor with God through labor and accumulation. Protestants in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States made for a compliant workforce committed to proving their worthiness to both God and their human employers. This gave rise to a *laissez-faire* capitalism that focused more on personal responsibility and individual rights rather than on communal good.

Notwithstanding the similarities in Latin America and among Latinos immigrating to the United States, there are dissimilarities as well. For example, there are doctrinal differences. Weber's observations were primarily Calvinist with its distinctive tenet of unconditional election (meaning God extends mercy to those who are chosen, while withholding mercy from those not chosen) as a main motive for working hard while pursuing prosperity. This is not the same in contemporary Latino Protestantism, which is often rooted in a Pentecostal-type doctrine that emphasizes free agency, individual salvation open to all, and the manifestation of spiritual gifts, without the Calvinistic tenet of election and belief in the accumulation of personal prosperity as a symbol of God's favor.

Even with both the parallels and disconnects of Weber's theory to the contemporary Latino experience, little work has been done to explain capitalism and religious belief, with the exception of an intriguing study by Anthony Gill (2004). Gill used survey analysis from the 1990 World Values Survey from four Central and South American countries to test various Weberian assumptions of attitudes toward liberal capitalism and religious beliefs. He was unable to support his hypotheses of linking liberal attitudes with Protestant beliefs. However, Gill's study is intriguing and provides a plausible interpretation for the presence of a certain set of religious tenets which support a more liberal society that is consumer oriented, with individualistic and personal-responsibility leanings, characteristics essential to a capitalist economy functioning smoothly. This relationship remains a thoughtful subject worthy of

further discussion and analysis.

Apart from the economic analysis, historically there has also been for some time a small but visible number of Latino Protestants in both Central and South America, in Mexico, and in the United States (Freston, 1998). There seem to have been waves of mass Protestant conversions occurring at various times throughout the twentieth century. Freston (1998) charts the rise of Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, within the Spanish-speaking Americas after the 1906 revival in Los Angeles. He cites large and significant growth in Brazil, the Andes region, and later in Chile. Espinosa (1999, p. 598) identifies an early movement led by Francisco Olazábal,

as a major catalyst in this shift towards religious pluralism in the early twentieth century. He (Olazábal) not only contributed to the birth and development of at least ten mainline Protestant and Pentecostal denominations by 1937, he had also converted tens of thousands of Latinos throughout the U.S., Mexico, and Puerto Rico to the Pentecostal movement during his more than thirty year ministry.

Vasquez (1999) reports a noticeable increase in Protestants in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico in the 1950s during a period of uneven economic expansion, and a large Protestant presence occurred in Latin America in the 1970s during a time of economic, social, and political upheaval. Maduro (2004, p. 224) suggests that U.S. imperialism merits consideration in any conversation of religion in Latin America: "for over 30 years... U.S. policies have included funding, isolating, favoring, or persecuting and eliminating religious groups and leaders depending on their potential for U.S. interests." Imperial meddling by the United States is most notable in the last quarter of the twentieth century with the assassinations of liberation theology leaders, priests, seminarians and lay leaders throughout the Central and South American continents, most notably Archbishop Oscar Romero. At the same time, the CIA used a variety of strategies to prop up, protect, and support homegrown dictators such as the Guatemalan General Rios Montt, a Pentecostal preacher. The complicity of the Church with the United States in these colonial activities is not lost

among Latinos. Protestantism provides its members with a break from colonialism by offering a more democratic organization with greater participation in church governance, as well as a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The sum result is the steady growth of Protestants in Latin America and among Latinos heading north; they identified with a new way of life, viewed the Church as an agent of repression and a champion of the “old ways,” and/or they saw Protestantism as a form of resistance to imperialism and colonialism.

Latinos have been most notably present in the Pentecostal movement since its inception in the early decades of the twentieth century in Los Angeles (Ramirez, 1999; Sanchez-Walsh, cited in Tippet, 2011; Vasquez, 1999). Born out of the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles from 1906-1909 (Tangenberg, 2007) Pentecostalism as a movement was quite unlike any other form of Christian faith in America in both its form and substance. In substance, Pentecostalism emphasizes being born of the Spirit as evidenced by a manifestation of spiritual gifts, living a spiritually-guided and filled life, and awaiting the Second Coming of Christ. In form, it is a faith that stresses caring and support for each other and reaches out to all people regardless of “ethnic, socio-economic and gender diversity” (Tangenberg, 2007, p. 231). The movement was born in the spirit of diversity. Tangenberg explains that the early Pentecostal movement “emphasized the presence of Divine love in meetings where the color line was washed away by the blood [of Christ]” (p. 231). Espinosa (2007b) reports that 64% of contemporary Latino Protestants identify themselves as Pentecostal or Charismatic (p. 29).

