

PENTECOSTAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND
CHURCH GROWTH IN LATIN AMERICA

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1. Introduction

The twentieth century was witness of an important social-religious phenomenon, the growth of Pentecostalism. Even non-Pentecostal authors such as Decker recognize, “no movement has made more of an impact on the church world than Pentecostalism.”¹ Even though Pentecostal growth is a global phenomenon, Pentecostalism has particularly impacted Latin America. According to Moreno, “nearly 40 percent of the world’s Pentecostals live in Latin America.”² This fact makes Latin American Pentecostalism an excellent case study for probing how Pentecostal beliefs have been integrated with local cultural dimensions to produce a socio-cultural and spiritual phenomenon without precedents.

Many of the scholarly works on Latin American Pentecostalism affirm that Pentecostal growth in Latin America is related and is a consequence of social phenomena such as people’s migration from rural areas to urban areas, poverty and popular religiosity’s growth.³ But there

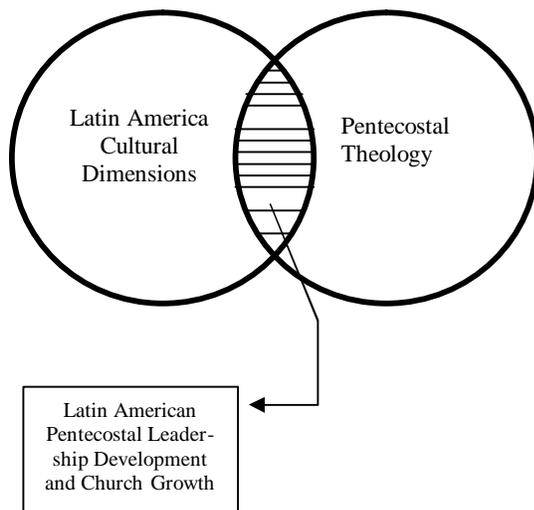
¹ Decker is a non-Pentecostal author that affirms that tongues have ceased. Beyond his anti-tongues theology, Decker cannot avoid the fact of Pentecostal influence on the life and mission of the World Church in twentieth century. For more information about Decker’s theology and position about Pentecostalism see R. Decker, “Pentecostalism in the Light of the Word,” *Protestant Reformed Churches* (www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_58.html) (March 2000).

² P. Moreno, “Rapture and Renewal in Latin America,” *First Things* 74 (June/July 1997), pp. 31-34.

³ Some of the authors that explain Pentecostalism in these terms are: J. Bastian, *Historia del Protestantismo en America Latina* [History of Protestantism in Latin America] (Mexico City: CUPSA, 1990); R. Blank, *Teología y Misión en América Latina* [Theology and Mission in Latin America] (St. Louis, MO: Concordia

has been almost no theoretical work directed to establish a model of analysis that provides a framework to understand what dimensions of the local culture have been integrated with Pentecostal beliefs to foster the tremendous growth of Latin American Pentecostalism. This paper attempts to offer a tentative model to analyze Latin American Pentecostal leadership development and church growth under the light of the integration of Pentecostal theology and the Latin American cultural dimensions.

The following figure demonstrates the fundamental premise of this paper which hopes to establish a thesis that Latin American Pentecostal leadership development and church growth are shaped by the integration of Latin America's cultural dimensions and Pentecostal theology.



Publishing House, 1996); D. Petersen, *No con Ejército, ni con Fuerza* [Not by Might nor by Power] (Miami: Editorial Vida, 1996); D. Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); D. Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the characteristics of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America, identifying particularly its leadership development styles and church growth strategies. This analysis also serves to identify the fact that Latin American Pentecostal's leadership development and church growth have been influenced by the integration of some aspects of Pentecostal theology and certain cultural dimensions of Latin America.

This paper does not intend to ignore the Holy Spirit's work in Latin America. As a matter of fact the author firmly believes that the main factor of the Pentecostal success in Latin America is the direct result of God's will and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. However, the author also recognizes that God, through his sovereign presence in the world, can operate through, and use the social and cultural conditions of society to expand his kingdom. Therefore, the initiative and sovereignty of God are not negated in this work, but it is understood that God operates and uses social and cultural factors to generate the present expansion of Pentecostalism in Latin America.

