

***Brincando el Charco/Jumping the
Puddle: A Case Study of
Pentecostalism's Journey
from Puerto Rico to New York
to Allentown, Pennsylvania***

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El hombre hispano va a la iglesia con todo el bagaje de sus problemas con la lengua, con el trabajo. La misión aquí es más difícil que en Puerto Rico (The Hispanic man goes to church with all the baggage of his problems with language, with work. The mission here is more difficult than in Puerto Rico).

-Pastor Edwin Colón

Scholars and practitioners generally acknowledge that Pentecostalism has its greatest appeal among the poor and marginalized. The work of Emilio Willems and Christian Lalive d'Epina in Chile¹ and Renato Poblete and Thomas O'Dea² in the Puerto Rican community in New York suggests that to join a Pentecostal church is to seek a way out of the anomie, or lack of community, that many recently transplanted people experience. In 1971, Joseph P. Fitzpatrick wrote of Puerto Ricans in New York that "the phenomenon of the Pentecostal storefront church represented a search for community, for the satisfaction of knowing that one belonged to, was respected by, and had a function to fulfill within the group."³ More recently, Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll concluded that because of its very personal relationship with the Lord Pentecostalism empowers believers on many levels, enabling them to thrive in this world as well as in the hereafter, and in this sense religion becomes a pragmatic strategy for survival.⁴

In 1960, Sidney Mintz noted the importance of the Pentecostal churches in Puerto Rico in his classic study *Worker in Cane*.⁵ Mintz concluded that Puerto Rico's rapid transformation from an agriculture-based plantation economy of family workers to wage working in an impersonal manufacturing setting caused many Puerto Ricans to fill the resulting social and psychological vacuum by joining Pentecostal congregations. The churches provided an ideology, sense of community, and purpose that compensated for the loss of a traditional style of life. It is not surprising, then, that displaced Puerto Ricans in the industrialized cities of the U.S. Northeast, where even the language is foreign, also find solace and a sense of belonging in Pentecostal churches.

This study examines the Latino Pentecostal churches in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where the growing Latino community is poor and marginalized. Allentown makes an important case study because it is typical of small dying industrial cities in the Northeast that are rapidly becoming populated with Latinos from New York seeking safer neighborhoods and cheaper housing. In Reading, Pennsylvania, for example, Latinos now make up 30 percent of the population.⁶ According to the 1990 census, 12,000 Latinos made up 15 percent of Allentown's population. Ten years earlier the population had been only 5 percent Latino. Seventy-two percent of the Latino population today is Puerto Rican.

To trace the migrations of Puerto Ricans from their island in the 1940s and 1950s to New York City and more recently to smaller cities such as Allentown is to trace the migration of Pentecostalism. Each of these migrations has created a more alienated and displaced population.

Puerto Rico, by virtue of its long political association with the United States, is the most Protestant of Latin American countries, with a Protestant population of approximately 33 to 38 percent, the majority of whom are Pentecostal. David Stoll calculates that if we extrapolate the growth rates of evangelical churches from 1960-1985 for another twenty-five years Puerto Rico will become 75 percent evangelical.⁷ Surprisingly, given the high percentage of Puerto Rican Pentecostals, there has been very little scholarly examination of them or their history. The available material comes primarily from divinity students or from Pentecostals.⁸ Most national histories of Puerto Rico or, indeed, of other Latin American countries, which have for centuries been officially or at least predominantly Catholic, make no mention of Pentecostals. Pentecostals' own histories of their churches represent an official discourse and chronology of God's will that lack historical, sociological, or anthropological analysis. Juan Lugo's autobiography, for example, chronicles various encounters with the Holy Spirit and the guiding hand of God in the building of Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico.

Because there are no national, legal borders between the United States and Puerto Rico and because Puerto Ricans travel frequently between the island and the mainland, Pentecostalism too travels back and forth. These journeys create an important bridge in the study of Latin American Pentecostalism. I have found

that Allentown Pentecostalism is similar in character to Pentecostalism throughout Latin America: It is the fastest-growing religion; the churches are homegrown independent entities, not foreign in doctrine or language; most churchgoers are of low socioeconomic status; their religion offers them a strong sense of community; women's status within the church and within the family is high; and, for many, church membership seems to improve the unity of the family. Despite these similarities, however, Allentown's Pentecostals have the disadvantage of being foreigners who often do not speak the language. Discrimination is a feature of their daily lives. For that reason, Pastor Edwin Colón believes that his mission in Allentown is more difficult than in Puerto Rico.⁹