Latinos played an integral role in the Pentecostal movement that took the country by storm in the early twentieth century. However, for Latinos, and Mexicans in particular, the country is not confined to politically arbitrary borders—as many regard the border as a mere inconvenience. Consequently, this new form of Christianity spread rapidly throughout the Southwest and into northern Mexico (Vasquez, 1999). As Pentecostalism entered a phase of greater institutional acceptance in American Christianity, it attempted to become more mainstream and to reconcile ethnic differences (Tangenberg, 2007). According to Vasquez (1999), this period of mainstream acceptance placed

the Mexican contingent especially in a marginalized role, primarily because they were often viewed as wetbacks who maintained a strong cultural-political frame of mind that was out of step with American politics. Ramirez (1999) characterizes Latino Pentecostalism in its early form as following a theological praxis based on a higher calling of scriptural application to political issues, especially immigration. This theological praxis seems to still hold true. Latino evangelical Protestants seem to hold more nuanced views on social issues as compared to their White counterparts. On social issues such as casual and premarital sex, abortion on demand and gay marriage, Evangelical Latinos tend toward conservative views, but on issues such as immigration, education, the death penalty, and women's roles in the church, this same group takes a politically more liberal position (Bartkowski, Ramos-Wada, Ellison, & Acevedo, 2012; Ellison, Acevedo, Ramos-Wada, 2011; Ellison, Wolfinger, & Ramos-Wada, 2013; Espinosa, 2008). While the White Pentecostal church gravitated toward mainstream American culture and became identified with consumerism, social conservatism, and an ally of the Republican Party, the Latino Pentecostal church has followed a different course, voting in large numbers for Democratic candidates in state and national elections over the last two decades. Lorentzen and Mira (2005) characterize Latino Pentecostal doctrine as fundamentally true to literal interpretations of scripture, becoming instead anti-consumerist (anti-idolatry), diasporic in nature, and living the holy life. Gonzales (2002) refers to this as *la vida cotidiana*, living a life informed by scriptures.

Besides the break from colonialism, Pentecostalism's overarching appeal to Latinos may lie in its links to indigenous roots. Mestizo ways of viewing the world include respect, reverence, and participation with the supernatural. The close proximity of the natural and spiritual worlds is a part of the Latino culture. Hence, emphasis on being Spirit-filled through the impartation of spiritual gifts, evidenced in speaking in tongues, prophecies, healing, and other miracles, fits naturally into Latino culture, as it manifests syncretist or hybrid appeal (Maduro, 2004; Pew, 2007; Tangenberg, 2007). This experiential expression transcends Pentecostalism and is also clearly evident in the Renewalist movement, which, regardless of denomination, seems to define Latino Christianity. Renewalism

is characterized by a belief in the day-to-day presence of God through the work of the Holy Spirit; God's presence is manifest through personal transformations, such as receiving spiritual gifts, revelations, healings, miracles, and special blessings (Pew, 2007). Latino Christians overwhelmingly identify with this set of beliefs (Espinosa, 2007b; Pew, 2007; "Separated Brothers," 2009). In the Pew (2007) survey, Hispanic Catholics 54% and Protestants 57% identified themselves as either Renewalist or Charismatic (terms often used interchangeably).

As noted earlier, historical political failures, as well as the Church's role in colonialism, may be one reason why Latinos are leaving. Throughout Latin America and Mexico, the Church has served as the arm of social control with its paternalistic, hierarchal, detached role in the everyday life of Latinos. According to Espinosa (2007a), part of the explanation for Latino disaffection with the Church is due to sanctioning or failure to speak up against a number of apparently gross violations of humanity that include: (1) maintaining corrupt and cruel governments; (2) oppressing movements such as Christian Base Communities and liberation theology; (3) sustaining cruel dictators; and (4) failing to hold the United States accountable for rampant Mexican-American War treaty violations. Only in recent years has the U.S. Roman Catholic Church taken a stand on important social justice issues, most notably in their support of César Chavez and the UFW, and recently in the struggle for immigration rights and reform in this century (Espinosa, 2007a).