The first preliminary task to analyze the relationship between Pentecostal theology and Latin American culture and its consequences on leadership development and church growth is to determine the content of Pentecostal theology. This has been a topic that has occupied the minds of some scholars during the last decades. Walter Hollenweger⁴ wrote in 1977 an important work on Pentecostalism which included a section about Pentecostal beliefs, but due the variety of doctrinal emphases,⁵ it has not been easy to determine a common nucleus of Pentecostal doctrines. Another important work that outlines Pentecostal theology is Steven Land's study on Pentecostal spirituality.⁶ Land says that the Pentecostal beliefs are comprised of five theological motifs: 1) Justification by faith in Christ; 2) Sanctification by faith as a second

⁴ Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) has a section entitled "Beliefs and Practices" in which he attempts to define Pentecostal beliefs such as the Bible and salvation. This work has been critical for further developments of research on Pentecostal theology.

⁵ See M. Clark, H. Lederle, et. al., *Pentecostal Theology?* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1983) on the methodological difficulties in determining a Pentecostal theology.

⁶ S. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). This book constitutes an intelligent and well-documented source for the study of Pentecostalism, not only about its spirituality, but also for an analysis of the Pentecostal beliefs and practices derived from that spirituality.

definite work of grace; 3) Healing of the body as provided for all in the atonement; 4) The pre-millennial return of Christ; and 5) The baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues.⁷

Other authors have tried to identify a more global definition of Pentecostal core beliefs that include Pentecostalism of the all regions of the world. Such is the case of Clark and Lederle. According to these South African authors, beyond the variety of doctrinal emphases among Pentecostals around the world, “a common nucleus of doctrines exists, held by Pentecostals in North America, South Africa, South-east Asia, Latin America and practically any other region on earth.”⁸ This common nucleus can be summarized as follows:

1. That Jesus Christ can/should be personally encountered as savior of the sincerely repentant sinner, resulting in regeneration to a transformed life.
2. To every believer there is an experience of God’s Spirit available according to the pattern of Spirit baptism found in the history of the first-century church in Acts.
3. The power of God is revealed today in the lives of individuals and communities as it was in the early Christian communities.
4. A sincere attitude of praise and worship should mark the life of the individual believer and the liturgy of the whole group.
5. The regenerate is obligated to reveal a distinctively Christian lifestyle based on discipleship of Jesus.
6. The goal of the individual believer, of the local church, and the larger Pentecostal community, is to further the mission of Jesus.
7. Jesus is coming again, to judge the world, and to apocalyptically renew creation.⁹

From this common nucleus of beliefs, the availability of the power of the Holy Spirit to all believers, and believers’ involvement and commitment to the mission of the church are particularly important topics in understanding leadership development and church planting in Latin American Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal belief in the availability of the Holy Spirit’s power to all believers implies that all members of the church, and not only the leaders, have access to spiritual power, anointing and divine wisdom. This doctrine allows Pentecostals to think that any member of the church could become a leader. The implications

⁷ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 18.

⁸ Clark & Lederle, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 16.

⁹ Clark & Lederle, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 17.

of this doctrine in leadership development are enormous. For the purposes of this paper this doctrine will be identified as “God’s Spirit to all believers.” The Pentecostal doctrine on the responsibility of all members to be involved in the mission of the church has also important repercussions in leadership development and church growth in Latin American Pentecostalism. For the purposes of this work this doctrine will be identified as “commitment to evangelize.”

The second preliminary task to analyze the relationship between Pentecostal theology and Latin American culture and its consequences on leadership development and church growth is to determine the cultural dimensions that will be taken into account in the analysis. The concepts of Gertz Hofstede¹⁰ on cultural dimensions will be used here for the discussions on Latin American Pentecostalism in relation to its cultural environment.

In his 1980 work, Hofstede presented his pioneering study of close to 88,000 IBM employees in over 60 countries, and proposed four dimensions of cultural value differences: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity. This initial study and subsequent research presented in a 1991 publication suggest the relevance of these cultural dimensions when studying organizations and leadership behavior worldwide.

Hofstede’s concept of power distance or power distance index (PDI) is directly related to people’s expectations of, and their relationships to authority in a given culture. Hofstede defines PDI in terms of the extent to which there is an acceptance of unequal distribution of power within a culture. In low-PDI cultures, the relationships between people in positions of authority and their subordinates are theoretically close and less formal in nature. On the other hand, in high-PDI cultures these relationships are expected to be more distant, hierarchically ordered, and reserved.

Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) is defined by Hofstede as the extent to which members of a given culture prefer certainty and predictability and find ambiguity confusing and uncomfortable. People belonging to high-UAI cultures prefer rules and stable jobs with long-term employers; members of low-UAI cultures may be more willing to take risks, and

¹⁰ The works of G. Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980) and *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1991) study national cultures and compared cultural dimensions among them. Hofstede affirms that each country possesses particular cultural dimensions and those dimensions influence people’s values and therefore influence the way in which they think and behave.

tolerate organizational ambiguity and change. High-UAI cultures have been called “tight” because norms are clear and people are expected to behave exactly as specified by those norms; “loose” cultures allow more latitude in behavior.¹¹ According to Jackson & Dutton¹² there is a strong relationship between UAI and leadership behaviors. People in leadership positions from high-UAI cultures will tend to exert and keep control in their work units in order to keep a low level of uncertainty.

Individualism-collectivism (IDV) differentiates between cultures in which individual identity and personal choice are revered and cultures in which a strong collective identity exists, linking individuals to cohesive in-groups over a lifetime. Individualistic cultures emphasize values promoting individual goals, whereas collectivist cultures emphasize the welfare of the in-group.¹³ IDV influences in the way in which individuals relate to and form part of groups. For instance in highly individualistic cultures, individuals tend to accomplish things individually based on a greater individual initiative, meanwhile in highly collectivist cultures, individuals will tend to accomplish things through grouping; therefore in these cultures there is a greater emphasis on team building.

Hofstede’s masculinity-femininity dimension (MAS) distinguishes between cultures in which assertiveness, challenge, and ambition are highly valued. These are called masculine cultures. This author also posits that there are cultures in which greater emphasis is placed on cooperation and good working relationships. Hofstede categorized these cultures as feminine. In his 1991 work, Hofstede found that across cultures managerial jobs required elements of both assertiveness and nurturance for effectiveness and thus were ranked in the midrange of jobs in terms of masculinity.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions described previously constitute the theoretical basis to analyze Latin American Pentecostal leadership development and church planting in the following sections of this paper. The following two sections of this paper are devoted to describe and analyze Latin American Pentecostalism and to indicate how Pentecostal

¹¹ See H. C. Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) about the relationship between cultural dimensions and social behaviours.

¹² S. Jackson and J. Dutton, “Discerning Threats and Opportunities,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33 (1988), pp. 370-87.

¹³ A study devoted to probe individualism and collectivism in cultures is H. C. Triandis, C. McCusker, and C. H. Hui, “Multimethod Probes of Individualism and Collectivism,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59 (1990), pp. 1006-1020.

doctrines on God's Spirit to all believers and the commitment to evangelism are integrated with Latin America's cultural dimensions. Finally, in the conclusion, the present challenges of Latin American Pentecostal leadership development and church planting are presented.

2. Latin American Pentecostalism: An Overview

The fast growth of Latin American Pentecostalism has become a focal point for profuse academic research.¹⁴ The research has shown that a trait of Latin American Pentecostalism is its autochthonous character.¹⁵ The indigenous character of the Latin American Pentecostalism connects this religious movement with the essential aspects of the Latin American culture. Although some social sciences specialists such as Willems¹⁶ and Flora¹⁷ have demonstrated that the advance of Latin American Pentecostalism complies with local factors, still there are some authors that fail in their analysis, attributing Pentecostal growth to foreign resources and leadership.¹⁸ They do not note the local aspects of the Latin

¹⁴ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 15.

¹⁵ L. Margolies, "The Paradoxical Growth of Pentecostalism," in *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from Caribbean and Latin America*, ed. S. Glazier (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 1-5. In this article Margolies presents evidence about the autochthonous development of Pentecostalism in Latin America.

¹⁶ E. Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

¹⁷ C. Flora, "Pentecostal Women in Colombia: Religious Change and the Status of Working-Class Woman," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 17 (1975), pp. 411-25.