The case of Puerto Rican Pentecostalism is also unusual in that, in contrast to the situation in the rest of Latin America, it was not North American missionaries who brought Pentecostalism to Puerto Rico but Puerto Ricans. Likewise, most Puerto Ricans on the mainland were converted not by North American missionaries but by insular Puerto Rican missionaries who made the slums of the First World their mission field. Although Puerto Rican missionaries have been evangelizing on the mainland for decades, recently other Latin American missionaries have begun work among their compatriots resident in the United States. David Barrett, former editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, estimates that more than 16,000 full-time Christian missionaries from Third World countries, most of them Pentecostals, are working in the United States.¹⁰

This study was undertaken in the summer of 1994. It is part of a larger study, a history of the Latino community of Allentown. As part of my research I visited several different types of Pentecostal churches—older, well-established churches and newer, smaller storefront churches. I attended four churches on Sundays as well as on Tuesdays and Thursdays for Bible study and prayer evenings. I interviewed six pastors and members of various congregations and conducted a written survey in four congregations to obtain data on socioeconomic status, religious history, and church social/political activities.

Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico

Protestant missionaries from the United States first went to Puerto Rico in 1899 when it became a U.S. possession after the Spanish-American War. A comity agreement among the U.S. Protestant churches divided the missionary field in Puerto Rico among nine churches: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist, United Brethren, Christian Church, Christian Missionary Alliance, and Disciples of Christ. The agreement gave each church a certain geographical territory. For example, the north went to the Methodists, the center to the Baptists, and the west to the Presbyterians. In some areas where a church was weak—in the Lutherans' eastern central area, for example—the Disciples of Christ spread out beyond their designated territory. Nevertheless, Dan Wakefield

claimed in 1959 that one could tell a Protestant Puerto Rican's birthplace by his/her religion.¹¹ Seventh-Day Adventists also established mission work in Puerto Rico.

Today, however, the flourishing churches are not the traditional Protestant churches that went to the island at the turn of the century. As in many areas of Latin America, it is the Pentecostal churches that are attracting the greatest number of worshipers. As early as the 1950s, when Henry Van Dusen, the president of Union Theological Seminary, traveled to Puerto Rico, he was surprised to encounter the growing popularity of "fringe sects," with their "life-commanding, life-transforming, seven-days-a-week devotion ... to a living Lord of all life."¹²

There is little information on the history of the early Pentecostal churches in Puerto Rico and virtually no scholarly work. We know that in 1916 Juan Lugo, a Puerto Rican who had lived in Hawaii since his youth, was converted to Pentecostalism by missionaries from the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles. Lugo was seventeen years old at the time and, like many adults who have converted to Pentecostalism, was living "a life of sin" – gambling, drinking, and smoking.¹³ After his conversion he returned to Puerto Rico to missionize among his compatriots. He began his mission on a street corner in the southern city of Ponce. In the chapter of his autobiography entitled "Let the Persecution Begin" Lugo describes the hostility he experienced from both Catholic and Protestant hierarchies. For one thing, the Pentecostals ignored the geographical limitations established by the other Protestant churches and evangelized all over the island. Lugo was warned by the Protestant pastors in Ponce that he lacked the training to perform enduring work and accused him of "putting the Gospel on too humble a level."¹⁴ Despite the pastors' warnings and some harassment from the local authorities, within two years there were eight Pentecostal churches on the island, and by 1929 there were twenty-five churches called the Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, associated today with the U.S. Assemblies of God.¹⁵ (There is some debate among Pentecostals as to whether Lugo's Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal was associated with the Assembly of God at the time.¹⁶)

During the depression years of the 1930s, there was a great expansion of Pentecostalism. By 1942, according to a study by J. Merle Davis,¹⁷ the Pentecostal churches were first among the Protestant churches in number of churches, sixth in the number of constituents, first in the number of candidates for baptism, and first in the number of pastors. At that time, Pentecostals constituted 8.5 percent of Protestants in Puerto Rico. Ten years later this figure had risen to 25 percent." Today almost every small town on the island has at least one Pentecostal church. The largest denomination after Roman Catholicism is the Iglesia Pentecostal de Dios, Misión Internacional, which is independent and self-supporting. It sends missionaries to Spain, Portugal, and nine other Latin American countries. Other Pentecostal churches are the Church of God Prophecy, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the United Pentecostal Church, the Missionary Church of Christ, the Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ, and the Church of Christ in the

Antilles.¹⁹ Puerto Rican missionaries are well known in Latin America. According to Everett Wilson, the Puerto Rican Pentecostal churches are a model of independence, rapid growth, and appropriateness to the culture. Their appeal can be seen by the fact that even with the recent rapid growth of Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico, at least 85 percent of the island's Pentecostals are long-term converts or their descendants. The early churches, writes Wilson, "have persisted, developing institutionally and, despite the obvious social mobility, and perhaps because of the continued assimilation of new, poor elements, have largely retained their character."²⁰