Beyond politics, the Church has seemingly been unable to keep up with the growing and changing nature of Latin American and Latino life. There are at least four examples of this from the literature. In regard to the U.S. Roman Catholic Church, Pineda (2007) identifies that: (1) there are simply not enough parishes equipped to minister to the growing Latino population, and, therefore, Latinos find that they are marginalized by the Church; (2) there are fewer and fewer Spanish-speaking priests to cover increasingly growing demands; (3) as the Church has attempted to meet the need for Spanish speaking priests, they have tended to import them from other parts of the Spanish speaking world, at the cost of "cultural incompetency" to deal with Latinos; and, (4) that Catholicism has historically been associated with hierarchical and

patriarchal systems that are quickly outmoded as Latinos have migrated and have entered the middle class (Vasquez, 1999). Protestantism, on the other hand, allows not only for greater levels of participation in the day-to-day life and leadership of the church but also for increased democratization of church decisions.

Latino migration from the Church is historically rooted and reflects changing economic and social trends. Colonialism, participatory forms of church governance, shifting economic structures that contribute to a growing middle class, and a new form of worship are all factors at play in this social trend. Tangenberg (2007), speaking of Pentecostalism, states that "its highly experiential, exuberant worship style, attention to the lived experience, and potential to bridge agrarian and industrialized economic structures" (p. 235) presents a viable option for Latino immigrants. In sum, these factors serve as historical antecedents and experiences that contribute to the explanation of Latino movement into the Protestant church.

Functions at the Heart of the Movement

Historical, political, economic, and cultural trends are important, but any social movement must also capture the imagination of the heart. Three "heart" matters are explored in this section. First is the spiritual function: What are Latinos experiencing in these churches that is fulfilling to them spiritually? Second is the idea that these sites are the center of the re-creation of family and community lost through migration and assimilation: In what ways does the Protestant church organize itself to create the families and communities that have been lost in the process of immigrating from a communal to an individualistic culture? Third is how the Protestant churches are a site for developing social and human capital in the Latino community. In the literature reviewed for this project, there are a wide variety of church functions and programs that develop both member and community capacities.

Each of these three functions are interrelated. Where one conceptually leaves off, the next picks up, and in most cases overlaps with another. The author recognizes this and notes that to some extent categorization is an inexact exercise because, in reality, there are common threads that run through all three, especially as experienced by Latino church members.

Spiritual: Personal and Participation

A personal relationship with God is the foremost reported reason for joining Protestant congregations (Pew, 2007). As noted earlier, however, most Latinos, even those still in the Church, seek a more embodied religious experience that recognizes the day-to-day presence of God in the world, as well as direct revelation through the reception of spiritual gifts. Their connecting to the mystical, the supernatural, is a cultural experience that is ingrained in the indigenous myths of the peoples from whom Latinos descended. For centuries, as Latinos were colonized into Catholicism, these spiritual encounters lay outside the doctrine of the Church but never outside of the culture, as evidenced by folk healers, *curandera/os* and other gifted persons who often performed spiritual rituals alongside but outside the purview of the Catholic Church. Although the substance of the myth is different, the form—direct participation in the supernatural—is in many ways similar for modern Latino Christians. Healing for the body, soul, and mind is a major component not only in the Pentecostal tradition but also in some mainline denominations that have adapted to serve Latinos ("Separated Brothers," 2009). For example, in one church this author frequently observes, a more than a century-old Presbyterian church that historically served a "well-heeled" Anglo congregation, which has long since died out or headed to the suburbs of this large southwestern city, has been transformed into a fully bilingual, multicultural church. In its present embodiment, it regularly offers healing services during its weekly worship (a not-so-typical practice of this denomination's worship). In addition, it has established a healing center that offers free and sliding-scale, bilingual, traditional and complementary healing and preventive care, such as acupuncture, massage, Reiki, yoga, healing dance, nutritional counseling, individual and family counseling (narrative therapy), along with a parish nurse and food distribution.