¹⁸ Much of the contemporary work on Pentecostalism in Latin America shows bias when it affirms that the historical development of Latin American Pentecostalism conforms to foreign factors and influences instead of local effort and work. Some of the authors who affirm that Pentecostal growth in Latin America is the result of foreign influences and resources are, A. Quartanciono, *Sectas en America Latina* [Sects in Latin America] (Guatemala City: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1981); J. M. Ganuza, *Las Sectas Nos Invaden* [Sects Are Invading Us] (Caracas: Ediciones Paulinas, 1978) and M. Spain, *And in Samaria: A Story of Fifty Years of Missionary Witness in Central America, 1890-1940* (Dallas, TX: Central American Mission, 1940).

American culture that foster the development of a powerful religious/spiritual local movement.

The importance of the aspects of the Latin American culture that permeate Latin American Pentecostalism demands a closer analysis of those cultural values indicated in Hofstede's¹⁹ work and explained in the introduction of this paper. In his study of Latin American countries, Hofstede²⁰ determined that the cultures of Latin American countries share two characteristics: they are collectivists and their PDI is high; meanwhile, scores of MAI and UAI vary from country to country. It is logical to infer that, due to the fact that Latin American Pentecostalism is an autochthonous movement, its leadership practices and strategies of church growth have to be integrated with collectivism and high PDI as cultural traits of the Latin American culture. This constitutes the main premise of this work.

3. Latin American Pentecostalism: Background

According to d'Epiney,²¹ in 1920, when James Thomson, the first Protestant missionary arrived in Chile, the National Census of this country showed that Protestants numbered only 54,000, which constituted 1.4 percent of the population. Of these 17,000 were foreigners, 10,000 of them were Lutherans who had become naturalized Chilean citizens. Seventy-two years later, the 1992 Chilean National Census showed that Evangelicals and Protestants together had reached 13.2 percent of the population aged 14 years and above. Sepulveda²² affirms that many observers agree that the higher rate of Protestant growth in the latter period in Chile has to be seen as the result of the dynamic expansion of Chilean Pentecostalism. Sepulveda also says that Pentecostalism was established in Chile as an independent and

¹⁹ Hofstede, "Culture's Consequences," pp. 65-210.

²⁰ Hofstede, "Culture's Consequences," pp. 77, 122, 158, 189.

²¹ The work of L. d'Epiney, *El Refugio de las Masas: Estudio Sociológico del Protestantismo Chileno* (Santiago: Editorial Pacífico, 1969) and later published in English as *Haven of the Masses: A study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969) constitutes one of the classics on Latin American Pentecostalism.

²² J. Sepulveda, "Future Perspectives for Latin American Pentecostalism," *International Review of Mission* 87/345 (1998), pp. 189-95.

indigenous church at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century.

According to Sepulveda²³ what has happened in Chile is not unique; it was an early manifestation of a phenomenon that has become characteristic of the Latin American religious landscape. Either Latin American Pentecostalism was born from local revivals within Protestant churches or from the work of foreign Pentecostal missionary individuals or agencies. The net result is that Pentecostal churches are the fastest growing religious movement throughout the continent. Blank illustrates the magnitude of Pentecostal growth in Latin America when he states, "it is almost impossible to work today [in the religious arena] in Latin America without having contact with the Pentecostal movement."²⁴ Some researchers, such as David Stoll,²⁵ for instance, have predicted that the present Latin American Pentecostal growth will continue. Stoll predicted that by the year 2010 Latin American Protestants (mainly Pentecostals) would surpass 50% of the total population in countries such as Guatemala, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Brazil, and Honduras.

The impact of Pentecostalism in Latin America deserves attention to identify the strategies of leadership development and church planting, and to identify the patterns that have fostered the development of this religious socio-cultural-spiritual phenomenon.

4. Latin American Pentecostal Leadership Development and Church Growth

One of the characteristics of the Latin American Pentecostal movement is an early autonomous development as local movements separated from the religious denominations that brought the Pentecostal doctrine to the Latin American lands.²⁶ Petersen calls this autonomous

²³ Sepulveda, "Future Perspectives for Latin American Pentecostalism," pp. 189-95.

²⁴ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 200.

²⁵ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, p. 337.