Pentecostalism in New York

In 1928 Juan Lugo sent Thomas Alvarez to New York to begin Pentecostal work there. He opened the first Puerto Rican Pentecostal church, the Iglesia Misionera Pentecostal in Brooklyn. Three years later Lugo came to New York to pastor that church and oversee the expansion of the work among Puerto Ricans. By 1937, of the fifty-five Hispanic Protestant churches in New York City, twenty-five were Pentecostal.²¹

After World War II, Governor Luis Muñoz Marín's rapid-industrialization program, Operation Bootstrap, failed to provide enough jobs for Puerto Rican workers. Increasing unemployment in Puerto Rico and the need for cheap labor in New York's garment industry and surrounding farms drove many islanders, who had become U.S. citizens in 1917, to migrate to New York. Between 1950 and 1965, 50,000 Puerto Ricans made their way to the mainland each year. Pentecostal missionaries followed them, and the rapid growth of their churches in Puerto Rico is reflected in a similar growth of Pentecostalism among Puerto Ricans in New York. Hundreds of new Pentecostal churches have been founded by Puerto Rican missionaries, some trained in the Discípulos de Cristo, who left the island imbued with the spirit of their homegrown version of this North American religion. By 1983 there were 560 Latino Pentecostal churches in New York City.²² The pastors of these churches believed that the United States was ripe for evangelizing and that they could offer salvation to the hundreds of thousands of poor, marginalized Puerto Ricans struggling to make their way in the industrialized cities of the Northeast.

The Pentecostal theologian José A. Reyes believes that for poor recent immigrants to the United States the Pentecostals' message is particularly meaningful. He stresses for future missionaries the importance of evangelizing in Spanish and of acting within the context of Latino culture so as to provide comfort and guidance in strange and foreign surroundings. He cites one recent immigrant's comments on his experience in the Catholic church: "In the Catholic Church, nobody knows me. In the Pentecostal church each member is greeted warmly, if you get sick, they visit you. The unity of the congregation is one of the most important expressions of community found among the Puerto Ricans in New York."²³

According to Eldin Villafaña, the mainline Protestant denominations have for the most part been unresponsive to the needs of Latinos. He cites a study by David Traverzo Galarza:

If there is any growth and vitality within the Hispanic Evangelical church in New York City, it certainly is not due to the historical response of the mainline Protestant churches of the city.

Rather it has been the emergence of a Hispanic clergy and church that has impacted the development of the Hispanic Evangelical church in the city. The initiative and follow-up has come from indigenous movements spurred under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Pentecostals in Allentown

Allentown, Pennsylvania, is one of the "gritty cities" of the northeastern United States and the fourth-largest city in Pennsylvania. Located fifty-three miles northwest of Philadelphia and ninety-two miles southwest of New York City at the confluence of the Lehigh River and the Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks and with rich deposits of anthracite and natural cement, Allentown until recently had a thriving manufacturing base. Allentonians have never been especially welcoming to new immigrant groups, and their response to the Latinos is no exception. Almost all the Latinos whom I interviewed claimed that they had experienced some kind of discrimination either in the workplace, in schools, or in stores. Several independently expressed the belief that Allentown was unique in the prevalence of discrimination and attributed it to the dominant Pennsylvania Dutch culture. One man who had been in the United States since 1949 and had lived in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Lancaster, and several small cities in Florida reported that he had never experienced such hostility as in Allentown.²⁵ Several prominent events serve as evidence for this perception. A popular member of the city council falsely asserted that 99 percent of Allentown's crime was committed by Latinos and blamed most of Allentown's troubles on the recent influx of Latinos who had "no values."²⁶ The night before the opening of the 1994 fall school term, the city council passed an English-only ordinance. It was largely a meaningless gesture, as the state mandates that certain materials be published in Spanish, but as a symbol it sent a clear message to the Latinos that their difference was not welcome.

Allentown's unwelcoming environment breeds precisely the conditions that might send outsiders to seek refuge in a Pentecostal church. Although 30 percent of Allentown's school population is Latino, less than 2 percent of the teachers are Latino. The dropout rate for Latino students is higher than for any other ethnic group, as is the number of suspensions and detentions. Teachers tell students not to speak Spanish even among themselves, and those who do so receive detention slips. Recently some Anglo students formed a white student union to "offer stu-

dents of European descent an opportunity to meet with like-minded students to celebrate western values and their European heritage.²⁷ A local radio talk-show host suggested on his program that Allentown shopkeepers charge non-Englishspeakers 5 percent more or that the city designate an area of town where goods would be sold to Spanish-speaking people at regular prices. To his surprise, very few people in his listening audience protested or even recognized the satiric tone of his comments.²⁸