Through their personal relationship with God, peoples' lives are transformed (Flores, 2009; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Marquardt, 2005; Tangenberg, 2007), as some find a new sense of direction, purpose, and meaning. While some have been saved from a life of gangs, substance abuse, and crime (Flores, 2009), women, in particular, are not saved *from* but

for something much larger—the world of possibilities that transcends culturally-defined gender roles ("Separated Brothers," 2009; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Maduro, 2004; Marquardt, 2005; Tangenberg, 2007). Women of Latino descent in many Protestant congregations have found a place to receive and exercise spiritual gifts that place them in positions of leadership that they never dreamed possible and which are beyond the expectations for Latinas in their social location.

Latinos migrating to Protestant churches have also encountered an increased opportunity to participate in the polity of the church (Marquardt, 2005; Vasquez, 1999). The Church, with its hierarchical and male leadership structure, mostly precludes input from parishioners on important issues of church governance. Therefore, leadership possibilities and participation in the democratic decisions of the Protestant churches marks a very significant departure from the experience in the Church. In turn, this opportunity provides Latino congregants with an important opportunity to participate and develop leadership skills, as well as an entry to civic life engagement.

Re-creation of Family and Community

Vasquez (1999) warns against a strict Durkheimian view of the growth of Pentecostal and Protestant churches among Latinos as a response to anomie. This author agrees that such an analysis is too reductionist and connotes a certain degree of social pathology. Yet, there is plenty of room for discussion regarding the social functions these congregations play in terms of restoring the family and community that have been lost through migration. This is true for all generations of Latino immigrants, as evidenced in Pew's (2007) research findings that not only recent immigrants, but also those who no longer speak Spanish, are migrating to Protestant churches that offer a Hispanic ambience in the liturgy and language. Flores (2009) reported finding that this was true of the mostly second and third generation Latinos in the churches observed in his study, and Ames et al. (2011) cite that 29% of third generation Latinos identify as Protestants. These findings are not surprising, considering that second and third generation Latinos may be considered the lost generations, the sons and daughters of immigrants who no longer carry the immigrant dream of a better life once held by their parents. Those of the second and

third generations often encounter downward mobility and become involved with gangs, drugs, and crime. These are the first to encounter the full break from the protective factors of a communal culture and are exposed to the harsh realities of American culture with its structural racism, subordination of the marginalized, consumerism, and unbridled individualism. What these churches provide are what Ramos (2004) called a "powerful Latino ambiance" that makes parishioners feel like they are at home in their country (p. 479), and what Ames et al. (2011) identify as a culturally-oriented support system that has been ruptured through immigration. This seems to be as important for immigrants as it is for those in the "1.5 generation," or U.S.-born and raised Latinos.

Churches often take on the role of recreating a sense of connection lost due to communities destroyed by civil wars, the economic ravages brought on by NAFTA, and family dislocation resulting from migration. They "reaffirm cultural roots and old patterns of sociability against the fragmentation and rootlessness of dominant Anglo civilization" (Vasquez, 1999, p. 621). Latinos of the second and third generation have often lost this connection to communal culture, as they have experienced various degrees of acculturation into the U.S. Immigration has come with a steep price; there is evidence in a wide range of literature that second and third generations are at higher levels of risk for mental health problems (Jani, Ortiz, & Aranda, 2009), chronic substance abuse, PTSD (Sanchez, Ortiz & Rosas-Baines, 2013), and downward mobility because of oppositional group behavior (Flores, 2009). It is hypothesized that the protective factors of family and communal culture have been stripped away by the social fragmentation of American life, and that social marginalization and exclusion in the form of racism, discrimination, microaggressions, microinvalidations (subtle and not-so-subtle comments and behaviors based on popular stereotypes and essentialist beliefs) serve to reinforce the social location of Latinos in this country (Ortiz & Jani, 2010), and anti-Hispanic sentiment in the media have resulted in a lost generation of Latinos. Flores (2009) observed that church leaders who mentored younger congregants served as a source of accountability, especially around the development of occupational goals and the fulfillment of spousal and parental roles. In many of these cases, the younger generation

congregants were successful in reversing downward social mobility. The church in this sense is a village of older adults mentoring and supporting young people as they struggle to find their way.

Maduro (2004) refers to this function as an opportunity to become “somebody” in a family, while living in a society in which Latinos are largely invisible, marginalized, and increasingly reviled by politicians and the media. Those who toil as gardeners, kitchen help, and hotel maids by day and often work two and three jobs, are able at night or on weekends to walk through the doors of a church and instantly be a member, and perhaps a leader, of a church family situated in a much larger welcoming ethnic community. There, they are somebody (Flores, 2009; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Maduro, 2004). The power of this experience cannot be underestimated.