²⁶ P. Deiros, *Historia del Cristianismo en America Latina* [History of Christianity in Latin America] (Buenos Aires: Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, 1992), Blank, *Teología y Misión* and Petersen, *No con Ejército* are some of the scholars that support the idea of an autonomous development of the Latin American Pentecostalism.

development, “early *latinization* of Pentecostalism”²⁷ in Latin America. One of the reasons for this autonomous local development may be related to the fact indicated by the Catholic author Prudencia Damboriena.²⁸ Damboriena states that during the early stages of Latin American Pentecostal development (after the Second World War), there were a relatively low number of Pentecostal missionaries in Latin America in relation to the number of missionaries of other Protestant denominations. That could have fostered the development of a national Pentecostal leadership. There are also cultural aspects that influenced this *latinization* of Latin American Pentecostalism. The collectivist trait of Latin American culture, which stresses the regard for the in-group/out group values, could have served as a pattern to opt for local practices (in-group values) instead of foreign practices and procedures (out-group values).

As a result of this *latinization* of Latin American Pentecostalism, a particular style of leadership training and development was implemented. This style of leadership formation and development has been named by Blank as “apprentices system.”²⁹ This system is based on the Pentecostal doctrine of God’s Spirit to all believers described earlier. Blank also says that, unlike other religious groups that preach about God’s Spirit to all believers, Latin American Pentecostalism puts in practice this doctrine through the participation of all members in the work of God’s kingdom.³⁰ William, Monterroso, and Johnson say that due to this belief “any member of the church is potentially a minister.”³¹ Thus the Pentecostal system of apprenticeship “produces pastors [leaders] from the laity.”³²

This leadership development system allows new members to publicly testify about their faith immediately after their baptism. In this way the prospective leaders develop speech skills and gain the congregation’s recognition. Those who demonstrate capability to lead are

²⁷ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 19.

²⁸ P. Damboriena, *El Protestantismo en America Latina* [The Protestantism in Latin America] (Freiburg, Madrid: Oficina Internacional de Investigaciones Sociales de FERES, 1963).

²⁹ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 211.

³⁰ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 215 states that a clear mark of Latin American Pentecostalism is the serious involvement of all believers in evangelization tasks, which is consistent with the Pentecostal principle of believers’ commitment to evangelism as an expression of the Pentecostal theology.

³¹ R. William, V. Monterroso and H. Johnson, *Latin American Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 295.

³² Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 211.

soon assigned to new tasks, such as the direction of the church's worship and participation in evangelism tasks, in which all members are supposed to participate.³³ In this system of leadership development younger leaders have the opportunity of progressively performing more complex tasks by positively fulfilling growing responsibilities.³⁴ The next step for prospective leaders is to take leadership responsibilities in the local church, such as teaching in a Sunday school class and preaching in the weekday services. Those members who show loyalty and commitment within the local church and demonstrate leadership skills soon are ready to assume the direction of home Bible studies. Meanwhile they receive some basic instruction from their pastors to help them in the exercise of their leadership. In this way new leadership is formed with a strong practical basis and some basic theoretical instruction. The result is men and women formed from inside the Pentecostal group and who represent in a singular way the social and economic context in which they serve.³⁵ This means that Latin American Pentecostal leadership is fully contextual and deeply native, which are the requisites to offer a ministry at the popular level.³⁶

This strategy for leadership formation and development is fully rooted in the Pentecostal in-group's characteristics and needs. It is influenced by the collectivist trait seen in Latin American culture. As mentioned earlier, collectivism as a cultural value fosters a high regard for the in-group's values and welfare. In this case this in-group leadership formation is consistent with what Hofstede³⁷ indicates are the

³³ See Petersen, *No con Ejército*, pp. 140-42 and Blank, *Teología y Misión*, pp. 211-14 comment on how new members in Latin American Pentecostal churches shortly after their conversion have opportunities to participate in church's work and develop in this way their leadership skills.

³⁴ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 211 describes how new members in Latin American Pentecostal churches assume gradually more complex responsibilities as part of the Latin American Pentecostal system of leadership development

³⁵ N. Saracco, "Type of Ministry Adopted by Latin American Pentecostal Churches," *International Review of Mission* 66 (January 1997), pp. 64-70 presents arguments about the adaptation of Pentecostal ministry to the social and cultural environment in which it develops.

