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ABSTRACT

Are most US Latina/o pentecostals concerned about sharing the gospel without having any interest in the reality of oppression, discrimination, and marginalization? Are they just dancing and singing in their temples, having ecstasies and emotional experiences while ignoring the poor and their social struggle? Many scholars see US Latina/o pentecostalism as a tradition with an anemic social ethic, one that lacks any significant interest in the needs of the poorest in society. However, new research on progressive pentecostals shows a different panorama. The theological perspectives and social ethics of a vast sector of US Latina/o churches have changed considerably since its origins as a religious movement. New generations of pentecostals are ably addressing the needs of the poorest and marginalized in the context of the United States. Hence, this research project challenges the idea that Latina/o pentecostals are socially apathetic through a qualitative research study carried out in Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer, a Hispanic pentecostal church in Los Fresnos, TX, just outside Brownsville and South Padre Island. This church has a social ministry called The Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries that primarily serves refugees seeking safety from persecution in their home countries. Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a mainline Protestant denomination.

The research questions explore the pentecostal mission, theology, and ethics that motivate Latina/os to social ministry. The hypothesis of this proposal is that the pneumapraxis observed in the daily life of US Latina/o pentecostals is fundamental for understanding their social concern with the oppressed and marginalized. The pneumapraxis is analyzed not only as a practice of the Espíritu, but as lived experiences of the articulation of practices, convictions, beliefs, and affections of the Latina/o pentecostal ethos and spirituality in an integrative model. The study concludes that US Latina/o pentecostals speak less about mission, theology, and ethics as motives to serve the poor. Rather, Latina/o pentecostals experience the mission of Jesus when they preach the gospel and help the poor; they do not have an articulated theology but live it every day; and they do not conceptualize their moral values but embody the fruit of the Espíritu as moral virtues and as a testimony of an authentic Christian moral life.