Another small Pentecostal church, which the author frequently observes, is located in a port city and offers a unique example of the re-creation of community. About twenty-five years ago, the pastor, originally from a small agrarian community southwest of Mexico City began to notice that many in his congregation were leaving to find work in the United States, most of whom were settling in or around this port town. Taking a temporary leave from his church, the pastor headed to *el norte* and established a church in the port city along with many of the congregants from the original church in Mexico. Church members from the original congregation in Mexico, now living nearby, began to buy and rent houses in the area around this new church, creating a welcoming and supportive community for themselves and new arrivals. The congregation that now numbers in the hundreds has literally transported much of the original Mexican community to the port city in the U.S. Migrants from the town in rural Mexico now have a place to land, and they not only connect with neighbors, friends, and relatives but also find work, health care, and housing. As will be discussed later, the town in Mexico now has a source of revenue through remittances, which has helped it survive the economic, social, and human capital drain on the community brought about by NAFTA and other trade agreement policies.

Social Capital: Resisting the Master Narrative

Coleman (1988) states that “social capital ... comes about

through ... relations among persons that facilitate action" (p. 200)—often in the form of improving human capital. Putnam (2000) submits that churches play an important function in the development of social capital. The sparse literature on Latino migration to Protestant churches offers many examples of social capital that result in life-enhancing opportunities for church members. In this instance, a sense of community, support, and personal development seem to converge in these churches and provide opportunities for members that might not otherwise be available to them (Williams & Loret de Mola, 2007). Several examples follow that suggest that the social capital in these churches produces human capital that in some ways is a form of resistance to laws, culture, stereotype, poor educational opportunities, racial discrimination, and forces of downward mobility that challenge the dominant culture's master narrative of Latinos.

Resistance to repressive immigration laws is rooted especially in a form of Pentecostalism known as the Apostolic tradition. Ramirez (1999) writes that Apostolic congregations have served as a port of entry for thousands upon thousands of undocumented workers seeking economic asylum, of families seeking to be reunited, and of others looking for new opportunities. All this is done outside the political purview, as most churches do not want to draw attention. There is no fanfare, nor do they have doctrinal statements that undergird these actions. They simply and literally follow the Mathew 25 parable of the sheep and the goats, wherein Jesus said "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (v. 40). Ramirez (1999) refers to this as "borderland praxis" (p. 573) and further states: "for Apostolics, and many other Mexican and Mexican Americans, the southwestern United States, and northern Mexico continued to constitute a 'single cultural province' one in which people *migrated*—not *immigrated*" (p. 584).

This author observed examples of this praxis in both the Pentecostal port city church and the metropolitan Presbyterian Church (identified earlier). In the former instance, a family that has long-standing ties to the church had a relative in México in need of urgent health care only available in the U.S. Collectively, the church worked with the family to hire a *coyote*,

a guide who provides direction and assistance in crossing the border (although once considered a time honored profession there is increasing evidence the craft is being replaced by gang members engaged in human trafficking), to bring the wheelchair-bound man across the border. The initial attempt went bad, and the *coyote* disappeared with their \$5000. After they raised more money, the next attempt was successful. The man is now receiving much-needed health care to sustain his life.

In the later instance, the minister shared with the author that one of the male members of the church had been arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and deported. His distraught wife called the pastor asking for financial support so the family could be reunited. The pastor discussed the request with the deacon board, which located the needed money from their budget. The pastor traveled to the border where the man had been deported, located him in México, helped him make necessary contacts, and left him with the money needed to get across the border. A few weeks later, at Thanksgiving, this writer witnessed the praises and thanks exhibited by this family for being reunited. This church also participates in the formal sanctuary movement. They converted unused space in their voluminous building into an apartment for a member who refused to obey deportation orders because that would require her to abandon her state-side born high school age daughter. This family lived in sanctuary for five years in the church.