³⁶ E. Nida, "The Indigenous Churches in Latin America," *Practical Anthropology* 8 (1961), pp. 97-105 deals with the issues of the ministry of indigenous churches in Latin America and describes the deep native character of those churches and their commitment with their sociocultural context.

³⁷ Hofstede, "Culture's Consequences," pp. 165-212.

traits of collectivist cultures, this is, the formation of long-lasting groups and the association of individuals to such groups for a lifetime to preserve the welfare of the group. This relationship between Pentecostal leadership development system and collectivism as a cultural dimension shows that Latin American Pentecostalism is culturally relevant and integrated with the local culture. This confirms once again the autochthonous character of the movement and its integration to local culture.

The possibility given by Latin American Pentecostalism to all members to perform leadership tasks in different areas of the church's work, such as outdoor witnessing, preaching on street corners, home Bible studies, and other evangelistic activities produces another phenomenon: a large number of prospective leaders.³⁸ This fact may produce a contest between younger leaders and the older generation of leaders. As Blank observed, younger leaders are assigned to new territory where they have the possibility of expressing themselves in creative ways using their youthful enthusiasm to work for the Lord and to avoid conflicts between them and older leaders. When these leaders have already established a church, they are older and therefore ready to train and develop new leaders. Thus, the process of leadership development continues with each new leader.

This system of assigning of new territories is consistent with another cultural trait of the Latin American culture, a high PDI. High PDI cultures value authority and hierarchy and the relationships of authority are highly regarded. This cultural dimension promotes the strategy of assigning new leaders to new territories to keep the balance in the authority relationships and to give new leadership the opportunity of increasing authority as well. In this way the Pentecostal strategy of leadership development is consistent and integrated with the cultural values of the Latin American culture. Hofstede states that in high PDI cultures greater power differences between the leader and subordinates creates a greater tendency for the leader to be authoritarian, directive, persuasive, or coercive.³⁹ However, Latin American Pentecostalism has been able to turn a potential source of conflict into a mechanism of leadership development. From this observation it is possible to understand why some Pentecostal churches or denominations suffer divisions in Latin America when they keep inflexible and pyramidal organizational structures, and are not able to integrate the theological

³⁸ See Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 212.

³⁹ Hofstede, "Culture's Consequences," p. 94.

principle of God's Spirit to all believers with high PDI as a cultural dimension.

The direct result of this strategy of leadership placement is a fast church planting methodology in Latin American Pentecostalism. Blank says that an apprentice system of leadership development "is only possible where the church is divided in cells [small groups],"⁴⁰ because new leaders need to acquire experience before they are in charge of a larger congregation. Petersen argues that small groups are the moving forces of Latin American Pentecostalism.⁴¹ The small groups, which later become a congregation, not only serve as platforms for leadership development, but they also demonstrate another important theological principle of Latin American Pentecostalism, which is commitment to evangelism.⁴² Deiros affirms that Latin American Pentecostalism has been successfully appealing to people who came to the cities from the country looking for a better life.⁴³ In that pursuit these internal immigrants lose their family relationships and social structure; therefore, they need to restructure their relationships within primary groups to find their lost identity. Thus the Pentecostal methodology of church planting through small groups provides for the spiritual, social, and psychological needs of those who d'Epinay calls "the oppressed."⁴⁴

Latin American Pentecostal small groups represent the integration of two factors: commitment to evangelism as a Pentecostal doctrine and collectivism as a cultural dimension. It is hard to imagine that small groups as a strategy for church growth could be effective without the collectivist character of the Latin American culture. Collectivism allows people integration in small groups, and develops people's identity and a strong sense of community.

⁴⁰ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 213.

⁴¹ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 108 affirms that small groups in Latin American Pentecostal church growth play a very important role in church growth and without them could be impossible for Latin American Pentecostals to be successful.

⁴² Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 141 and Deiros, *Historia del Cristianismo*, pp. 757-63 affirms that evangelism is a remarkable trait of Latin American Pentecostalism and constitutes one the key elements for the Pentecostal expansion in Latin America.

⁴³ Deiros, *Historia del Cristianismo*, p. 758.

⁴⁴ d'Epinay, *El Refugio de las Masas*, p. 31.