Even old-timers who have raised children and grandchildren in Allentown do not feel as if they belonged, and, despite the high percentage of Puerto Ricans living in Allentown, they remain on the margins of Allentown's social and political activity. The police force of 203 officers has 18 Latinos. There is one Latino on the city council. The courts do not provide Latino defendants with qualified translators and interpreters. Public housing is insufficient and too costly to meet the needs of the large majority of Latino families.²⁹

A feature article in the *New York Times Magazine* in May 1994³⁰ brought the plight of Latinos in Allentown and other smaller U.S. cities to national attention. In the past ten years, drawn by the green parks, cheaper housing, and safer streets, Latinos have begun an exodus from the poor, deteriorating, and dangerous neighborhoods of New York. However, along with the safe and attractive neighborhoods comes a sometimes blatant discrimination that was generally not a feature of life in the diverse New York neighborhoods from which they migrated.

The majority of Latinos in Allentown identify themselves as nominally Catholic. The Sacred Heart Catholic church offers mass in Spanish and claims a membership of 3,000 Latinos, 500 of whom go to mass on Sundays.³¹ The church also runs an active social action program for Latinos. The Lutheran, Methodist, and United Church of Christ churches also run Hispanic ministries, but their membership is relatively small. The Pentecostal churches of Allentown are the flourishing congregations. The twenty or so Pentecostal churches have an average of about 100 members who attend services three or four times each week.

The first Latino Pentecostal church was founded in Allentown in 1967 by Francisco and Miriam Vega. The Vegas came from Puerto Rico via New York, where they had studied for three years at the Instituto Bíblico Latinoamericano. After they had completed their training as pastor and missionary, "God called them to the city of Allentown to bring the good news to a place that was without faith and without hope."³² The Allentown that the Vegas encountered had a Latino population of approximately five hundred, many of whom felt alienated in the midst of a predominantly Pennsylvania Dutch community. Felix Puente, a Puerto Rican navy veteran, claimed in a 1962 interview in the *Allentown Morning Call* that he was unable to find a job or housing because of racial discrimination.³³ Martin Velázquez Sr. reports that in the early 1960s Mack Trucks clearly stated that they did not hire Puerto Ricans, and he and his Pennsylvania Dutch wife were unable to rent an apartment in an uptown neighborhood.³⁴ Except for masses offered in the migrant labor camps by Spanish-speaking priests aided by

seminarians, there were no worship services in Spanish until the late 1960s, when Pastor José Rodríguez of the United Church of Christ began to offer them. Fearful of losing parishioners, the Sacred Heart Catholic church also began to offer mass in Spanish to some fifty members. In 1969 the Catholic church opened Casa Guadalupe, a neighborhood center to provide help in obtaining basic services to the Latino community.

Allentown must indeed have seemed to the Vegas a place "without faith and without hope" for the Spanish-speaking population. They began their church, the Iglesia Pentecostal Betania, in their home with seven members. Francisco Vega was the pastor, and Miriam Vega went door-to-door as a missionary. As her efforts took effect, the membership grew, and the church moved several times into larger quarters. Within a few years the congregation was able to purchase an old church in downtown Allentown, where it has been thriving ever since. It founded a biblical institute for those who wanted to prepare for the ministry. Today the church has a new pastor and an active membership of approximately 160, many of whom have been members since the beginning. The church is completely selfsupporting through offerings and tithing.³⁵ It runs a food bank and has sent missionaries to Costa Rica, where they have established a church with thirty-five to forty members.

In the past five to six years approximately eighteen new Pentecostal churches have opened their doors to the Latinos in Allentown. (It is difficult to be precise, as some churches appear and disappear practically overnight.) Approximately 16 percent of Allentown's Latinos attend the city's Pentecostal churches, which provide familiarity and a sense of community for people who have been assigned outsider status. At their exuberant services, held in Spanish, Latinos feel at home in a church where the prayer is spontaneous and intense, the music is loud and rhythmical, the other worshipers are warm and loving brothers and sisters, and the pastor is a caring father. The strict rules provide structure that is missing in the community at large. Church members cannot drink, smoke, or dance. In most of the churches women are not allowed to wear pants, jewelry, or makeup or cut their hair. Speech in and out of church is heavily peppered with "Amén" and "Que Dios te bendiga." My surveys show that 83 percent of churchgoers attend regularly at least three times each week. Clearly, religion plays a very important role in their lives. For many, social life also revolves around the church and church activities such as evangelizing crusades, Sunday-school teaching, retreats, and the planning of worship services.