In recent years, some Latino Protestant churches that had been on the sidelines politically, mobilized to protest repressive U.S. immigration laws. Beyerlein, Sikkink, and Hernandez (2008), and Espinosa (2007) report that the immigration issue in the United States galvanized an alliance between the Church, led by Cardinal Roger Mahoney, and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference that drew on local Latino Protestant churches to advocate for more humane immigration policies and laws. This type of movement, often mobilized through the use of electronic media (Beyerlein et al., 2008) is a first, and, although it has not been successful in curbing the anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States nor in passing immigration reform, the movement, along with subsequent voting patterns in 2006 and 2008, placed Republicans on notice

that they no longer can count on the evangelical Latino vote in the same way conservatives have depended on the allegiance of White evangelicals (Espinosa, 1999; Gallegos, 2008; Kelly & Morgan, 2008; Lee & Pachon, 2007). Lorentzen and Mira (2005) provide an account of a small Pentecostal church they studied during the 2000 presidential campaign. Although the church leadership was inclined to support the Republican agenda because of "moral issues," they ultimately decided that those who could vote would support the Democratic candidate because of immigration issues and the party's position on policies toward the needy (p. 65), issues they found were compatible with the teachings of Christ. The Latino voter, regardless of religious or political identity, is largely supportive of humane and just immigration reform.

Throughout its history, Pentecostalism has given women opportunities not usually available in other Christian denominations, and certainly not in the RCC (Sanchez-Walsh, cited in Tippet, 2011; Tangenberg, 2007). Aimee Semple McPherson, an early evangelist and leader in the Pentecostal movement, serves as a pioneer role model for many women today, especially in Latin America (Sanchez-Walsh, cited in Tippet, 2011). McPherson demonstrated that a calling was sufficient for women to serve the church in a wide range of roles. Tangenberg (2007) asserts that for women in the Pentecostal church "religious communities facilitated empowerment by creating opportunities for free expression and social respect based on demonstration of spiritual gifts...[thus] transforming the master narrative" (p. 233). Although this transformation did not always carry over into all aspects of church life or even into the community, the undeniable spiritual gifts always served to give women a respectable, unyielding role in the church that was not based solely on gender. Through these opportunities, women have had a chance to become literate, develop leadership skills, learn organizational and business skills, practice public speaking, and transfer these skills to the world outside of the church, thus giving them the confidence to engage in civic and professional life (Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Maduro, 2004; Marquardt, 2005; Tangenberg, 2007).

Nevertheless, this discussion would be incomplete if it did not include a reference to the reality that Pentecostalism

does not promote gender equity. While there may be "Spirit"-inspired gender equity in the church, there is limited evidence of gender equity in the home. Often the church has been silent on issues of domestic violence, encouraging women to instead focus on spiritual matters (Tangenberg, 2007). However, Ames, et al. (2011) found in their qualitative study of Latino Protestant pastors that when they had training and resources available to them, the pastors were willing to speak against domestic violence from the pulpit and to provide education, counseling and referrals for couples who had encountered intimate partner violence. Marquardt's (2005) work also identified instances wherein women have been both encouraged and supported to leave abusive relationships, a pattern not altogether inconsistent in Latino Protestant churches.

Two ethnographic studies of Latino Pentecostal churches provided excellent examples of challenges to the dominant master narrative for Latino men by reversing their downward mobility through educational programs, mentoring, and important leads for job training and employment (Ek, 2008; Flores, 2009). Ek's ethnographic study of a Pentecostal congregation in a southwestern city focuses, in this case, on a Mexican adolescent male immigrant. Ek found that the "church created a nurturing and supportive environment for engagement in language and literacy practices while the school marginalized [him] ... and failed to provide effective teaching and learning in either English or Spanish" (p. 2). Through Sunday School, the boy learned "literacy practices [that] built [the] students' oral Spanish language in addition to reading comprehension, textual analysis, evaluation and interpretation—skills which align with [the state's] Department of Education Language Arts Content Standards" (p. 11). However, while at public school, the boy was relegated to remedial and ESL classes where these literacy skills were not taught and was warehoused in an overcrowded modular classroom away from the main building with mostly Latino students, except for an occasional African or Korean immigrant. Eventually, after several frustrating years, the boy left school, having been pushed out by a system designed for him to fail. Yet, through the teaching he received at his church, he achieved the precise literacy goals established by the state for a high school student, but he was not given the chance in the public school classroom to

demonstrate these skills.