Petersen describes how these small groups are established to later become congregations.⁴⁵ From the leadership aspect related to the growth of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America, small groups are established in the house of one member of the church.⁴⁶ The groups initiate their activities with two or three families. Usually the pastor of the mother church (the church in which the new leader of the small group has been trained) assists the groups in their organization and for some period of time he will oversee the progress of the small group.⁴⁷ These "home services"⁴⁸ are directed by the leader of the small group, but all members participate by singing, giving testimony, and participating in Bible readings and study. The members also participate by inviting their neighbors and relatives to the meetings of the small group, which prove to be extremely effective in reaching out to the community and to foster the small group's growth. When the small group reaches twelve families the mother church starts a process to organize the group and form a congregation. According to Petersen, there are several requirements that must be fulfilled for a small group to become a church. The small group has to have a pastor, the group must be strong enough to financially support its pastor, some kind of local leadership has to be available to help the pastor, and the group is in the process of buying a piece of land to build a temple.⁴⁹

The importance of these small groups is reflected, for instance, in the number of groups of the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in Latin America, had in 1992. In that year this denomination had 11,939 organized churches and 98,671 points of preaching, that is, small groups.⁵⁰ This means that there were almost nine small groups for every organized church.

⁴⁵ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ E. Wilson, "Dynamics of Latin American Pentecostalism," in *Coming of Age: Protestantism in Contemporary Latin America*, ed. D. Miller (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994) presents an analysis of the role and value of value of small groups in Latin American Pentecostalism.

⁴⁷ Bastian, *Historia del Protestantismo*, p. 73.

⁴⁸ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ *Asambleas de Dios, División de Misiones Foráneas* [Assemblies of God, Foreign Missions Division] (December 31, 1992), cited in Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 108.

Small groups are important not only for their strategic value for church growth, but also for the social and cultural role they play in the Pentecostal community. Through the small groups stable associations are established and the whole group works to buy the land on which they will build a temple. Petersen remarks on the importance of buying land and owning property.⁵¹ When the groups own property, members start to build a building with minimal resources, and they construct according to their possibilities, which is an obstacle concluding the construction quickly. As a matter of fact the construction of the church building can take years. The construction work develops a sense of ownership and the members submit themselves to strict rules of behavior, tithe with regularity, systematically support the group's program, show an elevated grade of loyalty, and freely exercise the right of expression on the matter related to the group.⁵² These characteristics of the Pentecostal Latin American small groups clearly reflect the integration of Latin American Pentecostalism with the collectivist dimension of Latin American culture. People's commitment, loyalty, participation, and sense of ownership fit Hofstede's descriptions of collectivist cultures.⁵³ Blank states the work and strategy of Latin American Pentecostalism reflects their "cultural origin and heritage."⁵⁴

5. Conclusion: Challenges for Pentecostal Leadership

This paper has discussed the integration of Latin American Pentecostalism's leadership development system and church growth strategy with collectivism and high PDI as cultural dimensions of the Latin American culture. The integration of the Pentecostal doctrine on God's Spirit to all believers and high PDI as a cultural dimension of the Latin American culture serves as a basis for the system of apprentices, and as a mechanism for leadership development.

On the other hand, the Latin American Pentecostal church growth methodology, which is closely related to the apprentice system of leadership development, is based in the establishment of small groups that, at the same time, manifest the Pentecostal theological principle of

⁵¹ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 108.

⁵² Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 108.

⁵³ Hofstede, "Culture's Consequences," pp. 171, 174.

⁵⁴ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 213.

believers' commitment to evangelism. The social and cultural dynamics of these small groups are consistent and fully integrated to collectivism as cultural dimension. Therefore, it is possible to agree with Westmeier when he says that, "Latin American Pentecostalism is an expression of folk religion."⁵⁵ Folk religion does not mean a low quality/low standards religion; this means a religion profoundly rooted in the essential aspects of the local culture. This is one of the reasons for the Pentecostal success in Latin America.

This model of theology-culture integration can serve as an example for leadership training and development and church planting in other parts of the world. The integration of Latin American Pentecostalism with Latin American culture, without compromising the fundamental values of the Pentecostal movement, is an example for the global church, which has to carry out its mission using culturally relevant strategies without compromising their core theological principles and beliefs.

Before concluding, I would like to introduce some of the challenges that the Latin American Pentecostal systems of leadership development and church growth are presently facing: 1) the mega-church phenomenon, and 2) the growing formalization of institutions of leadership training and development.