Some of the congregations are large and well established, housed in buildings bought from older Anglo congregations that have since moved to other parts of town, and some are in small storefronts. All of them hold some type of worship service three to four times per week. Of the members I interviewed, 64 percent were unemployed, held low-paying, menial jobs, or collected unemployment or disability insurance. Congregations were divided just about equally between men and women (47 and 53 percent respectively). Although 53 percent of respondents

were married (and another 5 percent divorced and 6 percent widowed, with many of the single persons being teenagers), only 24 percent attended church with their entire families. Each church had some recent arrivals, but 60 percent of the members were long-term (more than one year) residents of Allentown. About half had been members of a Pentecostal church before moving to Allentown. Approximately 25 percent had converted, mostly from Catholicism. Each church is involved in some kind of charitable endeavor, and all but one deny any involvement in "political" types of activities. All of them follow a discipline that prohibits drinking, smoking, dancing, and sexual relations outside of marriage, and to varying degrees they all control the appearance of women. In some of the stricter churches, such as the Vegas' Betania Church, men and women sit in separate sections. Most of the pastors belong to an organization of Latino pastors; none of them belong to the Protestant ecumenical Lehigh Valley Council of Churches.

On a hot summer day on Sixth Street in downtown Allentown, young men without shirts loll about listening to music and commenting in Spanish about the young women who wander by. Children run in and out of the Happy Dairy Spanish Grocery with dripping ice creams, begging the hot, tired adults to take them to the municipal pool. On this one block, there are two storefront Pentecostal churches, a Christian Spanish bookstore, the transmitting office of Radio Vive (a Christian Spanish radio station), and a women's shelter run by the Nueva Vida Pentecostal church.

Two devout recent converts, Miriam and Ramón Reyes, live in the shelter and run it as volunteers. Until three years ago, Miriam was a drug addict. As hard as she had struggled for twenty years, she had been unable to rise out of her life on the streets – drinking, buying and selling drugs, and stealing to maintain her habit. Ramón had killed his first man when he was nine years old and spent the next thirty years in and out of jail as the leader of one of Puerto Rico's biggest gangs. They both believe that God watched over them and kept them alive all those years while they were in Satan's grip. Now that they have found God, they have dedicated their lives to helping other addicts cure themselves through the Lord. Their faith is strong, and their lives are completely devoted to serving the Lord. They go to church four times each week, and (even though Ramón holds down two secular jobs) they both work full-time in the shelter, ministering spiritually as well as physically to the residents. Miriam's thirteen-year-old daughter lives in the shelter with them, and her two older sons attend church with them.

The Pastors

The six pastors I interviewed have similar histories and to a greater or lesser degree fit Peter Wagner's profile of the Latino Pentecostal pastor.³⁶ Many of them are older, working-class, and received their theological training "in the streets." As Wagner points out, "When all is said and done, the lack of skills in Hebrew, Greek,

and epistemology may have been more than compensated for by the inherent ability to identify with the proletariat."³⁷ These pastors are in their forties and fifties and converted as adults, when each was seized with a "burning desire" to serve. They are not well educated, having received their training in Pentecostal biblical institutes that they attended part-time for two to three years. They are from poor families and worked in low-paying jobs.

Raul Ramírez, for example, is the pastor of one of Allentown's larger Pentecostal churches, the Iglesia Pentecostal de la Nueva Vida. Ramírez came to Allentown in 1988 in search of a safer, quieter life for his family than the one they led in New York. Brought up as a Catholic in Puerto Rico, he had converted to Pentecostalism in Chicago during a low period of his life and had studied to be a pastor at the Instituto Bíblico Latinoamericano in New York. Upon his arrival in Allentown he had opened a Spanish Christian bookstore and become the pastor of an eight-member congregation. His church, which now has some 120 members, is located in a modest downtown row house the first floor of which is a fauxwood-paneled sanctuary. The lively services are well attended by men, women, and children. Guitar and conga-drum music accompanies their worship.

Hector Rodríguez, the pastor of the Iglesia de Cristo Misionera, is a Puerto Rican who appears to be in his midforties with little formal education. He converted to Pentecostalism as an adult in 1974 while working as an ironer in a clothing factory. He trained for three years at night in a Bible institute and began his new career in Buffalo, New York. He came to Allentown in 1986 to visit family and stayed to start a storefront church in its center city. The church is a simple space with pews facing an altar at what was the back of the store. Hand-painted signs and drawings and postcards of Puerto Rico decorate the walls. The church was bought with contributions from its hundred members.

Víctor González, pastor of the Iglesia Asambleas de Jesucristo, also fits the profile of Latino Pentecostal pastors. He too converted in his forties, having found that "the vacuum in his heart could not be filled with alcohol or worldly pleasures." Besides pastoring his hundred-member church and overseeing the food and clothing bank, González works as the chaplain to the Allentown police and visits inmates in three prisons. He also teaches in his church's biblical institute for the preparation of future pastors.