Flores (2009) concluded in his ethnographic study of subsequent generation Latinos that the church served to enhance social capital by redirecting its members to care for home and family, by fostering a positive work ethic, by providing leads for employment and training, and by giving them tools where-with to avoid substance abuse and gang life (Boyle, 2010). By enhancing social capital, the net effect was a reversal of downward social mobility. Some of the men Flores observed had been in gangs, done stints in prison, and were substance abusers. None were gainfully employed. They had lost the immigrant dream of their parents, mostly due to a repressive school system, fractured families, and lost communities in a society that devalues Latinos, as demonstrated in social institutions and manifested in the media. However, the church provided a strong community that in many ways served to restore the "lost" family and offered a feeling of belonging that gang membership had provided. This social capital resulted in a sense of personhood often imparted through scripture and sermons, mentoring through personal relationships, accountability for carrying through on commitments, and contact opportunities for training and employment options. Men and their families, Flores observed, were changed, and their trajectories of downward mobility were reversed.

Remittances that immigrants send to their families in their country of origin have gained tremendous attention over the last decade. Pew Hispanic Center (2002) estimated that by 2005 Latino immigrants would be collectively sending 15 billion dollars annually to families, usually in one of five Spanish speaking countries: Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Remittances are usually sent by individuals to support family members who are unable to find work or to go to *el norte*. However, in one of the above-mentioned churches, the act of sending money back to México is a congregational function. This Latino Pentecostal church, which was planted by a church originating in México, takes monthly offerings specifically earmarked to be sent to the home village. Estimates are that the church has remitted \$140,000 since it began this practice; this does not include in-kind support such as clothing, books, and musical instruments. These remittances are in addition to funds sent by individual members to their

families and are used to improve church buildings, repair and build houses for church members, and sponsor monthly clothing and food giveaways in the village. Additionally, the U.S.-based church is sponsoring a Bible education program in the village that is affiliated with a Mexican seminary which sends professors to hold classes in the town. Those enrolled in this program are able to work toward a degree. This is an excellent example of sharing social capital across national borders.

Discussion in this section has focused on the Latino Protestant church as a site of social capital—the kind of structural, formal and informal network that develops human capital. In most cases, the examples in this section are not a part of a planned curriculum or strategy that has a particular outcome in mind. These activities are organic in nature—they occur naturally within the social context as a function of shared cultural understanding and a praxis of one's faith in everyday life (Gonzales, 2002; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005). They are also a response to an emergent need perceived by the church and community and the responses utilize the skills and resources within the congregation. They most often take place without social institutional support from educational, health, or social welfare agencies. In this sense, these activities are viewed as a form of resistance that challenges the master narrative on issues such as immigration, downward mobility, literacy, and women's roles in church and society. Maduro (2004) sums up this challenge very well by observing:

There are probably few places in these U.S. of A. where a recently arrived jobless, dark skinned, Spanish-speaking, undocumented woman without a husband, parents, profession, or a high-school degree, can go and find an open and diverse community where she feels acknowledged as an equal, treated with respect, invited to come back, sought after if she stops going, provided with supportive and accessible network, trained as a leader, and given a chance to become a teacher, a preacher, a missionary or a pastor in just a few months—all of this for free, in her own mother tongue, and linked to the spiritual traditions of her own homeland, ancestors, and childhood. A place where the empire does not have the last word, and where her life is sacred despite what authorities think or do. A

place where she has a say as to which borders might be crossed for the sake of her survival, even against official claims to the contrary. (p. 226)

Summary

Without question, this shift in religious affiliations among the burgeoning Latino population in the United States qualifies as a social movement, similar in some ways to Weber's 19th century world. There are several interrelated reasons for this shift; some discussed in this paper include: the inherent role of spirituality in Latino cultures; the history of colonization; outmoded practices of the Church as irrelevant to the current conditions of Latinos; the opportunity to find and locate relevant forms of worship; increased numbers of Latino immigrants in the U.S.; and, the demands of a growing Latino middle class and changing social roles in a comparatively democratized country. This trend is unlikely to reverse itself, as U.S. Latinos carve out a unique cultural niche in this country. Essentialist notions of Latinos as strict adherents to Catholicism are outdated. Those working with U.S. Latinos need to expand their understanding of this population by incorporating an approach rooted in intersectionality and by embracing a strategy of cultural humility in engagement to both tap the inherent strengths of this population and to ally with valuable organizational resources such as the Latino Protestant Church.

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