During the last decade many Latin American Pentecostal churches have become 'mega-churches,' this means that their membership has surpassed 1,000 people. This is a relatively new phenomenon in Latin American Pentecostalism because Pentecostal congregations in Latin America usually had less than 100 members.⁵⁶ Mega-churches represent a challenge for Latin American Pentecostalism because they modify the communal character of the classic Latin American Pentecostal churches. These large churches do not reflect some of the most distinctive traits of the Pentecostal churches in Latin America such as "personal militancy, community and participation, and discipline."⁵⁷ If large churches are not able to develop their ministry using small groups in discipleship,

⁵⁵ K. Westmeier, "Themes of Pentecostal Expansion in Latin America," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17:2 (1993), pp. 72-78 (72).

⁵⁶ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 109. In a study on the Assemblies of God in Central America, Petersen has found that usually the Pentecostal congregations of that denomination do not surpass 100 members. This fact speaks about the type of interpersonal interactions among the members of the local congregations and is consistent with the Latin American Pentecostal methodology of church growth, which emphasizes the development the more or less small communities.

⁵⁷ Petersen, *No con Ejército*, p. 109.

leadership training and evangelism they may confront a crisis at the cultural level. Due the collectivist trait of the Latin American culture, the result of a massive religion could be the detachment of the individuals from their social groups to become uninvolved observers of the mission of the church. In addition, the lack of mechanisms for spiritual and moral accountability in massive churches may also foster a nominal Pentecostalism. This is the opposite of one of the most fundamental theological Pentecostal beliefs which states that Christian believers “are obligated to reveal a distinctively Christian life-style based on discipleship of Jesus.”⁵⁸ This is not an argument against large churches, but an argument against the implementation of foreign church models. Despite the size of the churches, the ecclesiastical models for Latin American Pentecostal churches have to take into account the collectivist dimension of the Latin American culture. Otherwise those churches will be neither Latin American nor Pentecostal.

The commitment of large Latin American Pentecostal churches should be to keep the communal character of the local church, allowing for the members’ involvement in the life and mission of the church. This requires creative organizational structures to integrate the social dynamics of the mega-church with the collectivist character of the local culture.

Another challenge for Latin American Pentecostalism is the growing formalization of leadership training programs and their growing separation from the local church. As Blank states, Latin American Pentecostals recognize that the apprentices system of leadership development needs to be complemented with other models of ministerial training.⁵⁹ This need has fostered the establishment of Bible schools to train the emergent leadership. Even more, Latin American Pentecostals send their outstanding leaders to take graduate studies in non-Pentecostal seminaries. Because of this formal training, Latin American Pentecostals presently have personnel to develop their own institutions of ministerial training and leadership development. Therefore, it is not rare today to find Pentecostal Bible schools, colleges and seminaries more or less uniform all over Latin America.

Although this institutional development has constituted an important advance in leadership training and development in Latin American Pentecostalism, some of those training centers have adopted foreign models of training derived from more individualistic societies such as the

⁵⁸ Clark & Lederle, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Blank, *Teología y Misión*, p. 212.

European and the US American. As William, Monterroso, and Johnson posit, there is a real risk for Bible colleges to adopt a professional class mentality in which leaders are trained, separated and detached from their local church's to return later to their congregations to function as experts in church's mission.⁶⁰ This mentality is particularly dangerous in the high PDI Latin American culture because it opens the door to autocratic styles of leadership based on authoritarianism.

The Pentecostal educational system in Latin America has to continue to grow because of its expanding ministry potential of the Pentecostals to the church at large as well as to the society. But that growth has to be closely related to local church needs and keep in mind the Pentecostal doctrines of God's Spirit to all believers and members' commitment to evangelism.

A Latin American Pentecostal system of leadership development and ministerial training should avoid the formation of a ministerial elite, prepared to rule over others. An effective Pentecostal system of training has to take into account the collectivist dimension of the Latin America culture and its high PDI to form leaders with interpersonal skills, prepared to coordinate the different expressions of spiritual gifts in the local church. This is the only way to keep a fully Pentecostal and fully Latin American system of leadership development and ministerial training.

⁶⁰ William, Monterroso & Johnson, *Latin American Church Growth*, p. 310.