Edwin Colón's church, the Iglesia Primera Corintios XIII, is a white clapboard church in a stable working-class neighborhood. His congregation shares the church with the Anglo Missionary Church. He began the church in 1992 with seventeen members, and it has grown in two years to more than eighty. Like the others, this church is self-supporting through tithing and donations. The members appear to be somewhat better-off than the members of other churches (my survey confirms that impression), but the worship is as fervent, the music as loud, and the fellowship as warm. Colón himself is from a middle-class Protestant family. In Puerto Rico he worked as an agent for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and his wife was a schoolteacher. When he was seized by a burning

desire to work as a missionary, he and his wife gave up their jobs and all their possessions and moved with their three small children into an American biblical institute in Puerto Rico for two years to prepare for missionary work.

Pentecostal Women

There are no women pastors in these churches, but women play an active role in church governance and leadership. Each of the churches has women in elected positions and as deacons. In some, women are responsible for planning and leading the services on particular nights. At all the services I attended, women either led the group in prayer or song, preached, gave testimony, or led Bible study. This is not to imply that the majority of fervent worshipers are women. In contrast to what may be found in Pentecostal churches in Latin America, in Allentown there are just as many men attending church, and their participation is as active and enthusiastic as the women's.

Elizabeth Brusco's study of male/female relationships in a Colombian Pentecostal family indicates that women enjoy more equality and higher status in Pentecostal families.³⁸ The aspirations of men and women seem to coincide more where life centers around church and churchgoing. Pentecostal men spend their time at home instead of in bars and become devoted to religion and to their families. For many women, their husbands' conversion can mean literally the difference between life and death: The men stop drinking, stop beating them, and bring home a paycheck that puts food on the table. These changes frequently mean an improvement of women's status within the family, as well as an improvement of the entire family's economic status.

In Allentown's churches, for instance, family life is a theme in the testimonies of men in church. Often their testimonies describe the importance of the church and the family in their fight against Satan's temptations. Many spouses attend church together, sit together, and share the care of the children. Some pastors allow couples living out of wedlock to attend church whereas others discourage them. Single men attend church, and participation in services is not dominated by men or women. On a Sunday afternoon, several stylishly dressed young men greet each other at the door with a "God bless you" and a hug. One of them describes himself to me as a former "Satanist." Before the services begin, they prostrate themselves on the floor in front of the simple altar to pray. A thirty-four-year-old single man with a good salary from a concrete company converted from Catholicism three years ago; now he comes to church four times each week to serve the Lord who saved him from a life of drugs and alcohol.

Carol Ann Drogus's chapter in this volume reports that, whereas Colombian Catholic women are encouraged to become involved in political activity and work outside the home, among Pentecostals men are enjoined to become more involved in the private sphere – to be more engaged with their families and abandon the traditional public men's world of drink and women. Although they may

remain household heads, their active participation in household duties creates a more egalitarian relationship between husband and wife. Similarly, many of the women I interviewed in Allentown work outside the home and believe that in "Christian" families there is less machismo and more cooperation between spouses.

The strong family orientation of the churches, the many hours that families spend together in church, and the public sharing of child care support the perception that men and women participate more equally in so-called women's work. One of my women respondents, who insisted that there was more equality between men and women in Christian homes, explained that the restrictions on women's behavior are not so much a question of church doctrine as of what women feel. These rules, she says, come from the Bible, not from men. Whatever the reality may be, it is significant that these women perceive that their religion provides a more egalitarian relationship between men and women.

Political Participation

The conventional wisdom with regard to Pentecostals and politics is that they do not participate in so-called worldly matters and that this nonparticipation lends conservative support to the political status quo. In 1980 Anthony La Ruffa observed of Pentecostals in Puerto Rico that they upheld the commonwealth status or saw statehood as the only alternative. Independence, they believed, would lead inevitably to another communist Cuba.³⁹ In three recent essays on Pentecostals' participation in Brazilian politics, John Burdick, Rowan Ireland, and Paul Freston⁴⁰ challenge the conventional wisdom. Their case studies show that to varying degrees Pentecostals have indeed become "political" in Brazil. The work of Kathleen Harder indicates that Pentecostals worldwide are involved in various forms of political activity. In her survey of fifty-six church leaders representative of thirty-two countries from all continents, forty-six confirmed that Pentecostals in their countries were politically active. The largest number reported Pentecostals voting in elections, universally the most common form of political participation, but nearly half said that Pentecostals were also engaged in working for political campaigns, supporting candidates, and attending political rallies. Twenty respondents even claimed that Pentecostals were publicly marching or demonstrating for or against certain public policies.⁴¹

My surveys and interviews indicate that although most churches are involved in some kind of charitable activity, such as food and clothing banks and visiting the sick, none claim official involvement in what they would define as political activity to try to influence public policy or to challenge the system. Beyond saving souls, the churches' perception of their role is to create a comfort zone and to provide and minister to basic needs. Nevertheless, government cuts in spending on social services have had a strong negative impact on Allentown's Latinos. The churches' response of actively collecting to provide basic services can be under

stood in political terms as providing a substitute for shrinking social services. Although they may not be doing "big" politics, they clearly have a stake in the community and are not uninvolved. Besides maintaining a food and clothing bank, the Nueva Vida church runs a treatment center for drug-addicted women, and another church is trying to establish a halfway house for recently released Latino prisoners. Although very few members are publicly involved in the various struggles of the greater Latino community, most of the people with whom I spoke were aware of the political issues and problems that confront Allentown's Latinos. All of them knew of the infamous councilwoman's public attacks on the Latinos and shared a negative opinion of her crusade against their community. Some protested to local authorities over the neighbors' complaints about their loud music in church and the city's denial of a permit to hold outdoor evangelizing campaigns. Many participated in the first annual Puerto Rican Pride Parade in the spring of 1994.

Only one of my interviewees took a traditional active role in Latino politics, as a member of the Mayor's Advisory Council on Latino Affairs. Only one pastor expressed a belief in the importance of political involvement for improving the position of Latinos in Allentown. He has invited political candidates to speak in his church and urges his congregants to vote. Several respondents from his church indicated that they did political work "when necessary." These were the only affirmative responses to that question of my survey. Despite the disclaimers, however, regarding participation in politics, respondents indicated that they had protested in some way when they perceived they were being treated unjustly because they were Latino. When the issue was injustice – being followed around in a store, not being served in a restaurant, being told to speak English or not to speak Spanish – they protested.

Comparing the political involvement of Latino Pentecostals in the United States and Latin American Pentecostals, Samuel Solivan notes that the Latinos see the roots of their oppression in racism whereas Latin Americans see them in poverty.⁴² His analysis supports the perception of Allentown's pastors, who believe that a large part of their work is to build self-esteem and cultural pride. Allentown's Latinos know that they suffer discrimination not necessarily because they are poor but because they look different, speak Spanish, and hold different cultural values.

Conclusion: The Pentecostalization of Allentown

Since Pentecostalism has an especially strong appeal to the most destitute of a given society, its popularity is greatest in the poorest barrios of Latin America as well as among new immigrant groups in the United States. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that only the poor and alienated are Pentecostals. Anthony La Ruffa's description of Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico is germane: "One of the most striking aspects of Pentecostalism is its accommodating propensity – adapt-

ability to changing socio-cultural conditions. Although beginning as a religion of the poor and oppressed, it can readily adjust itself to more affluent conditions. Some Pentecostal churches in Puerto Rico have a constituency which is part professional and fits into the middle and upper middle class.¹⁴³ Similarly, in Allentown, although the overwhelming majority of Pentecostals are poor, living on welfare or disability insurance, there are also solidly middle-class longtime churchgoers whose involvement in the church is steady and fervent.

Phillip Williams argues in this volume that individual anomie may not be sufficient to explain the growing membership in Pentecostal churches. Differentiating between social and individual anomie, he explains that second-generation inhabitants of a city may experience anomie for reasons other than social dislocation. Long-term residents of Allentown who have been attending Pentecostal church for many years are no longer uprooted and displaced, but Allentown's increasing hostility toward the growing Latino community makes all Latinos targets of discrimination, sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant. It is not surprising, then, that they continue to seek haven in the Pentecostal churches. They may not all be new to the city and they may not all be poor, but they are all Latinos who want a place where they can speak and sing and pray in loud Spanish without having to worry about conforming to Anglo culture. The added dimension that Allentown's Latinos are an unwelcome minority community creates a more demanding role for the churches. Indeed, the pastors agree that an important part of their work in Allentown is to build self-esteem by instilling pride in and trying to preserve Puerto Rican culture.

It is likely that the continued Latinization of Allentown will mean the continued Pentecostalization of Allentown. Because the character of the Puerto Rican Pentecostal community of this study follows the patterns of Pentecostalism in Latin America as described in the literature, it is also likely that Allentown's relatively new but growing population of Latino churchgoers will follow the trends in terms of numbers, political participation, and social influence. It is predictable that an increased hostility toward Latinos will send more Latinos into the Pentecostal churches. And with increased injustice toward this minority community more Pentecostals will become more publicly "political." Recently, an Allentown patrolman, Thomas Siteman, was suspended from his job for racially harassing Latino residents of the Cumberland Gardens housing project. When the Allentown city council moved to reinstate him, Pentecostal Pastor Gilbert Rivera led the public protest. As this book goes to press, the city council is about to vote on an extension of the English-only resolution that would make English Allentown's *official* language. Raúl Feliciano is an active member of Allentown's large Assembly of God congregation. In response to a councilmember's claim that the English ordinance was good for the Latinos because it would encourage them to learn English, he was quoted in the *Allentown Morning Call* as saying, "Telling Hispanics the resolution is for their own good is like breaking a person's leg so he can have some rest from work."¹⁴⁴

NOTES

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2. Renato Poblete and Thomas O'Dea, "Anomie and the Quest for Community: The Formation of Sects Among the Puerto Ricans of New York," *American Catholic Sociological Review* 21, 1 (Spring 1960), pp. 18-36.
3. Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 129.
4. Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll, eds., *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).
5. Sidney W. Mintz, *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life Story* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974).
6. Lawrence Stains, "The Latinization of Allentown, Pa.," *New York Times Magazine*, May 15, 1994, pp. 56-62.
7. Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, *Rethinking Protestantism*, p. 9.
8. See, for example, Donald T. Moore, "Puerto Rico para Cristo: A History of the Progress of the Evangelical Missions on the Island of Puerto Rico," Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, n.d.; Victor de León, "The Silent Pentecostals: A Biographical History of the Pentecostal Movement Among the Hispanics in the Twentieth Century," Master of Divinity thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif., 1979 (including a chapter on Puerto Rico); Juan L. Lugo, *Pentecostés en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Gospel Press, 1951), the autobiography of the first Puerto Rican Pentecostal; and Anthony L. La Ruffa, "Pentecostalism in Puerto Rican Society," in Stephen D. Glazier ed., *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980).
9. Interview with Pastor Edwin Colón, Allentown, Pa., June 7, 1994.
10. See Larry Tye, "Missionaries from Abroad Preach Message in US," *Boston Globe*, November 15, 1994.
11. Dan Wakefield, *Island in the City: The World of Spanish Harlem* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
13. Lugo, *Pentecostés en Puerto Rico*, p. 9.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
15. Everett Wilson, "Early History of Pentecostals in Latin America," manuscript, p. 32.
16. I gratefully acknowledge the comments of Samuel Solivan of the Newton Andover Seminary, whose knowledge of Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico has been invaluable.
17. See La Ruffa, "Pentecostalism in Puerto Rican Society."
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
19. David Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982).
20. Wilson, "Early History," p. 33.
21. José Caraballo, "A Certificate Program for Hispanic Clergy and Lay Leaders in an Accredited Theological Seminary: A Case Study with Projections," D.-Min. professional project, Drew University, Madison, N.J., 1983, p. 66, cited in Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating*

Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), p. 100.

22. Villafañe, *Liberating Spirit*, p. 93.
23. José Reyes, *Los Hispanos en los Estados Unidos: Un reto y una oportunidad para las iglesias* (Cleveland, Tenn.: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1985).
24. David Traverzo Galarza, "A New Dimension in Religious Education for the Hispanic Evangelical Church in New York City," cited in Villafahe, *Liberating Spirit*, p. 14.
25. Interview with Radames Santiago, July 29, 1994.
26. Stains, "The Latinization of Allentown, Pa." p. 61.
27. Allentown Morning Call, May 29, 1992.
28. Allentown Morning Call, December 2, 1992.
29. "Report of the Governor's Advisory Council on Latino Affairs," Harrisburg, Pa., March 1993.
30. Stains, "The Latinization of Allentown, Pa."
31. Interview with Father John Bisek of Sacred Heart church, February 15, 1994.
32. *Despedida pastoral del Reverendo Francisco Vega*, pamphlet (translation mine).
33. *Allentown Morning Call*, March 6, 1962.
34. Interview with Martín Velázquez Sr., November 12, 1993.
35. Like most Latino pastors, the pastor supports himself with a secular job.
36. Peter Wagner, *Look Out-The Pentecostals Are Coming* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1975).
37. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
38. Elizabeth Brusco, "The Reformation of Machismo: Asceticism of Masculinity Among Colombian Evangelicals," in Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, *Rethinking Protestantism*, pp. 143-158.
39. La Ruffa, "Pentecostalism in Puerto Rican Society," p. 60.
40. John Burdick, "Struggling Against the Devil: Pentecostalism and Social Movements in Urban Brazil," Rowan Ireland, "The *Crentes* of Campo Alegre and the Religious Construction of Brazilian Politics," and Paul Freston, "Brother Votes for Brother: The New Politics of Protestantism in Brazil," in Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, *Rethinking Protestantism*, pp. 20-44, 45-65, and 66-110.
41. Kathleen Harder, "The Expanding Politicization of the World Pentecostal Movement," in *Conference Papers 1992, Society of Pentecostal Studies*, pp. 6-7. See also Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995).
42. Personal communication, Samuel Solivan, October 1994.
43. La Ruffa, "Pentecostalism in Puerto Rican Society," p. 60.
44. *Allentown Morning Call*, October 4, 1994.